IRAQI DIASPORA IN ARIZONA: IDENTITY AND HOMELAND IN WOMEN'S DISCOURSE

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is gratefully dedicated to my grandmothers, the two strongest women I know: Rishqa Khalaf al-Taqi and Zahra Shibeeb al-Rubaye.

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ABSTRACT

In analyzing the collective experiences of Iraqi immigrants in displacement, facing any hardships, resettling and assimilating into their new environments, and the push factors that help form their own identity, this thesis explores the generational demarcation and the concept of the 'reluctant immigrant' in thinking about place attachment and displacement. Sense of belonging to the homeland is a theme in the diasporic narratives of Iraqi women. Immigrants reach out to the imagined homeland in an effort to manage the emotional trauma of exile, while diasporic imagination engages the construction of immigrant identity and political ramifications of this identity in the receiving country. This ultimately allows the individual to construct their diasporic identity in terms of their ongoing relationship with the nation-state and the intersections of class and gender in migration experiences, cultural and religious traditions, and the social struggles of fitting in and establishing a successful livelihood and state of being.

I. Introduction

Formation of Cultural Space in Diaspora

It was September 17th, the seventh day of *Muharram*, about 15 minutes after the *adhan* for *maghrib* prayer. My mother and I walk into the familiar hotel parking lot off the side of the highway, although it had been a year since we last stepped foot there. As usual, there are the occasional young guys standing outside the main doors having a cigarette or talking while they gazed at everyone who walked by. I felt a slight breeze so I tug at my shirt to make sure it is modestly long enough and I double check that my *hijab* is wrapped correctly. I open the main door of the hotel lobby and walk towards the conference room, assuming that many eyes would be staring up at us as we said our greetings. To my surprise, only three sets of eyes stared as we walked in and sat down. It was still early in the night and only a few women were sitting in the room, waiting for the sheikh's lecture to begin at 7:30 pm, sharp.

Slowly, women started entering the *Husseiniya*, many of them Iraqi women in what used to be a majlis heavily attended by Saudi Arabians.[1] The *Husseiniya* is a ritual hall, room or building meant for Shi'a commemoration ceremonies, especially the mourning rituals of *'Ashura* [2]and the martyrdom of Imam al-Hussein at the

[1] In 2016, this *Husseiniya* was majorly Saudi in attendance, but over the last couple of years, as more and more Iraqis in Tucson found out about the *Husseiniya*, their numbers of attendance have increased to about 150 people. To my knowledge, this is the only formal *Husseiniya* in Tucson although there are a couple of *majalis* that are held within the homes of Iraqi and Iranian families.

[2] For Shi'a Muslims, the month of Muharram not only marks the beginning of the year of the Islamic lunar calendar but also the tragedy of Karbala that happened in 680 CE. The tragedy involved Imam Hussein ibn Ali, the third Shi'a Imam, along with about 72 of his companions and family members went into battle against Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, the second caliph of the Umayyid Caliphate. Hussain ibn Ali was born in 620 CE in the city of Medina in Arabia. His father was Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, and his mother was Fatima bint Muhammad. The death of Imam Hussein

Battle of Karbala. The space is adorned in Arabic calligraphy, Islamic images and portrayal of Ahl al-Bayt. The *Husseiniya* is also a place where people gather for prayer, religious holidays, and funerals. In tenth-century Iraq, the *Husseiniya* began with tents erected for the time of 'Ashura. This temporary space became more fixed in the time of the Safavid Dynasty, when the term '*Husseiniya'* was first coined.[3] At the time, Iranian and Iraqi Shi'a Muslims attached the fixed structure to a house or a separate building.

Although the rituals conducted in the *Husseiniya* differ depending on the local communities, they all share a governing factor of the "Karbala paradigm,"[4] in which the focal point of the events is the commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussein and his companions. Some of the rituals practiced include the recitation of elegiac poems that focus on the themes of divine justice and worldly injustice, death and suffering. The emotional dramatization of these poems provokes weeping among the participants, beating their chests in rhythmic unison, or taking part in self-flagellation.[5] Theatrical reenactments, that include performances and actors in costume, also take place in the *Husseiniya* to present different moments in the Battle of Karbala.

The *Husseiniya*, as a physical space, is in a conference room within a hotel off of Interstate 10. It has been split into a men's section and a smaller women's section.

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on the 10th of Muharram ('*Ashura*) is an event that is commemorated and mourned by Shi'a all over the world. For Muslims, especially Shi'a Muslims, Imam Hussein is a symbol of a resistance against oppression, injustice and tyranny.

[3] Juan Eduardo Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 320.

[4] Michael M.J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

[5] Campo, 320.

A screen, projector and speakers have been connected together to be able to broadcast the lecture from the men's side for the female participants to view. On the busiest nights of *Muharram*, the women's section will reach a capacity of about 50-60 women and children, crouched together in about half the space (or even less than that) of this conference room. I found an empty seat against the wall, which I was quick to snag because sitting on the floor for an hour and a half when it gets crowded is not an ideal situation. Some of the older women sat to the right of me and started talking about who received her citizenship, who applied for it, who traveled back to Iraq, and the most dominant part of the conversation- what U.S. government benefits were offered to the women. One of the older women was asking her friend about the process for Section 8 housing because she was finally off the waitlist and didn't know how to complete the next steps. The other women shared their experiences (or lack thereof) with the Section 8 process and the woman took notes in order to tell her son how to move forward.

The donning of black clothing for at least forty days is a tradition that women particularly take part in when they mourn the loss of a loved one in the family. During '*Ashura*, women typically arrive to the *Husseiniya* wearing all black clothing and children sometimes would wear green bands on their heads. Older women wear traditional black cloaks (*'abayat rās*). Descendants of Prophet Muhammad through Imam al-Hassan or Imam al-Hussein (*sādeh*)[6] are highly respected among the Shi'a, and the men distinguish themselves by wearing a black or green turban-style head

[6] Males accepted as descendants of Prophet Muhammad through his grandsons, Hassan and Hussein, who were the sons of his daughter Fatima al-Zahra and his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib.

wraps (‘*amāmah*). The color black dominates the space in clothing and decoration to produce an atmosphere of mourning and sadness, which assists in separating the participants from the structure and practices of everyday life.[7] (Hamdan 2012: 125).

Additionally, to separate itself from the ordinary the *Husseiniya* is decorated for the rituals of ‘Ashura. The white walls of the space are covered in black cloths, images of Imam al-Hussein and Ahl al-Bayt, and calligraphic paintings of Quranic verses. Upon entering into the room of the *Husseiniya*, it no longer presents an ordinary space but has been transformed into a religious one through physical reminders of the religion and creating an environment for mourning with the use of the black cloth. Calligraphic paintings of short elegies with the portrayal of Imam al-Hussein or his brother, al-Abbas, are also hung up on the walls. Colorful flags in red, green and black with Husseiniya images are also placed around the Husseiniya. These images represent Imam al-Hussein and his family members who were martyred in the Battle of Karbala. Not only is the decoration used to create a religious landscape; it also produces an atmosphere of mourning and grief through creating a dark scene.

Throughout my visits to the *Husseiniya* over ten days, I noticed the patterns of attendance among the women, the approximate times they arrived, where they sat in the majlis and next to whom, the topics of their conversations, what they do for a living as well as the dialects of colloquial Iraqi Arabic they spoke and the regions they came from. Many women came from Baghdad (either as people from

[7] Faraj Hamdan, *The Development of Iraqi Shi'a Mourning Rituals in Modern Iraq: The `Ashurā Rituals and Visitation of Al-Arb`ain*, MA Thesis, Arizona State University, 2012, 125.

the city or migrants to the capital), Basra, Karbala and Najaf. Of the women who did work, they mainly worked in the hospitality sector as housekeepers in hotels or in administrative office jobs. Many of the mothers did not work because they had their hands full with raising children full-time. Throughout the majlis, I noticed these same women running back and forth from their seats to the children's area to shush their daughters or drag them to the seats next to them so that they were not disruptive during the *sheikh's* sermon. One of the women I talked to, Om Zainab[8], found out I was a teacher and asked me about the teacher certification process because she wanted to substitute at her daughter's school until her English was advanced enough that she could become a full-time teacher. Some of these women had finished college degrees in Iraq and either got their degrees accredited by the government or have chosen to work in a different area.

It was clear that many women wished they were back in Iraq for *Muharram* because it did not feel the same being in the small space of the majlis when they could participate in the larger mourning processions, the cooking, the changing of the decorations and flags, or holding their own *majalis* in their homes. Women shared the news of other women who had the opportunity to go to Iraq this year, and the others were happy for them or showed some envy that they were not able to go back "home" (as they put it) and be in the land of the Imams during this sacred time. Women refer to the idea of homeland in this sense because of the lack of social interaction and change in environment that usually occurs in the streets of Baghdad

[8] "Om" is a respectful way of referencing married women who are mothers. "Om" means 'mother of' so in this case, Om Zainab refers to the mother of Zainab.

or southern Iraq during the time of *Muharram*. To them, *Muharram* becomes part of the landscape and soundscape as a cultural event whereas in the United States, *Muharram* is a temporal addition to the daily structure of our lives. The lives of the participants go back to how they were as soon as the *majlis* finishes, unlike in the Middle East where "every day is *Ashura* and every land is Karbala."[9] Regardless of their decisions, it was clear that attending this *majlis* and the process of resettling into the United States was a long and difficult one, which involved many factors such as education, marriage, family, culture, language, memory and identity.

Overview: Refugees and their Struggles

The Federal Refugee Resettlement Program, created after Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, assists refugees in the resettlement process and helps them "achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival in the United States."[10] Since 1980, about three million refugees have resettled in the United States. According to a 2017 study conducted by Pew Research Center, from 2006 to 2016 the largest number of refugees came from Burma (159,692) and Iraq (135,643), both countries having faced sociopolitical conflicts.[11]

In the past few decades, Iraq has witnessed many changes to the state and faced many obstacles in terms of socioeconomic and geopolitical issues. Beginning in the 1990s when the United Nations first placed sanctions on Iraq due to the invasion of Kuwait until the fall of the Ba'th regime under the dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003,

[9] As commonly cited by Shi'a Muslims in Arabic.
[10] Jens Manuel Krogstad and Jynnah Radford, "Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 30 Jan. 2017.
[11] Ibid.

slowly the country began to decline into the current state it is in. In the last few years, the state has seen more instability and turmoil. Iraqis in the capital city, Baghdad, complain, "they still live in a permanent state of crisis because of sectarian and criminal violence, pervasive corruption, a broken infrastructure and a dysfunctional government."[12]

Migration patterns changed in Iraq in response to matters of international affairs that influenced the region. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, Iraq shifted from being a country of immigration to one of emigration. Two million foreign workers returned to their countries of origin after the Gulf War, in addition to the thousands of Iraqis who fled the country.[13] The diversity of Iraq's demographics includes its different ethno-religious groups of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Yazidis, Shi'a, Sunnis, Christians, and etcetera. Ethnic tensions in the country contributed to the instability and influx of emigration to developed countries in Europe, North America, and Australia, occurred.

Although ethnic tensions have existed since the time of the Saddam Hussein regime, the United States invasion and the Iraq War in 2003 greatly heightened these tensions to resurface. The creation of a new government caused a power vacuum among certain ethnic groups, with Shi'a and Kurds winning more seats in the election than Sunnis and Turkmen. The Shi'a Party were granted 140 out of 275 seats in the new government and Kurdish parties were allotted 75 seats.[14] This

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[12] Patrick Cockburn, "Iraq's Permanent Crisis." *Nation* 296.14 (2013): 17.
[13] Ibrahim Sirkeci, "War in Iraq: Environment of Insecurity and International Migration." *International Migration* 43.4 (2005): 198.
[14] Ibid., 199.

division left Sunnis without sufficient representation in the new Iraqi government, while they were the majority represented under the Ba'th Party and Saddam Hussein's regime. The results of this election triggered a power struggle among the different ethnic groups, which resulted in sectarian violence. The environment of post-war Iraq presents a lack of a functioning representative democracy and a chaotic political climate that ignites killings and bombing incidents among ethnic insurgent forces.

