

Abstract

Title of Dissertation: NEGOTIATING THE PLACE OF ASSYRIANS IN
 MODERN IRAQ, 1960–1988

Alda Benjamen, Doctor of Philosophy, 2015

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This dissertation deals with the social, intellectual, cultural, and political history of the Assyrians under changing regimes from the 1960s to the 1980s. It examines the place of Assyrians in relation to a state that was increasing in strength and influence, and locates their interactions within socio-political movements that were generally associated with the Iraqi opposition. It analyzes the ways in which Assyrians contextualized themselves in their society and negotiated for social, cultural, and political rights both from the state and from the movements with which they were affiliated. Assyrians began migrating to urban Iraqi centers in the second half of the twentieth century, and in the process became more integrated into their societies. But their native towns and villages in northern Iraq continued to occupy an important place in their communal identity, while interactions between rural and urban Assyrians were ongoing. Although substantially integrated in Iraqi society, Assyrians continued to retain aspects of the transnational character of their community. Transnational interactions between

Iraqi Assyrians and Assyrians in neighboring countries and the diaspora are therefore another important phenomenon examined in this dissertation. Finally, the role of Assyrian women in these movements, and their portrayal by intellectuals, will be evaluated using a gendered perspective.

NEGOTIATING THE PLACE OF
ASSYRIANS IN MODERN IRAQ
1960–1988

by

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To Danny and Aryo

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Contents

<i>Dedication</i>	i
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	x
<i>Note on Transliteration</i>	xii
<i>Historical Chronology</i>	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Assyrians and the Iraqi Communist Party	69
Chapter 3: Beyond the Kurdish Nationalist Lens: The Role of Assyrians and Communists in the Kurdish Uprising (1961–1975)	128
Chapter 4: Between Reconciliation and Repression: Ba‘thist Policies towards the Assyrians in the 1970s	170
Chapter 5: Between Compliance, Negotiation, and Resitance: Assyrian Press and Popular Culture (1970s–1980s)	214
Chapter 6: The Re-Establishment of the Assyrian Nationalist Political Movement (1970s–1980s)	266
Conclusion	315
<i>Appendix 1: The Territorial Boundaries of the Nineveh Plain</i>	336
<i>Appendix 2: The ‘Simele’ Song</i>	337
<i>Appendix 3: Cult of Martyrdom</i>	339
<i>Bibliography</i>	342

List of Abbreviations

Political Bodies and Corporations

ADM	Assyrian Democratic Movement
AUA	Assyrian Universal Alliance
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IPC	Iraqi Petroleum Company
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

Archival Collections

ADM-PR	Private Ba‘th Records acquired before 2003, pertaining to the ADM, and held by individuals or ADM branches
ADM-BR	Ba‘th records pertaining to the Assyrian and Christian communities acquired by the ADM after 2003, and held at the ADM headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq
AIR	Records of the British Air Ministry and the Royal Air Force
BRCC	Ba‘th Regional Command Collection

CO	Records of the Colonial Office, National Archives, London
FO	Records of the Foreign Office, National Archives, London
INLA	Iraqi National Library and Archives, Baghdad, Iraq
IMF	Iraq Memory Foundation, collection of Ba‘th records currently held at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland
NIDS	North Iraq Dataset, Ba‘th records acquired by the KDP and the PUK

Note on Transliteration

Transliterations of Arabic words are based on the style of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*. Names of known individuals and geographical locations that are used in English are retained in that form for consistency. Transliterations of Aramaic words are based on a modified system that combines the “Syriac Romanization Table,” provided by the Library of Congress, and *IJMES* style. In some cases, when Aramaic names appeared in Arabic manuscripts or archival documents, they were transliterated based on their Arabic spelling; otherwise, I have transliterated in ways that seem to make the most sense.

Historical Chronology

This chronology is adapted from Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xii–xix.

Date	Events	Notes
1914	November: British occupation of Basra	
1917	March: British occupation of Baghdad	
1918	November: British occupation of Mosul	
1919 to 1920	25,000 Assyrian survivors of First World War massacres from Urmia and Hakkari settled by the British in Ba‘quba camp (40 km north of Baghdad)	Assyrians begin to be considered a foreign element by some Iraqi intellectuals and politicians
1920	April: San Remo meeting designates Iraq a British Mandate July–October: Iraqi Revolution unites Iraqis of various ethnic and sectarian groups	
1921	The British institute the Hashemite Monarchy; Faisal bin Husain al-Hashimi assigned king of Iraq	
1922	British create the Iraq Levies Force from among local Arabs and Kurds. Later Assyrian men at Ba‘quba	

	camp incorporated into the Levies and eventually constitute a significant number within it	
1924	June: the passing of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty	
1925	March: Iraqi government agrees to concession on the Turkish Petroleum Company December: League of Nations designates Mosul an Iraqi province	
1927	Major oil field discovered near Kirkuk	
1930	June: New Anglo-Iraqi treaty passed, which promises independence of Iraq	
1932	British Mandate over Iraq ends; Iraq granted independence	
1933	King Faisal dies and is succeeded by King Ghazi August: Simele massacre of Assyrians by the Iraqi military; between 300 and 6,000 Assyrians killed; Assyrian leaders expelled, including Mar Shim'un, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, and Malik Yā'qo Ismā'īl, tribal and political leader	Interdenominational solidarity between Assyrians observed immediately following Simele, but in the aftermath, heightened sectarianism results; close to 10,000 Assyrians eventually settle in Khabour, Syria
1936	October: Military coup d'état supported by General Bakr Sidqi	Bakr Sidqi commanded the troops in Simele
1937	August: Bakr Sidqi assassinated; rise of pan- Arab nationalist	

	rhetoric and military influence in politics	
1939	King Ghazi dies, succeeded by infant son, Faisal II, Prince ‘Abd al-Ilah becomes regent	
1941	April: Military coup d’état forms a government led by Rashid ‘Ali al-Kailani May: British forces restore Iraqi monarchy; rise in influence of Iraqi nationalists at the expense of Arab nationalists	Kheith Kheith Allap I (Assyrian Love and Unity) forms in Habbaniyya in the 1940s ; British crack down on its activities and forces it to close
1944-1946	Sixteen labor unions formed in Iraq, twelve influenced by the Iraqi Communist Party; Assyrians heavily involved in organized labor activities July 1946: 5,000 Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) workers go on strike led by an Assyrian, and including 700 Assyrian IPC workers	Assyrians begin rural–urban migrations from their villages and towns in the north to urban centers (e.g., Baghdad, Basra and Kirkuk) in search of employment and educational opportunities
1948	January: new Anglo-Iraqi treaty signed at Portsmouth; <i>Al-Wathba</i> —Iraqis protest in Baghdad; influence of the Iraqi Communist Party demonstrated; demonstrations result in abandonment of the treaty May: Iraq sends expeditionary force to Palestine; force includes Assyrian ex-Iraq Levies officers	Assyrians attracted to communism in significant numbers

1952	<p>February: Iraq government agrees on 50-50 share of profits with the IPC</p> <p>November–December: demonstrations break out in Baghdad, known as <i>al-Intifada</i></p>	
1955	<p>Baghdad Pact formed</p>	
1958	<p>July: Military coup d'état overthrows monarchy and establishes republic under Brigadier 'Abd al-Karim Qasim</p>	
1959	<p>October: Mustafa Barzani leads the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)</p> <p>March: Rally organized by supporters of the ICP in Mosul leads to a rebellion under the command of Colonel Shawwāf, and involves Arab nationalist officers and conservative Arab tribes; Assyrians attacked in Mosul and the neighboring village of Telkaif; 600 communists killed of which 200 are Assyrians</p> <p>July: violent clashes erupt between Kurds and Turkomen in Kirkuk during the celebratory procession of the 1959 revolution; Qasim provides Barzani with arms following the Shawwāf uprising to garner his support; Barzani uses arms to consolidate his power over</p>	<p>Changing demographics in urbanizing cities and the politicization of new urban minorities, such as the Assyrians, exacerbates socioeconomic and ethnic and sectarian divides, leading to the eruption of violence in Mosul and Kirkuk.</p>

other Kurdish and Assyrian tribes

- 1961 April: Kheith Kheith Allap II (Assyrian Unity and Freedom) forms; not allowed to register officially in Baghdad, it moves its activities to the northern provinces
- June: Kuwait becomes independent; Qasim calls for its incorporation into Iraq; British and later Arab League Forces mobilized to Kuwait
- July: Barzani demands autonomy for the Kurdish region; fighting between Barzani's forces and the Iraqi army begins; Assyrians join the Kurdish uprising—first as individuals, later through organized Assyrian tribal and political associations
- 1963 February: Military coup d'état by Ba'athists and Arab nationalists topples Qasim's regime; violent campaign against communists and their sympathizers takes place, Ba'athist National Guard killing between 3,000 and 5,000 people; Assyrian neighborhoods and villages also targeted and attacked; memory of the 1959 Kirkuk crisis recalled in the court-martial trials
- Ba'athists and nationalists reclaim Iraqi socio-political space from leftists and communists supported by Qasim; the coup corrects the established order disrupted by communists and their affiliates, who include newly urbanized minority communities and women

of alleged communists, including Assyrians;

November: President 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif and his military allies expel Ba' thists from power

1965 Civil war erupts between the Iraqi army and Kurds; Kurds joined by Assyrian tribes and political organizations as well as communists, who escape government persecution in central and southern Iraqi cities, forming an Iraqi opposition

1966 April: 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif dies in helicopter accident; his brother 'Abd al-Rahman 'Arif becomes president
July: Barzani accepts al-Bazzaz's plan for Kurdish autonomy

1967 Arab-Israeli war; Iraq sends a small force

1968 July 17: military coup d'état by Arab nationalists and Ba' thists; Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr becomes president

1969 June: Agreements between Iraq and the USSR on Soviet assistance with oil field exploitation
November: Saddam Hussein heads the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and becomes its

vice-chair

The Assyrian Universal Alliance forms, as an international body representing Assyrians, under the leadership of Iranian Assyrians with influence on the Iranian government

1970	March–July: manifesto recognizes Kurdish national identity and language, and sets precedent for the establishment of Kurdish self-administration April: Conciliatory policies towards Assyrians also pursued by the government, and patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII invited back (his predecessor had been exiled since 1933)	Conciliatory policies enacted by Iraqi government towards Assyrian community as a result of the role of the Assyrians in the Iraqi opposition and the influence of diasporic Assyrian organizations on Western governments and human rights organizations; Iraqi government, Kurdish opposition, and communists compete to draw the Assyrian community closer to their particular cause
1971	Diplomatic relations between Iran and Iraq broken off	
1972	April: Fifteen-year agreement of Iraq-USSR Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed April: Law 251 promulgated, extending cultural and linguistic rights to “Speakers of the Syriac Language”—the Assyrians June: nationalization of the IPC Iran extends its support for Iraqi Kurds again, and fighting between	Law 251 contributes to an increase in Assyrian intellectual production within both the Assyrian community and the Iraqi press; Assyrian intellectuals negotiate for increased cultural and political rights using narratives accepted by government; popular culture also deployed to express similar narratives, often more assertively

	the government and the Kurds breaks out	
1973	ICP legally recognized and included in the National Patriotic Front April: Malik Yā'qo Ismā'īl invited back to Iraq after being exiled since 1933; he earns the label “Leader of the Assyrian People” from the government	
1974	March: autonomy for Kurdish areas announced; fighting with Kurds continues	
1975	March: Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran ends Iranian support for the Kurdish opposition, destroying the resistance	Shift from reconciliatory to repressive government policies towards the Assyrians following the Algiers Agreement, specifically in rural centers
1978	Iraq census forces Assyrians to choose between Arab and Kurd as an ethnicity; destruction of Assyrian and Kurdish villages in the north part of clearing of Iran–Iraq border	
1979	Spring: Iranian Revolution topples the monarchy and institutes an Islamic state April: Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) formed, incorporates Iraqi patriotism with Assyrian nationalism July: al-Bakr resigns and is	

replaced by Saddam Hussein as president; Hussein purges RCC and Ba‘th party

1980	September: Iraqi forces invade Iran	
1982	The ADM joins the Kurdish opposition; collaborates with Kurds and ICP members, and especially Assyrians within those organizations	Heightened phase of Ba‘thification of society, including Assyrian associations
1984	July: First wave of arrests of ADM members begins in Kirkuk, and spreads to Mosul; forty-eight people arrested, of whom eighteen are imprisoned and three executed	Persecution of ADM members and increased Ba‘thification of society heightens popularity of ADM and increases its membership among rural Assyrians
1987	Iraq campaign against the Kurdish opposition	
1988	February: beginning of the Anfal campaign Iran–Iraq war ends	Kurdish and Assyrian villages destroyed and civilians killed and displaced; Iraqi opposition in the north left in shambles

Legend	Font Color
Iraq chronology	Black
Assyrian chronology	Blue



The Statue of Tūma Tūmās
Alqosh, Iraq
(Photo credit: Alda Benjamen, December 2011)

1. Introduction

In July 2011 the statue of the late Tūma Tūmās, a communist leader and Assyrian nationalist figure, was placed in a park dedicated to him in the center of Alqosh, a town north of Mosul with a historic Assyrian Christian majority. Tūmās had passed away in Qamishly, Syria, in 1996, though he was not to be buried there but in Duhok, a few days later. Twelve years after his death, he was moved one final time, and re-buried in his beloved Alqosh. Tūma Tūmās holds a special place in Alqoshi and Assyrian history and memory. His life was that of a politically engaged Assyrian, active within the Communist Party, but deeply concerned about the welfare of his village, and community. Throughout Tūmās's political life, we learn about the ways in which Assyrian intellectuals and activists, belonging to numerous religious denominations and affiliated with various political ideologies, interacted with each other, both as Assyrians and as Iraqis struggling for a common cause. Tūmās's memories provide a nexus for different converging themes that recur throughout this text.

This dissertation contextualizes Assyrians within Iraqi history by analyzing their role in socio-ideological movements of the twentieth century, and more specifically under Ba'ṯh rule, which began in 1968. The relationship between a stronger Iraqi state under the Ba'ṯh regime and the Assyrian community forms the basis of this study. I examine four different aspects of this history: 1) government policies: the interactions between the state and the

Assyrians, and Assyrians' inclusion or exclusion within it; 2) intellectual production—the role of Assyrians within the Iraqi Communist Party and the Kurdish uprisings, as well as Assyrian cultural and nationalist movements, from the 1960s to the 1980s; 3) gender: the lens of gender is employed to examine the role of women in these movements, and their portrayal by intellectuals; 4) transnationalism: a comparative perspective is used to garner cross-national interactions between Iraqi Assyrians and Assyrians in Iran, Syria Turkey, and the diaspora.

Tūma Tūmās was born in 1924 in Alqosh, a small Assyrian town with a rich history. Situated just north of Mosul, Alqosh is surrounded by ancient Assyrian sites, and houses a few monuments itself, which Tūmās mentioned proudly in his memoirs: “My place of birth and childhood [was] in Alqosh, an ancient town in Mesopotamia, from the lands of Ashur. It lies 40 km from Nineveh, the last capital of the Assyrians.”¹ Alqosh, according to Tūmās, had preserved its authenticity (*aṣala*) and traditions, and had not allowed its “national identification” (*hawiyatuha al-qawmiyya*) to be destroyed. He claimed that the town’s identity had not been compromised following the fall of its state, despite tribal invasions and the influence of successive ruling states. He noted, for example: “until this day, its Chaldean-Assyrian language has remained *shāmikha*, or dignified.”²

¹ Tūma Tūmās, “Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (1),” *Thekriat*, 2006, <http://www.al-nnas.com/THEKRIAT/15jsf1.htm> (accessed August 23, 2013).

² *Ibid.*

Alqosh is believed to hold the grave of the biblical prophet, Nahum. Among its most important religious sites is the seventh-century monastery of Rabban Hurmizd, which was built in the mountains surrounding Alqosh. Adding to the town's importance was its role for many centuries (1504–1837) as the See of the Church of the East (known as Nestorian).³ From Alqosh's religious ranks came a bishop named Mar Sulaqa, who split from the Nestorian church in the sixteenth century and joined the Roman Catholic Church. This split eventually gave rise to the current Chaldean Church, which is in union with the Roman Catholic Church, as will be demonstrated in the next section. History coupled with geographical benefits—a mountain that guards the town—has given Alqosh and its people a reputation of resilience and pride. In his memoirs, Tūmās vividly articulates his pride in his town's ancient and modern history, and in its ability to maintain its cultural traditions, language, and national identity throughout the centuries.⁴ He fondly remembers his town's "heroic national position" in coming to the aid of Assyrians during the large-scale massacre of Assyrians in the village of Simele and the surrounding region in 1933. During this time, his family hosted twenty other families who had escaped the massacre and taken refuge in Alqosh. According to him, many Alqoshis took in other families, and refused to turn them in to the Iraqi authorities though the threat of attack was imminent, since the Iraqi army, Kurds, and Bedouin tribes surrounded the town. A few years later he was denied entrance to Mosul's only high school, which he attributed to his inability

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. Tūmās wrote his memoirs between 1990 and 1996. They were first published by www.al-nass.com in 2006.

as a small-town Christian boy to compete with the sons of urban and tribal elites, or what he described as Mosul's Bākāwāt and Duhok's Aghāwāt.⁵ These two events—the Simele massacre and his inability to continue on to high school⁶—were the first injustices that young Tūmās described in his memoirs. Combined with his experience as an officer in the British-formed battalion of the Iraqi Levies and his employment in the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) in Kirkuk, they drew him towards the Communist Party.

The chapters that follow will examine the role of Assyrians in Iraq's political and intellectual movements from the 1960s to the 1980s, the factors that attracted them to different groups, and the nature of the interactions both among themselves and with other Iraqis. The fluidity that existed between Iraqi political groups engaged in similar struggles, and between Assyrians as members of different groups, supports the argument that communities do not act only as homogeneous entities.

Assyrians did not always act collectively, but were generally attracted to intellectual and political movements that addressed issues that would have benefited other community members, given their shared circumstances. These political movements tended to be secular, leftist, and concerned with socio-economic justice and minority rights, stressing their shared identity as Iraqis. The involvement of Assyrians in such political groups allowed them to emerge from the periphery and take a central position on the political stage. According to Tūmās, the injustices he faced as a young man took both ethnic and socio-

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ He finished high school at a later time.

economic forms. In 1933 he witnessed the Simele massacre, which targeted his particular community, and as an older boy he was not able to continue his education given his socio-economic background. Moving to urbanized centers and working for large firms further politicized Assyrians, introducing them to grievances shared by other Iraqis who shared their socio-economic background. These politicized spaces temporarily opened up room for negotiations between the state and society, and between different political groups. Assyrians took their opportunities during these periods to forge associations with various groups, and mediated for increased cultural and political rights for their community.

The ways in which Assyrians identified themselves throughout the 1960s–1980s—understanding their internal divisions mainly in terms of religious denomination as well as identifying as Iraqis and members of a transnational Assyrian community—are a central concern of the chapters that follow.

Transnationalism was demonstrated in the movement of Tūmās’s body across the permeable international border of the two Assyrian towns of Qamishly, in Syria, and Alqosh, passing through Duhok—an action enabled by decades of civil war. Transnationalism also had significant effects on the Assyrian community’s understandings of itself, as ideas, as well as material objects and human beings, made their way across borders. The transnational nature of the Assyrian community, enabled by the diasporic character of that community, proved useful in articulating Assyrian Iraqi concerns to international humanitarian bodies and Western governments, and also in advocating on behalf of the

movements—such as Iraq’s political parties—and regimes that Assyrians were affiliated with.

Finally, the collective historical memory of the Assyrian community, and the ways in which it chose to commemorate specific events, were evoked by the statue erected for Tūmās fifteen years after his death, and by his inclusion of the Simele massacre in his memoirs. During the twentieth century, Assyrians used historical memory both to counter the state’s narrative and also to negotiate strategically with the state by weaving themselves into historical discourses that the state accepted and propagated. Historical memory was conveyed in both assertive and more subtle ways, reproduced both in print media and, orally, in songs of defiance.

Tūmās came from a town with a long and proud history associated with numerous religious and intellectual figures who could have been commemorated with a statue and a park dedication in 2011. Moreover, communism had lost its traction with members of the community (and with other Iraqis) during this period. Newer political groups—such as the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), a liberal party founded in 1979, fusing Assyrian nationalism with Iraqi patriotism—were much more popular at the time of his passing. In fact, Tūmās had created a slate called the ChaldoAssyrian List to compete for the five seats allocated to the Assyrians during the first Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) elections, in 1991.⁷ The ADM had won four of the five seats, and Tūmās none. The reason why Tūmās’s statue was nevertheless erected was that people still

⁷ Tūmās (40), *Thekriat* (accessed January 20, 2015).

remembered his heroic actions and political standing with respect and affection. For instance, his memoirs, written between 1990 and 1996, were published in 2006, ten years after his passing. Furthermore, in 2008 a song describing his heroism was included on singer Talal Graish's highly acclaimed CD, *X-Love*.⁸ Tūmās was a figure who successfully represented the complex convergence of identities that defined him: intercommunally, as an Assyrian member of the Chaldean Catholic Church; locally, as an Alqoshi and an inhabitant of the northern provinces; politically, as a communist engaged in the northern Iraqi opposition; and nationally, as an Iraqi.

My research sheds new light on the position of Assyrians, and minorities in general, in Iraqi opposition parties, and on their subsequent treatment by the state and its judicial institutions. More specifically, it shows how minorities such as the Assyrians contextualized themselves within their society, and elevated issues of significance to their community into the larger Iraqi sphere, while also identifying with Iraqis of their socio-economic class and gender, and relying on transnational community networks influential during the Cold War period. I explore the policies adopted towards the Assyrians by the early Ba'athist government, and examine the Assyrian intellectual response to the cultural rights granted by that government in 1972. I argue that Ba'athist policies towards the Assyrians reflected the regime's response to the pressures exerted on it, both internal and external. Internally, the opposition activism of Assyrians, and their interactions with Assyrians in neighboring countries and with regional

⁸ Talal Graish CD, "Toma Tomas, *X-Love*," Jam Music Production, January 2008.

governments, constituted a concern for the central government. Externally, meanwhile, the influence of a vocal diasporic Assyrian community on Western governments and human rights organizations resulted in negative publicity for the Ba‘thists.

Minorities in Middle East Scholarship

There is a general absence of scholarship on minorities in the Arab Middle East. Earlier studies of minority communities consisted of edited volumes pertaining to groups that had a direct political impact on regional or state policies. This was evident from an examination of scholarship dating to the late 1970s. In *The Political Role of Minority Groups in the Middle East*, the issue was addressed from the perspective of the state.⁹ The minority question was raised in relation to the stability or instability of Middle Eastern states. The book argued that cohesive and mobilized minorities could pose a serious threat to the political integrity and economic resources of a state—the Kurds of Iraq, for example;¹⁰ whereas in other states minorities either posed a threat to the established political order, as demonstrated in Syria with the rise of Alawites, or challenged the dominant groups’ values, as did the Palestinians living in the Zionist state of Israel.¹¹ The book predicted that minorities would continue to play a role in shaping the future of the region, and it thus recommended that the “perceptions and expectations of

⁹ Ronald McLaurin, “Minorities and Politics in the Middle East: An Introduction,” in *The Political Role of Minority Groups in the Middle East*, ed. R. McLaurin (New York: Praeger, 1979).

