Research Paper

Diaspora Identity: A Profile of Iraqi Immigrants in the USA*

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Abstract

Since the late 19th century, Iraqi immigrants have formed a community in the United States, which is widely known as a part of the Arab-Muslim diaspora in the country, while the reality is rather different, since the majority of this community is non-Arab and non-Muslim. The focus of this paper is to investigate the US-based Iraqi diaspora identity regarding its formation and evolution by reviewing its history and exploring its diversity, which could inform readers about the major identification modalities taken by members of the community in the American context. The *key question discussed in this paper is therefore the following: how does Iraqi diaspora identity diverge or converge within the American context, influenced by historical, ethnic and religious elements?* Using analytical narratives as our corpus of study, we will discuss the way in which Iraqi-Americans present their identity by commenting on their ethno-religious diversity and the impact of the diversity on the community. Findings indicate that affected by US-Iraq relationships as well as different contexts in both homeland and the host country throughout the last three decades, a divergent dynamism has serious potentials to influence the future of this diaspora community in the United States.

Keywords: Iraqi-Americans, Non-governmental actors, The Middle East, US-based diasporas, US foreign policy

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1. Introduction

Since the late 19th century, Iraqi immigrants have formed a community in the United States, which is widely known as a part of the Arab-Muslim diaspora in the country, while the reality is rather different, since the majority of this community is non-Arab and non-Muslim. In fact, the US-based Arab diaspora in general and the Iraqi diaspora in particular have remained understudied, while an influential role played by Iraqi-Americans in US foreign policy is noteworthy (Vanderbush, 2014). This gives rise to questions about the diaspora community, its members' identity, their organizations in the host country, and their activities within the American context in which racial, religious and class are important. On this basis, the major question raised in the present paper is the following: how does Iraqi diaspora identity, influenced by historical, ethnic and religious factors diverge or converge within the American context? To answer the question, it needs to be divided into relevant sub-questions: firstly, what is the history of Iraqis' immigration and their resettlement patterns in the US? Secondly, how have ethnicity and religion influenced Iraqis' diasporic identity within the American context? Therefore, we explore the US-based community through analytical reviews of the history of Iraqis' migration across the Atlantic, their population, and the major places of their re-settlement in the United States. Then, we will discuss the way in which they define their diasporic identities by commenting on their ethno-religious diversity and the impact of the diversity on the diaspora's identity.

As argued by Kennedy, Lyes and Russell (2014, p. 3), "diaspora is an imaginary community that is difficult to define or measure". James Clifford (Clifford, 1994, p. 307) propounds that "diaspora defines itself against the nation-state" while "the logic of the nation-state was to extend cultural unity to a national population".

He argues that "the relational positioning at issue here is not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tension." He develops his idea to propose that "diaspora discourse articulates or bends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identification outside the national time or space in order to live inside, with a difference" (Clifford, 1994, p. 308). Safran, another leading scholar in this field, defines diaspora as "expatriate minority communities" sharing a number of features: a history of dispersal, myth/memories of homeland, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity revolving this relationship (Safran, 1991, pp 83-84). It is therefore important to clarify that the term diaspora in this article refers to "the idea of transnational populations, living in one place, while still maintaining relations with their homelands, being both here and there" (Ionescu, 2006, p. 13).

Identity is another important concept in this study, which carries a certain amount of ambiguity and needs to be more clearly explained, as some believe:

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990, p. 222).

To draw together the above-mentioned points for reaching a comprehensive understanding of diaspora identity, we refer to Vertovec's "Three Meanings of Diaspora" (1997, pp. 277-299), which presents a theoretical framework regarding the variety of

academic disciplines participating in the field of diaspora studies. Vertovec suggests three different definitions for the concept of diaspora, bridging it to different identification models. These three definitions are respectively "social form", "type of consciousness" and "mode of cultural production". The first definition from contemporary literature has roots in sociopolitical theories. It considers diaspora as a "social form," which is founded on three strategic elements: 1. having "specific kinds of social relationships" both among themselves and with the host society "cemented by special ties to history and geography"; 2. having "political orientations" inspired by a form of loyalty to a homeland; 3. using "economic strategies" as an important new source and force. Vertovec (1997, p. 277-281) suggests the Jewish and Irish lobbies in the USA as the best examples for the social form of diaspora.

The second definition for the term diaspora stems from sociological and psychological studies. It is described as a "type of consciousness," which is increasing and reinforcing among "transnational communities." According to this viewpoint, the identity of people in diaspora has a solid core, which is covered by a number of layers that can change based on time and place, although the core resists change. Muslims in Europe and Jews in America represent this definition. They come from different countries with different cultures to live and integrate/assimilate, but the central part of their identity, which is formed in accordance with their holy books, remains unchanged. The final definition presents diaspora as a "mode of cultural production" and is usually, not exclusively, examined and developed by various scholars who focus on areas such as anthropology and globalization. Vertovec (1997, p. 289) argues that this definition of diaspora mostly highlights a "variegated process of creolization, back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations,

and constant transformations". Among the three meanings, the first one is the most appropriate framework for the objectives of this study, since it clearly acknowledges diaspora identity potentials to organize and engage in social and political activities.

The issues of identity in diaspora communities are paramount, which explains the focus of this research. This article benefits from a qualitative research approach, which "tends to favor a more exploratory, interactive exchange between the researcher and the subject with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding" (Queen University Belfast, 2017). Concerning data collection and considering the lack of data regarding our case study, we have used available resources in English, relying on two techniques: literature review and archival materials. The data will be analyzed through an analytical narratives method. Bates, Greif, Levi, Rosenthal and Weingast (1998, p. 10) introduce the method in the following terms:

> It combines analytic tools that are commonly employed in economics and political science with the narrative form, which is more commonly employed in history. The approach is narrative; it pays close attention to stories, accounts, and context. It is analytic in that it extracts explicit and formal lines of reasoning, which facilitate both exposition and explanation.