Iraqis also have overlapping identities that come to play different roles depending on the historical narrative and the issues at hand. Religious and ethnic identities hold significance, especially after the American invasion.[15] At the same time, Iraqis also identify with their kin, city, village, class, political ideology and gender. Regardless of these prominent identities, grappling with the national structures of forty years of totalitarianism, three wars, thirteen years of sanctions and destruction of the state through foreign invasion exacerbated divisions in Iraq in terms of sectarian and ideological beliefs.

Some of the main issues that Iraqi refugees face is the fear that human capital going to "waste" because refugees are not able to find careers in their professional fields of experience. There is also a struggle of resettling into a foreign country and starting over with a new foundation. Refugees have to learn a new language, new way of life, new laws, and new job system. Refugees may also face worry about their family's lack of security. Additionally, there may be cases of post-traumatic stress disorder from living in war and under sanctions.

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[15] Thabit Abdullah, *Dictatorship, Imperialism and Chaos: Iraq since 1989.* London: Zed Books, 2006, 3.

In 2007, one-fourth of Iraqi foreign-born adults in the US had less than a high school education. About 30.7 percent of Iraqi-born adults had a high school diploma and about 27.1 percent of Iraqi immigrants had a Bachelor's degree or higher.[16] Iraqi immigrant men outnumbered women in 2007; of the Iraqi immigrants living in the United States, 53.8 percent were men and 46.2 percent were women. In terms of employment, about 27 percent of employed Iraqi-born women worked in administrative occupations. 19 percent worked in service occupations and 15.9 percent of women worked in manufacturing, installation, and repair occupations.[17]

The environment of insecurity in Iraq is not a new concept but rather goes back to the middle of the last century. It is rooted in the Arabization policies employed by Iraqi governments and their leaders, beginning with the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and continuing through the invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and the Gulf War, the United Nations imposed sanctions in August 1990 and the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003.[18] All of these events contributed to the chaotic environment, in addition to poverty, instability, uneven distributions of wealth and human rights abuses in the country.

The deteriorating security conditions, along with the rising levels of sectarian violence, triggered a large exodus of Iraqis to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. After the bombing of the Shi'a shrine in Samarra in February of 2006, the fear of living in the country pushed many Iraqis --both Sunni and Shi'a-- to flee the country

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[16] Terrazas, Aaron Terrazas Aaron. "Iraqi Immigrants in the United States." *Migration Policy Institute*, Migration Policy Institute, 2 Mar. 2017.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Sirkeci, 202.

and seek refuge elsewhere.[19] By November 2006, a hundred thousand Iraqis were fleeing every month and refugee populations were estimated at 1 million in Syria, 750,000 in Jordan and 150,000 Iraqis in Egypt. Similarly, around two million people were displaced inside Iraq.[20]

At the international conference in Geneva in April 2007, the United States stated that it would resettle 25,000 Iraqis by the end of the fiscal year in September. In June of 2007, Senators Edward Kennedy and Gordon Smith introduced legislation that would require extra processing for refugees and expand the number of special immigrant visas made available to Iraqi employees of the United States military, government, contractors and media.[21] The World Health Organization estimated that about 151,000 Iraqi civilians had died from the beginning of the invasion in March 2003 to the middle of 2006. By 2008, the United States had admitted 13,823 Iraqis into the country, expecting to admit at least 17,000 by the end of the fiscal year for 2009.

Ever since the United States invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the consequent sectarian violence that occurred after 2006, the U.S. accepted and resettled around 159,000 Iraqi refugees.[22] While every refugee's story is different, they all have escaped their country to seek a better life for their families and provide their children with opportunities for success that they may not have been able to

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[19] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics,* 2007.
[20] "Iraq Displacement Figures Drop Below Two Million for First Time Since 2014; Nearly Four Million Have Returned Home." *International Organization for Migration*, 5 Sept. 2018.
[21] "Promises to the Persecuted: The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008," *Human Rights First*, 2009, 3.
[22] Krogstad and Jynnah Radford, "Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S.".

have living in a warzone. What do all of these refugees have in common? They hope for a safe haven away from the turmoil of what they once referred to as "home". Although unrest is not new to Iraq, especially after the wars and sanctions that occurred under the Ba'th regime, the violence and chaos had set the tone for the newly reformed country and government. Upon realizing their new reality, Iraqis were no longer willing to live every day in fear of death. Thus, Iraqis from all over the country left behind all they knew to arrive in a foreign country with little to no money, limited knowledge of the language, no work prospects, and no family.

Similarly, immigration waves to the United States in the 1990s brought Shi'a Iraqi women from Southern Iraq who were in the Saudi *Rafha* refugee camp. These women mostly came from families who participated in the 1991 uprisings in Iraq. Participants included the Shi'a majority of Southern Iraq and the Kurdish groups of Northern Iraq. In the ceasefire of the Gulf War, the Shi'a and Kurdish populations participated in rebellions against the social repression of the Saddam Hussein regime and called for a regime change. The rebellions were suppressed by the regime and as a result, thousands of people died, the Mesopotamian Marshes were drained forcing the relocation of the Marsh Arabs, and almost two million Iraqis were internally displaced. More than 80,000 Iraqis fled across the border to refugee camps in the middle of the deserts of Saudi Arabia. They registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross and resettled in the United States after the Gulf War. As for the Kurds, they had escaped to the mountains along the northern

border; 280,000 fled to Turkey, 750,000 fled to Iran and about 300,000 gathered at the Turkish border.[23]

Methods and Research Design

This study examines the factors that influence the ability for Iraqi refugee women to socially assimilate to American culture. This research includes an ethnographic study based on interviews with Iraqi diaspora women who have been living in the Arizona diaspora, in the greater Phoenix and Tucson areas, and who primarily arrived in the United States in the larger Iraqi immigration waves after 1990 and after 2003. These women are from different socioeconomic classes, ages, religion, ethnic groups, education backgrounds and immigration waves.

A diaspora can be an imagined transnational community; at the same time, "migrants do not automatically form a diaspora but become one when they image and constitute themselves through collective images and practices that construct them as such."[24] I do not aim to make any generalizations about diasporic identities in my study. However, I do aim to collect data on the collective experiences of Iraqi immigrants in displacement, facing any hardships, resettling and assimilating into their new environments, and the push factors that help form their own identity.

By conducting this study, I propose to shed light on the stories of Iraqi refugee women and their backgrounds. In doing so, I hope to gain a better understanding of identity formation and the concept of hybrid identity found among first and second-

[23] "Iraq Displacement Figures Drop Below Two Million for First Time Since 2014; Nearly Four Million Have Returned Home." *International Organization for Migration*, 5 Sept. 2018.
[24] Martin Sökefeld, "Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora." *Global Networks* 6.3 (2006): 267.

generation Iraqi immigrants. This study looks at how this identity is conceived in the minds of these women and the different factors that contribute to its formation. At the same time, I am looking at the aspects of diaspora consciousness that interrelate to identity formation, resettlement and livelihood management in immigrants.

This research is significant because it is the first academic study on the Iraqi diaspora in Arizona. Prior research has included interviews conducted amongst Iraqi women in Detroit and Toronto[25] but has been limited to those areas and do not necessarily relate to the generational differences amongst refugee women. Not only has this study focused on Iraqi refugee women in these specific cities, at the same time the women are of Iraqi Sunni origin and came to the United States after the Iraq War in 2006. My research does not only focus on Arab or Sunni Iraqi women, but also includes women of Shi'a, Kurdish and Christian backgrounds.

This research is based on ethnographic work and personal interviews with 15 Iraqi women, ranging from 20-55 years in age, which were conducted between September 2018 to March 2019. These women come from different immigration waves, particularly after 1991 and after 2003, as well as from different socioeconomic, educational, religious and geographical backgrounds. The women I interviewed came from Baghdad, Mosul, Karbala, Sulaymaniyah, Najaf, Nasriyah and Samawa. These women are Shi'a and Sunni Muslims and Christians. They are also Arab and Kurdish and have witnessed different generations of Iraqi history. All of

[25] See Nadia Jones-Gailani, "Qahwa and Kleiche : Drinking Coffee in Oral History Interviews with Iraqi Women in Diaspora." *Global Food History* 3.1 (2017): 84-100.

these women were born in Iraq, but some left the homeland as young as three months while others left as old as 50 years. The women who were in their 20s were unmarried and our meetings took place in coffee shops for the most, while the women in their 30s-50s were married and had kids so I met them in their homes.[26]

The experiences of the women I interviewed are expressed through narratives to understand the essence of diasporic life outside of Iraq. In this study, the use of narrative is important so that the refugees can tell their own stories of displacement, war, torture and resettlement because narration is seen as a relational achievement.[27] These women have faced persecution, experienced hunger and tackled isolation and adjusting to a new country. Through interacting with the women, language and communication occur in the interrelationship between a moral identity, narrative and sense of community.

It is also important that this study explores the generational demarcation and the concept of the 'reluctant immigrant' in thinking about place attachment, forced migration and displacement. In my study, I define 'reluctant immigrant' as an immigrant who is hesitant to assimilate to either their new community or hold onto and immerse into their native identity. In this sense, immigrants are constantly in a state of moving forward and back between their two identities: Iraqi and American. This trend is not only seen in Iraqi women in their 20s who are reluctant to maintain ties with the Iraqi community as it pertains to limited mobility, in their

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[26] The distinction between my married and unmarried interlocutors is visible in their names. "Om" refers to "mother of" and thus signifies a married woman, while the unmarried women are identified by first name.

[27] K.J. Gergen, "Narrative, moral identity, and historical consciousness," In J. Straub (Ed.), *Narration, identity and historical consciousness*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1988), 108.

perspective; this concept is also relevant to Iraqi women ages 30-50 as they struggle with fully assimilating and treading into American society while they want to remain in their comforting Iraqi community in diaspora, and thus complicating the issues of identity and migration experiences as not black and white but rather, more intricate. A question to think about is how reluctant immigrants influence first generation refugees, and thus create a hybrid identity and an identity crisis among this generation in the struggle to want to live an American life while holding onto the traditional teachings of their parents.

On the one hand, what role does kinship play into migration and identity? What factors are embodied within the reluctant immigrant? This study focuses on the different perspectives and outlooks that mothers and parents have versus those held by their children. How does the resettling process and the experience of American culture differ from family to family, person to person? What is the focus of the stories that these women choose to share? Where are the overlaps and differences? This research answers the aforementioned questions in order to express and narrate the individual stories of identity and challenges of survival among Iraqi refugees in Arizona.

Proximity and distance of homeland to diasporic communities can be frustrating or comforting for the millions of Iraqis living in the diaspora. Thus, it is important for the connection of diverse regions in transnational networks of families and friends scattered across the globe.[28] Diasporic imagination engages the construction of immigrant identity and political ramifications of this identity in the receiving

[28] Lewis, 2008, 133.

country. There is a sort of negotiation between gratitude to the host country and longing for the homeland which includes loss and nostalgia for homeland and language of memory. Self-identity, however, depends on how we understand our past and our links to homelands.[29] It is pertinent for refugees to recognize and identify with the host country and breaking the cycle of longing and mourning for the homeland. At the same time, however, the younger generation feels marginalized or on the outside as strangers in the host country.

This study discusses the challenges to resettlement as refugees, as well as the way that these women navigate and construct their identity as Iraqi women in America. My background as an Iraqi refugee who has been living in the United States for 19 years allowed me to establish rapport among the women with whom I worked. At the same time, this study is influenced and inspired by my own identity as an Iraqi woman in-between two cultures and nations. As someone who was a refugee to Arizona from Iraq myself, I have a sense of belonging in this narrative since I may not be seen as an outsider. Similarly, as a native speaker of Arabic and keenly aware of the Iraqi culture, I am capable of communicating and perhaps blurring the line between outsider and participant in the process of ethnographic research. The conversations I had with these women presented the internal and external conflicts that Iraqis have amongst their own communities and with themselves. Similarly, it was clear to me that generational demarcations exist in terms of constructing and maintaining a certain identity, Iraqi women's livelihood in the West and the aspirations these women have for themselves in the United States.

[29] Ibid., 139.