¹⁰ Ibid., 8–9; William E. Hazen, “Minorities in Revolt: The Kurds of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey,” in McLaurin, *Political Role of Minority Groups*, 49–73.

¹¹ McLaurin, “Minorities and Politics in the Middle East,” 9–11.

minorities” should be addressed.¹² The editor doubted that minorities would be assimilated by “dominant nationalism,” but believed there was “every reason to expect that the political role of minorities in the Middle East will continue to be a key factor in the directions, velocity, and nature of regional social change.”¹³

In the late 1980s, the discourse on minorities began to change, incorporating their right to self-determination and struggles for liberation and representation. The collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent independence of its affiliated states in the late 1980s contributed to this discourse. The massacres the Iraqi army committed against the Kurds and others in 1988, which came to be known as the Anfal campaign, further shifted the dialogue towards minority struggles and issues of human rights abuses. An edited volume, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, supplemented case studies of specific minority communities and Middle Eastern states with comparative and methodological discussions, as well as examining the historical context that had shaped the development of today’s minority communities.¹⁴ The editors argued for the inclusion of “ethnic pluralism” as a dimension of the study of twentieth-century Middle Eastern politics.¹⁵ They defined ethnicity as a “collective identity and solidarity based on such factors as imputed common descent, language, customs, belief systems and practices (religion), and in some cases race or

¹² Ibid., 14.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, “The Study of Ethnic Politics in the Middle East,” in *ibid.*, 4.

color.”¹⁶ Ethnic groups were understood to be non-monolithic entities, influenced by a variety of mobilizing factors, including class. The volume provided a periodization of the history of the region, and located the development of ethnicities and minorities within a specific trajectory. The First World War heralded the end of the traditional order, and saw the development of “‘traditional’ political communit[ies] predicated on religion [into] ‘modern’ communities based on nationalism.”¹⁷ The interwar period, the late 1940s-1970s, and post 1970s saw a rise and decline in the ethnic dimension. This fluctuation was based on regional factors, which included the strengthening of the state, the revival of religious politics, and competition between rival ideologies, including socialism and Arab nationalism, and the global influence of Cold War politics.¹⁸ A number of conceptual dualities were also examined, including models of “integration versus conflict,” in which pluralism was framed as a useful tool of analysis. The authors examined the ways in which pluralism was viewed by contemporary theorists belonging to different camps. The structuralist extreme viewed it as a “coflictual relationship” based on competition between groups for power and resources, in which order was derived from domination. On the other end of the intellectual spectrum, functionalists saw pluralism as an interdependence sustained by consensus, in which each group contributed and derived benefits.¹⁹ The applicability of such models to the experiences of ethnic and confessional groups in the Middle East was questioned, along with the ways

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5–6.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6–8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 13–14.

in which such groups operated and were held together by the state. By teasing out questions on pluralism in the Middle East, the book aimed to provoke further studies on the subject.²⁰

In the 1990s more books appeared questioning the rights of minorities, providing case studies focusing on various Middle Eastern minority communities. The Kurds, especially those in Iraq, were central to these discussions, as were the Palestinians, but the list also included non-Muslim, non-Arab, and heterodox Muslim minorities. The Assyrians were generally ignored, referred to only in passing, until Mordechai Nisan dedicated a chapter to them in his 1991 book *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*.²¹ In this chapter, Nisan provided a historical analysis of the community that spanned centuries, but focused on the modern era, briefly touching upon the role of the Assyrians in Iraq's socio-political movements. In 1992, Michael M. Gunter dedicated a monograph to the Kurds, entitled *The Kurds of Iraq*.²² The book covered the Kurdish movement's twentieth-century history, focusing on the Barzan tribe. Gunter dedicated a few pages to the Anfal campaign, focusing on the town of Halabja, and his text concluded with the establishment of the Kurdish safe haven in northern Iraq in 1991.²³

By the mid 1990s, the discussion on minorities had begun to include cultural dynamics. The editors of *Nationalism, Minorities and Diasporas*:

²⁰ Ibid., 14.

²¹ Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991), 156–65.

²² Michael Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992).

²³ Ibid.

Identities and Rights in the Middle East (1996)²⁴ considered the interactions between minority communities in the homeland and the diaspora. They also addressed the cultural sphere by examining the role of music and other forms of art as a medium of self-expression for minorities. A discussion of the interplay between law, politics, and culture highlighted the effects of these factors on each other. For instance, the editors questioned the practicality of international laws that ensured minority rights, or criminalized acts of genocide, but failed to address the exigencies of dealing with states committing such crimes. This volume shifted the discourse on minorities by considering their perspective as conditioned by cultural factors, and examined state and international policies on minority communities in light of this perspective.

Three significant studies were dedicated to the Kurdish community of Iraq and Turkey in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In *The Other Kurds* (1999), Nelida Fuccaro provided a historical survey examining the ways in which the political, social, economic, and cultural forms of communal association within the Yazidi community had developed during the Mandate period.²⁵ Paul J. White's *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (2000) traced the transformation of Kurdish peasants from social rebels to modern Kurdish nationalists in the late Ottoman period and into twentieth-century

²⁴ Kirsten Schulze, *Nationalism, Minorities and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East* (London/New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996).

²⁵ Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

Turkey.²⁶ And in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (2003), Abbas Vali addressed different dimensions of the theme of nationalism, including Kurdish historiography, the role of Kurdish nationalist figures, and the effects of Kurdish literary discourses on the making of Kurdish identity.²⁷

The literature on minorities during this period included a number of studies on non-Muslim communities. Taner Akçam contributed to a growing body of historiography dedicated to the Armenian genocide in *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (2004). He excoriated the taboo surrounding intellectual inquiry into the topic of the genocide by the Turkish state, arguing that it had had negative consequences both for Turkey and for the Armenian community. Akçam also introduced Ottoman-Turkish sources on the period, providing a conceptual framework for understanding the causes and effects of the genocide.²⁸

In *The Copts of Egypt: Challenges of Modernization and Identity* (2011), Vivian Ibrahim addressed the social, political, and cultural development of Coptic identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, questioning whether this identity “manifested itself as a collective Coptic response to various historical situations.”²⁹ She offered a critical assessment of the ways in which Copts had been presented as monolithic and stagnant, lacking individual power beyond the

²⁶ Paul White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (London/New York: Zed, 2000).

²⁷ Abbas Vali, *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003).

²⁸ Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London/New York: Zed, 2004).

²⁹ Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (London/New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 8.

constraints of the religious hierarchy. This historical assumption had also engendered the problematic notion that the Copts were a minority under threat, which shared no common cultural ground with Muslim Egyptians—an inflammatory differentiation between Copts and other Egyptians on the basis of religious factors alone.³⁰

Orit Bashkin's *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (2012) complicated traditional Zionist-inspired literature on the Baghdadi Jewish community by showing that urbanized Iraqi Jews identified as both Iraqis and Arabs in the first half of the twentieth century, and were sufficiently immersed in the Iraqi public sphere to contribute significantly to a growing Iraqi press, as well as to join leftist and communists political groups.³¹ The eventual disintegration of their community, and its exodus to Israel in the late 1940s and 1950s, was a result of increased Zionist activity in Iraq and the region, which led to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948—though this was combined with the failed Iraqi policy, supported by a segment of the radicalized Iraqi intelligentsia, of erroneously associating all Iraqi Jews with the Zionist cause.

Discussions of sectarianism were becoming more nuanced during this period, as was evident in the works of Ibrahim and Bashkin. In his seminal work on sectarianism in nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (2000), Ussama Makdisi argued that the discourse around sectarianism

³⁰ Ibid., 3–7.

³¹ Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

was an artefact of political modernism, shaped both by the new ways in which local Lebanese actors had begun to engage with each other as a result of the Ottoman reforms of the nineteenth century, and by an increase in European hegemonic power throughout the empire and in Mount Lebanon.³² In *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (2009), Orit Bashkin applied Makdisi's analysis of sectarianism in Lebanon to Iraq, arguing that sectarianism had been "produced, hybridized, and changed over time."³³ She argued that a "hybridized sectarian discourse" had existed as early as the 1920s, and was evident in the Iraqi print media, which cut across ethno-religious divisions. Sunnis, Shi'is, Christians, and Jews read similar texts, and engaged in shared dialogues that were significant to their societies.³⁴ This hybridization of influences between various sects was one of three aspects of an "Iraqi hybridity" that was characterized by the transformation of both the colonized and the colonizers. Two further discourses of cultural hybridization in Hashemite Iraq concerned those relating, firstly, to the encounter between colonial British culture and the "authentic" Iraqi one, and, secondly, to that between the Iraqi and transregional experiences. This hybridized Iraqi-transregional model was based on the movement and transformation of ideas within the cultural centers of the Middle East.³⁵

³² Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 6–8, 1–14.

³³ Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–7; see also 157–93.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–7.

This dissertation is informed by the studies of Bashkin, Ibrahim, and Makdisi. I understand sectarianism and the minoritization of Assyrians to be modern concepts derived from historical processes described by Makdisi. Moreover, as the study will reveal, Assyrians, much like Egyptian Copts and Iraqi Jews, did not constitute monolithic and stagnant communities. They shared similarities with Iraqis of various religious and ethnic backgrounds, and although they did not generally identify as Arabs, they did identify as Iraqis. Assyrians, like Iraqi Jews, came to be immersed in the Iraqi public sphere in the second half of the twentieth century, contributing to the press and joining political groups.

Most of the literature on the Assyrian community, except for a couple of books and a few articles appearing sporadically in recent decades, had stemmed from the linguistic and theological fields of Semitic and Syriac studies, focusing on the ancient and medieval periods of Eastern Christianity and its linguistic medium of Syriac—the liturgical dialect of the Aramaic language used by the churches. Given the nature of the sources used in Semitic and Syriac studies, this literature offers less on the communities of the period than on religious scholars and elites, and their Aramaic dialect. Exceptions within these fields include *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (1987), by Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey. This book offers the modern reader a glimpse into the contemporary narratives of female Syriac martyrs from the fourth to seventh centuries, and thus into the construction of gender during this period.³⁶ Whether the heroic accounts of these women were written immediately after their martyrdom or after some

³⁶ Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

time, the reader is able to learn about the communities in which these saints lived, through accounts as preserved in the collective memory of the survivors.³⁷

Sources on the Assyrians in the modern period include a few examining the late Ottoman context. In the second edition of his *Modern Assyrians of the Middle East* (2000), John Joseph focused on Assyrians' interactions with missionaries and the world powers from the late 1800s and up to the end of the First World War.³⁸ Hormiz Aboona's *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans* (2008) also dealt with the intercommunal conflicts between Assyrians, their neighbors, and the Ottoman state that were exacerbated by European encroachments into Ottoman lands.³⁹ Aboona focused on the massacres of Assyrians in the Hakkari region carried out by the Kurdish tribal chief Beder Khan Beg in 1843–46. The new edition of Joseph's book was heavily based on his original text, published in 1961, which in turn was based on his earlier dissertation completed in 1957; Aboona's book was based on his dissertation completed in the 1980s. Numerous new findings and resources have since emerged that should be taken into consideration when studying the Assyrian community.

Most studies of the community have been dedicated to Assyrians of Urmia, Iran, due to the accessibility of Western missionary archives and the large

³⁷ Ibid., 3.

³⁸ John Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Power* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2000).

³⁹ Hormiz Aboona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans: Intercommunal Relations on the Periphery of the Ottoman Empire* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).

collections of Assyrian Iranian periodicals to Western scholars.⁴⁰ In addition to Joseph's book, Eden Naby's article, "Theater, Language and Inter-Ethnic Exchange: Assyrian Performance before World War I" (2007), is unique within this genre, given its interest in Assyrian cultural production,⁴¹ while Nicholas al-Jeloo's dissertation, "A Study of the Socio-Cultural History and Heritage of Urmia's Ethnic Assyrians Based on a Corpus of Syriac and Neo-Aramaic Inscriptions" (2013) reconstructs the community's history by making use of tombstone epitaphs and other types of cultural and religious inscription.⁴²

Although Joseph and Aboona both dealt with massacres during the Ottoman period, the theme of genocide has recently gained greater traction. David Gaunt and Hannibal Travis attempted to fill a gap within studies on the Armenian genocide by focusing on the Assyrian experience.⁴³ Sargon Donabed has also contributed to the field of genocide studies, shedding light on the Simele massacre

⁴⁰ The most recent addition to this category is Adam Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁴¹ Eden Naby, "Theater, Language and Inter-Ethnic Exchange: Assyrian Performance before World War I," *Iranian Studies* 40: 4 (2007): 501–10.

⁴² Nicholas Jeloo, "A Study of the Socio-Cultural History and Heritage of Urmia's Ethnic Assyrians Based on a Corpus of Syriac and Neo-Aramaic Inscriptions" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2013).

⁴³ David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); Hannibal Travis, "'Native Christians Massacred': The Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians during World War I," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1: 3 (2006): 327–72; Hannibal Travis, *Genocide in the Middle East: The Ottoman Empire, Iraq, and Sudan* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2010); David Gaunt, "The Complexity of the Assyrian Genocide," *Genocide Studies International* 9: 1 (2015): 83–103.

and examining the Assyrian experience during the Anfal campaign of the late 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁴

Finally, a few studies have focused on the Assyrian diaspora. Arianne Ishaya's two books are anthropological examinations of the settlement of the Urmian Assyrian community in Turlock, California, and North Battleford, Saskatchewan, in Canada, from the early 1900s and onwards.⁴⁵ In their dissertations, Naures Atto and Yasmeeen Hannosh focused on the community in the European and North American contexts, examining the construction of identity in the diaspora.⁴⁶

There is a significant lacuna in scholarship pertaining to Iraq's Assyrians, specifically in relation to their interactions with the state and their involvement in the various social and intellectual movements of the twentieth century. Joseph concludes with a chapter on the circumstances of the Assyrian refugees in Iraq and Syria after the First World War.⁴⁷ Fadi Dawood's dissertation examines social and political aspects of the lives of Iraq's Assyrian community during the British Mandate period. He focuses on the Assyrian refugees in Ba'quba camp,

⁴⁴ Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining."

⁴⁵ Arianne Ishaya, *Familiar Faces in Unfamiliar Places: Assyrians in the California Heartland, 1911–2010* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2010); Arianne Ishaya, *New Lamps for Old: The Assyrians of North Battleford, Canada* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010).

⁴⁶ Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2011); Yasmeeen Hanoosh, "The Politics of Minority: Chaldeans between Iraq and America" (PhD diss., University of Michigan Press, 2008).

⁴⁷ Joseph, *Modern Assyrians*, 229–60.

examining the militarization of some of the Assyrian men by the British.⁴⁸

Donabed's dissertation focuses on Assyrians in the northern provinces from the 1960s to the 1980s, illuminating the destruction of Assyrian material culture, and the ethnic cleansing of Assyrian towns and villages during this period.⁴⁹ He also sheds light on Assyrian political involvement in the Kurdish movement, starting in 1961. Donabed's dissertation focuses chiefly on the rural Assyrian communities and their destruction during periods of turmoil.

This dissertation is centrally concerned with the construction of urban Assyrian communities, while still shedding light on the rural north. In addition, my study introduces new, unexamined archival sources retrieved in Iraq, at the Iraqi National Library and Archives, and Ba'athist archives acquired since 2003 by the ADM, and housed at their headquarters in Baghdad. My study also includes an in-depth analysis of Iraqi and Assyrian periodicals both in Arabic and Aramaic, and makes use of interviews with informants conducted in Iraqi cities and villages.

Apram Shapira comes closest to my area of interest in his two books, *Al-Ashuriyyun fi al-Fikr al-'Iraqi al-Mu'asir. Dirasat mas'ala: fi al-'aqliyya al-'iraqiyya tujah al-'aqliyyat*, and *The Assyrian Cultural Club: March of Challenges and Achievements 1970–1980*.⁵⁰ Shapira focuses chiefly on the

⁴⁸ Fadi Dawood, "Refugees, Warriors and Minorities in Iraq: The Case of the Assyrians (1920–1933)" (PhD diss., SOAS, London, 2014).

⁴⁹ See also Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 235–6.

⁵⁰ Apram Shapira, *Al-Ashuriyyun fi al-Fikr al-'Iraqi al-Mu'asir. Dirasat mas'ala: fi al-'aqliyya al-'iraqiyya tujah al-'aqliyyat* (London: Saqi, 2001); and Apram

intellectual production, and subsequent treatment by the state, of Assyrian nationalist clubs. My study expands on his work, and locates Assyrians in the context of other socio-political movements.

This dissertation adds to our understanding of Iraq's intellectual and social movements during the twentieth century. It suggests that pluralism in Iraq was indeed possible, and that Iraqis were able to transcend ethnic sectarianism and take part in the various intellectual, social, and political movements of the day. At the same time, it provides insight into an ancient ethno-religious community that is today fleeing Iraq due to the violence and instability instigated by the 2003 war, and the recent attacks of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As Assyrians leave Iraq to become refugees in neighboring countries, they leave archival material and private collections behind them, making it difficult for scholars to study this community. This work locates an under-examined community within the context of modern Iraqi and Middle Eastern history. It moves away from the popular representation of Middle Eastern minorities as either persecuted communities or agents of imperialism, instead treating their members as "subjects within their own right."⁵¹ Since the Assyrians are a transnational community, they operate as a model for the incorporation of transnational history as both a method of analysis and subject of study in the field Middle Eastern history. Finally, this thesis contributes to women's and gender studies, especially in the context of minority communities.

Shapira, *The Assyrian Cultural Club: March of Challenges and Achievements 1970–1980* (Chicago: Alpha Graphic, 1993—text in Arabic).

⁵¹ Paul Rowe, "The Middle Eastern Christian as Agent," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, 3 (2010): 472.

In the following pages, I seek to make three specific historiographical interventions, with the intention of correcting the following misconceptions: 1) the belief that sectarian tendencies were formed primordially between adherents of the Syriac religious communities, as opposed to historically developed and influenced by both external forces (missionaries, colonial regimes, and Middle Eastern states) and internal communal ones; 2) Assyrians, and especially those who came to be associated with Assyrian identity, mainly adherents of the Nestorian Church, were “foreigners” to the country that became Iraq, coming as refugees from Iran and Turkey in the aftermath of the First World War. 3) Instead, I will introduce new ways of understanding the community based on the position of the recently urbanized Assyrian community within the existing hierarchy of citizenship in Iraq.

Issues of Identity

Tūmās’s identification with ancient Mesopotamian and Assyrian roots, as well as his pride in a Syriac religious heritage, were impulses that had been shared by Assyrians since the late nineteenth century. What was atypical, judging by the historiographical accounts on the Assyrians, was his identification with this shared history as a member of the Chaldean Church, which he also took pride in. Most studies of Iraqi Christians depict community members as adhering to one of a handful Syriac churches that do not share conceptions of ethnic identity with one other. Sa‘ad Salloum’s recent edited volume on Iraqi minorities includes a chapter dedicated to the Christians of Iraq, in which Ara Bedlian claims that “the

identity of Iraqi Christians can be categorized on a nationalist basis (Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Syriacs).”⁵² Here Bedline identifies Christians as belonging to four distinct nations in which the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs possess no linguistic, cultural or religious commonalities. Like other scholars, Bedline fails to historicize the identity of the Assyrians to account for its development across the centuries, and especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They take divisions between Assyrians and Chaldeans, for instance, to be primordial, pointing to religious denominations as demographically static, governed primarily by rigid religious institutions.⁵³ Is Tūmas an anomaly? How is it that he can be at once Assyrian, Chaldean, and Iraqi? A close examination of intellectual production from the 1970s, the urbanization of the community, and its similar political involvement, yields a distinctive picture. On the other hand, the Ba‘thification of society—beginning in the late 1970s, but especially strong during the Iran-Iraq war—depicts concern for inter-denomination closeness, and hence a policy of exerting divisions between Assyrians and Chaldeans. How did these internal divisions come about?

⁵² Ara Bedlian, “Christians in Iraq: Decreased Numbers and Immigration Challenges,” in *Minorities in Iraq: Memory, Identity and Challenges*, ed. Sa‘ad Salloum (Baghdad/Beirut: Masarat, 2013), 60.

⁵³ Fanar Haddad studies the effects of sectarianism within the Iraqi context, arguing that Sunnis and Shi‘as “are not monolithic groups; rather they are themselves dissected by various social, economic and political categories that in themselves may unite ‘Sunnis’ and ‘Shi‘as’ on the basis of, for example, class or political ideology.” Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (London: Hurst, 2011), 8.

Western Missionaries and Intercommunal Division

The Assyrians are an ancient Christian community that has historically resided in northern Mesopotamia. They belong primarily to churches that follow the Syriac liturgy and traditions, including the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (also known as Jacobite), the Syriac Catholic Church, the Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East (also known as Nestorian), and the Chaldean Church of Babylon (also known as Chaldean).⁵⁴ They have generally been referred to by their ecclesiastical names, and hence they appear in Western scholarship under the designations Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syriac/Syrian.⁵⁵ However, Assyrians refer to themselves in their language as Sūroyo/Sūrāyā (first person, singular, masculine, respectively in Western Aramaic and Eastern Aramaic), which they argued in the twentieth century was derived from the word Assyrian—a claim to which some recent scholarship has lent support.⁵⁶

In 1535 Ottoman concessions awarded to France enabled Catholic missionaries to establish themselves in the newly acquired Ottoman territories of Mesopotamia.⁵⁷ In Mosul, these missionaries encountered native Christians, adherents of the Church of the East (Nestorian), whom they considered heretics,

⁵⁴ For more information on Syriac Christianity and its various churches, see Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 2.

⁵⁵ Sargon Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining: Illuminating Scaled Suffering and a Hierarchy of Genocide from Simele to Anfal” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 2.

⁵⁶ For the etymology of the word “Sūroyo/Sūrāyā” and “Assyrian” (Sur and Assur), see Simo Parpola, “Assyrian Identity in Ancient Times and Today,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 18: 2 (Fall, 2004).

⁵⁷ Aboona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans*, 74–5.

and worked on bringing them “into obedience with Rome.”⁵⁸ The opportunity to accomplish this goal arose in 1551, when the Patriarch Shimun Bar Mama died, leaving a successor who was eight or nine years of age.⁵⁹ A group of Christian notables, some with commercial connections with France, gathered in Mosul, and without consulting with the metropolitans, as was necessary to consecrate the next patriarch officially decided, at the request of the Franciscans, to seek help from Pope Julius III.⁶⁰ The notables asked the pope to consecrate as their patriarch a monk named Sulaqa, from the monastery of Rabban Hurmizd in Alqosh.⁶¹ During this period, the Ottomans had granted numerous concessions to the French and permitted their presence, and hence the French made efforts to convert “heretical” Christians to Catholicism. They would not be successful for another two centuries, but eventually, by the turn of the nineteenth century, their intervention would lead to the emergence of splits within all of the indigenous Syriac churches.

The missionaries therefore arranged for Sulaqa to travel to Rome to be examined by a special committee for his beliefs, following which it was decided that his theological views were “purely Nestorian.” They set about to instruct him

⁵⁸ Ibid., 75. The Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorian) and the Syriac Orthodox Church (Jacobite) split off from the official Church in the early centuries of Christianity, due to their understanding of the nature of Christ. The Nestorians stressed his human nature, while the Jacobites stressed his divinity. Sarah Shields, *Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 45–6.