In this method and "by reading documents, laboring through archives, and surveying the secondary literature, scholars seek to understand the actors' preferences, their perceptions, their evaluation of alternatives, the information they possess, the expectations they form, the strategies they adopt, and the constraints that limit their actions" (Bates et al, 1998, pp. 11-12). Therefore, research conducted through this method do not provide explanations by subsuming cases under existing patterns; rather, they account for outcomes by identifying and exploring the

mechanisms that generate them (Bates et al, 1998, pp. 11-12). In the case of the US-based Iraqi diaspora identity, it becomes applicable by coding the data and classifying the information under categories such as divergence and/or convergence of their collective identities. In the next step, the authors seek to assemble the story that accounts for the outcome of interest, e.g. the breakdown of order, the identification of their experiences of emigration and immigration, the maintenance of peace, and the escalation of conflict. By relying on this research methodology, we seek to investigate the specificities of a time and place, and to locate and trace the processes that generate the outcome.

2. History of Iraqis in the United States

According to UNHCR (2003), at the beginning of the 21st century, Iraqi residents lived in the four corners of the world, in approximately 90 countries. The dispersion of Iraqis from their homeland may be categorized into three major waves:

First wave: before the 1991 national uprising
Second wave: from the uprising to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003
Third wave: since 2003 until the present

While the first wave is mostly related to political pressures and comprised ethnic and religious minorities, the next emigration flow stems from both socio-political and economic situations in the country, with mostly Shia-Muslim dispersal. Finally, the current exodus of Iraqis is related to broader factors, including ever-increasing security vacuum, health crises and sectarian conflict. The current wave has witnessed an outflow from all across the country; whoever was capable of fleeing the situation left the country. Iraqis' migration to the US has taken place within such a longstanding context.

On the other hand, the history of Iraqis in the US needs to be understood in relation to Arab-Christians' and Muslims' histories in America, both of which are relatively new scholarly areas. Nyang Sulayman has traced the history of Muslims in the American continent to the pre-Columbian period, when the young Muslim empire was seeking to spread its territory around the world from South-East Asia to America (Sulayman, 1997). According to the earliest accounts, Arabs, weather Muslims or non-Muslims, have entered North America in significant numbers since the late nineteenth century and mostly from regions known today, as Lebanon, Syria and Iraq (Haddad, 2001; Moore, 1995). Two American metropolises, Detroit and Chicago, were the first concentrations for those migrants. The newcomers, with a dense population of young men who were seeking jobs, decided to stay, and later brought their families. Subsequently, they encouraged other relatives and friends to emigrate.[1] Approximately four generations of Arab Americans have settled in these cities, which clearly proves their long presence there (Howel & Shryoch, 2003; Takim, 2002). From a religious point of view, the diaspora community is divided into Christians and Muslims. Despite the fact that Christians comprise 5% of the Arab world, they mark slightly over 50% of the diaspora community in the US, the majorly from the Catholic Chaldean branch. This large percentage of Christians in the Iraqi diaspora in the US has a clear historical and geographical foundation, as they were the pioneers from Iraq to enter the US in significant numbers (Salari, 2002, pp. 582-583; Orfalea, 2003, p. 192). They have been living for several millennia in the foothills and fields of the junction area between Zagros and Anatolia mountains, where the city of Mosul and its surrounding

1. Family reunification has been always an important element in diaspora formations in America (Mir, 2013, pp. 325-337).

villages are now located in Nineveh province, and its vicinities in adjacent provinces. The region is close to the Syrian border, with a high population of similar ethno-religious groups. Therefore, their geographical proximity with their co-religious kin in Syria, who had already started emigration to the US, encouraged them and facilitated their journey (Chatelard, 2009, p. 9). This is a type of social system that works through family ties and ethnic dynamism.

The first wave of Iraqis entrance to the US began in the late 19th century, although the entry was relatively small until the late 20th century, when emigration increased due to different religious, political and socio-economic impulses. The overthrow of the Hashemite Monarchy in 1958 forced many of the monarchists, including landowners, economic elites and bureaucrats to leave the country. Unlike the former migrants, who were mostly Christians and ethno-religious minorities seeking jobs, this departure was characterized by wealthy and upper middle-class Muslims. They fled Iraq not because of religious clashes, but due to anti-capitalism revolutionary ideologies that expanded through the country after the Second World War. Their common profile was described as highly educated, professional and well versed in their religious beliefs – all of which helped them adapt more easily to their new home and its way of life, compared to the earlier generations who had fled the country (Al-Ali, 2007, p. 35). The change of US immigration laws in 1965, which gave more priority to family affiliations and skillful migrants, provided more attraction to Iraqis with similar profiles. Later, the two Baathi coups in 1963 and 1968 and their severe violence promoted the option of emigration. By the 1970s, as Sharkey Haddad (2000, p. 206) notes, “it was relatively easy for a US citizen to get approval within six months for immediate family members to come to the United States, especially if the immigrating family members brought over one hundred thousand dollars to invest”.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ethnic pattern of emigration from Iraq changed to one of Kurdish dominance. During the mid-1970s, open war broke between the Iraqi regime and the Kurdish movement under the leadership of Molla-Mostafa Barezani. During this time, approximately 200,000 Kurds fled to Iran, while tens of thousands were forcibly displaced in the south (Yeldiz, 2004, p. 25-27). During the eight-year war with Iran (1980-88) and particularly in its closing months, once again massive atrocities were committed against the Kurds. Saddam's regime undertook a number of brutal military operations named the "Anfal Campaign," implemented in the Kurdistan regions.[1] Consequently, large numbers of Iraqis escaped to Iran, Turkey, and Syria, some temporarily and others never to return (Johns, 2006). A few years after the pending cease-fire, the 1991 national uprising again lighted the flame of a civil war with a wider extension of refugees. Juan Cole (2003, p. 549) describes the massive impact of this traumatic event in the following words:

> How many persons were killed and buried in mass graves may never be known, but it certainly ran into the tens of thousands. Iraqis have for the most part never forgiven the US for its callous policy of standing by during these massacres.