Although there were advantages of being an "insider" in this community, I also faced some challenges. Similar to many of the girls in their 20s, the issue of gossip and rumors has made its way amongst the Iraqi community, and particularly the women in this context. I also fell victim to these rumors and my fall-outs with some friends influenced others' decisions in whether or not they would participate in my interviews in the Tucson community while the Phoenix community was more eager to assist and participate in my study. While this was the case with the girls in their 20s because I was a part of their age range, the women I interviewed developed my perception of life in the United States as an immigrant who is stuck between two worlds and the efforts taken to juggle their presence in these two arenas. On the other hand, many of the older women from their 30s to 50s were encouraging in the efforts to empower Iraqi women and thus their willingness was very relieving in accomplishing this project. Many of these women connected me to their friends and offered valuable insight into motherhood, femininity, identity and acclimation in the United States.

This thesis is organized into four different sections. First, I provide an overview of the role of Iraqi women in 20th century history from the 1970s until 2003, covering the different war periods, civil unrest, and economic sanctions that impacted Iraqi women's livelihood. Next, I offer a glance into the background behind the Iraqi diaspora in Arizona and the refugee resettlement process. Third, I dive into the individual case studies of the Iraqi women I interviewed, particularly paying attention to issues of honor and shame, adjustment to the United States, education, and marriage, family, and sexuality. Finally, I reflect on the role of the diaspora in

Iraqi women's day to day lives and the different ways they navigate the social and physical space that they inhabit.

II. Women in 20th Century Iraqi History

Iraqi Women and Nation Building (1970-1989)

The transition of the Iraqi state from a monarchy in 1932 to a republic in 1958 provided women and girls more rights and freedoms, especially during the 1970s and 1980s under Saddam Hussein's Ba'thist regime. Iraqi women's rights movements first emerged within the context of modernist discourses regarding the Iraqi nation and modernization. The Women's Awakening Club (*Nadi al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya*) was the first women's organization that was founded in Iraq in 1923 by secular Muslim, educated, middle and upper-middle-class women; the projects carried out in this club included literacy courses, lectures on health, hygiene, housework and discussions of political, social and economic issues.[30]

Efforts for reform continued and in 1945, the Iraqi Women's Union was founded through inspiration by a conference held in December 1944 by the Egyptian Feminist Union. The Iraqi Women's Union was active throughout the 1940s and 1950s and addressed women's education and social networking, as well as prostitution, divorce, child custody, property rights and women's working conditions – which had been previously known as taboo issues.[31] However, these women were politically affiliated with the monarchy establishment and did not push for a revolutionary change as younger women were doing.

The Arab Socialist Ba'th Party was established in Iraq in 1968 as a result of a military coup led by Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr. Saddam Hussein was appointed the

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[30] Nadje Al-Ali and Nicole Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?: Women and the Occupation of Iraq*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 22-23.
[31] Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 169.

vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council in 1969; however, he officially became president of Iraq in 1979 after al-Bakr resigned. Iraq in the first decade of the Ba'th regime witnessed a flourishing economy as a result of the nationalization of the Iraqi Oil Company and the rise in the price of oil. The state experienced economic growth, mass urbanization and the migration of people from rural areas to cities as job opportunities increased.[32] The Iraqi government attempted to benefit the poor and lower-middle class in order to transform them into an up-and-coming middle-class labor force and to participate in the regime's modernizing and state-building project. The Iraqi state chose to utilize its own human resources and employ Iraqi citizens, with an emphasis on the essential role of women.[33] Government developmental policies also were implemented to increase literacy, educate women and incorporate them into the labor force. Hence, the 1970s were referred to as the "days of the plenty".

As mentioned previously, the nationalization of the oil industry in 1972 created a flourishing economy and labor shortages, where state oil revenues rose from $1 billion dollars in 1972 to $33 billion in 1980.[34] During the 1970s, the Ba'th regime pushed women to complete university degrees and find employment in the public sector with this unprecedented economic growth. Iraqi mothers were also encouraged to take part in the labor force and were provided with benefits to be able to afford to work and be mothers at the same time. This idea continued into the

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[32] Yasmin Husein Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), 16.
[33] Al-Ali and Pratt, 31.
[34] Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 156.

1980s when many job positions were left vacant as men went to fight in the Iraq-Iran war, leaving a demand for female workers in positions for civil service, oil project designers, construction, scientists, engineers, doctors, and accountants.[35]

In September of 1980, Saddam Hussein declared Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab and launched pre-emptive strikes on Iran's military airfields. Iraqi units on foot invaded Iranian territory as a show of their force in hopes of pushing the Iranian government to recognize the power of Iraq and negotiate the territorial concessions.[36] Iran counter-attacked and thus began the eight-year long Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988. The aftermath of the war left Iraq with a debt of $80 billion and a decrease in oil revenues to $11 billion, which was less than half the amount of its revenue in 1980.[37] Economic burdens posed a great challenge to Saddam Hussein that would lead to further conflicts in Iraqi society. At the same time, women were encouraged to produce children who would eventually be fighters to defend their nation. The government offered maternity leave and compensation for families with four children or more in hopes to provide incentives for Iraqi families to produce more children.[38]

The Ba'th Party was established based on the notion of sparking a "revolution," to Iraqi society, focusing on Arab nationalist and socialist ideologies. Part of the nationalist rhetoric started by Saddam Hussein to mobilize the public included discussion of the role of Iraqi women as part of the nation:

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[35] Noga Efrati, "Productive or Reproductive? The Roles of Iraqi Women during the Iraq-Iran War". Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 35, no. 2, 1999, 28.
[36] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 224.
[37] Ibid., 239.
[38] Efrati, 1999, 27.

> A revolution is not a real one if it does not aim at women's emancipation and the development of their material and cultural situation. The commitment to the revolution by defending it, its principles and accomplishments and the commitment to the people's interests is the only way to women's emancipation … Strengthening women's position in the form of rights and customs in the society is part of women's emancipations.[39]

To accomplish the aim of development and progress, the Ba'th Party called upon women's contributions in Iraqi society. The Baghdad Meeting for Women of the World on March 4-8, 1985 included 261 representatives of 65 countries. It was held under the sponsorship of Saddam Hussein, who addressed the women present in defending the push for women's rights. In his speech, he claimed that: "he who does not believe in freedom for the people will not give women freedom and he who does not believe in the human cause, in general, will not understand women and, consequently, will not understand their rights and duties."[40] Thus, the Party believed in raising the level of Iraqi women[41] to prepare for their roles in the Arab nation, among Arab women and to support liberation movements in the world, while forming "solidarity with progressive women's organizations in the world."[42]

General Federation of Iraqi Women and Gender Discourse

The General Federation of Iraqi Women, established by the Ba'th Party in 1969, is seen by the government as the "sole representative of Iraqi women,

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[39] *Baghdad Meeting for Women of the World, 4-8 March 1985*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1985), 15.

[40] Ibid.

[41] In the official documents, the Iraqi government addressed women in the nation as the "Iraqi woman" and I speculate that this was to serve the purpose of highlighting the importance of every woman's role in the nation, rather than focusing on grouping women together.

[42] *The Iraqi Woman: Enjoys Equality, Participates to Development, and Calls for Peace,* (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1984), 1.

realizing the importance of peace and disarmament."[43] The GFIW aimed at raising the social and educational levels of Iraqi women. The Federation's various programs contributed to Iraqi women's involvement in the development process by training a "great number of women in different specializations and established a large number of nurseries to accommodate children of the working mothers."[44] As part of the larger narrative for Iraqi women's emancipation, the efforts of the GFIW were in accordance with the principles of the Ba'th Party.

The General Federation of Iraqi Women had received all its necessary needs from the Ba'th Party to "enable the Federation to carry on work efficiently to raise and develop the standard of women and urge them to benefit from the gains, which the Revolution achieved for their sake."[45] Created by the government as the only popular organization to represent Iraqi women, the GFIW worked in cooperation with government committees to raise social and economic standards. In order to achieve this, the Federation carried out programs for implementation among all Iraqi women throughout the country as part of a larger state-sponsored feminism project.

These development programs included concentrating on opening fields that were previously closed off to women, such as artistic and cultural activities, to encourage women to be pioneers in shifting the social outlook of women and their role in society. Other programs included the elimination of illiteracy, enhancing the

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[43] *Papers of the General Federation of Iraqi Women: Presented to World Congress of Women, Held in Prague Czechoslovakia, October 8-13, 1981*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1981), 39.
[44] Ibid., 47.
[45] Ibid., 54.

efforts of training leaders and establishing work factories in poor areas to provide jobs for the women living there as a change to the prevailing social values that would not allow them to work far away from their homes.[46] The Federation became the main reference of the social problems among Iraqi women in society, executing the necessary programs of the state that would work to improve Iraqi women's social position.

From January 1978 to December 1979, the General Federation of Iraqi Women participated in many activities throughout Iraq. The Federation held a total of 51,609 seminars, conducted 35,342 visits to schools and rural areas to talk to Iraqi women, and held 1,855 rural camps to educate and encourage rural women to work.[47] The Federation adopted effective methods to teach Iraqi rural women and sent members to rural villages enhance the social, cultural and economic standards of these women. The GFIW promoted women by making them aware of the equality the regime had realized for them in society and encouraged Iraqi women to benefit from the rights granted for them.

Iraqi Women and Economic Development in the 1970s

After coming into power with the 1968 coup, the Ba'th Party realized the importance of the role Iraqi women play in the process of development and construction. Since its existence, the Ba'th Party called for efforts towards:

> Equalizing women in society in rights and duties, and stipulated its equality in the Constitution . . . This principle has been taken into consideration in all

[46] *Working Program of The Iraqi Republic to Improve the Women's Status*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1980), 51.
[47] Ibid., 59.

> the revolution's programs to liberate women being half the society and secure for her equal rights and duties with man.[48]

The Ba'th Party emphasized education and eradicating illiteracy across the country. As a result, the National Comprehensive Illiteracy Eradication Campaign was initiated on December 1, 1978. The campaign called for all Iraqi citizens age 15 to 45 who were deprived from attending school in the past to attend compulsory education centers. Of the total 2,212,130 illiterate Iraqi citizens there were a total of 1,535,940 illiterate Iraqi females.[49] By 1983, 76.4 percent of Iraqis were literate as a result of increase attendance at illiteracy eradication centers.[50] In order to achieve gender equality, the Iraqi government had encouraged the education of Iraqis who were previously unable to attend schools. In an effort to increase educational opportunities, after completing the basic literacy stages, many of these citizens then joined public schools.

One of the aims of this campaign was to teach women the skills of reading and writing, in addition to developing their ability of thinking and informing them of the importance of science and education to rid them of "backwardness and strengthen their confidence in themselves and their ability of education and progress."[51] The educated women were also informed about the ideals of the Ba'th Party and the importance of national unity, in order to develop a spirit of pride in

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[48] *Papers of the General Federation of Iraqi Women: Presented to World Congress of Women, Held in Prague Czechoslovakia, October 8-13, 1981*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1981), 17.
[49] Ibid., 18.
[50] *Baghdad Meeting for Women of the World, 4-8 March 1985*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1985), 81.
[51] *Working Program of The Iraqi Republic to Improve the Women's Status*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1980), 8.

their homeland. This was done in an effort to evoke "national and social consciousness to strengthen their combative spirit against challenges facing the Arab nation."[52] In the 1970s Iraqi gender discourse mainly focused on encouraging women to educate themselves and mobilizing them towards fulfilling the aims of the Ba'th Party in an act of national loyalty and pride.

At the economic level, the GFIW were increasingly telling Iraqi women of the importance of working, claiming it was a "patriotic duty." In 1970, the percentage of Iraqi women in the labor force did not exceed 2% in private sector, and most of these women were either teachers or doctors. Consequently, the Ministry of Justice issued 17 regulations and laws to achieve the aim of equality between men and women. These laws included modifying the private status law, various economic regulations in favor of working women, and laws and regulations in favor of women, family, and children.[53]

In conjunction with the national development plans of 1970-1974 and 1976-1980, the Iraqi state achieved the goals in "transferring Iraq from the backward agricultural economy to a new stage of agricultural-industrial economy."[54] The national development plans stressed the need to provide atmospheres to increase women's contribution in productive work of the formal economy to increase the family's income. To encourage the participation of mothers in the economic sector,

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[52] *Papers of the General Federation of Iraqi Women: Presented to World Congress of Women, Held in Prague Czechoslovakia, October 8-13, 1981*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1981), 8.
[53] *Working Program of The Iraqi Republic to Improve the Women's Status*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1980), 34.
[54] *Baghdad Meeting for Women of the World, 4-8 March 1985*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1985), 32.

working mothers were granted privileges such as a 72-day paid leave at childbirth and then a six-month paid maternity leave that was to be taken anytime from the child's birth to its fifth birthday.[55] Maternity hospitals and centers were secured by the GFIW in Iraqi cities and trained specialists also taught health education, services, and sanitation at home for women's access in villages. Iraqi women were trained to meet the needs of the political ideology, such as being encouraged to study science subjects in order to meet requirements for the national development plan.[56]

Additionally, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs provided nurseries, kindergartens were increased and illiteracy among women of the ages 15 to 45 decreased. In 1976 the percentage of women in the labor force increased to 17% and then 28% in 1985. By the 1980s, Iraqi women were employed in a variety of different professions. Women accounted for 70% of pharmacists, 46% of teachers, 46% of dentists, 29% of doctors, and 15% of accountants.