⁵⁹ New rules of succession were adopted in the fourteenth century, after the disastrous invasions of Timur Lang (1393–1401). Having a successor ensured continuity within the Church hierarchy, even in times of uncertainty and devastation. Aboona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans*, 36.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 75.

⁶¹ Ibid.

for a period of two years in the tenets of the Catholic faith.⁶² Sulaqa was finally consecrated in 1553 as patriarch Shimun VIII. The new patriarch of the schismatic line derived from the Nestorian Church, but in union with Rome, was sent back to his native lands, though he was not successful in convincing members of the Church of the East to convert. Instead, he spent his time in partial isolation in Diarbekir and Se'arat, until his arrest and murder by Ottoman officials in 1555.⁶³ Sulaqa did not leave a qualified body of bishops to build the new Church after his passing; instead the new schismatic Church was isolated, and ceased to exist within thirteen years of the passing of the third patriarch assigned to Sulaqa's line.⁶⁴

Another opportunity presented itself in 1580, when bishop Shimun Dinkha of the important bishopric districts of Jelu, Salamas, and Si'arat revolted against the patriarch Mar Elia, who was seated in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd. Rome took advantage of this division once again, and with its support and that of Persia, to which bishop Dinkha had escaped, a new line of Mar Shimuns was established that came to be in union with Rome. Although this line existed until the twentieth century, it was only connected to Rome and the Catholic Church from 1580 to 1692; thereafter, the Mar Shimun patriarchs returned to their ancestral Church and faith.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the tide had turned, and, according to Deringel, in 1622 Pope Gregory XV established the institution of Propaganda

⁶² Ibid., 76.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 77–9.

Fide, whose goals were to convert so-called heathens and bring ancient Christian communities in the Middle East back into union with the Catholic Church.⁶⁶

During the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire suffered numerous defeats against Western powers, leading to an increase in the influence of Christian Europeans on the high levels of its administration, as well as larger concessions to those affiliated with Europeans. During the century, consular offices were established in the city of Mosul for the French, the British, and the Germans. The goals of these offices included encouraging trade between Mosul and their respective countries, and “protecting” religious minorities in the city—a trend that had previously been followed in other parts of the empire.⁶⁷ Some native Christians became protégés of these governments, acquiring benefits enjoyed by Western foreigners. Though numerous advantages were afforded to native Christian populations, their growing ties with Europeans caused tension between them and Muslims in their areas. Furthermore, the competition between the British and the French to convert Christians to their respective faiths, Catholicism and Protestantism, exacerbated such tensions, leading to violence against, and within, these native Christian communities.⁶⁸

The French government became aggressive in its efforts to convert native Christians—mainly Nestorians, but also Jacobites—to Catholicism. The British accused the French of scheming to reduce the numbers of Nestorians and degrade

⁶⁶ Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 119–34, 156.

⁶⁷ Shields, *Mosul before Iraq*, 46–7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

their living conditions, and of influencing the Kurds to inflict violence against Nestorians living in the Hakkari mountains.⁶⁹ Two new churches had now emerged within these communities: the Chaldean Church, which had split from the Nestorian Church, and the Syrian/Syriac Catholic Church, created for Catholic Jacobites. These new religious communities were allowed to practice their faith according to their old traditions and to use the Syriac liturgy, although they were in communion with Rome.⁷⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century the native Christian churches had dwindled considerably, mainly as a result of the success of French missionaries in establishing schools, hospitals, and printing presses in the city of Mosul, all of which attracted more adherents to their faith.⁷¹ The Nestorians, who had once enjoyed an overwhelming majority in Mosul and the surrounding mountainous areas, now consisted of only 550 members, two churches, and four priests in the city, whereas the Chaldeans counted 650 members, two churches, a bishop, and six priests and monks.⁷² On May 23, 1892, the Vali of Mosul corroborated these facts, claiming that the French had sent several special missions in the past four years, and that the patriarch of the Nestorians had complained bitterly to him.⁷³

This did not necessarily imply that conversions were final, and that no one wished to revert to their original native Church. Cases of such reversion were observed in 1909, in Alqosh for example, but the individuals concerned were

⁶⁹ Ibid., 49–50.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 119.

constrained and inhibited by the technical requirements of reversion.⁷⁴ On the eve of the First World War, many Chaldeans would have “gladly” rejoined the Nestorian Church if its patriarch could provide them with protection equal to the foreign protection received from the Papal delegate.⁷⁵ According to John Joseph, most people of this region, including some of the Chaldean patriarchs, were still “emotionally attached to their old church and jealous of the many alterations made in their ancient customs.”⁷⁶

Although these divisions, mainly within the Nestorian community, led to numerous conflicts, Sarah Shields reports that there was an absence of Muslim persecution of Christians and Jews in the city of Mosul, and that some Christians even held positions of authority as notables. This changed towards the middle of the nineteenth century, with major political upheavals resulting in violence and massacres against Christians—first in the mountain areas of Hakkari, and eventually in the city of Mosul itself. These violent episodes were comparable to the massacres of Christians in Lebanon and Damascus in the mid-1800s.⁷⁷ Hormiz Aboona focuses in particular on the massacres of Assyrians in the Hakkari region by the Kurdish tribal chief Beder Khan Beg in 1843–46. Aboona illustrates the demographic changes in the mountains surrounding Mosul, resulting from a significant decline in the Assyrian populations in Hakkari and Mosul, and the loss of Assyrian independence and autonomy within Hakkari’s established tribal

⁷⁴ Shields, *Mosul before Iraq*, 50–1.

⁷⁵ Joseph, *Modern Assyrians of the Middle East*, 58.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Shields, *Mosul before Iraq*, 51–64.

system.⁷⁸ Shields argues that Bedr Khan's rise to power and subsequent downfall exemplify key "midcentury issues," namely:

the process of centralization, the imposition of new taxes, the effects of the changing roles of the Christians, and the consequences of the growing foreign presence in the province. The Ottoman efforts to retake direct control and reform the empire took on different meanings as the central government extended its power into the mountains near Mosul.⁷⁹

Although Bedr Khan Beg's massacres of tribal Assyrian communities in Hakkari are beyond the scope of this study, two factors are of particular interest here: first, the movement of large numbers of the surviving population of Assyrians from Hakkari to the Nineveh Plain, an area just outside of the city of Mosul comprising Assyrian towns and villages that had become primarily Chaldean by this time; and, second, the influence of Mosul's Ottoman Vali on the mountainous area of Hakkari, east of the city of Mosul. Both of these factors, combined with a knowledge of the ancient history of the Church of the East, are significant for any understanding of those Assyrians who had moved to areas that came to be included within the state of Iraq following the First World War. Most historiography on Iraq designates Assyrian refugees—survivors of the massacres of 1915 coming mainly from Hakkari, but also from Urmia—as "foreigners." This designation fails to take into account the historical links between members of the Nestorian church, including the movement of patriarchs, bishops, and priests, and especially lay people, between different areas with concentrated Nestorian

⁷⁸ Aboona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans*, 169–95.

⁷⁹ Shields, *Mosul before Iraq*, 51.

communities and significant cultural and religious institutions. These movements were based on religious pilgrimages to monasteries or in commemoration of saints' cults—celebrations that had festive and even market-based dimensions, involving the exchange of goods.⁸⁰ Finally, as demonstrated in the nineteenth century, not only were the Ottomans increasing their efforts to exert their influence, as were both native and Western Christian religious officials and the colonial powers; population movements also took place, in the event of persecution, between the various areas traditionally occupied by their co-religionists—even when the members of those communities had adopted a new faith.⁸¹ The freshly drawn borders of the new nation-states in the region did not

⁸⁰ For instance, see literature on the life and legends of Mar Qardagh, which is part of the “Genre of Martyrdom” associated with the Church of the East (fourth-to-seventh-century persecutions of Christians by Zoroastrians). Mar Qardagh’s narrative focuses on his life and heroic deeds, and alludes to the status of Nestorian Christians under the rule of King Shapur II. According to his account, Mar Qardagh was born to a prestigious family of ancient Assyrian origin, where his father descended from the lineage of King Nimrud and his mother descended from the lineage of King Sennacherib. After Mar Qardagh was killed by King Shapur II for adopting the Christian faith, he was regarded as a martyr of the church, and the community began commemorating his life as described in literature dating back to that period: “And each year on the day on which the blessed one was crowned, the peoples gathered at the place of his crowning. And they made a festival and a commemoration for three days. But because of the size of the crowds, they also began to buy and sell during the days of the saint’s commemoration. And after some time had passed, a great market was established on the place in which the blessed one was stoned. It continues to this day. And the commemoration of the holy one lasts three days, and the market six days. And it is called the souk of Melqi from the name of the fortress of the blessed one.” Joel Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 68.

⁸¹ In a book on Alqosh published by the late Bishop Yousif Babana of Alqosh, the author includes information on Alqoshi families and their origins, showing movement between Assyrian towns and villages in Urmia, Hakkari, and Mosul from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. Yousif Babana, *Alqosh ‘Ebra al-Tarikh*

necessarily challenge these historic links in the immediate aftermath; in fact, communities residing in the vicinity of these borders have found ways of transgressing them throughout the modern history of Iraq. However, the stigma of being a “foreigner” continued to be associated with Assyrian adherents of the Nestorian faith as they came to be linked more directly with their Assyrian identity. In 1963, for example, courts-martial of alleged Assyrian communists raised questions relating to their citizenship and place of birth.

The Rise of Nationalism and Claims of Common Ancestry

Despite the internal sectarian divisions they experienced in the nineteenth century, Assyrian members of the Nestorian, Jacobite, and Chaldean churches understood themselves to be descended from the ancient Assyrians, and by the end of the century were claiming to be heirs of early Mesopotamian civilizations. For instance, at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, an Assyrian delegation comprising Nestorians, Chaldeans, and Jacobites attended collectively to petition for an Assyrian national homeland. The delegation defined the Assyrian community in its petition as including all of the Syriac religious communities.⁸² In the city of Mosul itself, British sources reveal that the “old Syrians,” or Jacobites, responded in January 1919 to a British inquiry on Iraq’s independence and tutelage under Abdulla by introducing their community as “belonging to the Assyrian race.”⁸³

(Baghdad: Offices and Printers of the East, 1979), 45–57. Other Assyrian villages in northern Iraq have included such demographic information on websites as well.

⁸² Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 3.

⁸³ FO 608/96/11, February 20, 1919, “Self Determination in ‘Iraq,” 26–7.

These claims have found both support and criticism among specialists in history, linguistics, Assyriology, Syriac studies, and the social sciences. Those supporting the Assyrian position have relied both on the spoken language of the Assyrians (Aramaic with Akkadian influences, denoting a continuous presence in the area)⁸⁴ and on connections between Assūr and Sūr, Sūroyo/Sūrāyā (first person, singular, masculine in Western Aramaic and Eastern Aramaic, respectively)—the self-designations used by community members, along with geographical relations.⁸⁵ Those disputing such claims have proposed that the Assyrians' identification with ancient Mesopotamians is a result of their interactions with Western missionaries and archeologists, who had imposed the Assyrian identity on native Syriac Christians after discovering Nimrud (1845–48) and other Assyrian sites.⁸⁶ This position has in turn been criticized for not crediting the community with agency in the construction of its own identity, and for its employment of orientalist rhetoric.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, new findings have complicated some of these established positions by detecting an identification with the Assyrian identity on the part of the community prior to the relevant

⁸⁴ Geoffrey Khan, “The Language of the Modern Assyrians: The North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic Dialect Group,” in *The Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence*, ed. S. Cetrez, S. Donabed, and A. Makko (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2012), 173–99; Geoffrey Khan, *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Qaraqosh* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2002).

⁸⁵ Simo Parpola, “Assyrian Identity in Ancient Times and Today” (Seminar at the Assyrian Youth Foundation, Sweden, March 27, 2004), <http://www.aina.org/articles/assyrianidentity.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2015); R. Rollinger, “The Terms ‘Assyria’ and ‘Syria’ Again,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65: 4 (2006): 283–8.

⁸⁶ This position was probably first introduced by John Joseph in the first edition of his book published in 1961, which was in turn based on his dissertation completed in the 1950s: Joseph, *Modern Assyrians of the Middle East*, 1–32.

⁸⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

archeological discoveries. For example, Horatio Southgate encountered Jacobites in the mainly Armenian town of Harput who identified themselves as Assyrians in 1844, just before archeological discoveries in Nineveh.⁸⁸ More recently, scholars of identity have begun to make use of community sources and oral histories to analyze identity-formation from a cultural perspective,⁸⁹ and have begun studying new regional communities, instead of focusing solely on the Urmian Assyrians, who have historically provided the basis for most studies of Assyrian nationalism.⁹⁰

Debates on Assyrian identity engaged not only academics but also Iraqi state officials, who tried to regulate the community's self-identity. Claims of a Mesopotamian heritage were viewed with suspicion by the various Iraqi regimes, since they would have cemented the Assyrian community within Iraqi territory, designating them as "natives," rather than as "foreigners" who had settled in Iraq following the First World War. This discourse of "native" versus "foreign" continued to be propagated throughout the twentieth century, and the Assyrians tried to counter it by engaging in liberal intellectual and political movements, and by exploring the same territory in their own publications.

⁸⁸ Sargon Donabed, "Rethinking Nationalism and an Appellative Conundrum: Historiography and Politics in Iraq," *National Identities* 14: 2 (June 2012): 119–120; Horatio Southgate, *Narrative of a Visit to the Syrian [Jacobite] Church of Mesopotamia* (New York: D. Appleton, 1844), 87.

⁸⁹ Öner Cetrez, Sargon Donabed, and Aryo Makko, *The Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2012).

⁹⁰ Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (PhD diss., Leiden University Press, 2011).

Sargon Donabed is reluctant to deploy Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community in the Assyrian case, "due to its emphasis on print culture," arguing that Assyrian identity is "steeped in oral folklore, ancient history, and deep-seated Eastern Christian belief."⁹¹ Donabed's position becomes problematic with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, which engendered the creation of modern nation-states. Although folktales and oral traditions remained important, they were often reproduced using modern technologies, facilitating their dissemination across borders. Moreover, print—which was used before the First World War by the Assyrians, for instance in Urmia—became especially important in the second half of the twentieth century.

Massacres and exodus during the First World War, followed by the creation of new nation-states whose border divided Assyrians from one another, and later blaming and associating the Nestorians with the Simele massacre, disrupted the social process of nationalization, leading to what Aryo Makko calls a "crisis of identity."⁹² During the 1940s and 1950s, the Syriac Orthodox religious leadership increasingly distanced itself from its Assyrian identity.⁹³ The Nestorians were the primary targets of the Iraqi army in the village of Simele, but the massacre soon spread to neighboring Chaldean and Jacobite towns thereafter. As Tūmās notes in his memoirs, Alqosh was under threat of attack for harboring

⁹¹ Ibid., 7–8.

⁹² Aryo Makko, "The Historical Roots of Contemporary Controversies: National Revival and the Assyrian 'Concept of Unity,'" *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 1–29.

⁹³ Donabed, "Rethinking Nationalism and an Appellative Conundrum." Sargon Donabed and Shamiran Mako, "Ethno-Cultural and Religious Identity of Syrian Orthodox Christians," *Chronos* (September 1, 2009): 77–82.

escaping Nestorians. Although the event seemed to draw the community together in its immediate aftermath, inter-denominational divisions began to emerge. The Chaldeans, like the Jacobites, began to distance themselves from the Nestorians, and the Assyrian identity because of the way Nestorians were presented in the Iraqi national press, and linked to the British. Not every Assyrian community member espoused this position, and secular and nationalist movements emerged in opposition to religious ones—the Assyrian Democratic Organization, for example, was founded in Qamishli Syria by Jacobites in 1959. Nonetheless, a consequence of the Simele massacre was denominational schisms within the larger Assyrian community.

The urbanization of Assyrians in the second half of the twentieth century removed them from the northern Iraqi villages and small towns where they had traditionally lived. In cities like Kirkuk, Assyrians from various religious denominations and geographical origins lived together in new neighborhoods that were constructed mostly by the Iraqi Petroleum Company. As employees of the IPC and residents of a politicized city, they participated in political movements where Assyrians were adversely affected by the same issues, regardless of their denominations, under the Iraqi republican governments. In Kirkuk, Baghdad, and other urban centers, they revived earlier efforts to standardize the Eastern Aramaic dialects. By associating with their new neighbors and friends, and through inter-denominational marriages, they gave rise to a koiné dialect. Intermarriage, especially, allowed Assyrians from different denominations to break free of institutional religious boundaries and raise children who felt a less

intense and exclusive connection with a specific church. Though such marriages were patriarchal, and tradition dictated that the woman follow her future husband's church and celebrate the wedding ceremony in his parish, there was still some room for negotiation; the wife and her children were rarely completely alienated from her own religious tradition.

Moreover, religious institutions did not always espouse sectarian positions. For example, the late patriarchs of the Chaldean Church and then Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Raphael I Bidawid (1922–2003) and Mar Dinkha IV (1935-2015), famously championed an international theological dialogue between their two churches in the mid-1990s, leading in 1997 to the ratification of a “Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity,” which in turn initiated dialogue between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Roman Catholic Church.⁹⁴ In an interview conducted in Lebanon, probably just before Mar Bidawid's death, he answered a question on the ethnic background of the Chaldean Church by insisting: “We have to separate what is ethnicity and what is religion ... I myself, my sect is Chaldean, but ethnically, I am Assyrian.”⁹⁵ This position complicates our view of Assyrian identity and sectarianism in their various denominational manifestations. Although sectarian identities have

⁹⁴ Catholic Near East Welfare Association, “The Assyrian Church of the East,” <http://www.cnewa.org/default.aspx?ID=1&pagetypeID=9&sitecode=HQ&pageno=3> (accessed March 18, 2015).

⁹⁵ Interview in Lebanon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQxnpI_nI4Q. See also Mar Bidawid's talk on unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church, probably given when the two churches convened for the international theological dialogue, either in November 1996 in Southfield, Michigan, or in August, 1997 in Roselle, Illinois: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8qVJh437OA>.

crystallized in certain communities, and especially in the diasporas, throughout the mid- to late twentieth century Assyrians of various denominations were still not rigidly confined to a specific sect, regardless of the internal and external influences to which they were subject.⁹⁶

Urbanization in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: Trans-regional and Transnational Dislocations

In 1920, in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, following the First World War, and in response to the effects of war and massacres on the community, Assyrians migrated throughout the new nation-states of the Middle East, as well as into the West, thereby becoming a transnational community.

Although sometimes divided and restricted in its movements, the community was able to interact in various ways, transcending the national borders that divided it.

David Sartorius and Micol Seigel argue that “dislocation is not always destruction: dislocated parts can survive, quintessentially mobile, ready to come together in new formations.”⁹⁷ Using the transnational method, I trace the local, regional, and global interactions between members of this community. On the other hand, my research confirms that Assyrians also identified with the newly created nation-states. They became integrated to various degrees into Iraq and other nation-states they resided in as indicated by their involvement in the various intellectual and social currents of the period.

⁹⁶ Hanoosh, “Politics of Minority.”

⁹⁷ David Sartorius and Micol Seigel, *Dislocations Across the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

Sartorius and Seigel argue that transnationalism allows scholars to “make sense of space.”⁹⁸ Transnationalism is “one of many spatial imaginings that attempt to represent the crises of place we are calling ‘dislocations.’ ... The concept of dislocation allows a crucial series of reformulations of transnational method, shading its nation-bound referent and multiplying its metaphors of movement.”⁹⁹ Transnationalism takes interest in the movement of people across borders, while dislocation documents the suffering involved with such movements. I will use this model to argue that, following the dislocation experienced by Assyrians in the first decades of the twentieth century, they were able to “make sense of space,” imagining their community in spatial terms, regardless of the national borders dividing them.

The First World War and Assyrian Dislocations

The physical and psychic displacements to which Assyrians were subject in the early decades of the twentieth century were caused primarily by the massacres of Assyrians—as well as other groups such as the Armenians—that took place during the death throes of the Ottoman Empire and Persia during the First World War. Estimates suggest that two-thirds of the Assyrian population was killed, and countless villages destroyed.¹⁰⁰ In the Urmia region of northwestern Iran, over 103 villages were destroyed, while 12,000 people were displaced and became refugees, fleeing to the Caucasus. In the village of Gulpashan in the Urmia region,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 47.

Kurdish forces killed only the men, and took the women as spoils of war.¹⁰¹ These massacres have been characterized either as the unfortunate results of war, or as genocidal campaigns waged by Turkish nationalists, aimed at eradicating the Armenian and Assyrian communities.¹⁰² It is not the intention of this study to determine the motivation of these events, but to trace the dislocations that were their result.

Demographic shifts resulted from these massacres, leading in turn to trans-regional dislocations. Like Assyrians in Urmia, highlander Assyrians living in the Hakkari region of southeast Turkey were forced to leave their homes. The British settled them in northern Iraq, often in malaria-infested areas, where they joined the existing native Assyrian population.¹⁰³ Other Assyrians, primarily from the Jacobite church, became refugees in Syria following the destruction of their homelands in southeast Turkey. They settled in cities like Aleppo, Hums, Hama, and Damascus. Most, however, settled in the largely unsettled district of al-Jazirah.¹⁰⁴

The British Foreign Office and the British civil commissioner in Iraq, A. T. Wilson, discussed the creation of new provinces of Assyria and Kurdistan, but these lands were never established. Assyrian intellectual and religious

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰² For more on this, see Hannibal Travis, *Genocide in the Middle East: The Ottoman Empire, Iraq, and Sudan* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic, 2010).

¹⁰³ Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining," 47; Fadi Dawood, "Refugees, Warriors and Minorities in Iraq," 86–110. For more on the Hakkari tribal Assyrians and their socio-political composition prior to this dislocation, see Arian B. Ishaya, *The Role of Minorities in the State: History of the Assyrian Experience* (Winnipeg, Canada: Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, 1977), 37–41.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph, *Modern Assyrians of the Middle East*, 201.

representatives from across the various Syriac Churches also lobbied for an Assyrian homeland.¹⁰⁵

The 1933 massacre of Assyrians in the town of Simele is a recurring topic in every book on Iraq. However, with the exception of a couple of publications, only a few sentences are generally dedicated to this event. Khaldun Husry, Charles Tripp, and Sargon Donabed present the most detailed accounts of the Simele massacre.¹⁰⁶ Those of Tripp and Donabed are the most balanced, and will be briefly summarized below.

In 1933 the Assyrian community, especially those dislocated from Hakkari and Urmia, were still pursuing the objective of autonomy. At that time, Iraq had recently been granted independence from the British by the League of Nations, in 1932. In May 1933, the patriarch of the Nestorian Church, Mar Shimun, began discussions with the British and Iraqi authorities about an autonomous area for his community in northern Iraq. The Iraqi authorities detained the patriarch, alarming the Assyrian community.¹⁰⁷ Speeches inciting hatred against the Assyrians were read in the parliament by Iraqi deputies on June 1933, and were subsequently published in various newspapers, including *al-Istiqlāl*.¹⁰⁸ As a result, armed Assyrian men attempted to cross the border and settle with their families in French-mandated Syria. The French authorities refused to accept these Assyrians,

¹⁰⁵ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 48–9. For more on the intellectuals and religious figures involved in these lobbying efforts, see pages 49–54 of this same text.

¹⁰⁶ I recently acquired Fadi Dawood’s dissertation. For his discussion of the Simele massacre, see Dawood, “Refugees, Warriors and Minorities in Iraq,” 211–50.