It was in this period - from the 1970s to the 1990s - that Kurds entered the US in significant numbers as refugees and asylum

1. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW, 1993), the Anfal Campaign resulted in a massacre of almost 100,000 civilians, including women and children and also the poisoning of nearly 4000 villages out of 4655. The enormous figure of casualties includes only civilian victims while a large number of Kurdish militias and also some Iranian civilians and military troops were victimized by the usage of chemical weapons, which put the figure beyond 185,000 dying and more casualties whose health suffered because of the breathing of the chemical gases (Johns, 2006).

seekers. Since then, Nashville and San Diego have become major home to large Kurdish communities in the United States, mostly emanating from Iraq (Natali, 2007, p. 200). In the 1990s, several events - including the first US-Iraq war, the oppression of the 1991 uprising, intensive economic sanctions, the forced dispersal of Shia-Muslim Arabs, and the longevity of the regime - dramatically increased the size and changed the order of migration out of the country (Chatelard, 2009, p. 35).

The transportation of thousands of refugees from camps in Saudi Arabia to the US since 1992 was a turning point in the history of the Iraqi migration to the US. Their settlement in the US and their integration in the American society have their special uniqueness. They differed from their compatriots who previously emigrated to the US, not only because they were refugees, but because of their level of religiosity, their high social class and their procedure of coping with the new home. It is also tangible that these recent groups have a stronger sense of identifying themselves as Iraqi Shia-Muslims, with an emphasis on Iraqi-ness as well as Shiism (Walbridge & Aziz, 2000, pp. 321-340). They were mostly sent to Michigan to be settled in Dearborn, where the Muslim, predominately Arab-Shia, community lives. This strategy helped Iraqis adapt more easily to the new home.[1]

1. As Walbridge and Aziz (2000, p. 329) note: “It is not just the restaurants, shops and mosques that draw people here. In the Arab section of Dearborn, Middle East notions of modesty and social/sexual priority prevail. One does not find bars and other public places that would violate Islamic law and distract people from their religious and family duties. Dearborn has both primary and secondary immigrants and has a larger concentration of refugees than other American cities”.

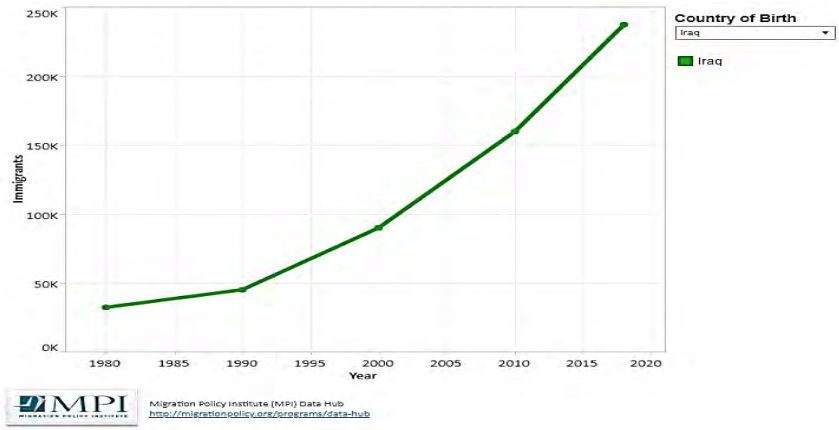

Figure 1. U.S. Immigrant Population by Country of Birth, 1960-2018.

Source: MPI, n.d.

According to the existing statistical data from diverse sources,[1] the highest numbers of Iraqi arrivals to the United States were firstly in the 1990s and then in the last three years of the first decade in the 21st century. A significant rise during a six-year period, between 1992 and 1997, reveals that in average, 3600 refugees were accepted each year by the federal government. After a decrease, from 1997 to 1999, once again the years 2000 and 2001 met a relatively similar increase in the number of Iraqi refugees in the US soil. Statistics indicate that in the two years before and four years after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the number of refugees and asylees from the country in the US had a sizable decline. By contrast, since 2007 due to some internal factors in Iraq, including sectarian tensions and security vacuum,[2] another wave of

1. The statistics in this section have been used from a range of resources including: Terrazas (2009); Walbridge & Aziz (2000); U.S. Department of Justice: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997); Orfalea (2003); Cappucci (2014); Department of Homeland Security (2012).
2. Sectarianism, civil war and the lake of employment have been the main reasons in this period.

demographic displacement occurred, and the country has witnessed a gradually continuous migrant outflow. A proportion of approximately 65,500 refugees and asylum seekers entered the US from 2007 to 2013, with a peak of almost 20,000 in 2009.

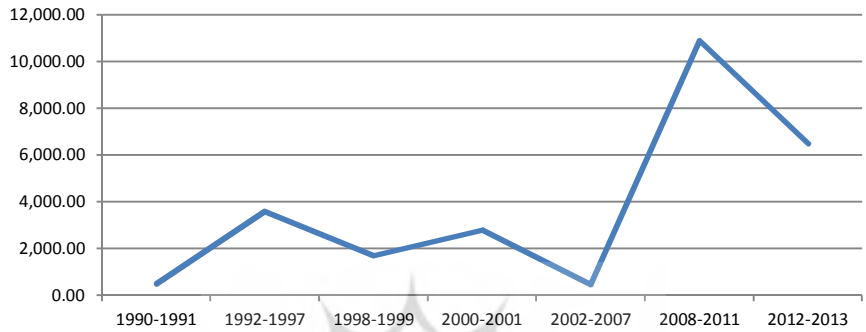

Figure 2: The Trend of Iraqi Refugee-Asylum Acceptance in the USA (1990-2013).