When Saddam Hussein formally became president in 1979 and entered into a war with Iran in 1980, the economic conditions and social construction of the state were affected. Political rhetoric called for women in the public sphere because many of the men were lost while protecting their homeland during the war.[57] A shift in the Ba'th regime's political ideology had impacted the perception and role of women within Iraqi society.

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[55] *The Iraqi Women: A Munificent March*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1984), 9.
[56] *Papers of the General Federation of Iraqi Women: Presented to World Congress of Women, Held in Prague Czechoslovakia, October 8-13, 1981*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1981), 10.
[57] Al-Ali and Pratt, 37.

As evidenced above, throughout the 1970s multiple efforts were made by the Iraqi government and carried out by the General Federation of Iraqi Women towards improving the status of Iraqi women as a result of the plans for national development. These changes included eradicating illiteracy to increase women's education in different fields, in addition to providing new law reforms for equality, and offering incentives for Iraqi women to work, especially mothers. Although these changes were made to satisfy the regime's agenda for mobilizing Iraqi women to increase their contribution in the developmental process, the 1980s would see a different focus in Iraqi gender discourse.

Iraqi Women and the Call for National Security in the 1980s

The second decade of the Ba'th regime experienced the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1988. Saddam Hussein had anticipated a quick victory, but within two years the impact of the war was felt keenly as oil exports and prices dropped and reduced the state's income. Iraq looked to its neighboring Gulf countries to borrow large sums of money to maintain war finances. Additionally, the war created shortages in the labor force by 40-45 percent as men were on the front fighting.[58] As a result, positions were available in factories, state organizations, and government offices. Saddam Hussein encouraged women of the General Federation of Iraqi Women to participate and fill these positions in production. The GFIW developed a plan to employ more than one million women who had completed literacy school, which was followed by a conference to increase women's participation in economic

[58] Efrati, 1999, 28.

development.[59] There was also an attempt to encourage housewives and unemployed women to fulfill the vacant positions Iraqi men had left behind.

Before the war with Iran, the Iraqi state had paid all of its attention to further flourishing under the banner of peace, life and goodwill. In light of the war, however, "it should be clear that national dignity and full independence are the higher values in the Iraqi society [and] for these values we are ready to sacrifice."[60] Thus, Iraqi women were called on to contribute their honor and to defend national dignity and sovereignty in the war. A total of 48,013 Iraqi women participated in civil defense operations from September 1980 to December 1984.[61] Iraqi gender discourse called on Iraqi women, along with men, to do everything in support of the war and to enhance the national economy.

Additionally, Iraqi women carried the responsibility of Iraqi men as well so that they could focus on the war front. As a result of this, Iraqi women concentrated their work on the internal front. 38,760 women joined training courses on typing and driving and 45,863 women took part in production campaigns.[62] Iraqi women also encouraged their sons to volunteer in defense of the country. Political ideology during this time had shifted and now Iraqi women had realized that they held responsibilities towards the war waged by the Iraqis against the Iranian regime as it aimed to obstruct the Iraqi "pan-Arab role in countering Zionism and

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[59] Ibid.
[60] *Baghdad Meeting for Women of the World, 4-8 March 1985*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1985), 81.
[61] Ibid., 87.
[62] Ibid., 88-89.

imperialism."[63] Whereas previously the Iraqi government focused on national development in the 1970s, the ideology of the 1980s revolved around protecting national security as a result of the threat of the Iranian regime.

In order for women to be part of the public sphere, they were to move out of non-productive fields of work, such as household jobs, and to be active outside of the comfort of their homes. To do so would allow them to be able to make their own social and economic decisions for their families, especially since the men were off fighting in the war. However, the GFIW found 10,000 vacant jobs and filled about 66 percent of them, leaving an addition 9,000 unemployed women without jobs.[64] The reasoning behind this was that the regime did not provide enough support for the GFIW campaign, stress the significance of the Iraqi woman's role in the wartime conditions or emphasize training programs to raise competence levels.[65] The GFIW rose to the challenge the regime had presented them with: the campaign to employ more women to replace the male labor force.

Women were provided incentives from the government to quit their jobs and take care of their children in 1987. A woman's maternity leave would be fully paid to the woman for six months, and half that amount for an additional six months; a married male would also be granted 25 dinars as a monthly allowance for three years after his wife had delivered a fourth child.[66] During the war, the state had focused on a more nationalistic view of a need for women to reproduce more future

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[63] Ibid., 91.
[64] Efrati, 1999, 31.
[65] Ibid.
[66] *Papers of the General Federation of Iraqi Women: Presented to World Congress of Women, Held in Prague Czechoslovakia, October 8-13, 1981*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1981), 28.

Iraqi soldiers to fulfill the title of a "good Iraqi woman", shifting from a working laborer to a reproductive laborer.

In the 1980s the regime had attempted to mobilize the Iraqi population in support of the troops and gave them a more distinct social prestige than that of women or other civilians. The regime encouraged women to reproduce more to address the demographic imbalance between Iraq and Iran. As a result, "the glorification of a militarized masculinity coincided with the glorification of the Iraqi mother."[67] The state stressed the importance of men to step up as heroes to protect their invaded nation, as well as female honor and female dependence on men.[68] Thus, the regime launched a fertility campaign to encourage women to have at least five children who would be the fighters, martyrs, and defenders of the Iraqi nation.

Gender discourse called for Iraqi women to participate in the efforts for building national security and protecting the nation's honor through their cooperation and participation. Iraqi women mobilized sons, husbands and themselves to participate in the war front. At the same time, Iraqi women also contributed to preserving the national economy by filling positions in the workforce that were left behind by men. As Iraqi society had become more militarized, however, the regime distanced itself from previous notions of equality and women's rights to focus on the role of women as reproducers and protectors of the nation.

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[67] Al-Ali and Pratt, 38.
[68] *Baghdad Meeting for Women of the World, 4-8 March 1985*, (Baghdad: General Federation of Iraqi Women, 1985), 86.

Iraqi Women and Social Conservatism in the 1990s

Two years after the end of the war of the war with Iran, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and the Second Gulf War began in January 1991. The war led to the death of thousands of civilians in addition to the destruction of the state's infrastructure such as electrical grids, water supplies, factories and storage facilities.[69] Although the war had heavy repercussions on the state, the thirteen years of economic sanctions, imposed by the United Nations Security Council, that followed were of greater detrimental impact on Iraqi women and gender relations. The war had "ushered in 'Islam' as a state ideology, thus imposing an additional limitation on women in the name of religion, morality, and tradition."[70] Iraqi women were now restricted in mobility because of state laws, in addition to being financially unable to continue working without any support from the government.

Additionally, about 60 percent of the population became dependent on food rations from the government for survival.[71] With the high rates of unemployment and economic crisis, marriage for Iraqi women became unattainable. However, other Iraqi women were arranged to marry older men or enter into a polygamous marriage as a way out of the social and economic conditions in which they were living.[72] On the other hand, many wives had found themselves to be widows at the end of the Iran-Iraq War or were left by their husbands to escape the conditions of

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[69] Al-Ali and Pratt, 46.
[70] Nada Shabout, "Images and Status: Visualizing Iraqi Women" in *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality* edited by Faegheh Shirazi, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 151.
[71] Al-Ali and Pratt, 47.
[72] Ibid.

Iraq that would not allow them to successfully provide. While those whose husbands were killed by the war received a small government pension, those whose husbands were killed by the regime for political reasons received no government benefits or support.[73] In the case of these women, they were now the head of the household and responsible for providing for their families.

In this time of crisis, the socioeconomic conditions in Iraq underwent significant changes, which impacted the status of Iraqi women.[74] Social restrictions made it difficult for women to be more mobile within their society. Saddam Hussein had adapted Islamic traditions as part of his political ideology to gain religious and tribal support. As a result, the government imposed different laws that restricted women's freedom in addition to pushing women out of the workforce and into their homes to fulfill the idea of the "good Iraqi woman" who remained domesticated and protected her reputation.

In 1998, the government fired all females working as secretaries in governmental agencies, and in June 2000 a law was imposed that required state ministries to place restrictions on women working outside of the house.[75] In addition, a law was instituted that called for a *mahram* escort to accompany Iraqi women leaving Iraq. The law did not allow Iraqi women to leave without the presence of a male first of kin for any woman under the age of forty-five years old.

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[73] Ibid., 48.
[74] Jacqueline Ismael and Shereen Ismael, "Gender and State in Iraq" in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* edited by Suad Joseph, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 211.
[75] "Background on Women's Status in Iraq Prior to the Fall of the Saddam Hussein Government," *Human Rights Watch*, 8 Jan. 2009, 4.

Women experienced a change in the social construction of the society as they were returning to their homes and into traditional roles of being mothers and housewives. At the same time, women's employment rate went from "23 percent in 1991, to only 10 percent in 1997."[76] In addition, the monthly salaries had dropped and women could no longer afford to work because the state had withdrawn its welfare benefits for working mothers and did not provide them with incentives to continue working, such as free transportation, maternity benefits, and childcare.

A change in dress code arose among young girls to encourage them to wear *hijab* because their families could no longer afford to buy all of their children nice clothes or their families wanted them to dress more modestly.[77] At the same time, people feared for their reputation and worried about the gossip that other people would talk about family honor since now there was more free time to interfere in the affairs of others. The image of the abaya takes prominence in this period as a tool for modesty and women's protection from unwanted gazes or harassment. Similarly, the return to social conservatism and protecting the family name impacted the status of women because families were worried about the honor and reputation of the women, and felt they needed to be protected.

The economic conditions of the war in the 1990s increased crime rates and a sense of insecurity overtook Iraqi society. Consequently, Iraqi women were pushed back into their homes as social attitudes towards women's work had changed from the previous narrative.[78] The image of Iraqi women working alongside men in the

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[76] Al-Ali and Pratt, 46.
[77] Ibid., 49.
[78] Nadje Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present,* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 189.

workforce as a way to portray a modern and developed nation, which had been encouraged in the 1970s and 1980s, was no longer the desired image. Instead, ideal Iraqi women were to be respectable housewives and mothers who did not mix with the opposite gender. While the 1970s and 1980s foreground a modernist image for Iraqi women, the 1990s idealized a conservative image for Iraqi women.

III. Arizona Diaspora and Refugee Resettlement

Refugee Resettlement Process

The diversity of Iraq's demographics includes its different ethno-religious groups of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Yazidis, Shi'a, Sunnis, Christians, and so forth. Ethnic tensions in the country contributed to instability and the flow of emigrants to developed countries in Europe, North America, and Australia. Although Iraqis had left the scene of the crimes and incidents, they were now without a home while living in the host country. Many Iraqis fled to nearby Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey for safety while applying for refugee status with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or United Nations. The fight for "democracy and freedom"[79] in the modern Middle East has not come without a price. Conflicts in the region drive thousands out of their homes to seek refuge in Europe, Australia, the United States or neighboring countries.

Three federal agencies play important roles in the United States' Refugee Resettlement Program: Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), U.S. Department of State (DOS) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The ORR is "responsible for the domestic program of refugee resettlement services, including cash and medical assistance."[80] The Department of State is responsible for coordinating resettlement policy and overseeing processing and cultural

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[79] This is a Western concept advanced by U.S. foreign policy to justify military actions in the Middle East. In retrospect, the operations for freedom in the region did not produce the results that some in the United States had hoped for and as a result, we see the events of today unfold in the manner that they do.