¹⁰⁷ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 68.

and on their way back Iraqi forces tried either to disarm or subdue them, although these Assyrians had not engaged in violence during this journey. During the confrontation, both Assyrian and Iraqi soldiers were killed. At this point the Iraqi press issued further propaganda claiming that the Assyrians, “despite the small size of the community, [were] a threat to the national integrity of Iraq and, it was hinted in these papers, as part of a sinister design by Great Britain to establish its control over the northern part of the country.”¹⁰⁹ In August 1933, the Iraqi military launched a campaign against its own population in the village of Simele and the surrounding area. In the process, over one hundred Assyrian villages were destroyed and looted. According to Donabed, 300 people are estimated to have been killed in the village of Simele itself; a figure rising to 6,000 if those subsequently killed in the region are counted.¹¹⁰

Khaldun Husry was the son of Arab nationalist Sati‘ al-Husry. His account also confirms that the massacre was committed by the Iraqi army, but he denies that it was planned or premeditated.¹¹¹ Donabed, and probably also Tripp, would disagree with Husry’s latter claim. Husry differs more significantly from the other two authors in the approving tone he employs towards the positions of the monarchy and the army in the Simele affair. This he does by exaggerating the threat of the Assyrian community, due to their “excellent fighting qualities,” hence deeming the massacre an unfortunate necessity.¹¹² He paints a positive

¹⁰⁹ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 78.

¹¹⁰ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 69–72.

¹¹¹ Khaldun S. Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5: 3 (1974): 346–7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 349.

image of his personal acquaintance, Colonel Bakr Sidqi, the commander of the northern region who was responsible for the massacre in Simele, and fondly remembers joining the crowds greeting the returning troops to Baghdad after they had resolved the Assyrian problem in Simele.¹¹³

Following the Simele massacre, the League of Nations Council took up the issue of the Assyrians once more. An Assyrian Committee was set up, and resettlement in New Guinea and Brazil were discussed. However, the Great Depression of the 1930s and the rise of fascism in Europe intervened, pushing the Assyrian question onto the back burner. Nevertheless, the Council did call for an improvement in the living conditions of those Assyrians who had settled in Syria before the massacre but after the initial confrontation with the Iraqi army.¹¹⁴

The settlement of this small Assyrian community in Syria led to a second transnational dislocation. These men had settled on the banks of the Khabur river, 150 miles from the Syrian-Iraqi border. Eventually their families (2,100 people) were allowed to join them. They were followed by continual waves of refugees from the Simele massacre. In 1935, they were joined by 4,000 Assyrians from Iraq, and in 1936 2,500 more Assyrians crossed over.¹¹⁵ As Sartorius and Seigel insist, dislocation does not have only negative consequences: new opportunities arise for dislocated communities. In the case of the Assyrians, the fertile region of al-Jazirah allowed them to prosper and enjoy relative security as they joined the community of Assyrians who had previously escaped from southeast Turkey. This

¹¹³ Ibid., 352.

¹¹⁴ Joseph, *Modern Assyrians*, 199–200.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 201.

previous community, mainly Jacobite and Chaldean, became “craftsmen, mechanics, electricians, shopkeepers and entrepreneurs.” Many Christians, both Assyrians and Armenians, were well educated, and had attended American missionary schools in Turkey prior to their displacement.¹¹⁶ During the Second World War, the district had developed to include many prosperous villages and two thriving towns—Qamishli (population: 23,000 of whom 20,000 were Christian) and Hasaka (population: 12,000). It became a major center for the production of grain, and later cotton (financed from the commercial sector), and the Euphrates Dam was constructed, with the aid of the Soviets, in the early 1970s. This dam was the second-largest in the Middle East, after Egypt’s Aswan Dam, providing electricity and irrigation to the region.¹¹⁷

Less information is available on the socio-economic circumstances of the Assyrian community in Iraq, though the Iraqi government provided some information in a report to the League Council in charge of the Assyrian case in 1938. The report showed that Assyrians indigenous to Iraq living in Nirwah, Rayqam, and Barwar-i-Bala were holding their villages by prescriptive right as their non-Assyrian neighbors. The migrant Hakkari Assyrians lived in seventy-three villages, of which twenty-four were owned by the government and forty-nine by individuals. No reports were provided concerning Assyrians living in other regions, or those in urban areas.¹¹⁸ A thorough investigation is needed of the socio-economic situation of the Assyrians in the second half of the twentieth

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 203–4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 200.

century. To fill this gap, I will turn to the Iraqi census records of 1957. This information will provide contextual background on the community as it existed in the second half of the twentieth century, which will be the main focus of this dissertation.

The 1957 Iraq population census included information on gender, religious affiliations, and the language spoken by the various Iraqi communities in all provinces. The largest Christian communities were found in Mosul, which at this time incorporated the district of Duhok, followed by Baghdad, Kirkuk, Basra, Al-Ramādī, and Erbil.¹¹⁹

Province (Liwa')	Total residents	Christian residents	% of Christians
Mosul (including Duhok)	755,447	90,348	11.96
Baghdad (including Salāh al-Dīn)	1,313,012	68,775	5.24
Basra	503,330	11,238	2.23
Al-Ramādī	253,023	8,041	3.18
Kirkuk	388,839	13,150	3.38
Erbil	273,383	7,198	2.63
Country Total	6,339,960	206,206	3.30

¹¹⁹ Ministry of Interior, General Census Administration, Census Summary for 1957, Iraq and Iraqi Expatriates (henceforth IIE), Table 6, 40–5.

These percentages do not always reflect the real concentration of Assyrians in a certain district or city in the province. For example, Assyrian immigrants to urban centers chose to live in cities, as opposed to outer districts of the province. The percentage of Christians living in Baghdad increases from 5.24 percent in the province to 8.5 percent in the city. Similar trends were to be found in other major urban centers, such as Basra and Kirkuk (see Table 1.2). On the other hand, although the percentage of Christians living in the city of Mosul was higher than the percentage living in the province as a whole, the absolute number of Christians outside the city of Mosul was much greater, indicating that most Christians remained in their ancestral villages and districts, many of which were overwhelmingly Christian (see Table 1.6), especially before the turn of the nineteenth century.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ See Aboona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans*.

Table 1.2			
DISTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN CITIES VERSUS PROVINCES (1957 CENSUS)			
City/Province	Total residents	Christian residents	% of Christians
Greater Baghdad City ¹²¹	793,183	67,383	8.50
Baghdad Province	1,313,012	68,775	5.24
Basra City ¹²²	164,905	7,805	4.73
Basra Province	503,330	11,238	2.23
Kirkuk City ¹²³	120,402	12,691	10.55
Kirkuk Province	388,839	13,150	3.38
Mosul City ¹²⁴	178,222	24,887	13.96
Mosul Province	755,447	90,348	11.96

The birthplace of residents was a useful indicator of the movement of Christians between provinces. In the case of Baghdad, we see that 47 percent of Christians had been born in the city in 1957, whereas the majority had immigrated primarily from Mosul Province (27 percent).¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid., For information on Baghdad and Rumadi provinces, see 168.

¹²² IIE, Table 15A, 112.

¹²³ Ibid., For information on al-Diwaniyya and al-Nasiryya provinces, see Table 15 A, Residents specified according to gender, religion, and place of birth in Kirkuk city, 236–7.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Table 15A, 165–7

¹²⁵ Ibid., 168–71.

Table 1.3		
BIRTHPLACE OF BAGHDADI CHRISTIANS (1957 CENSUS)		
Place of birth	Christian residents	% of total number of Christians
Mosul	18,425	26.79
Baghdad	32,218	46.85
Iran	1,276	1.86
Turkey	3,921	5.70
Other	12,935	18.80
Baghdad Province Total	68,775	100

Similarly, Table 1.4 demonstrates that about 40 percent of Kirkuki Christians were born in Kirkuk province in 1957, whereas the rest had immigrated from other places, and especially from Mosul Province (22 percent) and from Turkey (9 percent).¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Ibid., Table 15B, Kirkuk Province, 239–41.

Table 1.4		
BIRTHPLACE OF KIRKUK CHRISTIANS (1957 CENSUS)		
Place of birth	Christian residents	% of total number of Christians
Mosul	2,940	22.36
Kirkuk	5,445	41.41
Baghdad	927	7.04
Iran	162	1.23
Turkey	1,188	9.03
Other	2,488	18.92
Kirkuk Province Total	13,150	100

In Mosul Province, however, the largest percentage of Christians (93 percent) was native to the province, followed by those born in Turkey (4 percent).¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ibid., For information on al-Diwaniyya and al-Nasiriyya, Table 15B, Mosul Province, 167–70.

Table 1.5		
BIRTHPLACE OF CHRISTIANS OF MOSUL (1957 CENSUS)		
Place of birth	Christian residents	% of total number of Christians
Mosul	84,254	93.25
Turkey	3,623	4.01
Other	2,471	2.74
Mosul Province Total	90,348	100

Table 1.6			
DISTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE DISTRICTS OF MOSUL PROVINCE ¹²⁸ (1957 CENSUS)			
District name in Mosul	Total number of residents	Christian residents	% of total number of Christians
Al-‘Amedia	56,340	13,308	23.62
Duhok	37,813	5,013	13.26
Zakho	45,665	9,887	21.65
‘Aqra	46,390	2,289	4.93
Al-Shaikhan	43,158	7,349	17.02
Mosul City ¹²⁹	178,222	24,887	13.96
Mosul Province	755,447	90,348	11.96

¹²⁸ Ibid., Table 9, Iraq and Iraqi Expatriates, 124.

¹²⁹ Ibid., Table 15A, 165–7

Although Aramaic is a linguistic designation, with 61,053 identified speakers in the census,¹³⁰ it is not useful in determining the overall distribution of Assyrians in Iraq. Many would also have spoken Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish in addition to Aramaic, and might have registered as speakers of those languages, as opposed to the language they used at home. Alternatively, some Assyrians might not have spoken Aramaic fluently, or at all, being exposed to the language only within their religious institutions.

To determine how many of the Christians were Assyrians one must also subtract those who probably did not belong to this community. For instance, it is not clear whether movements between Assyrian populations already settled in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq were taking place at this time. It is possible that Syrian and Lebanese Christians belonged to the Greek and Roman Orthodox, and Maronite Christian communities. Also, one can assume that European and American Christians were Western expatriates working in Iraq. On the other hand, it is likely that Christians from Iran and Turkey were mainly Assyrians born in Urmia and Hakkari, respectively, as well as Armenians. For instance, in 1919, of the 40,000 refugees who settled in Ba‘quba camp, outside Baghdad, 60 percent were Assyrian refugees from Turkey and Iran, while 40 percent were Armenian.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ibid., Table 16, 187.

¹³¹ Dawood, “Refugees, Warriors and Minorities in Iraq,” 87–9.

Table 1.7		
PRIMARY COUNTRIES OF BIRTH FOR CHRISTIANS ¹³² (1957 CENSUS)		
Country of birth	Christian residents	% of total number of Christians
Syria	788	0.38
Lebanon	1,681	0.82
Jordan	655	0.32
Iran	2,085	1.01
Turkey	10,726	5.20
Europe	6,378	3.09
U.S.A.	1,538	0.75
Other (Iraqi born)	182,355	88.43
Total number of Christians	206,206	100

A Hierarchy of Citizenship

Citizenship in the Iraqi political space was hierarchically defined. The various communities were ranked according to their gender, class, ethnicity, and religious identity. These categories were established during the Iraqi republic, causing further “minoritization” of the Assyrians under the mandate state. Assyrians, like other groups, had begun to conceptualize themselves as a “minority” in the context of the Ottoman reforms, European encroachments upon their states, and Western missionary activity within their communities. All these interconnected

¹³² IIE, Table 15, 184–6.

factors led to the limiting of privileges for Assyrians residing on the periphery of the Ottoman state and, more significantly, disrupted their communal association with their Muslim neighbors, leading to massacres, demographic ruptures, and exoduses from some of their ancestral homelands. This trend of minoritization continued into the twentieth century with the creation of borders between the new nation-states, which divided communities and disrupted their natural movement. Finally, the imposition of national ideologies, designed to foster a sense of citizenship around a specific conception of identity, left various communities, including the Assyrians, on the periphery of their society, deepening their minoritization.¹³³ The legal and administrative apparatuses established under the British Mandate, along with misguided rural versus urban imaginations and hence organization of Iraqi society further cemented differences in Iraqi society.¹³⁴ Finally, the Simele massacre of 1933 reinforced the community's "minority" identity by fostering distrust between the community and the state and, as a result of the way in which Iraqi intellectuals portrayed Assyrians in the press, between Assyrians and some other segments of Iraqi society.

However, under the monarchical rule and during the first republican period, Assyrians were able to overcome their minoritization by the state by

¹³³ Benjamin White, "The Nation-State Form and the Emergence of 'Minorities' in Syria," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7: 1 (2007): 64–85; Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 1–14.

¹³⁴ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 63–81. For a hierarchy of citizenship based on state social policies in French Mandated Greater Syria, see Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 71–90.

joining leftist intellectual and political movements. These included communism, that attracted Iraqis of various ethno-sectarian backgrounds, and collaborators with regional oppositional forces, as in the Kurdish uprising. The Assyrians were able to move to center stage in the Iraqi public sphere the issues that preoccupied their communities, and thus the communities themselves. At politically charged moments in Iraq, Assyrians engaged with their society and took advantage of government policies that temporarily afforded them the space to operate, celebrate their culture, and negotiate¹³⁵ for increased cultural and political rights. They used the same strategies when operating within Iraq's opposition parties. While they were tightly integrated into their own society, they reached out to neighboring and diasporic Assyrian organizations in order to communicate with Western states and humanitarian organizations, both on behalf of their communities and political groups they were associated with.

In *The Politics of Nation-Building*, Harris Mylonas examines the international and geostrategic influences on the policies of nation-states. He argues that strategies employed by host states towards non-core groups are dependent on the non-core groups' interactions with an external power. The non-core group seeks to increase its well-being and avoid state persecution. Under such circumstances, members of the non-core group might request formal recognition or basic minority rights, or even to pursue autonomy or full

¹³⁵ "Negotiate," according to Oxford Dictionaries, is defined as "try to reach an agreement or compromise by discussion with others." I offer my interpretation of the term "negotiate" below, in Chapter 5.

independence.¹³⁶ A state, for its part, is likely to pursue a policy of assimilation when a non-core group lacks the support of an external state or if that state is an enemy. On the other hand, a state will accommodate a non-core group if the external state supporting the non-core group is perceived as an ally.¹³⁷ The approach of external states that claim a shared interest with the non-core group will depend on that group's size, territorial concentration, and proximity to the border.¹³⁸

Mylonas's study focuses mainly on geopolitical state interactions and nation-state-building policies. While I take these factors into account, I will focus specifically on the strategies employed by local actors, and the ways in which they choose to navigate the spaces available to them. Nevertheless, this model provides an interesting perspective on the instrumentalization of minorities—or “non-core groups”—by imperial institutions, nation-states, and oppositional parties. It alludes to the patrimony of minority citizens, and the extension or removal of favorable policies by the state on the basis of external global interactions, rather than on their treatment as citizens. However, this study shows that, although the Assyrians made use of the transnational character of their communities—sometimes to win increased rights for their communities or the movements they were affiliated with—they were not always dependent on such strategies. They also worked successfully within political parties that enjoyed mass appeal across the country.

¹³⁶ Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5–6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

After the toppling of Iraqi president ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1963, conservatives and Arab nationalists moved to reclaim political space from leftists and communists and thus from the minorities, such as Assyrians and women, associated with these movements. They sought to put an end to the “chaotic tide” caused by these groups’ disruption of the established order. To Arab nationalists and conservatives, the Communists and their affiliates had engendered a “crisis of paternity,”¹³⁹ caused by their erroneous social and political ideas, disrupting traditional family and societal values, as well as the modernization project the Ba‘thists had worked so hard to achieve. Most importantly, these groups, and those associated with them (women, minorities), had climbed up the ladder of citizenship to occupy a rank that was not intended for them.

Dina Khoury, focusing on Iraq during the war years (1980s–2003) in *Iraq in Wartime*, supports that this was the nature of social organization. She argues that “society was organized vertically by political party, professional, and labor organizations that mobilized the population over political and social agendas and linked the population directly to the state.”¹⁴⁰ The primary targets of the state’s policies were social categories (women, children, workers, peasants, illiterate citizens, intellectuals, and youth). Citizens enjoyed rights if they did not belong to any of the categories of people deemed threatening to the security of the party and

¹³⁹ For a conceptualization of Thompson’s “crisis of paternity” within the Iraqi context, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation, and Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*.

¹⁴⁰ Dina Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5.

the state. These included members of outlawed political parties and their families, and those who belonged to certain ethnic groups.¹⁴¹

Data-Collection and Methodology

To address the challenges of writing on the history of an Iraqi minority that includes women's and gender issues, I have woven together conventional and unconventional archival sources, as well as ethnographic data. I travelled to Iraq in 2011 to conduct research at the Iraqi National Library and Archives (INLA), in Baghdad. Many smaller libraries and publishing houses in Baghdad and Duhok contained useful research material, and numerous individuals provided me with access to their private collections and personal memories. In addition, I conducted research at various libraries in the U.S., including the Harvard College Library, the Library of Congress, and Stanford's Hoover Institution; in England, I visited the Public Record Office, the British Library, and Cambridge University's collection.

Due to a general over-reliance on British colonial sources, Assyrians in Iraq are frequently portrayed merely as agents of an imperial power. To present a more balanced and nuanced perspective on the community in Iraqi society, this study introduces archival sources from the Iraqi National Library and Archives in

¹⁴¹ Ibid. In this context, Khoury draws from Partha Chatterjee: "The object of the development and welfare state was not the individual citizen with universal political equal rights but rather a multiplicity of 'population groups that are objects of governmentality—multiple targets with multiple characteristics requiring multiple techniques and administrations.'" 5–6.

Baghdad.¹⁴² The unstable security situation in Iraq and the proximity of the archives to the Ministry of Defense—a regular target for armed insurgent groups—make access to the building difficult for researchers of all backgrounds. In addition, the destruction wrought against the INLA’s archives in 2003 has critically reduced their collection, specifically of Ottoman and Hashemite documents.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, as this study will show, important material relating to the Assyrian community in the 1960s was available. Archival sources retrieved from INLA add to our understanding of leftist radical movements of Iraq in the 1960s, the role of minorities within these groups, and the subsequent treatment of Assyrians by state judicial institutions in 1963. The bulk of the available material from the Ba‘thist archives is not in Iraq, however, but in the Hoover Institution in California.¹⁴⁴ This poses an ethical dilemma for those researchers who want to see these documents returned to Iraq. Needless to say, researchers within Iraq find it difficult not to have access to the modern archives of their country. On a more practical note, researchers interested in the Assyrian community who intend to use the Hoover archive will encounter some obstacles navigating the digitized index using the existing search engine.

In search of alternative sources from the Ba‘thist period, specifically concerning Iraqi Assyrians, I approached smaller libraries and publishing houses

¹⁴² Alda Benjamen, “Research at the Iraqi National Library and Archives,” *TAARI Newsletter* 7: 1 (Spring, 2012).

¹⁴³ Nabil Al-Tikriti, “‘Stuff Happens’: A Brief Overview of the 2003 Destruction of Iraqi Manuscript Collections, Archives, and Libraries,” *Library Trends* 55: 30 (2007): 730–4.

¹⁴⁴ Hugh Eakin, “Iraqi Files in U.S.: Plunder or Rescue?” *New York Times*, July 1, 2008.

in Iraq. These included Najm al-Mashriq and the Dominican Library in Baghdad, as well as the Assyrian Cultural Center and the Oriental Cultural Centre in Duhok, where I discovered plentiful material written in classical Syriac, modern Aramaic, Arabic, and various Western languages. The secular and religious textual material found in these libraries helped to balance the study. The Assyrian Democratic Movement's center in Baghdad also housed a collection of Ba'ath Party archives that was specific to the Assyrian and Christian communities. The ADM had acquired these sources following the fall of the Ba'ath regime in 2003. Since this collection has not been catalogued or used by other scholars, I have provided sufficient information on every particular source used in this study to make it identifiable by future scholars. Furthermore, various ADM branches and individuals own small private collections of sources from the Ba'ath period, which had been acquired prior to 2003. I also searched the Modern Assyrian Research Archives, which is a digital library affiliated with the University of Cambridge containing collections of Assyrian periodicals and personal archives. Both government archives and Assyrian periodicals used in this dissertation, focus primarily on the early Ba'ath rule of the 1970s. In analyzing recently acquired archival documents from this under-examined period, the dissertation provides a new narrative of Iraqi Ba'athist history. This history is complimented with Assyrian periodicals which utilize the Arabic and Aramaic languages, accentuating the linguistic multiplicity existing in Iraq, and introducing hitherto unknown Iraqi Assyrian intellectuals.

In addition to archival documents, popular culture in the form of music and poetry is an important medium of intellectual and cultural production that scholars can use to take account of the voices of various segments of the population. More specifically, oral interviews fill the gap and provide a perspective that is missing in print sources and archival documents. This approach becomes particularly important when examining rural Assyrian movements. With the flow of music across borders, via cassette tapes and singers themselves, the influence of music on Assyrians penetrated national borders. Abboud Zeitoune's discography of Assyrian music is a comprehensive work on this genre that can be complemented with cassette tapes and CDs purchased in community centers and online digital collections, as well as interviews with folk singers.¹⁴⁵ In addition to written sources, oral history and folk songs can provide unique insights into the roles and representations of women in Assyrian communities that have significance for gender discourses in other sectors of Iraqi society.

My methodology, which has included the conduction of interviews, was approved by the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board. Informants used in this study included Assyrian men and women involved in the relevant social and ideological movements, currently residing in various Iraqi villages, towns and cities (Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, and Mosul) and North America (Toronto, Chicago, and California). In *The Voice of the Past*, Paul Thompson

¹⁴⁵ Abboud Zeitoune, *Music Pearls of Beth-Nahrin: An Assyrian/Syriac Discography* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Assyrische Demokratische Organisation, 2007).

argues that oral history gives voice to those “hidden from history.”¹⁴⁶ Using oral history as a methodology, the historian turns ordinary men and women into historical actors. Moreover, oral history affords women and other underrepresented groups, such as the Assyrians, “a central place in the historical process through their own words.”¹⁴⁷ During the oral-history interview, the informant not only recalls the past, but also reinterprets it.

Oral history enables a personal, interactive, and vivid narration of history by its informants. The interview guide is not used as a questionnaire; broad themes rather than specific questions guide the informant in recalling his or her particular history. Less controversial areas of questioning are placed at the beginning and interviews do not necessarily proceed chronologically through the events recalled.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 introduces the historiographical interventions in the study of minorities, and presents new ways of understanding the Iraqi Assyrian community, including their urbanization in the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 builds on the theme of urbanization, describing the ways in which Assyrians located themselves in urban centers. Assyrians migrated to cities such as Baghdad and Kirkuk in search of employment and better educational opportunities. Through their shared experiences with other Iraqis—as neighbors and co-workers—they

¹⁴⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

negotiated their ethnic, religious and socio-economic grievances, either personally or communally, within the larger Iraqi context. In Kirkuk, the discovery of oil in 1927 had led to rapid economic and urban development, sharply increasing the city's population. The demographic composition of the city changed in favor of new migrant communities coming from rural and neighboring towns and cities. These communities found empowerment through their political affiliations with the Iraqi Communist Party, and through employment at large firms such as the Iraqi Petroleum Company. Political and economic empowerment in turn mobilized communities like the Assyrians, allowing them to emerge from the peripheries into the centers of their societies. However, their increased political mobilization disrupted the existing patriarchal order and ignited socio-economic tensions. Arab nationalists, Ba'athists, and conservatives felt particularly marginalized as the first president of the Iraqi republic, 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, seemed to favor leftists, communists and those affiliated with them—notably minorities and women.