Source of data: Terrazas (2009), Walbridge & Aziz (2000), U.S. Department of Justice (1997), Orfalea, (2003), Cappucci (2014), Martin & Yankay (2012)

In terms of geographical patterns regarding the Iraqi residents' settlement in the US, several major states were more widely chosen by the Iraqis: Michigan, California, Illinois, Tennessee and Arizona. Over half of them live in the first three states with a dense population in Detroit; 34.2% of all Iraqi migrants (Grieco, 2003). Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI; Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ; and San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA, also have large Iraq-born populations while roughly 40% are concentrations in other parts of the country (Terrazas, 2009). With respect to demographic dimensions, it is difficult to determine the exact number of Iraqi-Americans, since they are not represented as such in the US official statistics. However, it is evident that their number has had a gradual increase since 1980. Certain scholars state that their number has tripled during the last 35 years (Terrazas, 2009). In addition, as indicated above, their reason for emigration and the

type of their entrance to the US has changed dramatically from the people looking for career or study (before the 1970s) to those fleeing conflict and predominantly accepted as refugees and asylum seekers.

3. A Diaspora with Unique Ethnic and Religious Dispositions

The ethnic and religious distribution of Iraqis around the world has not conformed to a single pattern. Research indicates that during the last three decades, dispersed Iraqis have largely been resettled in the neighboring Muslim countries as well as in Europe. Iran and Syria, because of their open-door policy to refugees and for their proximity to Iraq were host for significant numbers of various ethnic and religious groups; countries such as Germany and Sweden hosted considerable numbers of immigrated Kurds, whereas the UK accepted mostly Iraqi Arabs and Assyrians (Sassoon, 2010; Chatelard, 2009, pp. 12-13).

In each region of settlement, Iraqis have encountered different regulations and social systems, which have shaped their experiences. In the US, they entered a society in which race, ethnicity, color, religion and sect are important in determining social positions (for individuals) and social status (for groups). From an ethnic and religious perspective, the Iraqi community in the US is significantly different from other Iraqi diaspora in the world. This diaspora community has formed over decades with a majority of Christians and Jews, who are well integrated into the host society and with a relatively successful social-economic profiles, usually as business owners in the private sector (Abraham, Howell & Shryock, 2011, p. 133). This does not mean that all Iraqis dwelling in the US are rich or even among the middle-class,

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as a considerable number of poor Iraqis in the United States (Kayyali, 2005, pp. 100-101).

Another distinctive characteristic of Iraqis in the US, which has made them different from other Iraqi diaspora communities around the world, is that the majority of them do not have strong connections with their homeland (Hanoosh, 2011, pp. 126-150), which means that their diaspora vision and their perception of the dream of return is not the same as the other dispersed Iraqis. This creates complexities for the member of the diaspora because in the US, they are usually treated as Arab-Muslims, while the majority of them are Chaldeans, Assyrians and Kurds in terms of ethnical and racial origins (non-Arab), and Catholic Christians and Jews with reference to their religion (non-Muslim). Moreover, they are non-Protestant, which is different from the mainstream Christianity in the American context. It is acknowledged that diaspora identification modalities are complex and much dependent on elements such as diaspora's history, its current situation in the host society, and the type of relationship between the country of origin and the host state (Hall, 1990, pp. 222-237; Lacroix, 2007, pp. 410-414; see also: Khater, 2005). As an example, one can site the way in which Iraqi-Americans refer to themselves as living in a host country that has experiences of war with the homeland, which is different from the self-presentation of those whose homelands have strategic relationships with the US, like British-Americans or Israeli-Americans. Some suggest that until 2003, Iraqi-Americans mostly presented themselves as people who simultaneously were deprived of their homeland because of a dictatorship, and have been discriminated against in their host country as "others", "suspicious people", and "Arab terrorists" (Salhi & Netton, 2006, pp. 127-140; Abraham et al., 2011).

Research indicates that in the post-2003 era, Iraqis in the US

mostly introduce themselves with a profile that has more emphasis on a struggle to build an adoptive identity in the new home, disappointed about prospects of returning to the land to which they belong (Abraham et al., 2011). This can clearly be traced in the activities and tone of certain well-known Iraqi-Americans, such as Bassam Haddad and Sinan Antoon, who were critical about the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Shapiro, Antoon, Haddad, Mikdashi & Salamy, 2004). Accordingly, for many of the US-based Iraqis, Iraq retains a powerful imaginary and affective association as homeland, but they believe it is not possible to return. For all, the post-9/11 "war on terror" has become a significant discourse, influencing the way in which they construct their identities, represent themselves, create their organizations and define their strategies. This is a reality, which makes the diaspora's evolution more complicated. The following sections present a more refined image of the US Iraqi community and its future within the American context.