[80] "Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program Resources." *Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program Resources | Arizona Department of Economic Security*.

orientation, travel to the United States and refugee placement. On the other hand, the Department of Homeland Security determines which applicants meet the requirements for refugee status and are allowed entrance into the United States. The involvement of the government ends after the refugees arrive to the United States. At that point, local contractors take over to support refugee resettlement.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is an international agency that works to protect displaced and stateless communities. It screens applicants and determines who is able to qualify as a refugee and refers them to certain countries, such as the United States, Canada and others. In some cases, refugees are referred by a United States embassy or a nongovernmental organization, qualifying them for a special visa. Among Iraqis, those who served with the United States military in Iraq after 2003 were able to apply for a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), which was established as part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008.[81]

At the local scale, refugee resettlement programs in Arizona work in coordination with public and private resources to tend to the cultural and linguistic needs of the clients. In Arizona there are five general refugee resettlement agencies that function as the refugees' first point of contact. These include: International Rescue Committee, Catholic Charities Community Services, Arizona Immigrant Refugee Focus, and Refugee Services and Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona. These organizations serve the larger Maricopa and Pima county areas. There are also ethnic community-based organizations to better serve specific

[81] The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 was a law signed by George W. Bush on January 28, 2008. The purpose of the bill was to authorize funding for the defense, military, and national security related programs.

groups in resettlement: Bhutanese Mutual Assistance Association of Tucson, Arizona All Nations Refugee Resource Center, Somali American United Council, Somali Association of Arizona, and the Congolese Community of Arizona.[82]

Since 2006 about 135,000 Iraqis have sought refuge in Arizona. The ecology and environment in Arizona reminds Iraqis of the heat and desert that is their former homeland, thus making it a destination of choice when resettling to the United States. Although unrest is not new to Iraq, especially after the numerous wars, social unrest and economic shortcomings that occurred under the Ba'th regime, violence and chaos had set the tone for the newly reformed country and government. Upon realizing their new reality, Iraqis were no longer willing to live every day in fear of death. And thus, they left behind all they knew to arrive in a foreign country with little to no money, limited knowledge of the language, no work prospects, and no family connections.

Construction of Diaspora

The concept of diaspora, according to Rogers Brubaker (2005), can be applied to a population that is dispersed within a space, is oriented to a specific homeland and is present within a certain boundary of a host country. The individual members of a "diaspora maintain a distinctive community that is held together by solidarity and strong social relationships that link together members of the diaspora who reside in different states of a larger transnational community."[83] Sense of belonging to the homeland, indeed, a longing for it, is a theme in the diasporic narratives of Iraqi

[82] "Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program Resources."
[83] Brubaker 2005, 6.

women. Immigrants draw upon the imagined homeland in an effort to manage the emotional trauma of exile, with an emphasis on the importance of nation and religion in the diasporic imagination of Iraqi women. At the same time, the proximity to and distance from the homeland and diasporic communities can be frustrating or comforting for the millions of Iraqis living in the diaspora.[84] While those who faced hardships and struggled when living in the homeland feel heartened to live away from the source of misery, the distance from the homeland and away from their family can also be wearisome. Thus, diaspora is important for the connection of diverse regions in transnational networks of families and friends scattered across the globe.[85]

Steven Vertovec (1997) categorizes diaspora into three different definitions: 1) diaspora as a social form, 2) diaspora as a type of consciousness, and 3) diaspora as a mode of cultural production.[86] First, diaspora as a social form is a network of social relationships that relate to a common origin and migration routes. There are identifiable social groups that are characterized by their relationship despite dispersal; the groups maintain a collective identity across nation states based on memory of history and place, ties with homeland. Second, diasporic consciousness is related to resistance through "engagement with, consequent visibility in, public space."[87] Diaspora as a type of consciousness refers to senses of being that are

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[84] According to State Department data reported by the Immigration and Refugee Services of America, 32,187 Iraqis entered the United States as refugees between 1989 and 2002.
According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, about 2 million Iraqis fled the country after 2003.
[85] Lewis, 2008, 133.
[86] Vertovec, 1997, 283.
[87] Ibid.

experienced by diasporic groups; it can also cause tension as diasporic groups experience marginalization in the settlement society while also imagining themselves positively with identification of history, cultural traditions, myths or religion. Marriage and kin are also a major force in maintaining diasporic nodes of communities. Trauma and its memory are a major component of the collective experiences that a diasporic group endures.

According to Saskia Witteborn, "Diaspora as cultural production refers to the creation of a hybridized and fluid cultural values, norms, meanings and products with the traditional and new media playing a major role."[88] Diasporic imagination engages the construction of immigrant identity and political ramifications of this identity in the receiving country. There is a sort of negotiation between gratitude to the host country and longing for the homeland which includes loss and nostalgia for homeland and language of memory. Self-identity, however, depends on how we understand our past and our links to homelands.[89] The collective identity, on the other hand, is the image that a group constructs of itself and with which its members identify. Collective identity is a question of identification on the part of the participating individuals. It does not exist "in itself," but only to the extent that certain individuals profess to it or work to maintain it.[90] Similarly, the diaspora also brings to light experiences of trauma and identity in Iraqi women's discourse.

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[88] Saskia Witteborn, "Identity Mobilization Practices of Refugees: The Case of Iraqis in the United States and the War in Iraq." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 1.3 (2008): 207.
[89] Lewis, 2008, 139.
[90] Jan Assman and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65, 1995, 132.

Within this arena, one can find that there is a decontextualized culture associated with trauma and memory, particularly as it is related to stories of the homeland. Shattered lives, shattered worlds, and shattered space produce questions of trauma, wellbeing and emotions in the Middle East.

The environment of insecurity in Iraq is not a new situation but rather goes back to the middle of the last century. It has been rooted in the Arabization policies employed by Iraqi governments and their leaders, beginning with the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) to the invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and the Gulf War, the United Nations imposed sanctions in August 1990 and the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003.[91] All of these events contributed to the chaotic environment, in addition to poverty, instability, uneven distributions of wealth and human rights abuses in the country.

Iraq's Sectarian Environment

With so much ongoing damage occurring in Iraq, one may not help but wonder where and how it all began. In the past few decades, Iraq has witnessed many changes and has faced several obstacles, leading to a decline into its current state and a spark in sectarian issues in the 21st century that were not previously seen in the 20th century. This change can be traced back to the 1990s when the United Nations first placed economic sanctions on Iraq for the invasion of Kuwait, to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and then the fall of the Ba'th regime under the dictator, Saddam Hussein, in 2003. In the last few years, the state has seen even more instability. Iraqis in the capital city, Baghdad, complain that they still live in a state of crisis because of sectarian violence, corrupt government, and damaged

[91] Sirkeci, 2005, 202.

infrastructure. Although to some the U.N. sanctions were a success in accomplishing the set agenda for Iraq, to others the sanctions were one step in the direction of the decline and instability that the country would later experience from 2003 to today.

Iraqi development was limited and distorted from 1990-2003 due to Saddam's efforts to reinforce his own power. Hussein's action of invading Kuwait led to the imposition of the sanctions, which ultimately placed a strain on the country. One of the main goals of the sanctions was to diminish the power of Saddam Hussein. Yet, they did not overthrow Hussein but rather strengthened his regime. At the end of the sanctions, the United States invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein in 2003 with the thought that U.S. combat units were to withdraw after 90 days from his fall, yet, the training and rise to power of inexperienced and deeply divided Shi'a leaders helped keep Iraq from developing any form of stability.

The main effect on Iraq that came as a result of these issues is the ongoing sectarian violence between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. While Iraq is a Shi'a Muslim majority country, Saddam Hussein rose to power in Iraq as a Sunni leader in 1979 and employed his authority, until its end in 2003. Hussein managed to suppress and control the Shi'a living in Iraq, targeting and killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Shi'a. He destroyed shrines, shops and holy centers in Karbala, a Shi'a holy city in Iraq, while also prohibiting the visitation of all holy shrines among other Shi'a ritualistic practices.

The remnants of Saddam Hussein's Ba'thist regime, along with radical militant groups, used Sunni rhetoric in order to build up a resistance to the rise of Shi'a power in Iraq. This then triggered a bloody civil war between Shi'a and Sunnis

that lasted from 2004 to 2010, with the deaths of 103,619 civilians. The bombing of the Shi'a holy shrine in Samarra in 2006 was an important point in the conflict, leading to Iraqis choosing a side in the sectarian war and creating tensions between the two groups that continues until today. Sunni insurgency militias arose, such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (later on becoming Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), believing to act as a resistance to Shi'a power and a "defender" of the Sunni community. Al-Qaeda members conducted suicide bombings at Shi'a holy shrines and Shi'a-populated cities as part of their ideology to provoke Sunni hatred in the hearts of Iraqi Shi'a, thus motivating a counterattack on Sunni communities and areas by Shi'a militias. The Personal Status Code that was introduced in 1959 – which replaced Shar'ia-run courts with personal status courts – provided Iraqi women with equality and increased mobility in social and economic dynamics. The statewide crisis felt after the Gulf War and the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations led to a stark shift in the Ba'th party's political ideology. This led to the embrace of social conservatism and religious traditions in the 1990s. The effect of this implementation continued after the establishment of a new Iraqi government in 2003 until the current day in 2019. Consequently, Iraqi women's rights in employment, marriage, and family became divided into paper and practice by religious authorities and civil law to 2019.

Although the personal status laws of 1959 secularized women's rights, the establishment of the 2005 Iraqi government was built on the inclusion of different ethnic and religious groups. Each one of these groups had members to represent them in the government to ensure that their needs would be included in the

decisions and actions of the Iraqi state authority. Women's rights became present on paper but were not always implemented in practice, due to the dominance of specific traditional and religious norms in Iraqi society after the fall of the Ba'th Party.

In theory, the civil laws of the constitution are to be upheld by civilians. The preamble of the Iraq Constitution claims that the people of Iraq need to "pay attention to women and their rights."[92] Women's rights after 2003, however, fell into the hands of religious authorities without taking women's well-being into consideration. This can be seen in women's rights in aspects such as marriage, family issues, employment and social justice. The personal status code stated that the minimum legal age of consent for marriage is 18 for both sexes, but unauthorized and underage marriages (punishable by civil law) still occurred and were conducted by religious leaders. In this matter, religious leaders were able to circumvent the authority of the civil law of the land and practice their own power in the shape of religion.

The justice system in Iraq does not treat women and men equally on the issues of honor killings, rape, and personal status law. Article 409 of Iraq's penal code provides men leniency in honor killing cases, "setting a maximum penalty of three years in prison for a man who kills his wife or close female relative and her partner after catching them in an act of adultery."[93] Legally, the victim is unable to practice the right of self-defense. In 2001, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) Order

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[92] *Iraq Constitution*, 2005, 3.
[93] Huda Ahmed, "Iraq" in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, Eds. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, (New York: Freedom House, 2010) 130.

No. 6 prohibited acts of revenge to be carried out against the killer.[94] The government treats honor killings and rape as private matters because of the cultural stigma surrounding such issues. Therefore, it becomes easy for perpetrators to walk away without an investigation or without the other party raising charges against them.

In the earlier years of the regime, the Ba'th party, based on secular and Arab nationalist ideology, strayed away from the conservative religious and tribal traditions that made up the social structure of Iraq. Women have been an important dynamic in the religious context and the state-building process of Arab countries. During the 1970s as the movement for women's activism and rights developed, the Iraqi state under the Ba'th Party provided Iraqi women with legal and civil rights. This was done to liberate women from the grasps of social traditions, in addition to espousing equality between men and women in the process of nation building.

In the 1980s this gender rhetoric adapted Arab nationalism against Persian influence to defend the nation and homeland. In the aftermath of the Gulf War with Kuwait and the economic sanctions, however, Saddam Hussein adapted and implemented social conservatism and religious traditions. In addition, the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 gave the Iraqi clans and tribes more recognition and status within society, which was not in place under the previous regime.

[94] Ibid., 130.