Two events in 1959, organized by affiliates of the Communist Party, led to eruptions of violence in Mosul and Kirkuk. Colonel Shawwāf's rebellion, supported by other Arab nationalist officers and conservative tribes in Mosul, resulted in attacks not only on communists but also on Assyrian quarters, and on an Assyrian village outside Mosul; meanwhile, in Kirkuk, the procession celebrating the 1959 Iraqi revolution prompted clashes between Kurds and Turkomen. The memory of the 1959 Kirkuk crisis was recalled in 1963, following Qasim's toppling by Arab nationalists, Ba'athists, and conservative Iraqis, as is

evident in the 1963 court-martial records. During the coup a campaign of terror ensued, in which thousands of communists were killed or imprisoned. Assyrians affiliated with communism were also targeted, as were some Assyrian quarters in Baghdad and villages outside the city of Mosul—a repeating pattern observed earlier in 1959. The Arab nationalist, Ba‘thist, and conservative leaders of the coup had set out to reclaim the strategic political ground from the communists and leftists supported by the Qasim government.

Chapter 3 shifts focus from urban centers to the mainly rural north during the early Iraqi republican period (1961–75). In 1959, Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī established his influence over the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Using arms given to him by Qasim, when the president had requested Kurdish support after the Shawwāf rebellion, Barzānī consolidated his power over Kurdish and Assyrian tribes. In 1961, as Kuwait was granted independence, Qasim called for its incorporation into Iraq, leading Britain and later the Arab League to mobilize their forces against the Iraqis in protection of Kuwait. While Qasim was preoccupied with the Kuwaiti crisis, Barzānī demanded Kurdish autonomy, causing the onset of the civil war between the Kurds and the state. The chapter complicates the traditional understanding of the Kurdish uprising as a Kurdish nationalist movement alone, demonstrating that Assyrians, as well as communists who survived following Qasim’s toppling, were significant actors in the politically charged conflict between the Iraqi state and the opposition. Starting in 1961, Assyrians like Margaret George joined the Kurdish opposition, first as individuals, and later through organized tribal and political associations. Local

Assyrian political parties such as Kheith Kheith Allap II, established in Baghdad in 1961, moved their operations to the north after being denied registration in Baghdad. As the civil war continued, local cooperation between the Kurds and Assyrians expanded transnationally. This process involved organizations such as the Assyrian Universal Alliance, which was founded in 1968 by Iranian Assyrians who had influence within Iran. Although a minority, the Assyrians became useful to the Kurds not only in military conflict with the Iraqi army, but also in garnering regional and international support from actors engaged in Cold War politics. Through these actions, the Assyrians hoped to win full citizenship and equality in the north. The involvement of Assyrians in the Kurdish opposition contributed to competition for alliances with the Assyrian community between the Iraqi state, the KDP, and the Communists. All three of these groups strived to entice the Assyrians by presenting them with favorable policies. But the consequences of the civil war were devastating to the Assyrian community, resulting in major demographic shifts and rural-urban migrations, as well as the destruction of Assyrian villages and religious and cultural sites in northern Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Ba'athists were ousted by Arab nationalist leader 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif in 1963, shortly after they had succeeded in toppling Qasim. On July 17, 1968, the Ba'athists succeeded in consolidating their control over the Iraqi political sphere under the leadership of Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, who became president. Chapter 4 analyzes the early period of Ba'athist rule during the 1970s, arguing that, in response to the activities of Assyrians in the Iraqi opposition and the successful influence of Assyrian diasporic organizations on Western

governments and human rights groups, the Ba‘th pursued conciliatory policies with the Iraqi Assyrian community. Exiled leaders were invited back, including the patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, following the exile of his predecessor after the Simele massacre in 1933. In April 1972, Law 251 was promulgated, extending cultural and linguistic rights to the “Speakers of the Syriac Language,” as the community came to be identified by the government. Similar conciliatory policies were followed with the KDP and the ICP, in an effort to draw Ba‘thist political foes closer to the regime at a time when the regime was weak.

Meanwhile, in collaboration with the KDP, the Assyrians established the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs in the north, and enlisted 3,000 men to its battalion. This demonstrated that rural Assyrians remained to be fully convinced of Ba‘thist policies of reconciliation towards their community. It also indicated that the KDP was concerned that the regime would succeed in drawing the Assyrian community towards it, and wanted to secure its own relations with the Assyrians by allowing them a more significant role within the Kurdish resistance. The Ba‘th responded by inviting back Malik Yā‘qo Ismā‘īl, another Assyrian leader exiled following the Simele massacre and giving him an official role as the leader of the Assyrians. Yā‘qo Ismā‘īl was a tribal leader with strong links with the Barzānīs—but he was refused government permission to meet with them. In Baghdad, the government tried to incite Yā‘qo to create a pro-government force that would fight off the Kurdish opposition, but this force never materialized. Although the political dealings of the Assyrians with the Iraqi government, on one

hand, and the Kurdish Iraqi opposition on the other, complicated the situation for Assyrians, the community generally benefited, forging alliances with a variety of political actors. The Assyrians tacitly navigated between these groups, negotiating for more rights, within the volatile and temporary tactical space opened up under these circumstances of political instability.

Chapter 5 highlights the ways in which urbanite Assyrian intellectuals took advantage of Law 251 and negotiated with the state. In their magazines and clubs, these intellectuals used accepted narratives of socialism and Abbasidism to argue for greater cultural, political, and administrative rights. This campaign was pursued subtly in the press, but more vocally in popular culture. Assyrian intellectuals and singers also engaged with Arab and Kurdish intellectuals, contributing to a hybridized Iraqi sphere that cut across sectarian and ethnic divides, contributing to Assyrian intellectual discourses whose reach extended beyond Iraq's borders.

The 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq brought an end to Iranian support of the Kurdish opposition, marking a turning point in the Iraqi regime's conciliatory policies towards the Assyrian community. Chapters 4 and 5 detail the aftermath of this agreement and its consequences for the Assyrian community, based on government archives and Assyrian print sources. Rural Assyrian communities were the first to be affected, in the late 1970s, as the government's so-called border clearings destroyed Kurdish and Assyrian villages near the Iraqi and Iranian border. Assyrian intellectuals began to show more compliance towards the state, while those resisting faced state retribution. The

state's contradictory policies were highlighted in the Iraq census of 1978, which forced Assyrians to choose between Arab and Kurd ethnicities. At this time, the state had begun referring to them as a religious denomination rather than a national minority, as had been the case in the early 1970s.

The late 1970s saw the rise to power of Saddam Hussein, and his succession to the presidency in July 1979. During this period Hussein consolidated his rule over the Ba'ath party and the state, where a distinction between these two bodies had been abolished since 1977. This fusion, combined with increasing oil revenues, further consolidated the influence of the Ba'ath over the state. Within this framework, the Iran-Iraq War heightened the Ba'athification of society by the state, as Chapter 6 explores. As a result, Assyrians began to experience the reversal of conciliatory state policies towards their community. The destruction of villages in the late 1970s, the imprisonment of singers whose work focused on Assyrian identity and culture, and the Iraq census of 1978, were all factors that drove the re-constitution of the Assyrian nationalist movement as a whole. This was to be seen especially clearly in the creation in 1979 of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), which was established by university students and other young people born in the 1950s and mostly living in urban centers. Given its milieu it was perhaps natural that this party fused Iraqi patriotism with Assyrian nationalism. The persecution, and later execution, of the party's members by the regime in the 1980s enhanced its popularity, and increased its membership among rural Assyrians. In 1982 the ADM joined the Iraqi opposition in the north, fighting the Iraqi state alongside Assyrians involved

with the Communists and Kurds. The chapter concludes before the onset of the Anfal campaign, in 1988.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides a brief summary of arguments presented in the previous chapters and a sketch of the post-Anfal period, highlighting Assyrian political and intellectual activism in the enclaves of the safe-haven established in 1991. The Conclusion briefly outlines the current crisis that the Iraqi Assyrian community has continued to face since 2003.

2. Assyrians and the Iraqi Communist Party

This chapter examines the role of Assyrians in the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) from the 1940s to the early 1960s. It will begin with a description of the Assyrians in the Communist Party, and outline the reasons for the attraction of Assyrians to communism, as well as their form of organization within the Party. The chapter will then turn to Kirkuk, a multi-ethnic oil city with a history of workers' strikes and urban violence, all influenced by the Communist Party to varying degrees. The focus will be on the IPC, a British-dominated multinational corporation that employed a significant number of Kirkukis, including Assyrians. This will serve as background for the analysis of court-martial records dating from 1963, acquired from the Iraqi National Library and Archives in Baghdad. The attitude of the state to the ICP will be illuminated through an in-depth analysis of court cases involving Assyrians accused of being communists, and the subsequent treatment of those individuals by the courts. In addition, these cases also elucidate the conceptualization of identity, gender, and socio-economic issues by state institutions and society at large.

Kirkuk experienced accelerated economic and urban development following the discovery of an enormous oil field in 1927. Assyrians and other communities relocated from surrounding rural districts and Mosul to this new urban space in search of employment at the Iraq Petroleum Company, in a process that altered the demographic makeup of the city. The changing demography of the

city, combined with its rapid urbanization and economic development, gave rise to new political affiliations that recent arrivals to Kirkuk took advantage of and were empowered by. The Assyrians experienced socio-economic mobility as a result of their employment at the IPC, where some acquired positions of leadership; but their employment by the organization could also be complicated. Assyrian workers at the IPC became politically engaged, forming workers' unions, going on strike, and joining the Communist Party. Within this new urban space, they were able to mobilize politically, emerging from the peripheries to take a visible and active role in the urban politics of Kirkuk. Their activities disrupted the existing paternalistic order, igniting socio-economic tensions that had gendered dimensions.

The chapter draws on British and Iraqi archival sources, personal memoirs, and oral histories pertaining to members of the Assyrian community, as well as publications of the Iraqi Communist Party. The British colonial sources provide background on communist activity within the Assyrian community from the 1930s to the 1950s. Through its relations with certain members of the Assyrian community during the Mandate period, the British Foreign Office received enquiries from a number of Assyrian figures who had either been exiled by the Iraqi regime following the events of the Simele massacre, or had immigrated to Britain and its commonwealth nations. Iraqi archival sources pertain to the period following Qasim's toppling in 1963, and comprise a collection of court-martial records of communists and their sympathizers. Memoirs and oral interviews with Assyrians affiliated with the Communist Party

enable a close analysis of individuals and community members, revealing their level of organization and reasons for attraction to the ICP. Their accounts contribute to the construction of the historical memory of the community, which runs alongside, but is often in tension with, the account of the ruling authority, whether that was the British colonial administration or the Iraqi Republican regime. Similarly, publications of the ICP illustrate the Party's own narrative of its history, providing a place to commemorate its persecuted members, whom it identifies as martyrs. Using a variety of complementary sources, the chapter provides a unique analysis of an under-examined period in Iraqi history.

The sources mentioned above all indicate that many Assyrians were indeed drawn to the Iraqi Communist Party. They were attracted by the Party's emphasis on socio-economic and ethno-sectarian injustice, and its promotion of anti-sectarianism, secularism, and minority rights, "a struggle shared by all religions and ethnicities" in Iraq.¹ The Simele massacre of 1933 is a recurring theme of the memories of Assyrian communists born in the 1920s, who became politically active during the 1940s and onwards.² The injustices they faced as a community are blamed not only on the Iraqi government, but to some extent also on imperial powers, especially Great Britain.

¹ Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 143.

² For instance, Abu Baz had been a prominent Communist leader in the north, especially following 1963. Describing his birth on the eve of the Simele massacre, he related that his mother had gone into labor early, and her milk had "dried up out of fear." Yazidis saved Abu Baz and his mother, and their women nursed him. The injustices he faced, beginning with the Simele massacre and continuing later on—mainly a result of poverty—drew him to the Communist Party. His Yazidi saviors led him to believe that the ICP's goal of an Iraq shared by all Iraqis was possible, Abu Baz, interview by author, Alqosh, Iraq, December 18, 2011.

In the second half of the twentieth century the Assyrian community became more urbanized than it had been in its modern history. By moving to larger city centers, or living in cities that became more urbanized, such as Kirkuk, Assyrians began working for larger firms—for example, the IPC—or studying in mixed high schools and universities. Alongside injustices they might have suffered as a community, urban centers exposed them to grievances that had an impact on other Iraqis on their socio-economic level, such as workers in the IPC. Leftist ideology and exposure to a more vibrant Iraqi press during this period helped draw them towards communism. In Kirkuk these influences were supplemented by active workers' unions and a Communist Party growing in strength and influence. The republican state under Qasim's leadership, which replaced the monarchy in 1958, did not translate into what communists might have anticipated, yet the toppling of Qasim in 1963 unleashed extreme violence towards communists and their sympathizers. The Assyrian community was not spared during this period, as the court cases demonstrate. Assyrians were imprisoned for a variety of reasons, but primarily because of their membership in the Communist Party or involvement in one of its affiliated organizations. Issues of identity, citizenship, and gender also played a role, however. According to Batatu and Ismail, and evidence retrieved from certain court-martial records, grudges based on socio-economic, ethno-sectarian, and personal hatreds surfaced during this period, especially in Kirkuk. Urban violence ensued and, at least temporarily, interrupted the urban imaginary created in Kirkuk. Rapid urban development in such cities, combined with new political affiliations, allowed new

communities to emerge that disrupted the established order and the place of traditional communities within it. In 1963, the patriarchal socio-political system corrected this disruption that had been enabled by Qasimite rule, identifying this period as the “chaotic tide.” As this chapter will reveal, alleged Assyrian communists, members of the Iraqi Women’s League, and thousands of other Iraqis, were targeted in the campaign of terror that ensued following Qasim’s overthrow in 1963. By examining the role of Assyrians associated with the Communist Party in Iraq, this chapter contributes to scholarship on the position of minorities in oppositional political parties in the Middle East. More specifically, it allows an understanding of how minorities such as Iraq’s Assyrians positioned themselves in their society, and how they promoted issues that were significant for their community to the larger Iraqi sphere, while also identifying with other Iraqis of their class and gender.

Although the ICP appeared to be blind to ethno-sectarian affiliations of members, and many of its urban cells comprised members of diverse backgrounds, Assyrian communists generally organized according to their communal affiliations, especially after 1963, when the Party’s center shifted to the rural north. This sort of organization simply made sense to a newly urbanized community flocking to large cities such as Baghdad and Kirkuk, in contrast to the much smaller towns and villages they had left. In urban centers, new immigrant communities would have relied on each other and held on to their communal and regional affiliations, which would have been beneficial in finding employment and housing, and learning how to navigate a big city. Many Assyrian ICP

members indicate that they were attracted to the Party through a relative or a friend from their hometown. In times of political turmoil and persecution of the ICP by the government authorities, these communal ties were important both for individual members and for the Party, and contributed to the passing of information from the center to the peripheries. Furthermore, communal affiliations within the Party and community were strengthened after 1963, as relatives and townspeople were collectively punished by state forces in times of turmoil, including 1959 and 1963, and in the early 1970s by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), due to the ICP's temporary association with the Ba'athist state. The ruling authority came to identify the community, at least in certain areas, with the Communist Party, and punished them accordingly during its corrective revolution. In turn, a certain village or town would have felt obliged to stand in union with the communists in defending their village, hence further reinforcing the affiliation between party and community members. Moreover, as this chapter will show, Assyrian communists, especially following 1963, found themselves in an ambiguous position. They had joined the Communist Party to transcend their ethnic and religious associations, yet they found that the Party afforded them the space they needed to reinforce their identity, but also as a result of the attacks on their communities by state agencies and anti-communists groups.

The Assyrians and Communism in Iraq

Although the role of Assyrians within the Communist party has not been fully investigated, there are some primary and secondary sources that illuminate it. For

instance, Batatu identifies important communist figures within this community, such as Petros Vasili and Yūsif Salman, known as Fahd. Fahd was the secretary-general of the ICP from 1941 until his execution by the Iraqi government in 1949. His story can be taken as an example of how members of communities do not necessarily think along ethnic lines. Vasili, a “professional revolutionary,” is credited with introducing Fahd, “the real builder of the Iraqi Communist Party”—to the ideals of communism.³ Vasili’s family originated from ‘Amadiyya, a city in northern Iraq. In Ottoman times they had emigrated to Tiflis, Georgia, where Vasili was raised and educated.⁴ His multilingual fluency surely aided him in his constant movement from place to place. Vasili returned to Iraq by way of Iran in 1922, probably with the wave of Assyrian refugees who had escaped the massacres in Ottoman territories and in Urmia, Iran, following the First World War. In Iraq he lived in various cities, including Basrah, Baghdad, Sulaimaniyya, Nasiriyyah, and Ba‘quba—the town where the Assyrian refugee camps were located. Just before his banishment from Iraq in 1934, the British Special Service assisted the Iraqi police in discovering his communist activity, and specifically his communication with Filimonovo, a Russian professor of “Oriental Propaganda” at the University of Baku living in Kermanshah, Iran, through an Assyrian driver. Batatu makes an explicit connection between Vasili and Fahd, but more implicit ones can also be drawn between this important communist leader and the general

³ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba‘thists, and Free Officers*, Princeton Studies on the Near East (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 404.

⁴ Ibid.

Assyrian community. For example, Ba‘quba was home to a large Assyrian refugee camp, and if Vasili lived in Ba‘quba it seems natural to assume that he either lived in this camp temporarily or visited Assyrians (relatives and friends) living there and passed his communist teachings and organizational skills on to them. Kermanshah allows for yet another connection between Vasili, the Assyrian community, and communism in general. Kermanshah was a city that many Assyrians passed through during the exodus en route to refugee camps in Iraq; some eventually settled there. In the early 1920s, many Assyrians of Urmia who had settled in Iraq following the exodus were anxious to return to their villages. In 1922 the Iranian authorities allowed them to return. Of the Assyrian returnees, approximately five thousand settled in Hamadan, one thousand in Kermanshah, and four thousand in Tabriz and Maraghah.⁵

Drawing connections between cities such as Tbilisi and Kermanshah, cities in the shadow of Soviet strategic and/or ideological influence (for example, there was a Soviet consulate in Ahwas according to Batatu, and one in Kermanshah itself according to British Foreign Office sources)⁶ allows for an interesting transnational understanding of communism in general, and a possible Soviet–Assyrian/minority connection in particular. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, they allude to interactions between Assyrians across the recently fortified borders. Although Assyrians in the next half of the twentieth

⁵ John, Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 207–8.

⁶ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 405; FO 371/68481A, February 9, 1948, No. 2096, “The ‘Iraqi Communist Party and the League of ‘Iraqi Communists,” prepared by Security Intelligence Middle East, to Foreign Office, p. 2.

century would become more integrated in their respective countries, especially as the Iraqi state gained more power and influence, Assyrian transnational interactions would become evident within Iran and Iraq, and in other countries they emigrated to.

Meanwhile, the British blamed the Russians for the attraction of Assyrians to communism, an attraction corroborated by British Foreign Office archives. For instance, a report on the strike in Kirkuk's Iraq Petroleum Company in 1946 specifies the importance of the Palestinian cause to all workers, including Assyrians. The ICP was believed to be the organizing force behind the strike, as will be demonstrated.⁷ In February 1948, the British Foreign Office issued a report titled: "The 'Iraqi Communist Party and the League of 'Iraqi Communists.'" It offered an analysis of the Communist Party for the previous year that included reports on Iraq's minority communities. Assyrians, like many Kurds and Armenians, were believed to have been drawn to the Communist Party under Russian influence:⁸

Assyrians feel themselves insecure in Iraq and many are disappointed in the British from whom they had expected (usually unreasonably) more help than they have received. As a result a number of people among them, as in the Armenian community, seek leadership and protection from the USSR.⁹

⁷ FO 371/52456, August 1, 1946, No. E 3860, "Minutes," by P. Garran.

⁸ FO 371/68481A, February 9, 1948, No. 2096, "'Iraqi Communist Party.'" See also FO 371/75131, March 1949, No. 10110, "The Iraqi Communist Party," prepared by M.I.S.'s representative in Baghdad [possibly the Middle East Security Intelligence] to Foreign Office. See also FO 371/68481A, March 1949, "Iraqi Communist Party," p. 6.

⁹ FO 371/68481A, March 1949, "Iraqi Communist Party," p. 6.

Striking an orientalist note, the report continued: “The Assyrians have a natural love of intrigue and capacity for being dissatisfied with their lot.”¹⁰

According to the report, there had been talks in support of Russia among the Assyrians, and Russia had made contacts with Assyrian Nestorian converts to the Russian Orthodox Church.¹¹ Nevertheless, the British report downplays the role of Assyrians in the ICP by suggesting Soviet influence. Moreover, it seems that the report took into account only Assyrians who had come to Iraq after the First World War, ignoring those who were in Iraq already. It also focused on Nestorian Assyrians, but ignored Chaldean and Jacobite ones. On the other hand, a secret investigation into the ICP issued by the British in March 1949 showed how individual Assyrians had been drawn to the Party.¹² This investigation used police reports of house searches and arrests of suspected communists in Baghdad and the northern provinces. For instance, among the arrested men in Kirkuk, many Assyrian names came up. Following a search of the house of Nafi Mohammad ‘Ali—the head of the ICP branch office for the northern provinces, situated in Kirkuk—several men were arrested, including Tūma Shāba, an Assyrian bus driver.¹³ Further investigation in Kirkuk led to the arrest of more ICP members, including two Assyrians—Yūnā William, a workman, and Ilyās

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² FO 371/75131, March, 1949, “The Iraqi Communist Party,” S. 91/0/9/248. Eastern Iraq, file number 10110.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

Ḥannā, a secondary school student.¹⁴ In Baghdad, Ḥannā Tūmās was believed to be the link between the central committee of the ICP and party members.¹⁵

The personal account of Yūsif Ḥannā is quite revealing.¹⁶ After finishing his education in 1947, Yūsif Ḥannā held a couple of temporary jobs, first for the railway, then in a lawyer's office, before moving to the north in search of better employment opportunities.¹⁷ Prior to 1947, Yūsif Ḥannā was not a formal Communist Party member, but had an interest in communism, and hence read literature issued by the Dār al-Ḥikma bookshop, and other communist publications such as *al-Qā'ida*. In Kirkuk he met communists such as Ḥannā Elias, all of whom helped to further his interest in the Party. Yūsif Ḥannā was eventually nominated as a party member, and went on to lead Ḥannā Elias's group, which included members who were non-Assyrian or Christian.¹⁸ Seeking employment, Yūsif Ḥannā left Kirkuk for Mosul, where he met a group headed by another Assyrian named Behnām (his last name is unknown).¹⁹ The British knew less about this group, but it is interesting to note that at least one of the cell's other five members, 'Umar, was a Muslim, indicating the existence of confessionally mixed Communist Party cells.