3. 1. Christians and a Majority-Minority Impact on the Diaspora

If we agree to use the recently defined term of "Chaldo-Assyrian" as an ethnic tag for Iraqi Christians,[1] until the 1990s, this ethnic tag was the third major Iraqi ethnic group in the US, after Arabs and Kurds, while Turkmen was the fourth major ethnicity. According to the national Iraqi census, in 1987, Christians from all sects had almost 9% of the entire population in the country -1.4 million out of 16,335,199- whereas, after the 1990s to the present days, despite the doubling of the national population, Iraqi Christians' number

1. There is a controversy over this categorization among Iraqis including Christians, but it has been used by certain scholars and in certain official national documents in Iraq and in the US. (Michael, 2004).

has had a significant decline. The latest figures are an estimate of 300,000–450,000, which in a national population of almost 34,000,000 means they are somewhere between 1-1.5% (Iraqi Central Statistical Organization, n.d.; B.C., 2014; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2009). According to United Nations reports, 30% of Iraqi refugees around the world belong to those minorities, whereas their national population is much less than this percentage (Taneja, 2007). Their population in Iraq keeps dwindling by the day, whereas, American Iraqi Christians comprise 50% or even more of the entire population of the diaspora (Carlisle, 2011, pp. 148-149). Moreover, Chaldo-Assyrians have their own language, which is different from Arabic and Kurdish.[1] In addition, it is worth noting that they have to some extent maintained their culture along with their religion (Michael, 2004). Strategically, these factors have leading influences in different levels for the community and its members, in terms of their visions, their identifications and their representations, both in the short and long term.

Yasmeen Hanoosh argues that the majority of Iraqi Christian immigrants in the United States do not have a daily life with constant connections to their land of origin, or frequent visits there, despite the fact that their identities have been shaped in relation to Iraq within the American context. Examining narratives through which US-based Iraqi Christians describe themselves to other Americans, Hanoosh notes that the key terms used are the following: “offspring of the founders of the first civilizations; speaking Aramaic, devout Catholics, hardworking and successful entrepreneurs, and community and family oriented” (Hanoosh, 2011, p. 127). Considering these ingredients, it is clear that the nation-state of Iraq has no determinant place in their representation

1. Syriac which a branch of Aramaic language.

and identification. In other words, it is not a unifying factor or an acknowledged part of their identity. Considering this observation, it can be said that their perception of the ancestral home may be historical and cultural, rather than social and political.

3. 2. Iraqi Muslims in the United States

Iraqi-Muslims in the American context are in the margins of both the host society and the diaspora, whether in accordance with the national patterns of religion and race in the US, or in comparison to the majority of the diaspora, which is non-Muslim. Another parameter differentiating the US-based Iraqi-Muslims with their non-Muslim compatriots stems from the form of their entrance in the United States. The minority Muslims have mostly entered as refugees or asylum seekers, whereas the remaining groups have been accepted to a considerable degree via work permission, student visa or joining family members who already lived there, specifically before 2003 (Sassoon, 2010, pp. 110-113). This means not only their experiences of leaving the homeland are different, but their migration networks vary as well. The non-Muslim segment benefiting from a well-established network in the US have been entering the country since the early 20th century, while the Muslim part, lacking close connections with the US, started its transatlantic experience majorly after the first war between the US and Iraq in 1991 (Chatelard, 2009, pp. 10-15).

According to Husham al-Hussainy, the imam of the Karbala Islamic Center in Dearborn, “It is necessary to differentiate between Iraqis who came before 1990 and those who arrived afterward”, because those senior Muslim members of the diaspora were different from the next group both in terms of their economic

status and their social class (Takim, 2009, p. 25). Randa Kayyali notes that the main place for the wealthiest Arabs in the US is Northern Virginia and Washington DC, and the majority of Iraqi-Arabs who immigrated before the 1990s live there. On the other hand, Dearborn, in Michigan, and Nashville, in Tennessee, are major concentrations respectively for recent Iraqi immigrants with lower-middle-class profiles (Kayyali, 2005, p. 101). It has also been observed by scholars that the recent groups have a stronger sense of identifying themselves as Iraqi-Muslims (Cappucci, 2014, pp. 135-142; Walbridge & Aziz, 2000, pp. 321-340). "Many of these Iraqis see themselves in exile, a term that suggests a desire and the possibility for a return to one's homeland" (Takim, 2009, p. 25). For them, the myth of return and the perception of "homeland" mark major differences, with respect to the Christian segment of the diaspora. This can be understood as a divergent dynamism, especially in the absence of a strong unifying leadership within the diaspora.

3. 3. Impacts of the Christian Elements

Christians in Iraq, who are generally known as "Syriac speaking people", are called by other different names among themselves, including: Kaldani (Chaldean), Ashoori (Assyrian), Seryani (Syriac), and a small minority of Armani sect (Armenian). There is a certain degree of contestation and confusion over the ascription of identities among these groups.

> There are heated debates and doubts about the actual identity of these people. Some writers think that these are all one group of people; others suppose that they are multiple groups of people with different identities. Some of these groups claim that their current names are the only genuine names; that all other names or identities are a distraction of theirs (Hanish, 2008, p. 32).

With all these groups, Chaldeans constitute at least two-thirds of the entire community's population; they are therefore the largest group, followed by Assyrians, Syriacs and Armenians respectively (Assyrian International News Agency, 2003a). These groups all have a number of major elements in common: their religion as Christianity, their race as Semite, which is shared with Iraqi Arabs and Jews as well, their language as Syriac (an existing dialect of Aramaic language) and various traditions and customs, which have been preserved in the course of history.