IV. Challenges and Survival in Iraqi Women's Discourse: Case Studies

Diyana, 34 years old, a beauty stylist and mother of two, lives in Glendale, Arizona with her husband and children. Originally from Baghdad, Iraq, Diyana's story captures the struggle of Christians living in a violent and sectarian Iraq and the borders crossed with the hope of reaching survival. Before the American invasion in 2003, Diyana's family lived openly as Christians in the midst of Baghdad. After 2004, however, the situation in Iraq had gotten worst, and very fast. Studying business administration, Diyana was on her way home from school when she witnessed a man getting shot and having the contents of his brain splattered on the ground. Since the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the sectarian identity of people as Sunni and Shi'a Muslim, or Christian grew increasingly significant in the city of Baghdad. After the upsurge in sectarian conflict in 2006, "sectarian identity [had] also been transformed into a spatial marker that designates where a person can safely move, live and work in the city."[95] Diyana's family was not immune to these issues. Her husband worked in a bar in Baghdad and received several death threats. When her son was threatened, Diyana fell ill and into a very depressed state- the family had enough. Amidst a state of chaos, religious conservativism and militancy, the family left Baghdad and fled to a village in Baghdeda (also known as Qaraqosh), 20 miles southeast from Mosul, in hopes for safety and to seek treatment for Diyana.

[95] Mona Damluji, ""Securing Democracy in Iraq": Sectarian Politics and Segregation in Baghdad, 2003-2007." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21.2 (2010): 71.

Today, the most common notion of diaspora relates to "forced movement, exile and a consequent sense of loss derived from an inability to return."[96] Among the generations of the Iraqi diaspora in Arizona there is a different perception of the idea of homeland that is related to the struggles that the groups face, either on the collective or the individual level. In this study I examine the factors that influence the production and negotiation of their identity and the ability for Iraqi refugee women to acculturate to American culture.

This study emphasizes the generational demarcation in identity and the concept of the 'reluctant immigrant' in thinking about place attachment, forced migration and displacement. Some questions to think about are how reluctant immigrants influence first generation refugees, which consequently creates a hybrid identity and an identity crisis among this generation. Part of this larger crisis is related to the hybrid identity refugees holds in relation to their struggle to want to live an American life, while also holding onto the traditional teachings of their parents. This study also explores women and their social and economic experiences in relation to the oral histories Iraqi women's collective and individual experiences of dispersal, enduring struggles and hardships through the resettlement processes that shape their identity and integration. This study does not intend to derive generalizations from diasporic identity narratives. It works to relate the oral histories of these women as members of the Iraqi diaspora who constitute who they are by positioning themselves in discursive practices and sociopolitical structures that confirm, challenge and form their identity.

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[96] Kalra et al 2005: 10.

Every woman's story is unique to her own situation and experience, however, and I do not attempt to make generalizations or assumptions about their character or personality. Rather, this research focuses on contributing to the general body of knowledge pertaining to Iraqi women's discourse. Studies on the Michigan and Canadian diasporas have been published, but there is a gap of knowledge on the Iraqi diaspora in Arizona. With the assistance of oral histories, I attempt to present the intricate methods that Iraqi women have taken to navigate their livelihood and identities in the United States.

Issues of Honor and Shame

> *There is a constitution and law system in Iraq, but no one follows it. In America, even if we face struggles or discrimination, the law can protect us; your rights are protected. There is no law in Iraq- Saddam left and the tribes came. The tribes make up stories in order to get a "fasel 'asheera" (tribal decision)[97] from other tribes. Why don't you threaten the Iraqi government and take your fasel that way? Do we live in a forest or something, why don't we have a law system in place? Iraq has become a laughingstock to all Iraqis and everyone around the world. We are tired of everyone being sheikhs and wanting to go on a power trip. (Om Hamza)*

Some instances of the efforts of the Iraqi tribes in modern day Iraqi society can be seen in the realm of women and honor killings. According to the tribal code, a man who threatens the honor of a family or tribe by engaging in an illicit relationship with a woman, is subjected to punishment by the tribe. Previously, this usually meant that the man and the woman in the relationship would be killed in the name of honor. Today, however, some members of the tribes are greedy for money, so they engage in schemes to receive a huge payout:

[97] In Iraq whenever a problem occurs between members of opposite tribes, the two parties involve the tribal authorities to resolve any conflicts. A sum of money is usually agreed upon for issues of disturbance, death, fights, etc.

> *What some people do nowadays is a guy will make a fake Facebook page and pose as a girl. He will add random Iraqi men and engage in conversation with them, flirting and asking for pictures. After continuing the relationship for some weeks, the man acts as the "brother" of this account and tell the other man that he has all the messages and will involve the tribes for this honor crime. When the tribes met, the family asked for $10 million Iraqi dinars (approx. $10,000 American dollars). In other cases, a married man will set up his wife to be with another man in order to get a fasel from his tribe. The Iraqi gheera[98] (pride) has fallen. (Om Aliya)*

Om Maria and her three daughters, Om Hamza, Om Aliya and Jihan compared the conditions of Iraq today to the way it used to be in during the 1980s and 1990s, there are environmental cases problems that arise in relation to the actions of the Iraqi government.

> *Don't you see the earthquakes hit Iraq now because of the corruption? I remember when I was little, an earthquake hit Turkey and only went along the border of Iraq before moving to Iran. Isn't this balad al-Imamayn (land of the two Imams)? How is this country supposed to be blessed when there is so much corruption? (Jihan)*

As a reflection of the way of life in Iraq today and under Saddam Hussein, multiple concerns arise about the rise in power of the conservative tribal and religious authorities. Not only does this set Iraq back some years in development and progression, as determined by my interlocuters, but is also limits the rights and implementation of Iraqis laws. The government has given tribes the ability to govern and rule as they please, in order to maintain their loyalty.

> *It's true we do not have the Ba'th Party anymore. But Iraqi men nowadays have taken off the zaytooni[99] (military uniform of the Ba'th regime) and now wear 'amamat (religious turbans) instead. It is shameful that we witness our great*

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[98] The Arabic word *gheera* literally translates to "jealousy". In this context, however, I use pride to describe the feeling of pride amongst Iraqi men and their desire to protect the nation and the women as a way to protect their honor.

[99] *Zaytooni* literally translate to "olive-like" in reference to the olive color of the Ba'th members' uniform. This quote refers to the turn from militarism and socialism under the Ba'th Party to the conservative, tribal society that Iraq is today.

> *country decline to such levels. Man, if only Saddam did not invade Kuwait. We were better off before 1991.*

In this time of crisis, the socioeconomic conditions in Iraq underwent significant changes in the twentieth century, which impacted the status of Iraqi women.[100] Social restrictions made it difficult for women to be more mobile within their society. Saddam Hussein had adapted Islamic traditions as part of his political ideology to gain religious and tribal support. As a result, the government imposed different laws that restricted women's freedom, in addition to pushing women out of the workforce and into their homes to fulfill the idea of the "good Iraqi woman" who remained domesticated and protected her reputation.

While this idea was pushed by the Ba'th regime during this certain time, the idea had continued throughout the rest of the 1990s and into the 2000s. The lack of security and the social restrictions placed during this time influenced an influx in migration during the twenty-first century, and thus many Iraqis left to the West to escape the restrictions and newly changed Iraqi society that did not provide Iraqis with the opportunities that once were available.

Adjustment Challenges and Identity

The adjustment to living in a new country, particularly a Western country, was not an easy one to make. Many refugees think that life would be easier after they left their homeland, because the worst of the situation has passed. Diyana, however, claims that life here is tiring and exhausting. On the one hand, she is constantly worrying about whether or not her children and husband will go to school and work

[100] Ismael and Ismael, 2000, 211.

and come back safe and alive. On the other hand, she is not used to the amount of work that people have to do just to get by. The American dream is not easily attained, especially when one relies on U.S. welfare benefits such as Medicaid, in order to survive. Diyana struggles with cancer and, although she wants to help her husband out and work so that she can gain experience, there is only a certain amount of hours before the family's income surpasses the threshold that allows them to maintain eligibility for Medicaid. Without health insurance, Diyana will die and leave behind her two children, ages 9 and 7, without a mother. She is faced with a tough issue because she does not want to live a life based on a lie.

> *If we work less [hours] we won't get money. If we work harder, all of our benefits are gone. I have to work and lose my insurance and then I'll be able to own my own house, or I do not work and keep my benefits, but I will not get a house. I have an apartment that leaks and floods when it rains. This is not the "easy" life that we had imagined America to be. We need our own house to experience our own stability (Diyana).*

Although the family faces financial struggles, Diyana is grateful that they live in safety. Before the war in Iraq, she was active in religious activities within her church. After 2003, however, this was more difficult for her to do. Here in the United States, Diyana is able to be active in her church and openly take part in the religious activities and holidays that are particular to her Christian faith, without worrying about being attacked for her beliefs.

While nation and religion hold some importance in the diasporic imagination of some Iraqis, for others the imagination is less clear. In Yasmine's case, she came to the United States at ten years old in 2008 and quickly learned to adapt to the American way of life.

> *I do not consider myself Iraqi or American. How can I do so when I do not fully belong in either group? I am too different for Americans and I am too Western for Iraqis back home. I am Iraqi-American. I am Iraqi, but I have been raised, influenced and educated in the West (Yasmine).*

The collective identity of Iraqis living in diaspora shifts due to generational differences because it is "situated and can depend on the audience and the setting."[101] Identity can also be utilized to be more salient or silent depending on the environment in which a person finds his or her self. After September 11, the focus on the American part of the Arab-American identity became salient as a response to the public perception towards Arabs and Muslims. Among a group of Arabs, the Arab identity of the second generation of immigrants may become more salient to "affirm the intergroup and interpersonal relationships."[102] While Diyana continues to have strong ties to the larger Iraqi community in Arizona to remind her of her homeland, Yasmine has distanced herself from the Iraqi community because of the socially negative judgement and lack of connection that she experiences:

> *I used to be active in the community, attending Arab and Iraqi events, going to the masjid, et cetera. But after a while, I found that I was constantly being judged and talked about in the 'community' so I decided to cut off interaction. No matter what I do, I will be judged for it. I want to do what makes me happy without constantly being examined under a microscope.*

Yasmine is one of many children of immigrant parents who were raised in the West. Generational gaps produce differences in the perception of homeland. To some like Diyana, the idea of homeland is used as a point of mourning or reminiscing about her past, especially when the country that she one knew as home is no longer there:

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[101] Witteborn, 2007, 572.
[102] Ibid., 573.

> *It is a shame that Iraq has become what it is. We used to live together, Christians, Sunnis, Shi'a, Jews, Mandeans, Kurds. No one asked about the other's sectarian or political identity and we all got along. The violence and hatred that has infested the country is disgusting. Iraq was once the greatest nation in the Middle East and now it is a joke…*

The fear incited by the violence forced many Iraqis to leave Baghdad- or Iraq-altogether and seek refuge elsewhere. Yasmine and her family fled Iraq in 2007 for precisely this reason. Born to a Sunni mother and Shi'i father, Yasmine, her parents and three sisters lived in Baghdad. Her father was a television host for a predominantly Shi'i religious program, and the family became a target for sectarian militias. The father had received a couple of death threats even at the door of their house, so he built a gate to separate them from the neighborhood. When Yasmine's family was hosting a dinner, her paternal uncle had driven her father's car out of the neighborhood, where insurgents were watching and waiting. Thinking that her uncle was actually her father, the men shot into the car. Yasmine's uncle died at the scene. The family fled Iraq to Syria the next morning, leaving everything behind except for a few changes of clothing.

On the other hand, Sarah's perception of the homeland is different in that she has mixed feelings towards it, especially after having been away from the country for so many years:

> *I was very young when I left Iraq in 2003, I was only five years old. I can say that I have an 'idealized' image of the homeland. No matter what citizenship I get, I will never forget the place where I took my first drink of water. I am mad that my mother did not let us go back and visit so that I can witness the good and the bad of my country. I want to go back to Iraq to live there and eventually, die there.*

The concept of diaspora as a social form includes identifiable social groups that are characterized by their relationship, despite the dispersal of that group's

members. Nevertheless, these groups maintain a collective identity across nation states that is based on the memory of history and place, with specific ties to the homeland. Clifford (1994) pointed out that1 an important aspect of the diasporic groups is the tension between loss and hope, allowing the diaspora to live as strangers in the majority society while also being able to retain and maintain their sense of pride and identity. At the same time, however, the collective identity and memories can be shaped and redefined in different ways to create a trans-local collective identity that allows the diasporic groups to live in the host state.