Discussing the Assyrian community, however, the British indicated in this same investigation: "No further evidence has emerged on this community's

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "History of Yūsif Ḥannā from his own and other statements," in *ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹ Ibid.

connection with the Party.”²⁰ This analysis indicated that the British continued to subscribe to the argument they had postulated in 1948, namely that the Assyrian community’s attraction towards communism was a result of Russian influences. The persistence of this attitude is corroborated in another report, issued a few years later by the British embassy in Baghdad. The report focused on Russian advances in Iraq, and suggested ways to combat them.²¹ On minorities, the report stated again that Russians had a “specialist appeal to minority communities.”²² To prevent Russian advances in the country, the British were to “rub that Russian imperialism is far worse than Western imperialism, by repeating the facts about genocide, etc.” It is not clear which genocide they were referring to; perhaps they were blaming the Russians for their role in the genocidal campaigns against the Armenians and Assyrians in 1915. But British investigations provided conflicting accounts of the attraction of the Assyrian community towards communism. British reports on the Assyrian community minimized the attraction of Assyrians to communism and attributed it simply to Russian influences and to the Assyrians’ dissatisfaction with their “lot” in Iraq. But it is not clear whom they included or excluded in their conceptualization of the Assyrian community. On the other hand, British reports on communist organization and police raids of party members revealed examples of Assyrians involved in the Communist Party who had been drawn to it by reading progressive and leftist literature and the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

²¹ FO 1110/306, July 18, 1950, No. PR 31, “Secret,” from Mr Humphrey Trevelyan, British Embassy Baghdad, to F.R.H. Murray, Information Research Department, London, 2. Letter number: (G.2192/35/50).

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

communist press, and also through family members, friends, and co-workers, some of whom were also Assyrian. One might therefore wonder what the percentage of Assyrians in the Communist Party was.

Batatu provided useful statistics about the ICP's makeup. In 1935 he identified sixteen leading communists, five of whom were Christians (Assyrian Chaldean), when Christians constituted only 5.9 percent of the Iraqi population in 1947.²³ Furthermore, four of these sixteen leading members were Shi'ites, who also formed a political minority. To account for the overrepresentation of these two minorities, Batatu suggested: "This carries the implication that the exclusion by the existing order, not necessarily of the individuals themselves but of their religious group in general—from certain roles or benefits, may have been a factor in their proneness to communism."²⁴ In the same section, Batatu included interviews with two Christian party members, Nurī Rufa'īl and Jamīl Tūmā. Tūmā, according to Batatu, had had an unhappy childhood. His three brothers had been killed by "Turks" in Van in 1915, and he and his mother had been exiled and imprisoned in Jazirat Ibn Umar when they were caught trying to escape from Mosul to British-occupied Baghdad.²⁵ The theme of injustices experienced at an early age and the attraction towards communism connects to the writings of Tūma Tūmās and other communist Assyrians born in the early twentieth century. Between 1941 and 1949, a significant number of Christians, 22.7 percent, were once again to be found at the leadership level in the ICP. Batatu posited that the

²³ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, Table 14.3, 424. Batatu characterized Chaldean men as "Arabized Chaldeans." It is not clear how he developed that identification.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 422.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 425–7.

“conspicuousness of the Christians in the Party can be essentially understood in terms of social disabilities to which religious minorities are normally subjected.”²⁶ However, the number of Christians in the Party declined between 1949 and 1951 to 3.1 percent. A reduction in the number of non-Muslim minorities within the Party’s high command was observed during this period. Batatu correlated these figures with the situation of the ICP in 1949. With most party cadres behind bars as the government succeeded in cracking down on communist activity, non-Muslim minorities “belonged to a more physically exposed community and appear, perhaps on that account, to have been sufficiently impressed by the severe blows that fell upon the party.”²⁷ Between 1955 and 1963, only six out of seventy-five members of the central committee of the ICP (8 percent) were Christians. Of these, one was Armenian and the rest were Assyrian Chaldeans. Christians constituted 8.4 percent of the Iraqi population, which equaled their representation in the Party. Other non-Muslim minorities remained numerically insignificant at the ICP command level.²⁸

In the middle and lower echelons of the ICP during 1947–49, Christians also had a significant presence. In the middle echelons during this period, Christians made up 6.1 percent of local Party committee members in the provinces, while Christians constituted 5.4 percent of the total urban population

²⁶ Ibid., 651.

²⁷ Ibid., 701.

²⁸ Table 54.1: Summary of Biographical Data Relating to Members of the Central Committees of the Communist Party, June 1955 to February 1963, in *ibid.*, 996.

outside of greater Baghdad in 1947.²⁹ In the same year, the number of Christian communists in Greater Baghdad stood at 12.6 percent, while Christians made up 7 percent of the urban population of Baghdad. There were 8.8 percent communists who were Christian in all organizations, while the total number of Christians in the urban population in 1947 was at 5.9 percent.³⁰ In the lower echelons of the ICP, Christians made up 5.8 percent of members in the provinces in 1947, 8.2 percent in Greater Baghdad, and 7.2 percent in all organizations.³¹ The majority of these Christians were Assyrians, including Nestorians and Chaldeans, though Batatu lists Chaldeans separately from Assyrians, as well as a small number of Armenians. These numbers are significant enough to suggest that Assyrians were drawn to the Communist Party not only through Russian influence, but had other reasons to be attracted to it, as will be demonstrated by an examination of the activity of Kirkuki Assyrians between 1946 and 1963.

This section has provided an outline of Assyrian involvement with the ICP since its formation, indicating that they were well represented in the ICP, and that their numbers increased and decreased reflecting crackdowns on the Party by the Iraqi government and the British authorities. It has also provided evidence relating to the ways in which Assyrian communists organized politically in urban centers and within the ICP more specifically, relying on communal ties but also joining cells that were ethnically and religiously mixed.

²⁹ Ibid., Appendix Two, Table A.28: ICP (Fahd's organization): Religion, Sect, and Ethnic Origin, Middle Echelons (1943—June 1949).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., Appendix Two, Table A.29: ICP (Fahd's organization): Religion, Sect, and Ethnic Origin, Lower Echelons and Active Rank and File (1947—June 1949).

Kirkuk: City of Oil

The first gusher at Baba Gurgur—an area just northwest of urban Kirkuk—flowed profusely on October 14, 1927, leading to the discovery of an enormous oil field.³² The discovery of oil in Kirkuk transformed the city at a significant rate. When Baba Gurgur’s gusher struck, Kirkuk’s urban population was estimated to be around 25,000. Two decades later, the population of urban Kirkuk had more than doubled, reaching approximately 68,000 according to the 1947 census. The British government estimated that, in 1948, IPC workers and their families numbered 30,000, suggesting that “nearly half of the city’s inhabitants were directly or indirectly reliant on the oil company for their livelihood.”³³ By 1957 Kirkuk’s urban population had doubled again, according that year’s census, to over 120,000.³⁴ Bet-Shlimon suggests that “the company therefore dominated Kirkuk’s labor affairs and wielded enormous leverage in its local politics.”³⁵

Assyrians as employees in the IPC

The number of Assyrians also began to increase in Kirkuk from the 1920s onwards. In 1957 Assyrians made up 10 percent of the urban population numbering 120,000.³⁶ It is difficult to determine exactly how many Assyrians

³² Arbella Bet-Shlimon, “Kirkuk, 1918–1968: Oil and the Politics of Identity in an Iraqi City” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012), 144.

³³ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ Official Iraqi census from 1957 in Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 913; also Table 1.2 of this dissertation.

were employed at the IPC, but British sources allow one to speculate. In 1943 approximately 1,300 discharged Assyrian levies were employed at the IPC.³⁷ In a conversation between Dr. Nazim al-Pāchachī, Iraqi director-general of economics, and Mr. Furneaux of the IPC, regarding the formation of an Assyrian battalion to aid in the war effort for Palestine, 1,000 Assyrian IPC workers were said to have volunteered.³⁸ These seem to have consisted mainly of ex-levy soldiers, and do not take into account Assyrian IPC workers who were not interested in participating in the war efforts. Assyrian workers were involved in organized labor activities at the IPC that ensued in the 1940s.³⁹

Between 1944 and 1946, sixteen labor unions were allowed to form in Iraq, twelve of which were controlled by the ICP.⁴⁰ The most significant unions were formed in the important industrial centers of Basra Port and the Iraqi Railways, both of which were under British administration.⁴¹ In both centers, major strikes for increased wages took place, in 1945 at the railways, and in the late 1940s at the port.⁴² In Kirkuk's IPC, however, unions were not licensed.⁴³

As a result, the IPC workers in Kirkuk went on strike in July 1946.⁴⁴

Information retrieved from oral-history interviews and from Batatu's work

³⁷ FO 624/144, August 18, 1948, No. 720, "Assyrians: Recruitment Palestine," from the Air Vice-Marshal A. Gary, Air Headquarters, Royal Air Force, to Mr Richmond, British Embassy in Baghdad.

³⁸ FO 624/144, August 18, 1948, "Minutes," 720/4/48.

³⁹ FO 371/52456, August 1, 1946, No. E 3860, "Minutes," by P. Garran.

⁴⁰ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38–9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

supports the claim that the labor organization in Kirkuk was guided by the ICP.⁴⁵ It was led by Ḥannā Ilyās, encountered earlier, who was known as Ilyās Gūhārī, using his mother's last name, as Alqoshis take their maternal last name if the mother comes from a well-known family.⁴⁶ Ilyās was twenty-three years old, and a former member of the Supervisory Council of the Railway Workers. After moving to Kirkuk he had been employed as an oil worker, and became a member of the Kirkuk local ICP committee.⁴⁷ On July 2, Ilyās, with other communist IPC workers, helped organize the workers in forming committees and coordinating regular strikes.⁴⁸ Batatu, British sources, and the oral accounts of A.Q. help us to form a more complete list of workers' demands. Batatu's list includes: the right to form a union, an increase in the minimum basic daily pay rate from 80 fils to 250 fils, an end to the arbitrary firing of workers, and social security.⁴⁹ The British reports list some of these issues, but also include workers' demands for housing, transportation, and bonuses.⁵⁰ A.Q. offers a vivid oral account of this turbulent period, drawing on the experiences of an active participant in the strike and member of the Communist Party who went on to become instrumental in

⁴⁵ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 622. A.Q. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, July 10, 2013.

⁴⁶ E.O. interviewed by author over the phone, May 28, 2013. Also, Tūma Tūmās uses this last name in reference to Ilyās in his memoirs, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (1)," 2006.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 623–4.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fo 371/52456, July 20, 1946, No. 456, "My dear Doctor Jamali," from British Embassy Baghdad to Dr. Muhammad Fadhil al-Jamali, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

founding the Oil Workers Union under Qasim. His list of demands includes a social club for workers, and an increase for the needs of desert workers.⁵¹

On July 3, about 5,000 workers went on strike.⁵² This number included approximately 700 Assyrian workers, according to A.Q.⁵³ The workers would meet in the gardens of Gāwur Bāghe. Their diversity was indicated by the use of Arabic, Kurdish, Turkomen, Aramaic, English, Armenian, and even Hindi by the various speakers in their addresses to the workers.⁵⁴ Edward Odisho recalls:

As a child, I remember my illiterate father used to sing out those slogans at home before joining the rest of the demonstrators at the field in Gāwur Bāghe. One of the slogans said: “What do you want?” ... The response from the masses came: “We want our bread and our children’s bread.” ... Another slogan said: “What do you want?” The response came: “We want naphtha for our houses.”⁵⁵

The mutasarrif of Kirkuk refused to use force against the demonstrators, and was consequently replaced by one who proceeded to do so. On July 12, mounted police began firing at the workers in Gāwur Bāghe, killing between ten and sixteen workers, and injuring twenty-seven.⁵⁶ In addition, about ten workers were detained, including Aprim ‘Ama, who was a Communist at the time but would go on to become an important mentor to the younger generation that formed the Assyrian Democratic Movement in 1979. A.Q. remembers

⁵¹ A.Q. interviewed by author.

⁵² Ibid., 624.

⁵³ A.Q. interviewed by author.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Edward Y. Odisho, “City Of Kirkuk: No Historical Authenticity without Multiethnicity,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* (2002): 8.

⁵⁶ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 264. A.Q. estimates the number of killed workers at sixteen.

participating in a silent demonstration the next day, where the workers demanded the release of the detainees and that the police be brought to justice. Both demands were carried out, and the police eventually faced courts trials. Following this, A.Q. was detained for his role in the strikes, and his house searched. His case was forwarded to Baghdad, and in a search of his house progressive literature was found. The judge eventually authorized his release, stating that such material was present in many homes.⁵⁷ The company eventually conceded some of the workers' demands, such as higher wages, but refused to allow them to form a union. The workers returned to their jobs on July 16.⁵⁸

Another decade would pass before the oil workers were able to establish a union. A.Q. was instrumental in its formation in 1959, under Qasim's rule. In honor of the workers killed in Gāwur Bāghe in 1946 and their struggle to form a union, a statue of a worker representing those killed was erected near the oil workers' club in Kirkuk, close to Gāwur Bāghe.⁵⁹

Some Assyrian employees of the IPC who were active within the labor movement eventually joined the ranks of the ICP. One of these was Tūma Tūmās, whose memoirs we have already encountered. The path to both the IPC and ICP for this soon-to-be-Communist leader had begun, ironically, in the Iraqi Levies. After failing to be accepted into high school in 1941, Tūmās went without schooling or employment until an opportunity presented itself in 1942,⁶⁰ when the

⁵⁷ A.Q. interviewed by author.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tūma Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (1)," *Thekriat*, 2006, at <http://www.al-nnas.com/THEKRIAT/15jsf1.htm> (accessed August 23, 2013).

British began enlisting Assyrians (members of the Nestorian and Chaldean churches) and Kurds into the Iraqi Levies. According to Tūmās's memoirs, a colonel by the name of "Mack Qeen" came to Alqosh and enlisted the seventeen-year-old Tūmās as an officer in the Iraqi Levies. Tūmās remained with the Levy forces until 1948. In that year the Iraqi army decided to form a special brigade composed of Assyrian volunteers to participate in the war effort for Palestine.⁶¹ Along with hundreds of Assyrians in the Levy forces, Tūmās signed up with the new brigade.⁶² The continuation of the Iraqi Levies into the 1940s contradicts the widespread notion that they were disbanded in 1932. In the Iraqi Levies, Tūmās, together with Kurdish, Armenian, and Assyrian officers, "accepted democratic principles," and some joined the ICP. Reflecting on his reasons for joining the ICP, Tūmās stated:

As for me, it was a result of the arrogant stances of British officers, the rising democratic tide, my communication with martyr Ilyās Ḥannā Gūhārī,⁶³ and our exposure to the Iraqi press, especially the newspaper *al-Ahālī*, the most influential in the progression of my political awareness. I began to feel the enormity of my error in joining the levy army. This feeling deepened for me further in my years of employment at the IPC in Kirkuk. I often collided with British officers who considered themselves higher than local [native] officers ...⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. See also FO 624/144, August 18, 1948, "Assyrians: Recruitment Palestine," from the Air Vice-Marshal A. Gary, Air Headquarters, Royal Air Force, to Mr Richmond, British Embassy in Baghdad.

⁶³ Ilyās Ḥannā Gūhārī, who was discussed earlier, was Tūma Tūmās's paternal cousin. In a footnote, Tūmās reveals that Ilyās Ḥannā was killed following the 1963 coup, after being horrendously tortured. Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (1)," 2006.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

In 1950 Tūmās began working for the IPC in Kirkuk. He also started receiving Communist political publications, and paying a monthly membership fee to the Party.⁶⁵ Tūmās described a heightened political awareness on the part of IPC workers as a result of Communist activities. In addition, he believed that the arbitrary politics of the company, and its refusal to accept the “simplest requests of workers,” also contributed to the politicization of workers. Tūmās was further frustrated by the contempt shown by the British to Iraqi workers and staff. For instance, Iraqi employees at the company were required to use the phrase “Yes, Sir” when addressing English men employed at the IPC. The president of the IPC, according to Tūmās, enjoyed absolute power in Kirkuk; even the police and security officials obeyed his command.

In his memoirs, Tūmās identified various events that had led him towards the Communist Party in his early life. The labor movement in Kirkuk had heightened his political activism, but this activism exacerbated socio-economic and ethnic tensions between the various Kirkuki communities, which reached a boiling point in 1959.

The 1959 Kirkuk Crisis

The July 1959 crisis in Kirkuk was a watershed event whose lasting repercussions resurfaced in 1963. Though this crisis played a significant role in how communists and their sympathizers would be treated by nationalists and state authority figures in Kirkuk following Qasim’s toppling, the events that transpired

⁶⁵ Ibid.

in Mosul a few months earlier shed light on the ways in which Assyrians were treated due to their membership or assumed affiliation with the Communist Party, and foreshadowed events in Kirkuk.

On March 6, 1959, the Partisans of Peace, supported by the ICP, organized a rally to showcase the strength of the left in Mosul. This was probably a response to rumors of a revolt by Mosul's armed forces, which was allegedly to be orchestrated by the disgruntled Free Officers.⁶⁶ A strong anti-Qasimite group in Mosul comprised Nasserites, nationalists, Ba'athists, and the Muslim Brotherhood, alongside tribal leaders whose interests had been threatened by the fall of the monarchy.⁶⁷ With the exception of Christian and Kurdish neighborhoods in the city of Mosul, which favored the left, the rest of the population seemed to follow a "vague form of Sunni-pan-Arabism."⁶⁸ Following the commencement of the rally, confrontation ensued in particular after Colonel Shawwāf announced the rebellion over the radio, on March 8. For the next four days, chaos reigned. According to Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, much of the violence was primarily based more on "long standing ethnic and inter-tribal rivalries between Arabs and Kurds and between different Arab tribal factions and with the hatred of peasants for their landlords than with strictly party political matters."⁶⁹ Abu Baz in an interview claims that, of the 600 communists killed, 200 were Assyrian. Furthermore, 500 Assyrian families escaped Mosul and the surrounding area for

⁶⁶ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, 66–7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

other parts of the country—probably Baghdad, in most cases.⁷⁰ Abu Baz’s account is supported by an entry on “Martyrs of Telkaif” in an ICP publication on its martyrs.⁷¹ The entry claims that “great tragedies” were endured by the residents of the Telkaif district at the hands of a “regressive coalition” of nationalists, conservatives, and chauvinists.⁷² The events of these days are not clear, but according to this entry eight men from Telkaif were charged with killing two people, and sentenced to be executed by the first courts-martial.⁷³ The sentences were carried out after the 1963 coup as will be demonstrated.

The effects of the Shawwāf massacre on the Assyrian community, both in the city of Mosul and in Telkaif, confirmed the fragile position of the community, and the consequences of the increased political engagement of its members and their affiliation with communism. The large number of Assyrian Communists killed even in a city with a high concentration of Assyrians (14 percent in the city of Mosul: see Table 1.6) was significant. This incident led to the displacement from their native city of Assyrian families who were evidently fearful of continuing to live in Mosul after centuries of coexistence. The attacks were a result of ethno-sectarian and socio-economic factors, and underlined the sense of disenfranchisement felt by Arab nationalists and traditionalists that came with the political mobilization of a newer segment of their society. This form of violence was to be repeated a few months later in Kirkuk.

⁷⁰ Abu Baz interviewed by author, Alqosh, Iraq, December 18, 2011.

⁷¹ Ḥizb al-Shuyū‘ī al-‘Irāqī. Lajnat Maṭbū‘ Shuhadā’ al-Ḥizb, *Shuhadā’ Al-Ḥizb, Shuhadā’ Al-Waṭan: Shuhadā’ Al-Ḥizb Al-Shuyū‘ī Al-‘Irāqī, 1934–1963* 2nd edn, ([Beirut?], Ḥizb al-Shuyū‘ī al-‘Irāqī, 2008), 300.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 300–4.

On July 14, 1959, violent clashes broke out between Turkomen and Kurds in Kirkuk during a procession celebrating the first anniversary of the revolution. As in the case of Mosul, scholars agree that the conflict in Kirkuk was based on ethnic rather than political tensions—albeit exacerbated by social underpinnings—caused by growing animosity between the more established Turkomen community and the newer, communist-affiliated Kurdish one.⁷⁴ The oil industry had attracted more Kurds from surrounding villages, increasing their numbers to one-third of the population in 1959, whereas the numbers of Turkomen had declined to half of the overall population of 120,000. Assyrians accounted for about 10 percent of the population, and Arabs made up the rest.⁷⁵ Changing demographics, and the appointment of Kurds to many important posts in the city traditionally held by Turkomens, contributed to the conflict by causing the Turkmen to feel marginalized.⁷⁶ Regardless of the issues underlying the conflict, the Communist Party was held responsible. Furthermore, members of the People’s Resistance—a “popular militia” organized by the government in 1958 but heavily influenced by the ICP—also shouldered the blame.⁷⁷ Like the Shawwāf Massacre in Mosul, the Kirkuk incident highlighted the disgruntlement of traditional nationalists and other established communities in Kirkuk City. The emergence of new communities, and in particular their political and economic mobilization, exacerbated ethno-sectarian and socio-economic tensions that led to

⁷⁴ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 912; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 71.

⁷⁵ Official Iraqi census from 1957 in Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 913.

⁷⁶ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 914; Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 71.

⁷⁷ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958*, 62–3.

the eruption of violence. The association of the ICP and its affiliate organizations with the 1959 crisis is significant for the courts-martial that were held in Kirkuk in 1963. For the majority population, the crisis evoked the memory of the Qasimite regime; like his presidency, it was referred to by his adversaries as the “chaotic tide,” following which the Ba‘thists, presenting themselves as the vanguard of the revolution, would proceed to restore order.

I have attempted in the foregoing to understand the role of Assyrians in the Communist Party of Iraq during the monarchical period. In the brief period in which Qasim held power (1958–63), the Assyrians enjoyed a relatively beneficial situation. From the 1950s, Assyrians had begun a process of integration into major urban centers, as will be discussed in the following section. During the 1950s, Assyrians moved to cities in large numbers, in search of employment and education. Assyrian refugees from the First World War who were still living in the Habāniyya camp purchased land and began building a new neighborhood on the outskirts of Baghdad city.⁷⁸ As the city grew this district was eventually incorporated into Baghdad, attracting more Assyrian families over the decades, who migrated to the capital from their villages in the northern provinces. In 1959, with their growing presence in Baghdad, Assyrian members of the Nestorian Church opened their first church in the capital since the creation of the republic. In a sign of official support, Qasim and other government officials attended the church’s opening ceremony.⁷⁹ At the same time, however, Assyrian aspirations to

⁷⁸ AIR 19/764, May 29, 1958, No. A123817/52/Pr. III, “Confidential,” from P.S. to S. of S., signed K.C. MacDonald, 1–2.

⁷⁹ FO 371/141092, April 27, 1959, “Opening of an Assyrian Church in Baghdad.”

form secular cultural and political organizations were dashed. For instance, April 1961 saw the formation of Khuyada w Kheirūtha Athōrayta (“Assyrian Unity and Freedom”), known by its acronym, Kheith Kheith Allap II. When its application to register was denied by the government, its organizers were prompted to move their activities to the north. Such advances led to the strengthening of ties between Assyrian organizations and the Kurdish resistance, especially following Qasim’s toppling in 1963. Assyrians within the Communist Party, or sympathetic to it, probably felt ambivalent about Qasim. Although communists expected more from Qasim than they received, they were generally loyal to him until the very end. For instance, A.Q. described how difficult it was to receive a permit for the formation of an oil workers’ union even under Qasim’s rule. A.Q. and other organizers discovered that Qasim wanted to block their efforts to form a union, and instead bestow rights upon workers in a paternal fashion. Qasim eventually allowed the formation of the union, after some skillful maneuvering on the part of its activists—though A.Q., reminiscing about the president, suggested that he had “had a good heart.”