From a diaspora perspective, in the US-based Iraqi Christian community, the demographic arrangement is different from the homeland, where Chaldeans are the majority. In the United States, there is a large body of Iraqi-American-Assyrians, in a way that there is no significant difference between the two communities in terms of numerical size. While there are common features, the two communities have distinctive differences, which must be taken into account when analyzing the groups' identities. From a historical point of view, the majority of Assyrians in Iraq, or now from Iraq in other countries, are not considered as native Iraqis. From a cultural perspective, they have had a lesser degree of assimilation and integration into the Iraqi society (Bazzi, 1991). However, their presence in Mesopotamia and its surrounding lands has a record for thousands of years; their settlement patterns and the extension of their communications, especially until the end of the Ottomans, indicates that members of the community were largely inhabitants of the Eastern and Southeastern valleys and villages of Anatolia, where Turkey is located today. The high mountains in the South of Anatolia and the North of Iraq made it difficult for the people to have a close and frequent communication with Iraqis, especially in that period of time when technologies were not developed as they are today. Mutual interaction between the majority of Assyrians

and Iraqis was minimal to the end of the Ottomans. At that time, and by the provocation of British promises of independence, Assyrian leaders revolted against the declining Ottoman Empire. They failed and were subjected to aggressive operations by the Turks. Following the clashes, many of them decamped into the southern territories of the empire, where Iraq is located today, and resettled largely in Baghdad and Baqubah, which were under British Occupation at the time (Austin, 2006, pp. 7-15). It is therefore understandable that Assyrians are viewed as originally non-native Iraqis. Yet, a small number of Assyrian Kurds have been in the Iraqi territories, mainly in Kurdistan.

On the other hand, Chaldeans have dwelled in Iraq for several millennia with a dense population in the North and sporadic colonies in the central and Southern parts of the country. This geo-demographical profile has resulted in a closer interaction with other Iraqis in a context in which Chaldeans are primarily known as a segment of Iraq's diverse society. In other words, they have been always considered as native Iraqis. These identity integrations can be pursued within the communities' strategies and actions in various historical events. In the shaky situation of the country under the British occupation, Chaldeans had a different position from the Assyrians, which was similar to the majority of Iraqis opposing the British occupation, while Assyrians mostly adopted a supportive approach to the foreign occupier. Even more, Assyrians were the main body of local servants to the British troops during the occupation and in the post-independence period. After the collapse of the Hashemite Kingdom, which was backed by the British, many of the Assyrians left the country and in a short period, most of them were accepted as refugees by the British government (Al-Rasheed, 1994).

These two Iraqi Christian communities within the American

context usually converge on a range of cultural and political matters, but diverge on other issues that revolve around identity-related questions and nationalist affiliations. For example, until the mid-1990s and in a time when a large part of the dispersed Iraqis around the world was engaged in struggles against the former regime, there was no involvement among the US-based Iraqi diaspora. This was due in a great part to the majority-minority impact within the community. In fact, the Christian minority position in Iraq and their social political strategies in the homeland were such that the Baathist regime did not consider them a threat.[1] Meanwhile, the participation of Christian figures in top governmental posts, for example as prime minister and foreign minister, may be assessed within this context. Tareq Aziz[2] is the best-known instance, especially if we do not forget that he led a majority of Iraqi delegations to other countries. There is no doubt that the reason for which those people were appointed to those positions was their loyalty to the party's principles and hierarchy, apart from their religion. However, at the same time, their presence gave an opportunity to the diaspora to contact its homeland and influence the ruling of the country. Certain believe that "the more inclusive the political system or proposed system, the more are diasporic activities channeled into that system and shaped accordingly, rather than taking place outside the system in more confrontational forms" (Natali, 2007, p. 197). In other words, since

1. It will be more meaningful when we keep in mind that the regime essentially responded aggressively to a couple of issues and realized them as threats for its principles: firstly Islamist activities that were against its secular fundamentalism and then independent or separate tendencies that were against its national authority. Forasmuch as, Iraqi Christians have not been involved in those two fields subsequently they had not been accounted as threat for the regime as well.
2. His real name was Mikhail Yuhanna.

there was no need for Christians to take an oppositional approach to the regime or to be under pressure to leave the country, there was no oppositional activity in the diaspora against the regime. Thus, their reason for leaving the country has mainly been inspired by other motivations such as academic or professional motifs, rather than political ones (Chatelard, 2009; Benjamin, 1996, pp. 18-46). It does not mean that there have been no opposition organizations or figures among Iraqi Christians; to a large extent, their aspirations have been led and formed by a small but active political group known as the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM). This party is one of the political groups in Iraqi Kurdistan; since 1979, it joined the opposite on front and even entered a military phase, but was never widely welcomed by its co-religious people in the homeland and the diaspora (Yeldiz, 2004, pp. 44-45).

The quietist strategy towards the former regime is a good example of convergence between the two groups in the US. Meanwhile, their crucial contribution in facilitating and developing an out-flow migration from the homeland to the host country proves their convergence as well. Recent immigrants in the US have received great assistances from the established Iraqi-American community in cities such as Detroit, San Diego and Chicago. In addition, there have been a number of gatherings like formal conferences and informal meetings between the two communities in the US, aiming to define a unified path for their future. Furthermore, a growing call among Iraqi Christians, especially in diaspora to encourage people to use the term “Chaldo-Assyrian” indicates another form of their convergence (Hanoosh, 2008, p. 75). On the other hand, their major divergent tension in the contemporary era was seen in post-Saddam Iraq when a number of the US-based Iraqi Chaldean leaders wrote a letter to Paul Bremer, the Civil Administrator of Iraq at the time, and criticized the fact

that the Chaldeans constitute at least 75% of the Christian population in Iraq and "must be represented by Chaldeans and no one else" (Chaldean News Agency, 2003). They rejected the decision of the occupying forces to appoint an Iraqi Assyrian party in the Transitional Authority as the representative of all Christians in the country. In return, this position was criticized by the Assyrian leaders who considered the protest as "undermining their unity" (Assyrian International News Agency, 2003b). Apart from their differences in terms of religious affiliations and beliefs, the divergence is reflected in the way in which they identify themselves in America and in relation to Iraq. The appellation of their two leading organizations can be a good example: The Assyrian American National Federation (AANF) is an umbrella organization, established in 1933. It has eight affiliates, which undertake lobbying and advocacy activities, and provide scholarships for students, run educational and social programs and pursue their communities' needs and problems in the United States and in Middle Eastern countries (AANF, n.d.). An overview of this organization's history reveals that it has never been labelled with a prefix or suffix of "Iraq", while from its birth until present days, Iraqi Assyrians are the first priority group who benefit from its activities. Furthermore, the stated vision of the Federation, its strategies and its various projects narrate a clear sense of American-Assyrian diasporic transnational ethnic-religious connectivity, rather than any particular national belongings to Iraq.