Similarly, maintaining interpersonal relationships to members of the diaspora and hoping for a return to the homeland helps preserve a sense of future within the diasporic group. It is important to recognize and identify with the host country as a way to break the cycle of longing and mourning for the homeland. Additionally, however, the younger generation feels strange in the host country while also experiencing the same marginalization in the homeland, particularly after they have separated from the country for a period of time. Thus, those individuals living in diaspora find themselves in an "in-between" stage, where they are not completely integrated into the host society or the homeland.

20-year-old Yasmine works in banking and is studying business in college. The youngest of four daughters, she has spent more than ten years of her life outside Baghdad. This past April of 2018 she had the chance to go back and visit Iraq, after having left in 2006. Yasmine described the experience as:

> *I was excited and nervous to go back but when I was there, I did not feel like I belonged. This was not the Iraq that I had left behind, and I had been away for too long to feel any sense of connection to a 'home' that was no longer familiar to me.*

The younger women who are in their 20s struggle with balancing their Iraqi-American identities. Sarah considers herself to be an Iraqi who is temporarily living in the United States because she has no choice. Furthermore, she feels at odds with her Iraqi identity because although she does like to be part of the community to retain ties to the culture, language and share similar experiences, she still feels a disconnect when actually thinking about Iraq. She does not remember her short-lived experience there and neither has she been back since she left. Sarah's experiences here in the US, however, are shaped by struggles with her identity:

> *Iraqis are not good with their own kind but they are good with others. Even though I want to be in the culture, I do not have to take part in all of the bad that happens. I like to celebrate Christmas and the Eastern Orthodox Easter. We also like to keep Arabic food alive in our family, go to Arab parties, try to read novels in Arabic and listen to Arabic music. I really love Kadhim al-Sahir! I got to listen to him live in concert a couple of years ago and I have never had such a great experience in my entire life.*

The struggle that Sarah faces presents itself as the 'reluctant immigrant'; her case is an interesting mix of attempting to hold onto Iraqi identity as a way to resist American assimilation, but also what the United States stands for. Sarah had certain ideas about the United States that angered her before she arrived here as a refugee:

> *It was not my idea to come here and it upset me that it was out of my control. My parents could have chosen to go to any country, but they chose to come to America. I was really angry about coming to a country that bombed my own. I hated this idea, and still do. But at the same time, there is no country of mine left to go back to, so where does that leave me?*

Her reluctance to fully immerse herself and assimilate into American culture is also partly due to the fact that her parents had laid down a discussion of cultural differences to them. At the end of this discussion, it was clear to Sarah and her siblings the expectations that her parents had for the way the children were to

behave in the United States- they were not to lose their "Arabhood" to the West. The process of 'Othering' and producing an "us versus them" concept has been used by the West and the East in terms of discussing the Orient. Edward Said's work of Orientalism is significant in that it addresses the issue of perceiving the East as the Orient and the West as the Occident. In creating this dichotomy, the West sees itself as the more civilized and progressed society, whereas the East is uncivilized and backwards.[103] Thus, it seen that the West is responsible to modernize and civilize the East because the West became civilized first and distinguished itself from the rest of the world. Within discourse, there is a perception of the West as the peak of civilized society and the center of modernization, while the rest of the world is developing or behind in civilization. As a result, we have the compartmentalization of two different groups that exist in the world as the classification between "us" and the "Other".

Yasmine faces the issue of being a Muslim in America, particularly in terms of what her parents expect from her. Growing up in the West, Yasmine has been greatly influenced by the American way of life and mingled with those kinds of friends the most. Yasmine faces the pressure to fit in as a young woman with conservative parents:

> *One of my biggest accomplishments is getting myself through tough situations on my own. With that though, comes my biggest disappointment, which is that I am not able to talk to my parents about anything. My mom does not know who I am because I feel forced to live a double life.*

[103] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 3.

A common perception among the young women I interviewed is that Iraqi culture is limiting, particularly in terms of women's empowerment and progression. Girls like Zahraa, Yasmine, Maria, and Sarah face external pressures from relatives and family friends to focus on their future, but not in the way for which these girls are aiming. For Zahraa, a Biochemistry and Social Work undergraduate student at Arizona State University (ASU), she finds herself at a crossroad:

> *The Iraqi culture is limiting in what I can or can't do. My cousins have gotten their degrees and then got married. They are expected to stay home and stop following their dreams; I do not agree with this. I want to go to medical school. I want to open up opportunities and make changes to help people's lives for the better.*

In addition to facing challenges as Muslim minority women in America these women face a disconnect between their identity and their immersion into the Iraqi community. Unlike the older women I have interviewed, this younger group feels like an outsider because of the drama that arises from interactions with Iraqis. To avoid the negativity and lack of acceptance of life choices, they avoid mingling with Iraqis as much as possible. This, however, makes it more difficult for the women's experience in an in-between state. Zahraa claims that her time at ASU has helped, and confused, her understanding of her identity because of the diversity that she has been exposed to:

> *It is hard to try to understand my identity as an Arab, Muslim, Iraqi woman living in the US and fitting into the different groups that make up the US. You'll never completely be able to live their life but at the same time I cannot live within the Iraqi society. It is a patriarchal society and there are a lot of things I do not agree with, so I'm an outsider in both situations and I'm trying to find the middle ground.*

Iraqi women who have emigrated to the United States over the last five decades have brought with them a wide range of cultural, social, and religious expectations

that are influenced and shaped by their different upbringings. It became clear to me in my conversations with these women that, regardless of their ages, socio-economic status, and religious background, they all struggle to navigate around the multi-faceted identity that they have constructed for themselves or have been influenced by others. This is moreso for the girls in their 20s who receive pushback from family members and limitations on their mobility and choices. This frustration is expressed in every conversation and they find themselves in a struggle against said limitation, often causing family discord. When asked about what family means to her, 20-year-old Narjis presents her challenges:

> *It means "mako raha" (there is no comfort)- they butt into everything and have something to say about whatever I do. Traditions and customs are heavily embedded into my life so some things are not able to be changed, even though I try to push back and make my parents see things in my perspective.*

While speaking about being in an "in-between" stage and navigating her way through a merging of two identities, Sarah discusses the limitations she experiences:

> *Limitations on social life, if you have fun today you can't have fun tomorrow. Have to focus on being part of the family and securing the future, not being the child to move out at 18. Living in a dichotomy of wanting to have fun but not wanting to transgress boundaries. Girls at age 16 are viewed as marriageable age, marriage is the epitome of success for women when there are other avenues to take. You can get married and get an education, it is not mutually exclusive anymore. Limitations of dating because of family mindsets.*

Girls are articulate about the double standard between them and their brothers. Parents tend to go easier on their sons, allowing then to party, date and stay out late as they wish while they put more control and surveillance on their daughters. By doing so, immigrant parents are able to work to maintain a positive image of their honor in the face of the community, a concept that has greater meaning and hold in their minds than their daughters ability to do as she pleases.

Marriage, Family, and Sexuality

The girls I interviewed were in their early 20s and were not yet married, although they were in public settings of intermingling with people of the opposite gender. Growing up as an Iraqi woman in conservative households, the topic of dating and marriage does not come up in conversation with parents. As university students, however, these girls had been exposed to other Iraqi men or men of different nationalities in the context of their classes or through mutual relations within their friend groups. It is important to these women that they have a say in who they marry without succumbing to an arranged marriage under false pretenses.

> *I received a marriage proposal from a man who is friends with my uncle back in Iraq. I told my parents that I would only consider it if I can talk to the guy and see if there is connection. They agreed and after talking to him a couple of times he was telling me that he loves me. This is not the type of relationship or affection I had in mind. I decided that we were not a good match. My parents did not take this decision lightly and stopped talking to me for three months after the fact. (Narjis)*

Dating and marriage, like education, are crucial points in the lives of Iraqi women in diaspora. Although they recognize that traditions and customs play a prominent role in their lives, they also transgress gender norms in order to have a choice in who they want to marry. Children of immigrants are discouraged by the idea that their parents are more interested in ensuring that their daughters marry men from the same cultural background or nationality than paying attention to what qualities their daughters look for, if there is a connection or harmony between the couple.[104] Daughters of immigrants living in America struggle to both respect their

[104] Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, Kathleen M. Moore, and Ebrary, Inc. *Muslim Women in America the Challenge of Islamic Identity Today*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), 86.

family's name and honor and to liberate themselves from any expectations that this may place on them.

> *I tend to stay away from Arab guys in general, and particularly Iraqi ones. We always have a good time when we hang out as friends, but we do not have the same mindset or values. In their minds I am too Americanized for them and they want an obedient wife and I have a strong personality with dreams to accomplish; I do not want to be held back. When I get married then it will be to an American guy, not an Arab, and my parents just have to accept my decision. (Yasmine)*

At the same time, the topic of boyfriends and dating found its way into the conversation of traditions and customs in the Iraqi household.

> *When I came to the university, I was exposed to the Kuwaiti students and eventually I met this one Kuwaiti guy. We started off talking as friends and then feelings began to develop into something more. I told my mom about him and she jokingly said after my last proposal rejection, if I bring a Kuwaiti guy home then she will beat the both of us. (Narjis)*

The constraints around dating are not only strong amongst Iraqi Muslims, but the Christians as well.

> *My parents view me at a marriageable age as long as I continue my education and achieve my dreams. How do they, however, expect me to get married if I limit my abilities to go out and date or hang out with my friends? They expect us to get married the way they did- have their families arrange it and get to know each other after the wedding. I want to get to know the guy first and see if we are compatible and comfortable with one another. I want to experience a relationship based on respect and love. I do not think that is too much to ask. (Sarah)*

Marriage within Iraqi society is an embodiment of a social institution but also a network. This is particularly true for Iraqis in diaspora because family links and networks are strengthened and expanded through marriage. As people who live in

ghorba[105] marriage plays a pertinent role in ensuring that the family does not end but continues to grow and prosper.

> *My sister lives in Tucson and my parents, husband, son, sister and I lived in Atlanta. When she told us we should move to Tucson for better economic opportunities we jumped at the idea, only because our families would be closer now. We all followed one another to Tucson and now we are just waiting for our brother to come to the United States from Turkey. Without our family, all of our struggles and our lives in isolation would be too dark to manage. (Om Hamza)*

Marriage also provides Iraqi women with a network or social group that excludes the single women. As a married woman you enjoy a certain status within Iraqi society that allows you access to more mobility in some cases than what could be practiced by single women. A married woman has more responsibility in terms of taking care of a husband, house, kids, in-laws and fulfilling social obligations. Another part of the marriage network among Iraqi women is socializing and catching up on the gossip or current drama within the community. Keeping up to date with the news of the Iraqi community and maintaining ties are aspects of these women's daily lives.

> *After I complete all my housework, I like to call my best friends or go over to their house for tea. We discuss what is going on in our lives but I also hear the news about other Iraqis from them. This is how we know what everyone is up to. (Om Hassan)*

The talks of gossip and rumors is a thread that keeps Iraqi relations tied together in the Iraq community. For the married Iraqi women, this aspect is an important part of carrying out their personal and social lives, but that is not the case for the

[105] Estranged or foreign- in this case the West.

unmarried Iraqi girls. Gossip and backbiting are some of the influencing factors that push these girls away from the community as much as possible.

> *You see this is the reason why I don't talk to many Iraqis. There is too much talk and creation of stories amongst them. Some people just see you, and then next thing you know they will have created stories about you and spread rumors to everyone they know, all while assuming that you have done something wrong. (Narjis)*

I empathized with Narjis because I remember growing up, my mother used to always warn me to watch what I do because I never know who will be watching me, but the fact of the matter is that there is always someone watching. The Iraqi body is under constant surveillance, and most of the time it is without the individual's knowledge. The concept of honor (*sharaf*) and shame in the Iraqi community is a crucial point in understanding the social politics and policing that occurs in the society, particularly as it pertains to the Iraqi female body.