Regardless of communists’ ambivalent feelings about Qasim, his toppling in 1963—mainly by Arab nationalists and Ba‘thists—was catastrophic for their party. The next section focuses chiefly on the period following the 1963 coup, and highlights the treatment of Assyrians accused of being Communists in court-martial proceedings.

What Happened in 1963?

On February 8, 1963, an army coup led by Ba‘thists and nationalists toppled the Qasim regime and began a violent campaign against Communists and their sympathizers. On the same day, the new government broadcast Proclamation 13, stating:

In view of the desperate attempts of the agent-communists—the partners in crime of the enemy of God Qasim—to sow confusion in the ranks of the people and their disregard of official orders and instructions, the commanders of the military units, the police, and the National Guard are authorized to annihilate anyone that disturbs the peace. The royal sons of the people are called upon to cooperate with authorities by informing against these criminals and exterminating them.⁸⁰

House-to-house arrests of alleged communists followed, allegedly facilitated by lists provided by the CIA.⁸¹ During this campaign, close to 10,000 people were detained, and between 3,000 and 5,000 executed.⁸² Those arrested were tortured by “special committees” and by the National Guard, which was a Ba‘thist militia.⁸³ Ismail suggests that the campaign of terror “mixed personal, sectarian, and tribal hatreds,” while Batatu emphasizes socio-economic factors.⁸⁴ The campaign against the Communists and their sympathizers continued throughout the ensuing months. In May, as the Ba‘thists felt more isolated, having

⁸⁰ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 982.

⁸¹ Ibid., 985; Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107.

⁸² Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 985–88; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, 107.

⁸³ Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, 108.

⁸⁴ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 983–5; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, 108.

fallen out with the Nasserites and Nasser himself in July, and due to the rekindling of war with the Kurds, they began to be more violent towards their enemies. This violence was exacerbated in July, as communist-inclined soldiers and officers unsuccessfully attempted to take over the Iraqi military camp of al-Rashid and liberate its communist prisoners. Another wave of Ba‘thist aggression was then unleashed upon Communists.⁸⁵

This violence also affected Assyrians. In response to an inquiry from the British Foreign Office regarding complaints from Assyrians in the diaspora about discriminatory practices faced by Iraqi Assyrians, the British embassy in Baghdad confirmed having heard reports that the National Guard and the army were searching the Assyrian quarter for communists, and in the process raping Assyrian women.⁸⁶

The more progressive elements within the Ba‘th Party criticized the level of violence used against Iraqi Communists by Ba‘th Party members and the National Guard.⁸⁷ They would have been concerned with the way in which these events reflected on their party within Iraq, as well as with regional and Western audiences. For instance, Michel ‘Aflaq, founder and secretary-general of the party, gave a speech on this subject on February 2, 1964, at the Extraordinary Congress of the Syrian Ba‘th.⁸⁸ Although this self-criticism was never officially or publically articulated beyond the Congress, it could have been the reason for

⁸⁵ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 985–8.

⁸⁶ FO 371/170509, July 11, 1963, “Dear Goodchild,” from R. W. Munro, British Embassy Baghdad, to D.L.N. Goodchild, Eastern Department, Foreign Office.

⁸⁷ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 990–1; Ismael, *Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, 109.

⁸⁸ Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, 991.

the public trials of communists that followed, discussed below. In its efforts to re-order society following Qasim's ouster, the Ba'ath regime attempted to legalize the violence and chaos experienced during the 1959 incidents in Mosul, and especially Kirkuk, and the massacres of Communists and their affiliates in 1963, which had extended to include Assyrian villages outside Mosul.

Court Record Summaries

I reviewed about twenty cases from the court-martial records. The cases illustrate how Communists, and especially Assyrians accused of being members of the ICP or an affiliate organization, were treated by the judicial system, while also revealing conceptions of ethnic differences and expectations of gender roles on the part of state institutions and society. Most cases involved more than one person. Those grouped together were accused of being members of a cell, or were connected through family relationships, friendships, employment in the same company or department, and so on. The largest case involved fourteen people. Not all of the accused within any given group received the same verdict, and some were released on bail or acquitted. Although most people in the same cell were usually Assyrians, some contained one or two individuals of a different religious or ethnic background. Moreover, almost all witnesses were neither Assyrian nor Christian. Most witnesses knew the accused in some capacity, generally having worked or lived in close proximity with them. A few court cases for Assyrian towns were listed in the records of the Iraqi National Library and Archives, but the files are missing.

The trials for which I have records took place in Baghdad and Kirkuk, the latter also including cases from Erbil. All of the accused were men, with the exception of two women. The accused were between twenty and sixty years of age, and they included students, teachers, Iraq Petroleum Company workers, a member of the military, and a housekeeper. The investigation for these cases began in March 1963, and the trials were scheduled between July 1963 and the end of the year. Most cases were completed in a matter of months, while others were followed in later years by processes of appeal. Charges issued usually included membership in the Iraq Communist Party, or an organization believed to be affiliated with it, including students' and women's unions, workers' and oil syndicates, and the People's Resistance, especially in Kirkuk. Acts considered to be incriminating included involvement in the 1959 Kirkuk crisis, the reading of a communist newspaper, owning illegal communist-related books, collecting membership fees for the Communist Party or any of its syndicates or affiliated organizations, talking about the Communist Party and inciting others to join it, and finally insulting the Ba'ath party, Nasser, or the Turanians—Turkomen pan-nationalists in Kirkuk.

The rest of this chapter focuses on two cases from Kirkuk—one involving a housewife who was also the branch president of the Iraqi Women's League, and the other involving four male employees at the IPC. Josephine Warda was convicted for her activism and membership within the Iraqi Women's League—an affiliate organization of the ICP—and for “causing chaos” in her community. In 1963, Warda was considered to have crossed gender, ethnic, and confessional

boundaries for an Assyrian Christian woman that were widely accepted in this turbulent period. For this and her membership within the League, Warda was sentenced to one year in prison. The four men were also accused of belonging to the Communist Party or one of its affiliated organizations. They were said to have caused chaos in their community through their political activism, and by highlighting their Assyrian identity. As a result of the increased mobility enabled by their political affiliation with the ICP and employment in the IPC, these men were deemed to have disrupted the established socio-economic order, heightening the fears of Arab nationalists by asserting their ethnic identity. Two of the four men were sentenced to five and two years in prison, where one died mysteriously while serving his sentence.

The Case of Josephine Warda

Josephine Warda was an Assyrian woman from Kirkuk who was the branch president of the Iraqi Women's League in the city. Largely due to the League's close association with the ICP, Warda was accused of being a Communist. Warda's case shares similarities with other cases of Kirkuki Assyrians in relation to its format and court regulations. As in many other cases, Warda's membership within the Communist Party was never established, but traces of personal animosity can be detected between her and a few of the witnesses against her. Moreover, her case allows for an ethno-sectarian analysis in the context of the "chaotic tide" of revolutionary Iraq. Warda's case is unique, in relation to the cases concerning males, in the gendered tone characterizing the testimonies of

witnesses and of Warda herself, and also in the guilty verdict issued by the court. The use of gender complicates the court-martial records of 1963, and allows one to examine the way in which Iraqi women, and specifically women associated with the Communist Party, were treated by the Iraqi courts, as well as to understand some of the attitudes towards women widely held by society during this period.

Though Warda admitted to being associated with the Iraqi Women's League, she rejected charges of communist affiliation; but the League's close association with the Communist Party cast doubt on Warda's case. In order to make sense of why such an association was made between a women's organization and the Communist Party, and the position of the Iraqi Women's League during this turbulent period, a short history of the Iraqi women's movement, and the League's position within it, will follow. This history enables Warda's actions to be placed in their historical context, starting from the 1940s.

A History of the Iraqi Women's Movement

In December 1944, female delegates of various Iraqi organizations concerned with issues relating to women and children, and to general societal welfare, attended the Cairo women's conference. Inspired by the conference's call for the formation of a women's organization in the Arab states, the participants founded the Iraqi Women's Union in 1945. The union was an amalgamation of the women's branches of five associations: the Red Crescent Society, the Child Protection Society, the Houses of the People Society, the Women's Temperance

and Social Welfare Society, and the Women's League Society.⁸⁹ Three members of each society became part of the executive council of the Iraqi Women's Union, until 1947, when the leftist Women's League Society was excluded following government attacks on leftist groups.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, this union quickly became a powerful medium for the advancement of Iraqi women's social, civil, and economic rights. Among its goals were the welfare of the family and society, and women's role in their elevation. In the 1950s, the union led the campaign for women's suffrage.⁹¹ Alongside a national aspiration for cooperation with other women's organizations, they also sought regional (mainly Arab) and global cooperation. This transnational approach was especially stressed in their support for Arab nationalist causes such as that of Palestinian national rights.⁹²

However, members of the Iraqi Women's Union were affiliated with the monarchical ruling class at the time.⁹³ The more revolutionary, younger women involved in the student movement were therefore drawn to Rabitat al-Difa' 'an Huquq al-Mar'a (the "League for the Defense of Women's Rights"), founded in 1952.⁹⁴ This organization, re-named Rabitat al-Mar'a al-'Iraqiyya (the "Iraqi Women's League"), was closely affiliated with the ICP, having as one of its founders and leader Naziha al-Dulaymi. Al-Dulaymi became a minister in

⁸⁹ Noga Efrati, "Competing Narratives: Histories of the Women's Movement in Iraq, 1910–58," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (2008): 456.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 557.

⁹¹ Noga Efrati, "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq: The Women's Movement in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2 (2004): 169.

⁹² Noga Efrati, "Competing Narratives," 557.

⁹³ Nadjé Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (University of California Press, 2008), 24–6.

⁹⁴ Noga Efrati, "The Other 'Awakening' in Iraq," 168.

Qasim's cabinet, elevating the positions of both the ICP and the League.⁹⁵ Female lawyers within the Iraqi Women's League, such as Naziha al-Dulaymi, were instrumental in changing women's legal status in Iraq. In 1959, with the support of Qasim's revolutionary government, "one of the most progressive family laws in the region" was passed.⁹⁶ Although still based on Shari'a principles, the law specified a new personal status code encompassing both Shi'i and Sunni men and women. Among other things, the code was more progressive in its interpretation than previous laws, giving women equal rights of inheritance, restricting polygamy and unilateral divorce, and requiring women's consent in marriage. Opposition to the personal status code, and specifically its inheritance provision, was instrumental in uniting Sunni and Shi'a religious authorities behind Arab nationalist rhetoric, leading them to support the Ba'athist coup against Qasim in 1963. As a result, the first measure taken by the Ba'athists was to revoke the inheritance provision of the 1959 personal status law.⁹⁷

Although Qasim's government supported the demands of the Iraqi Women's League for women's rights, this association was short lived. Demonstrations, violence, and ensuing conflict between Arab Nationalists and Communists escalated after the revolution. On one hand, some of this violence was clad in personal, ethno-sectarian, and socio-economic garb. On the other, changing gender roles including women's involvement in the public sphere during

⁹⁵ Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*, 26.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁷ Sara Pursley, "A Race against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945–63" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2012), 5.

the revolutionary period contributed to what opponents of the Qasimite regime would come to call the “chaotic tide.”

During this period, women were occupying an expanding social space situated between the private and public spheres.⁹⁸ Beginning in 1959, and especially after 1960, societal perceptions of the roles of men and women within the revolution were rigorously questioned, uncovering “deep divisions in Iraqi society over questions of sexual equality, family law, and women’s political activism.”⁹⁹ This resulted from two contentious items introduced by the Iraqi Women’s League: the 1959 personal status law—more specifically its equal inheritance clause—and the rural literacy program for women.¹⁰⁰ The government and anti-communist organizations, including the Ba‘th, believed that the literacy program intensified “social promiscuity,” endangering the country’s vulnerable political and economic sectors,¹⁰¹ primarily because of the difficulty of examining women’s activities associated with the literacy program. Women operated in ways that restricted both male and government surveillance. Since most women associated with this program were teachers, they offered lessons during their summer breaks, or in the evenings, in unused public school classrooms. Moreover, they relied on “existing female homosocial networks and

⁹⁸ Jacques Donzelot refers to this space as the “social.” Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Pantheon, 1979). For Sara Pursley’s conceptualization of the “social” in the revolutionary Iraqi context, see Pursley, “Race against Time,” 259.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 262–3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

rural modes of hospitality.”¹⁰² Finally, the program was funded by donations some of which came from international communist organizations.¹⁰³

In the midst of this contention, although Qasim realized that he needed the support of the ICP, he was wary of its influence on the masses and fearful of the mounting opposition to both the ICP and his own regime on the part of nationalists and conservatives.¹⁰⁴ As a result, Naziha al-Dulaymi, with two other communist sympathizers, was removed from his cabinet. These three individuals had been given ministerial positions to bring the ICP closer to the regime, and their removal in the winter of 1960 was followed by the closing down of organizations associated with the ICP—including the Iraqi Women’s League, which thereafter had to operate underground.¹⁰⁵

The association between the ICP, the Iraqi Women’s League, and an increasingly gendered political sphere complicated matters for Warda. Her personal conflict with a convincing witness during an especially tumultuous period in Iraqi history, and a gendered investigation and trial committed to reinstating the patriarchal order needed to restore the revolution, eventually led to her conviction.

¹⁰² Ibid., 305.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*, 28–9.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 154–5.

The Case

In February 1963, the investigation into the case of Josephine Warda, initiated by security officers in Kirkuk, concluded that there was enough evidence to accuse Warda of being a “dangerous communist,” and forwarded her case to the criminal courts.¹⁰⁶ Warda was a twenty-four-year-old housewife and mother of three children aged between two and seven.¹⁰⁷ She resided in Kirkuk with her family. Her husband, who is mentioned in the court record only briefly, appeared to be an employee of the IPC.¹⁰⁸

Numerous witnesses testified against Warda, including a few convicted communists. The witnesses accused Warda of being the president of the Iraqi Women’s League, of collecting membership fees on behalf of the League, and of handing out its publications, along with Communist ones. Some of them also believed she was a member of the ICP. The witnesses further raised questions regarding her reputation, marital fidelity, and the repercussions—both personal and organizational—of her actions on the community in which she lived. Communist witnesses were mainly brought in to establish her relationship, and by extension that of the League, with the ICP.

Warda’s problems with the law began in 1961, following a quarrel between her and Majīd, a twenty-five-year-old Sunni Muslim school teacher and

¹⁰⁶ Iraqi National Library and Archives (INLA), Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, 4206064/253, No. 963/45, February 19, 1963, “Honorable Judge of Investigation in Kirkuk,” 29/46.

¹⁰⁷ INLA, “The Honorable Military Judge for the Northern Region,” 38/56; INLA, March 27, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Josephine Warda,” 28/44 (numbers illegible).

¹⁰⁸ For instance, under her signature in INLA 38/56, it states that she lived in homes reserved for IPC employees.

one of the main witnesses in her case. This conflict led to what can be described as a vendetta with sectarian and gendered dimensions that lasted into 1963, leading to Warda's conviction. During this time Majīd testified against Warda twice, in 1961 and 1963—and, according to her, convinced other witnesses to testify against her as well.¹⁰⁹

Witness Testimonies

According to Majīd, the story began in 1961 at his in-laws' house. Warda lived near his in-laws, and would visit them often. After spending a night with his in-laws, Majīd woke up in the morning and stepped outside their door to find Warda standing with three women. Warda, in Majīd's testimony, was carrying magazines belonging to the League; she also held a piece of paper on which she had written the names of subscribers to this magazine. Warda was handing out copies of the magazine to subscribers, and also collecting funds. Majīd was not sure whether the funds had been given in exchange for the magazine, or were membership fees to the organization.¹¹⁰ The distinction was probably important, as it would alter the seriousness of the conviction. At this point, Majīd interfered, showing his dissatisfaction and stating: "You are a woman. Why are you committing such actions that are in conflict with a woman's role?" In clarification, he added: "[T]his is because the League was illegal at the time." According to the witness, Warda daringly responded: "I curse this time, this government and its president

¹⁰⁹ INLA, May 21, 1963 (date based on another document from the court), "Testimony of the Accused," given in court, 9/9.

¹¹⁰ INLA, March 26, 1963, "Testimony of Witness Majīd Ḥamīd," 28/39 (citation numbers not clear).

that has allowed you [plural] to speak to us [in this manner].” The witness described Warda as being bold, loud, and aggressive in her manner, which he took to mean that she was not only a member of the League, but of the Communist Party as well.¹¹¹ Majīd went directly to the authorities and testified against her.¹¹² Following his testimony, Warda was detained and her case forwarded to the courts-martial cases in Baghdad, according to Majīd.¹¹³

The use of the plural by Warda in addressing Majīd might suggest that the witness was himself politically motivated, perhaps belonging to the nationalist tendency. This cannot be confirmed from the court documents, but it provides an alternative explanation of the animosity between the witness and the accused. If, besides this personal conflict, the two individuals belonged to two different political tendencies—for example, Arab or Turkish nationalism and communism—one can understand why the relationship between them became so charged, and caused him to be determined to testify against her twice, in 1961 and 1963.

Furthermore, Warda’s house visits were in line with the League’s activities during the period. Under its slogan “Defending the Republic,” the League organized door-to-door campaigns, sending its members to Iraqi households to collect the signatures of women on issues of relevance to both the

¹¹¹ Ibid.; INLA, May 11, 1963, “Sworn Witness Testimony for Persecutor or Defense,” Testimony of Majīd Ḥamīd 9/13.

¹¹² Ibid.; Testimony of Majīd Ḥamīd 9/13.

¹¹³ INLA, 9/13.

ICP and the defense of the Iraqi republic. Through such activities, the League strived to politicize and educate Iraqi women.¹¹⁴

As the investigation against Warda proceeded, Majīd was supported in his testimony against Warda by his friend ‘Uthmān, a twenty-four-year-old production observer at the IPC, who was Warda’s neighbor and also a Sunni Muslim.¹¹⁵ ‘Uthmān recalled observing Warda in the neighborhood as she sold the League’s magazines. For example, he recounted an instance at the residence of Majīd’s father-in-law, stating that one day, while Majīd and ‘Uthmān were seated, Warda came into the residence and called Majīd’s sister-in-law, and began talking to her. After Warda had left, the two men inquired about the conversation, learning that Warda had been seeking donations on behalf of the League, and tried to recruit Majīd’s sister-in-law to join the League.¹¹⁶ Warda was maneuvering in this social space that temporarily allowed for a conversation uncensored by male surveillance between Warda and Majīd’s sister-in-law. These women exchanged a culturally acceptable form of hospitality, mingling as neighbors usually do at each other’s homes. But their conversations did not focus on their families or other accepted female topics, as far as Majīd, Uthmān, and the political elite were concerned. Warda was trying to recruit and politicize her neighbor’s daughter at a time when Qasim’s regime and the other Iraqi political parties had agreed to suspend political mobilization in order to establish a secure national space with

¹¹⁴ Pursley, “Race against Time,” 299.

¹¹⁵ INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of Witness ‘Uthmān Murād, 28/37. Majīd’s father-in-law was also his paternal uncle. Hence, one can assume that Majīd had been visiting his father-in-law/uncle for a long period of time, and had acquaintances such as ‘Uthmān, in his uncle’s neighborhood.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

room for modernization and development.¹¹⁷ By interacting with a Muslim neighbor, Warda, as an Assyrian Christian, was transgressing into a cross-sectarian space that had recently been inflamed by the memory of the 1959 Kirkuk incident.

In addition to gender, ethnic, and sectarian boundaries, Warda had defied culturally acceptable modes of behavior by interacting with men outside her family. ‘Uthmān raised questions about Warda’s morals while speculating on whether she was a Communist, since she always carried the ICP’s newspaper, *Ittihad al-Sha‘b*, and had relations with Mu’ayyad, a Communist whose home she had often visited.¹¹⁸ He also recalled that, in 1960, she had attended the League’s second conference in Baghdad, but returned from it angry with Qasim, because the president had not attended the conference. Predictably, according to ‘Uthmān, Warda was cursing the government and Qasim.¹¹⁹

The court tried to establish a connection between Warda and the ICP by admitting testimony from three convicted Communists. The men were questioned about the Communist women’s branch and the Party’s connection with the Iraqi Women’s League—and, more specifically, whether Warda was herself a Communist. The witnesses denied knowing whether she was an organized Communist or not. It was important for the investigators, however, to establish a connection between the League, its branch president, Warda, and the Communist Party, which would have enabled them to make further connections in the future.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 262.

¹¹⁸ INLA, 28/37, and INLA, May 11, 1963, “Sworn Witness Testimony for Prosecutor or Defense,” Testimony of ‘Uthmān Murād, 9/15.

¹¹⁹ INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of ‘Uthmān Murād, 28/37.

Warda's Testimony

In her own testimony Warda denied being a Communist, calling the party an anti-religious, atheist organization that went against her beliefs.¹²⁰ To stress this further, she referred back to her case in 1961, during which she was detained for cursing Qasim, “the criminal,” and also due to charges of Communist membership, of which she had been cleared and released on a 200-dinar bail.¹²¹ She continued her attacks on Qasim, stating: “I thank the Lord that ‘Abd al-Karīm Qasim was arrested. I am loyal to the blessed government of 14 Ramadan which saved us from the oppression [of Qasim’s rule] ... ”¹²²

Warda admitted to being a member of the Iraqi Women’s League, but played down her role in the organization. She denied collecting membership fees for the League or handing out its magazine to subscribers, stating that Majīd had only seen her carrying a personal copy of the magazine.¹²³ More significantly, she used accepted gender roles to defend her position in the League.¹²⁴ For instance, she claimed to have been nominated to attend the League’s second conference because she was a seamstress, an acceptable job for women, and one that she apparently carried out on the side while caring for her family as a housewife. She also claimed to have joined the League to learn “sewing, childcare and

¹²⁰ INLA, March 16, 1963, Testimony of the Accused Josephine Warda, to Nūrī al-Khayāt, Security investigator (in Kirkuk?), missing document and page numbers.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ INLA, March 27, 1963, Testimony of the Accused Josephine Warda, 28/44.

¹²⁴ Denize Kandiyoti, “Bargaining with Patriarchy,” *Gender & Society* 2: 3 (September 1, 1988): 274–90.

cleanliness,” clearly downplaying the League’s struggle for women’s rights.¹²⁵

Trying to normalize herself, she insisted: “I used to go to the League as any other women went to the League.”¹²⁶

The gendered nature of Warda’s trial relates to another reality of the Iraqi political arena. The client–patron relationships that had long defined the Iraqi political sphere were composed hierarchically, differentiating between various interest groups. Gender, ethno-sectarianism, and socio-economic differences were among the dividing elements that shaped this hierarchy. In Warda’s case, traces of these divisions appeared in the proceedings of the trial and the guilty verdict issued by the court on June 3, 1963:

It has been confirmed to the council on the basis of the proceedings that the accused Josephine Warda was the president of the Iraqi Women’s League [in Kirkuk] during the chaotic tide. The League was one of the fronts for the Communist Party. In addition she incited women to join the League and collected membership fees and donations illegally on its behalf. She also distributed the League’s magazines. Furthermore, with the support of the security directory of Kirkuk, it has been proved that she was responsible for causing disturbances and chaos in the community.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ INLA, March 27, 1963, second page of Warda’s testimony, 28/45.