The story from the Chaldean side is rather different. From the beginning of their migration to the US, they have chosen a name referring explicitly to their Iraqi origins. Even after 2003, they decided to keep the name and add "American" to it. One of the most influential bodies among them, which was established more than fifty years ago, is the Chaldean Iraqi American Association of

Michigan,[1] previously the Chaldean Iraqi Association of Michigan[2] (Hanoosh, 2008, pp. 206-207; Jabiro, 2005). Another symbolic point of difference is the unique architectural mode of the Chaldean centers and churches in the United States, as they are inspired by Middle Eastern styling, unlike Assyrian institutions in the United States.

Figure 3. Saint George Chaldean Catholic Church. Source: Stgeorgechaldean, n.d.

Figure 4. Chaldean Center of America. Source: Swedenburg, 2010, Feb 04

1. CIAAM
2. CIAM

Moreover, the two communities have preferred to live in separate concentrations with dense populations in Chicago and Detroit. They have their own centers, networks and gatherings around the two poles. In addition, while the Iraqi Assyrians in the diaspora convey more signs of "victim communities", the Chaldeans are classified mostly as "labor" types (Cohen, 2008, p. 18). Their different forms of emigration experiences and their distinguishable visions inevitably define different strategies of identity formation and representation and create distinct networks.

3. 4. The Diaspora's Problems in the US

Diasporic internal tensions take different forms; these can be caused by political disagreements, historical disputations and/or generational gaps. Usually, parents suffering from the trauma of being dispersed and not fully accepted in the new home are concerned about the safekeeping of their identity and their cultural heritages. They experience a degree of challenge with the next generation, which is more integrated to the new home and usually less concerned with the values of the land of origin (Jamil, Nassar-McMillan & Lambert, 2007, pp. 199-205). Political issues have also been reported as sources of tension among parts of the community, especially in relation to the American wars with the homeland and the post-2003 US foreign policy towards Iraq. In addition, ethnic tensions or religious conflicts may be transported from the homeland to the host country. These types of tensions between Iraqi Kurds and Chaldo-Assyrians have been reported in the post-2003 Iraq as well. In an interview with *the New York Times*, Rosie Malek Yonan, a member of the Chaldo-Assyrian community in the US, "accused Kurdish commanders of depriving

the Christians of security in an effort to tilt the demographics in favor of Kurds" (Kramer, 2008).

The important point is that this status does not belong only to the above-mentioned Iraqi ethnicities. Iraqi Arabs, although they have had no similar tensions, have experienced various problems among themselves in Iraq and in the United States. In their research about recent Iraqi refugees (after 1990) in Dearborn, Linda S. Walbridge and Talib M. Aziz refer to problems between these Iraqis and the established residents (before 1990). Due to cultural differences, as well as the level of integration within the host country, the recent Iraqi Arab immigrants were quickly shut out of the east Dearborn rental market (Walbridge & Aziz, 2000, p. 334). Since many of them are from small cities and rural areas, the size of their families, their perceptions of living in a populated metropolis like Detroit and their strategies to solve their problems have been barriers to smoothing relations with the new home and the established Arab-Americans. Walbridge and Aziz note a common attitude among them in the area: "do not bring the police into your disputes". They mostly prefer to solve their problems by turning to lawyers of ACCESS[1] (Walbridge & Aziz, 2000, pp. 328-336).

4. Closing Remarks

This paper presents significant insights about the Iraqi diaspora identity in the US, its relationship to both the homeland, the host country, and the way in which it has been shaped by distinctive

1. Arab Community Centre for Economic and Social Services is an agency established in 1971 to assist with immigrant matters. It serves as a link to other providers of services for the community and has shown an effective influence (ACCESS, n.d.).

ethnic, religious and class factors. Regarding the theoretical framework mentioned in the introduction, this identity is very different from the first meaning or the "social form", as signs of the three strategic elements are not reflected strongly and coherently among the current representations of the diaspora members, their organizations and their activities. Instead, our research supports a perception that conveys a form of identity, which is more similar to the third meaning or "type of consciousness," rather than "cultural production". In other words, the US-based Iraqi diaspora identity reflects a certain degree of uncertainty and constant transformation. It tells us that the community's identity still needs time to position itself properly within the American context and in relation to the homeland.

Our study illustrates that there are 45 registered and officially active Iraqi-American institutions in the US.[1] Among them, 35 organizations have been created and active after 1990, while only 10 organizations were established and registered before that date. This significant growth can amplify divergent approaches and strategies within the American context, in which ethnic, religious and racial factors are formally accepted as bases for social-political activities. The divergent case is relatively mirrored in the history, visions, and activities of the organizations. Of these, 22 have a transnational vision of collaboration across borders of ethnicity and religion, proving a sense of their Iraqi-American identities. By contrast, 23 organizations have ethno-religious visions and mostly follow sectarian strategies through their specific ethnic-religious networks.

As depicted in this paper, Iraqi diaspora identity relates to territorial attachment and the powerful symbols of "homeland".