> *It is very frustrating to grow up and live in the midst of an Arab or Iraqi community, especially if you are raised in the West. You find yourself constantly being judged for what you wear, where you go out, who you are friends with, what you decide to study, the list is endless. If I do not care what others think then I am still judged and if I care what others have to say about me then I will live my life for the sake of others and go crazy in doing so. My parents did not leave Iraq for a place of opportunities only for me to feel like I have to hold back in order to please others. I will succeed on my own terms. (Yasmine)*

Choices of Education and Career Paths

Education and degree choices become a main component of Iraqi identity in the diaspora. Some Iraqi parents push their children to study professions that will secure them an income such as medicine and health sciences or engineering. Socially, there is some stigma attached to the social sciences and humanities because these fields do not necessarily offer immediate hiring or secure a stable financial path. Iraqis are

revered as more "successful" if you are a medical doctor or an engineer than a business, political science or sociology graduate.

> *Every time an Iraqi auntie asks me what my major is, I tell them business and they give me a weird look before asking me, "What does that mean? Where will you find work? Were your marks not high enough to study medicine?" They think only a doctor can find a job and I feel that my dreams and efforts are not respected because it is not the "ideal" situation. My parents have not pushed me to pursue the path most chosen (medicine) and I think that's all that matters. In the end my degree is for me, not for others. (Mina)*

On the other side, some Iraqi parents only want what is best for their children. They want them to have financial security and establish a name for themselves, without always having to rely on others. Many parents experienced the harsh conditions of the Iran-Iraq War and the U.N. economic sanctions in the 1990s, so they have seen how tough it was for the working class. Thus, they wish that their children would be better off than they were.

> *I wanted my son to go to college and study medicine. Our (his father and I) degrees were not accepted here so we had to open up our own business in order to provide a living for our children. But my son, he had the chance to have an American degree that is respected wherever he goes. Unfortunately, he did not care much for school and now is a business major. When he graduates, he can work with his father in the shop. (Om Ahmed)*

The degree choices that Iraqi women have to make also impact other aspects of their lives. In terms of marriage, the girls who are on a pre-med track are aware that they would have to marry doctors or a man who is very considerate of the heavy schedule that a doctor takes on. This also means that marriage and children may be delayed because these women want to earn their degrees first.

> *I want to go to medical school because if you do not have your health then you lose everything. I want to open up opportunities for people and make changes to help people. Maybe even open up a free clinic and stab healthcare in the back. Create changes in people's lives that way. I know this means that starting my own family may be pushed back a bit, but I*

> *want to get married to someone I care about and who respects my dreams. I want him to support me and push us forward towards a better and brighter future, not hold me back so he can shine. (Zahraa)*

The children of refugees are not the only ones who have hopes for the better. Women who held professional positions in Iraq come to the United States and go back to school to continue working in the fields in which they are proficient.

> *America has always been the land of dreams and opportunities. Here it is all about going to work and life is fast-paced. People do not stop and enjoy life. Everyone lives their own life. At the same time, no one is too old to work or go to school. If you have a dream, then you can work towards it and no one will tell you know. As refugees we miss our homeland, but our lives are here now because the homeland is no more- disappointment and frustration. (Nour)*

Unlike in Iraq, women in diaspora feel safe to know that they have options here and will not be turned away or discriminated against because of their age or status.

> *I was 45 years old and I went to the Ministry of Education to apply for a Master's degree. They rejected my application because they said I was too old to go back to school. The Iraqi government did not support my dream of completing a higher degree. I now have 37 years of teaching experience and I did that on my own. (Om Maria)*

The phrase, "the land of opportunities" repeatedly came up as a theme in my conversations with my interlocutors. In their minds they have been exposed to an America that is the place where dreams come true and a government is there to support you, rather than hinder you. At the same time, however, many Iraqis are shocked to find out that, when they arrive to the United States, they are unable to find a job within their field of expertise or based off of their degree major. They have to start anew with education or find other fields to be able to make a living and support themselves.

> *I have 18 years of teaching experience in Iraq. I have been working since I was 20 years old and never took a year off. It is hard coming to America and finding out I have to do extra schooling and take more classes before I am able to be a*

> *teacher here, especially when I have already completed my degree and have received the necessary training. (Om Hamza)*

These issues present the anxiety and, at times, fear that these girls undergo because of the pressures that they feel from their parents, family and other community members watching what they do and where they go. The issues that these young women experience are consistent with the problems that Arab-American women face in defining their identities and determining their own destinies.[106] Second generation immigrants are faced with the challenge of coming to terms with the way traditional Arab values and the family are modified within a Western context. The roles these women adopt work to define and redefine what it means to be Arab in America, while also slowly face of the community and the image of the Arab, or Muslim, woman as subordinate and secluded.[107] The journey that they have taken to arrive in the United States, after leaving behind their homeland and all that they know, is because the main goal is to embark in search of new opportunities. The way to navigate the opportunities that they have, however, is more intricate and complicated than culture and nationality differences, but rather deals with the multiple networks of identity such as tribe and kinship, socio-economic status, family upbringings and educational background.

[106] Ibid., 1.
[107] Ibid., 122.

V. Conclusion

As one theorizes gender relations on certain levels, as they pertain to women of color and minorities, it can be determined that while identity holds a special place in the minds and hearts of those who are living in diaspora, identity can also be fluid and makeshift in the midst of a conglomeration of different groups of people. Similarly, kinship can provide women with a sense of protection while also being a source of limitation for women to progress forward. This is particularly apparent amongst the women I interviewed, but especially those who are in their 20s and unmarried compared to the married women in their 30s to 50s. As a unit, kinship is an important feature of living in the diaspora because it maintains the connection between the homeland and the host country. At the same time, kinship and the community keep the imagination of the homeland alive and well in the collective memory and identity of Iraqis in the diaspora.

While the distance from the place of the trauma and sorrow can be comforting to some, living in a foreign country that is so far away from the comfort of their homeland and family is also challenging and can take a toll on Iraqis. In an attempt to alleviate the pain of this feeling of frustration and being in *ghorba*, diverse regions in transnational networks of families and friends scattered across the globe connect with one another on different levels- in person and through various social network outlets- to keep the spirit of the homeland and their Iraqi identity alive and well, even thousands of miles away.

Reputation and family honor transcend national borders and move into the imagined moral boundaries of Iraqi diaspora. Diasporic imagination engages the

construction of immigrant identity and political ramifications of this identity in the receiving country, producing a "Negotiation between gratitude to the host country and longing for the homeland."[108] The demands of diaspora, however, can also open up new roles for women. Iraqi women take the initiative to depend on themselves and advance their credentials in order to secure a future for them and their families in the United States. Life in Iraq allowed Iraqi women to focus either on their studies or professional work and social obligations, whereas in the United States they have to juggle work, school, a social life and family obligations. To some, it is a complete culture shock and requires some adjusting in order to balance this lifestyle. For others, their previous standard of living in Iraq is enough motivation to keep these women going to make sure their families do not have to experience the same conditions that they endured.

As immigrants and refugees, the Iraqi women living in the Arizona diaspora comprehend their struggles and survivals to be an essential part of their identity, in addition to playing the role of a common link that joins the community together. There is always someone who has gone through the process of assimilating and constructing their livelihood before and there will be individuals who will soon go through the same process. In the end, however, everyone has endured the same sequence of events in Iraqi history, has experienced specific repercussions of the regime and struggles to navigate their way as women in an "in-between" state in the diaspora.

[108] Lewis, 2008, 139.

Many women utilize the space and the rituals of *Muharram* not only to fulfill a sense of religious piety, but for social and personal reasons too. This can be used to make sense of why many women show up on the seventh and eighth days of *Muharram*. The seventh day is usually meant for al-Abbas and the story is told from the perspective of his sister, Zainab, who has lost her beloved brothers in the Battle of Karbala and is all alone. This story appeals to women who have lost brothers, sons, or any male figures in their lives because they feel the loneliness that Zainab felt. The eighth day is designated for al-Qasim ibn al-Hassan. This day is heavily identified by the ritual of the *seeniya* (tray) where women bring in trays of goods as offerings to fulfill a vow. In addition to attending the Husseiniya, women participate in mourning rituals that include cooking food for the purpose of serving Imam Hussein and the other members of Ahl al-Bayt. These women fulfill vows and desires previously made by bringing food, sweets, and drinks (Hamdan 2012: 143). Some of these desires include getting married or having children. After their wish is fulfilled, the women comply with their vow by using food as offerings.

The trays are usually filled with henna, candy, flowers, incense, candles and cookies. Many women will show up on this day with their *seeniya* to fulfill their vows or attend the *majlis* to gain *amrad* (what they want). The story of al-Qasim is one that produces a heavy atmosphere of mourning because al-Qasim was killed on his wedding night, making his mother a tremendously sad woman around after not being able to see her young son get married. Rather than seeing the smile on his face, she witnessed the blood pooling around his body. This year was the first year I made my own *seeniya*; usually younger women who make one are perceived as

wanting marriage, although that is not the case for many. As I was passing around my tray, women would wink at me and tell me "*Allah yetqabal a'malich wa yendich amradich*" which translates to "God will accept your actions and give you what you want." I politely smiled back and thanked them for their good wishes, but I felt strange because I had not wanted people to think marriage was what I wanted and the reason behind my tray.

Ironically, some might say that the next night my wish was fulfilled (depending on who you asked). In the middle of the *latem* (beating), I was in the circle when I noticed that my mother had sat down and next to her a woman had her phone out and was whispering to her. I saw my mom give out her phone number and the two women continued to talk for a brief moment. After the *latem* and *dua* (supplication), any woman who had brought something to share passed it out to the women before they left. I noticed that the same woman that asked my mom for her number was giving my mother many plates of the dessert she had made. She made three laps around us and every time gave us three plates. I look at my mother and ask her what this new friendship was all about and she whispered under her breath, "She wants you for her brother-in-law." Everything made sense at this point, but I immediately told my mother that I was not okay with the proposal and did not want to hear any of the details. She told the woman that she would discuss it with my father and give her an answer. The next day the lady had called, and my mother told her no, but the woman persisted. Nevertheless, later that night at the *Husseiniya* she continued to be nice to us, making sure she gave me the tea and desserts herself and asking me if I needed anything else.

This encounter got me to thinking that to some, I had asked God and the Imams for something and probably received what I wanted- although marriage was not the object of my desire for which I had made a vow. At the same time, it made me realize that some women do not come to the majlis only for the religious rituals and to fulfill a religious need. This woman had said she was looking for a 'good' girl for her brother-in-law and many of the girls did not appeal to her the way I did. Clearly this lady had taken advantage of the *Husseiniya* as a place to find a pious woman from a good family who would also make a good wife for her brother-in-law. While this lady is not the only one who looks for women to matchmake with the men in their lives, it is an interesting social practice that Iraqi women do in the context of *Muharram*. In the midst of all the conversations about school, jobs, money, Iraq, family, the U.S. government, we will find that women are also talking about marriage as another way to fulfill a religious duty.

On that note, it was also interesting to note my conversation with an older lady who has been living in the United States for 10 years but only received her citizenship in the last year. I asked her why she waited so long and she said that as her three older kids all got married and received their citizenship she did not find that it was a priority at the time because her children were safe, regardless of what happened. However, when Trump came into presidency she feared that she would be sent back to Iraq with just a green card, so she applied for citizenship and went to test and, fortunately, received her citizenship just in case anything was to happen. This story brings to light the worries surrounding security in the United States. This lady was living in the US for nine years without worrying about her immigration

status but with the shifting of the political situation in the White House, this woman feared that she could possibly be separated from her family and decided to take it upon herself to test, although language was a barrier and a struggle (as she claimed) at her age to study and memorize for the test.

Circling back to the nights of *Muharram* and the community of shared memory and trauma, it is visible to the reader that regardless of differences some aspects of the tradition of what is means to be Iraqi is replicated, even in a foreign setting[109]. For those who are unable to go to Iraq, they choose to bring Iraq and the atmosphere to them. Iraqi women will wear black and will listen closely to the *sheikh's* sermon, or they will bring a *seeniya* or other offering to fulfill their vows in exchange for certain wishes of marriage, pregnancy, good health, travel, peace of mind. Ultimately, it is evident that Iraqi women are able to construct their diasporic identity in terms of their ongoing relationship with the nation-states and the intersections of class and gender in migration experiences, cultural and religious traditions, and the social struggles of fitting in and establishing a successful livelihood and state of being.

[109] The Shi'a example of this tradition can be generalized as each group has its own rituals and ceremonies.

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