1. See appendix 1.

Despite this, for many of the organizations studied in this research, being "Iraqi" goes beyond a connection with the modern geographical country as a nation-state. Their connections to Iraq are based much more on an older history, long-standing traditions and customs, rather than the post-Westphalian concept of "nationalism". They express pride in the Babylon era, the powerful Abbasid Empire, their strength and perseverance through adversity, and their diversity and unity in the course of many centuries. At the same time, their diaspora identity formation is understood and represented through ethnic and religious criteria, whether as Chaldean, Assyrian, Arab or Kurd. This is why, for example, the Iraqi Chaldeans and Assyrians in the US, and in spite of many similarities, still keep their main concentrations and centers separate in Detroit and Chicago. Similarly, Iraqi Arab Shias in Dearborn create their own centers in a city with several Lebanese Arab Shia organizations. The case for Iraqi Kurds in the US is not much different. The divergence in diaspora identity is unlikely to be overcome in the near future, as the Iraqi Ambassador to the United States expressed: "Iraqis have not had the chance to sit down, away from pressure, and clearly decide what identity they want for their country in the next years" (Namou, 2016).

Appendix 1. Table of US-Based Iraqi Diaspora Organizations[1]

	Name	Vision & Mission	Location	Since
1	Al Iraqi	Communal Services for Iraqis in and outside of Iraq	USA	1996
2	Al Khoei Foundation	Religious Services Cultural	London, NY, Montreal, Paris, Islamabad, Karachi and Mumbai	1989
3	American Aid Society (Iraqi Jewish in the USA)	Religious Services Cultural	Jamaica Estates (NY)	1934
4	American Kurdish Association	Lobby/Advocacy, Refugees & Immigrants	Lodi (NJ)	2010
5	American Kurdish Centre	Social Services, Refugees & Immigrants	Fairfax (VA)	2003
6	American Kurdish Information Network	Lobby/Advocacy, Information Resources Center	Washington (DC)	1993
7	Arab Chaldean Social Service Council WIC	Social Services	Detroit (MI)	1979
8	Assyrian American National Federation, Inc. (AANF)	Cultural	Southfield (MI)	1933
9	Assyrian Universal Alliance Foundation (AUAF)	Philanthropic, Non-profit, Non-political Organization	Chicago (IL)	1978
10	Atlas Group	Business, Development, Consulting Management	-	1976
11	Chaldean Americans Reaching and Encouraging	Community Service & Outreach	West Bloomfield (MI)	1997
12	Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America	Lobby/Advocacy	(MI)	2007
13	Chaldean Democratic Forum in the USA & Canada	Lobby/Advocacy	(MI)	2003

1. The information in this table has been gathered through an intensive research and from online resources, scholarships, academic dissertations and the like.

	Name	Vision & Mission	Location	Since
14	Chaldean Federation of America	Civil Rights Social Services	Southfield (MI)	1981
15	Chaldean Iraqi American Association of Michigan	Recreational & Social Events Cultural	Southfield (MI)	1970
16	Chaldean National Congress, The	Political Party Lobby/Advocacy	Detroit (MI) Irbil (Iraq)	2002
17	Chaldean National Union	Social Services	El Cajon (CA)	2004
18	Darul-Salam	Religious Services Cultural	(DC)	1999
19	Education for Peace in Iraq Centre, The	Human Rights Lobby/Advocacy	Washington (DC)	1998
20	Hire Iraqis Com	Human Rights Business/Development	Chicago (IL)	2004
21	International Society of Iraqi Scientists	Research	Dearborn (MI)	2000
22	Iraq Association Society for Peace and Friendship	Refugees & Immigrants	Phoenix (AZ)	2000
23	Iraq Community Centre	Refugees & immigrants, Social Events	Peoria (AZ)	2009
24	Iraq Foundation (Previously as the Free Iraq Foundation)	Political Organization, Networking, Civil Society, Regional Stability	Washington (DC), Baghdad	1991
25	Iraq Memory Foundation	-	-	2003
26	Iraqi American Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Business & Development	Herndon (VA)	2003
27	Iraqi American Higher Education Foundation	Development	Harrisonburg (VA)	1990 s
28	Iraqi Community Centre of Seattle	Refugee & Immigrants, Social Activities	Seattle (WA)	1998
29	Iraqi Forum for Democracy	Lobby/Advocacy	Ann Arbor (MI)	1998
30	Iraqi Medical Science Association (IMSA)	Business / Development, Consulting	USA & Iraq	1998
31	Iraqi National Accord (INA)	Lobby/Advocacy	USA & Iraq	1991
32	Iraqi National Congress (INC)	Lobby/Advocacy	USA & Iraq	1992
33	Iraqi Peace Action Coalition (Previously as Iraqi Action Coalition)	Human Rights Lobby/Advocacy	Raleigh (NC)	1997

	Name	Vision & Mission	Location	Since
34	Iraqi Research Foundation for Analysis and Development (IRFAD)	Providing expert knowledge and insight understanding of the Iraqi Community	Washington (DC) Baghdad	2006
35	Karbala Islamic Educational Centre	Religious Services Cultural	Dearborn (MI)	1994
36	Kurdish Human Right Watch	Lobby/Advocacy Human Rights Civil society	USA & Iraq	1989
37	The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies	Refugees & Immigrants	Washington (DC)	2007
38	Mandaean Society of America, The	Recreational/Social Events	Morristown (NJ)	1991
39	Minority Humanitarian Foundation, The	Refugees & Immigrants, Iraqi Minorities' Rights	San Diego (CA)	2014
40	Nineveh Council of America, The	Lobby/Advocacy Iraqi Minorities' Rights	Bingham Farms (MI)	2013
41	Rally for Iraq	Higher Education, Students & Social Activities	Cordova (NM)	2009
42	Zahra Trust	Religious and Social Services	-	1980
43	Washington Kurdish Institute	Human Rights Lobby/Advocacy Research	Washington (DC)	1996
44	Women's Alliance for a Democratic Iraq	Advocacy for Women's Rights	Washington (DC)	2007
45	Women for Free Iraq	Human Rights Women's Issues Lobby/Advocacy	(MI)	2003

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