¹²⁶ INLA, May 21, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused,” continuation of Warda’s testimony to the court, 9/10. The use of gender-accepted roles, such as sewing and childcare, by Warda during this period of extreme violence can be understood through Elizabeth Thompson’s notion of a “crisis of paternity.” Thompson argues that social, political, and economic problems after the First World War led to the “destabilization” of the patriarch’s authority, and to changing female roles. As a result of this destabilization, Syrian women negotiated with their patriarchy by adopting gender roles associated with patriotic motherhood in the 1930s. Women accepted conventional gender roles, including domestic responsibilities and charitable work, as their national duties. Thompson’s conceptualization seems appropriate for the Qasimite period of revolutionary Iraq. Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 6, 142.

¹²⁷ INLA, June 3, 1963, “Criminalization Decision,” issued by the court, 3/2.

The last sentence of the verdict proves that the court agreed with the way in which Majīd and ‘Uthman had represented Warda, holding her responsible for “causing disturbances and chaos in the community.” Warda had disrupted the patriarchal order through her increased political and social mobility as a member of the League, and probably also the ICP. Moreover, as an Assyrian Christian, she had crossed ethnic and sectarian boundaries that had recently been exacerbated by violent clashes in a newly urbanized oil city.

Contributing to the “chaotic tide” that came to define the Qasimite regime, a “marriage crisis” was elevated partly due to Iraq’s small population, which was believed to be detrimental to the country’s economic development and military defense.¹²⁸ The “marriage crisis” in turn aroused interest in issues concerning women, children, and singlehood, the last being associated with mental and sexual disturbances. Both of these crises, of marriage and singlehood, were closely linked to “discourses of excessive mobility, disorder and ungovernability of non-marital interpersonal relationships in Iraq.”¹²⁹

During Qasimite rule the political elites had tried to reinstate their own patriarchal control over the nationalist movement. One way to accomplish this was through the political immobilization of various segments of the population, an objective shared by most political parties. The League clearly defied this accepted political bargain by refusing to immobilize its members and political activities. As a consequence, its literacy program was shut down, and opposition

¹²⁸ Pursley, “Race against Time,” 284.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

began to form against the personal status law, for which the League had petitioned. The proceedings of Warda's trial present an example of the repercussions experienced by a member of the League shortly after the 1963 coup. Warda's excessive mobility in the neighborhood on behalf of the League invoked the disapproval of her male neighbors. Warda was not only aiming to politicize women in her neighborhood, but also soliciting these women's attention in a social medium that was semi-closed to men. In this uncontrolled social space whose accepted activities included neighborly conversations at each other's door or home visits, Warda would approach her female (Muslim) neighbors, perhaps while sewing clothes for them, and in the process try to politicize them by asking them to join the League, collecting donations, and distributing reading material. Warda's actions, as far as her accusers were concerned, were disturbing, and caused chaos in the neighborhood. As an Assyrian Christian woman, she also crossed ethnic and sectarian boundaries insistently asserted during this chaotic period, and entered into inappropriate relations with men. Her political mobility resembled that of her community; Warda's activism was possible because of the emergence of a political space enabling communities such as the Assyrians and women to become empowered through alignment with the Communist Party.

Finally, Warda identified the personal animosity between her and Majīd as the root cause of her current predicament.¹³⁰ When asked about the causes of this animosity, she identified her reputation as the issue.¹³¹ Majīd suspected, wrongly

¹³⁰ INLA, May 21, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused," beginning of Warda's testimony to the court, 9/9.

¹³¹ INLA, March 27, 1963, second page of Warda's testimony, 28/45.

according to Warda, that a “dishonorable relationship” existed between her and Mu’ayyad because she would visit his house.¹³² ‘Uthmān brought this relationship up in his testimony, and alluded to Mu’ayyad also being a Communist.¹³³ In his testimony, Mu’ayyad rejected accusations of an affair between himself and Warda, and stated that she had visited his home because she was a neighbor, and his family used her services as a seamstress.¹³⁴ It is not clear what kind of relationship existed between Mu’ayyad and Warda. What is revealing is the way her reputation became an issue in a criminal investigation, where it was both implicitly and explicitly questioned, almost as much as her political involvement in these two organizations. It is interesting to note that Ba‘thists had been accusing Communists of destroying the family structure and promoting the sexual promiscuity of European communists during this period. Since both Warda and Mu’ayyad stood charged as Communists, such accusations would have seemed appropriate. According to Warda, Majīd had also insulted her physical appearance, calling her a skeleton. Following the guilty verdict, the court-martial sentenced Warda on June 4, 1963. According to article 3/13 Q. ‘A. B Warda was to be imprisoned for one year under a “simple sentence.” Her detention period would be counted towards that year.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ INLA, March 26, 1963, Testimony of Witness ‘Uthmān Murād, 28/37.

¹³⁴ INLA, May 11, 1963, “Sworn Witness Testimony for Persecutor,” Testimony of Mu’ayyad Shukrī, 9/16.

The Case of Barkhū and His Colleagues

The case of these four men shared many elements with that of Warda, though in general it was more representative of the cases involving Assyrian men affiliated with the ICP. Where Warda's case had been preoccupied with the issue of her gender, Barkhū's case focused on his ethnic identity, and questioned his status as an Iraqi. Barkhū and his three colleagues were employees of the Iraq Petroleum Company and residents of Kirkuk. They were accused of being members of the ICP and its closely associated militia, the People's Resistance. Barkhū was a twenty-nine-year-old electrician with a leadership role of some kind in his department.¹³⁵ Bābājān was twenty-one, worked as an electrician in the same department, and was also a bandage-dresser at the IPC hospital.¹³⁶ The two Sahakians were father and son; the father was a forty-seven-year-old stock clerk at the IPC,¹³⁷ while his son was a twenty-seven-year-old employee of the electrical department.¹³⁸

The investigation was initiated on March 4, 1963, with the questioning of seven witnesses, most of whom were employed in the electrical department of the IPC, while some held positions in its hospital. The witnesses accused their colleagues of being members of both the People's Resistance and the Communist

¹³⁵ INLA, 79/122.

¹³⁶ INLA, 79/122, April 16, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused Gharīb Bābājān," 79/121; INLA 72/107.

¹³⁷ INLA, March 5, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused John Sahakian," 79/124.

¹³⁸ INLA, March 5, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused Farīsh John Sahakian," 79/123.

Party.¹³⁹ Following these reports, the men were arrested according to article 12/31 Q. 'A.B.¹⁴⁰

On March 5, 1963, the four accused men were questioned in turn. All men were asked whether they were members of the Communist Party, whether they owned a firearm, whether they had participated in the 1959 Kirkuk crisis, and whether they had insulted Ba'athists, Nasser, or Turanians. In their responses the accused men declined being members of the Communist Party, owning firearms, and having insulting the Ba'athists, Nasser, or the Turanians. Each also denied participating in the violent events of 1959, Barkhū claiming he had been in Baghdad vacationing with his family during that week. They were asked whether they had any animosity towards the witnesses, or could suggest reasons for such accusations being made against them. The Sahakians were surprised by these accusations; Barkhū believed that the senior position he held in the department was the root cause of the resentment; and Bābājān questioned the idea that membership in the People's Resistance was assumed to include membership in the Communist Party:

I joined the People's Resistance without being a Communist. My purpose [in joining] was patriotic (waṭanī). I did not know that every Resistor (Muqawim Sha'bī) becomes [identified as a] communist. No one [asked me] to become a Communist. I did not commit any crimes, and these accusations against me are not true ...¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ INLA, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, No. 963/196, March 4, 1963, "To the Honorable Investigation Judge of Kirkuk," 78/119.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ INLA, March 5, 1963, "Testimony of the Accused Gharīb Bābājān," 79/121.

The house search did not yield any evidence of prohibited items, whether firearms or an illegal press.¹⁴² On March 16, 1963, the Investigation Committee forwarded the cases to the military court of the northern region.¹⁴³ The report indicated that there was incriminating evidence against Barkhū, Bābājān, and Sahakian junior for acts committed during the “chaotic tide.” They would continue to be detained, and their case would be forwarded for further investigation. It was determined, however, that not enough evidence was available on Sahakian senior, and he was released on bail of 500 dinars.

The three remaining men—Barkhū, Bābājān, and Sahakian junior—were questioned further, along with the witnesses. Sahakian junior still denied being part of the ICP or any related organization.¹⁴⁴ Barkhū denied being part of the ICP, but admitted to collecting membership funds for the Workers’ Syndicate,¹⁴⁵ and to being a member of the People’s Resistance, though he had carried arms only during practice. He had joined the People’s Resistance with a large number of people out of a patriotic commitment to defending the nation. Bābājān continued to avow his membership in the People’s Resistance, but not the ICP.¹⁴⁶ Witnesses had testified that he had distributed ICP newspapers to patients at the hospital; Bābājān claimed he had only distributed newspapers given to him by the company

¹⁴² INLA, March 5, 1963, “Record of Release,” 79/120.

¹⁴³ INLA, March 3, 1963, “Case Transfers,” from Muhammad ‘Alī Bandar, head of the Investigation Committee in Kirkuk, to the Honorable General Military Judge for the Northern Region, 74/111.

¹⁴⁴ INLA, April 4, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Farīsh John Sahakian,” 72/106.

¹⁴⁵ INLA, April 16, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Aprim Barkhū,” 72/108.

¹⁴⁶ INLA, April 16, 1963, “Testimony of the Accused Gharīb Bābājān,” 72/107.

On July 15, 1963, the fourth court-martial in Kirkuk was formed, issuing a guilty verdict that declared:

1. Barkhū was part of People's Resistance and carried an armed gun during the chaotic tide. He insulted the Ba' th party and Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir. He collected memberships for the Worker's Union. He attacked all nationalists, and supported the Kurdish rebellion. He claimed to be a descendant of the Sumerians [or an Assyrian]. [Note: witnesses made this accusation, Barkhū did not provide a clarification]. Therefore article 12/31 from Q 'A B applies to his actions and he will be tried according to it.
2. It has been proved to the court that Bābājān was part of the People's Resistance. He distributed Communist newspapers to the sick at the Iraq Petroleum Company's hospital. Therefore article 12/31 from Q 'A B applies to his actions and he will be tried according to it.
3. Sahakian Junior used to carry a weapon in his private car [during] night patrols under pressure from the People's Resistance. Due to the lack of evidence against him, the court has decided to release him according to article 155 and [illegible] the bail, which was taken from him.¹⁴⁷

As a result, Barkhū was sentenced to five years of hard labor, plus one year of parole following the completion of his sentence, and Bābājān was sentenced to two years of hard labor and one year of parole. The sentences were carried out in Suleiman prison.

In 1964 and 1965 the Ministry of Justice apparently reinvestigated some Communist Party members and sympathizers. These crimes became known as "crimes of intellect." In Barkhū's case, an appeal initiated by his wife was denied in 1964 by the Investigation body for the Martial Law Cases, although recommendations to reduce his sentence were advanced by the Ministry of

¹⁴⁷ INLA, July 15, 1963, "Criminalization Decision," issued by members of the Fourth Military Court-Martial, headed by Colonel Aḥmed al-Khawja, 15/17.

Defense.¹⁴⁸ The appeal appears to have been raised again in 1965, which appears to have triggered further negative consequences, as a new investigation into his citizenship was now requested. The report issued an inquiry into Barkhū's citizenship, specifying that, if he had acquired Iraqi citizenship through naturalization instead of birth, he should be sent back to his country of birth upon the completion of his sentence.¹⁴⁹ On April 29, 1965, Barkhū was proclaimed dead in Al-Dīwāniyya hospital.¹⁵⁰ No cause of death was specified, and the case was closed.

Through these court cases, it is possible to witness the experience of ordinary individuals within a broad societal conflict. In the Kirkuki cases, the accused had crossed ethno-religious, gender, and ideological boundaries. The case of Barkhū brought into question the "Iraqiness" of Assyrians, triggering an inquiry into his citizenship, and specifically tested how the new political elites would deal with the identity of Assyrians, whose claim of descent from ancient Mesopotamians was included as incriminating evidence by the fourth court-martial. The subsequent sentencing of various Assyrians in Kirkuk offers an example of this patriarchal socio-political system correcting itself. As members of an ethno-religious minority, some of these Assyrian men and women benefited from the new political and economic opportunities available to them. Some, such

¹⁴⁸ INLA, June 12, 1965, "Auditing Body for Martial Law Cases," issued by members of the Auditing Body for Martial Law Cases, headed by Judge Ibrāhīm Waṣfī Rafīq, 21/23.

¹⁴⁹ INLA, December 12, 1964, "File Number: 63/196," from the General Military Judge Muhammad Nafi' Aḥmed, Ministry of Defense, to the Forth Military Court-Martial, 28/31.

¹⁵⁰ INLA, May 2, 1965, "Wireless Telegram," from Selmān Prison, to General Prisons, 2/2.

as Barkhū, held positions of leadership within the IPC, while others joined the ICP or its affiliated organizations. Members of these organizations were visible in the Kirkuki public sphere and, together with the Communist Party, were held responsible for the 1959 incident in the city. These men and women had contributed to the “chaotic tide” by crossing ethnic and confessional boundaries and claiming a degree of citizenship not available to members of their community. In addition to their political mobilization, some were accused of highlighting their Assyrian identity in a way that inadvertently exacerbated Arab nationalist fears of being further sidelined by the Qasimite regime.¹⁵¹

The cases of Assyrian men and women would have had numerous similarities with those of Iraqis of other ethno-religious backgrounds. Although many of the accused would have been Communists, or members of an affiliate organization, false accusations motivated by personal grudges, as well as by gender, socio-economic, and ethno-sectarian differences, were also possible, as we saw earlier. Further analysis of court-martial trials and of the history of early Ba‘thist rule is needed to deepen our understanding of this under-examined period in Iraqi history.

Conclusion

Assyrians in the second half of the twentieth century were attracted to the ICP, as well as to organizations closely associated with it. Urban Assyrians were exposed

¹⁵¹ INLA, Ministry of Defense, Fourth Military Court-Martial, No. 963/196, March 4, 1963, “To the Honorable Investigation Judge of Kirkuk,” 78/119; INLA, July 15, 1963, “Criminalization Decision,” issued by members of the Fourth Military Court-Martial, headed by Colonel Aḥmed al-Khawja, 15/17.

to political ideologies that appealed to various segments of the Iraqi population through common experiences in mixed neighborhoods, schools, and places of employment. Assyrians associated with the ICP negotiated the ethno-religious and socio-economic grievances they encountered, either as a community or individually, within the larger Iraqi context. The ICP's emphasis on socio-economic issues, secularism, and minority rights especially appealed to the Assyrian community.

Following the toppling of Qasim in 1963, violence erupted in the country as thousands of Communists and their sympathizers were arrested and killed. The Assyrian community also suffered, as British sources and Iraqi court records indicate. According to A.Q., who was also imprisoned in 1963, many Assyrians were interrogated and temporarily imprisoned. Out of 500 convicted Kirkukis, one hundred were Assyrian. If the Kurdish farmers from beyond Kirkuk are included, the number of prisoners in Kirkuk increases to 1,500.¹⁵² Not all of those arrested were Communists. Membership in an ICP-affiliated organization, personal grudges, and differences based on socio-economic, ethno-religious and gender roles, also motivated people to testify against each other.

In Kirkuk, all alleged Communists were questioned and eventually tried on the basis of their involvement in the 1959 Kirkuk crisis. Accusations of being anti-Ba'athist and anti-Nasserite were to be expected, but in Kirkuk the charge of being anti-Turanian was also added, emphasizing the alliance between conservatives and Arab and Turkomen nationalists. By 1963, this pointed to the

¹⁵² A.Q. interviewed by author.

enduring memory of the July 1959 crisis, and the ethno-sectarian divisions in Kirkuk during that period.

In 1963, Arab nationalist leaders proceeded to reclaim the Iraqi socio-political space from leftists and Communists the Qasimite regime had supported. The representation of Qasimite rule as the “chaotic tide” signified the chaos exacerbating a crisis of paternity, which resulted not only from the overshadowing of Arab nationalists by leftists and Communists but also from the “chaotic” imaginations these groups had for this new Iraqi socio-political space.

The “marriage crisis” allegedly increased promiscuity and adversely affected both traditional family relations and the modernization project intended for Iraq. Together with the marriage crisis, the activities of the Iraqi Women’s League threatened the revolution and the modernization project that the Ba‘thists and nationalists had worked hard to achieve. Women of the League not only ignored calls to cease political activities for the sake of the revolution, but threatened male authority with their excessive mobility, political campaigning, and social programs such as the literacy project for peasant women and the personal status law. Conservatives and Ba‘thists joined forces to halt the literacy program while Qasim was still in power. Following his toppling, the Ba‘thists reasserted their patriarchal control over Iraq’s political space by amending the personal status law, specifically in relation to its equal-inheritance provision.

This new political space, like those that had preceded it, was not equal for all. The various communities were ranked according to a hierarchy segregating citizenship on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. The

1963 coup corrected this disruption that the Qasimite regime had failed to harness—mainly leftist and communist groups, and their affiliates. Minorities and women in general, and especially in Kirkuk, operated under the umbrella of the Communist Party and organizations closely linked to it: the Iraqi Women's League, the Worker's Union, student and youth organizations, and the People's Resistance.

Kirkuk's rapid economic and urban development, resulting from the discovery of oil, exponentially increased its population. As new communities flocked to this new urban space in search of employment the demographic makeup of the city changed in favor of newer migrant communities coming from the rural surroundings of the city. Novel political affiliations and employment at the IPC empowered some of these communities by increasing their political or economic mobility. The Assyrians benefited from employment at the IPC, and some held positions of leadership within it, but their association with the IPC was not without complications. The Assyrians, like the Kurds, were attracted to the IPC, within which they formed unions, organized strikes, and mobilized politically in the new space that development had opened up. Their activities disrupted the existing patriarchal order, igniting socio-economic tensions and an associated gender crisis.

These trials and convictions had severe consequences for the Assyrian community. In cities, the families of the arrested would have been devastated. Barkhū's wife appealed the case of her husband years after his conviction and imprisonment. Warda, recalling her three young children who needed her, pleaded

with the court to release her. Moreover, although Assyrians were arrested for a variety of reasons, the fact that some cases involved personal conflicts and identity issues would have caused the community to feel targeted. This impression is reinforced by complaints from the Assyrian community in England to British officials about the treatment of Iraqi Assyrians in 1963.

Although the British investigation focused mainly on Baghdad, the court cases, ICP publications, and oral interviews indicate that Assyrians in Kirkuk and other areas also felt threatened. For instance, on June 30, 1963, the army and the Juhūsh forces, Kurdish militia affiliated with the state, advanced towards Alqosh, threatening to attack it. The residents escaped to Alqosh's mountain, and were saved by Communist forces, some of whom were probably Alqoshis and Assyrians from neighboring villages.¹⁵³ On July 2, executions were carried out of six of the eight Telkaifi men sentenced in 1959, with their families and townspeople forced to watch. According to ICP reports, a campaign of terror ensued when friends and family members of the executed men were arrested, including the religious figures who presided over the burial ceremonies.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile, in Alqosh, the National Guard planned a second attack on 9 July—this time equipped with artillery and tanks. The intention appears to have been the arrest of Communists and their families—but Alqoshi residents were attacked and injured, and two elderly men killed. During the battle a number of Communist Alqoshis died as well. Some of their bodies, and those of others killed in similar

¹⁵³ *Shuhadā' Al-Hizb, Shuhadā' Al-Waṭan: Shuhadā' Al-Hizb Al-Shuyū'ī Al-Irāqī, 1934–1963*, 344.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 300–4.

battles that year, were eventually transported to the martyrs' cemetery in Saint Hormizd monastery, a seventh-century religious and cultural site that is of significance to both Alqoshis and Assyrians. This indicates that the townspeople did not think of these slaughtered men only as politically motivated individuals who were members of the Communist Party, but also took pride in them as Alqoshi community members, commemorating their deaths by burying them in one of the community's most sacred places.¹⁵⁵

Whether such attacks on Assyrian villages were isolated incidents or a common practice affecting other communities as well, given that they were combined with the arrests of Assyrians in urban centers and attacks on some Assyrian quarters, it is reasonable to assume that the community would have felt threatened. It seems that, in certain cases, and when the attacks extended to majority Assyrian villages, the Assyrians were being targeted as a community, whereas in others they were tried narrowly on the basis on their activism within the Communist Party and its affiliated organizations. Regardless of the aftermath of the 1963 coup, membership of Assyrians within the Communist Party should not be limited to communal interpretations only, although it was an indication of their interest in being better integrated within Iraq. Ironically, due to their association with the ICP, the Assyrians instead felt isolated and targeted after the 1963 coup.

At the state level, the trials highlight the level of internal dissatisfaction on the part of the more progressive elements within the Ba' th Party, who criticized

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 344–6; Tūmās, “Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (4).”

the intense violence used by their party members. The public trials may therefore have represented the Party's attempt to appease its dissatisfied members and show Iraqis and the world that the new regime was committed to the rule of law. Whether the trials achieved this end in practice is another question. Since there was room for appeal against convictions on "crimes of intellect" following the ousting of the Ba'athists from power in November 1963, it seems that the new regime was concerned with its public image as well.

3. Beyond the Kurdish Nationalist Lens: The Role of Assyrians and Communists in the Kurdish Uprising (1961–1975)

In 1960, Margaret George, a twenty-year-old Assyrian woman, joined the Kurdish uprising and became one of its most iconic figures.¹ In this contested space, temporarily carved out by the Iraqi opposition, she was empowered—like the Assyrian community to which she belonged—and allowed to operate outside her gender constraints, relying on “new forms of oppositional agency.”² George became the first female *peshmerga* (“freedom fighter”) and commander, and was especially well known for her success in the Zāwīta Valley mission.³ Photos of her in military clothing bearing arms, having circulated in Iraq, eventually reached Europe, offering a romanticized image of the Kurdish movement. It is said that the price placed on her head by the Iraqi regime was higher than that placed on Mulla Muṣṭafa Barzānī’s.⁴

¹ Mirella Galletic, “Western Images of the Woman’s role in Kurdish Society,” in *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, ed. Shahrzad Mojab (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2001), 217.

² For a similar analysis of Palestinian female activism within ambiguous spaces, see Rajeswari Mohan, “Loving Palestine,” *Interventions* 1: 1 (October 23, 1998): 54.

³ Information was retrieved on April 10, 2008, from the “Assyrian Information Medium Exchange.” Link to this website is no longer active.

⁴ Galletic, “Western Images of the Woman’s Role,” 217. In 1963, I.I., as a student at the University of Baghdad, recalled Kurdish men selling her picture for ten dinars. This, combined with her popularity in Europe, supports the international propaganda argument for which the Assyrians were utilized. It is further endorsed by the example of Dana Adams Schmidt, an American journalist who was invited by Barzānī to northern Iraq in 1962. Schmidt included a picture of George in his book, *Journey Among Brave Men*, and claimed that he acquired it from a

Myths and folk songs about Margaret, referred to as the “Joan of Arc of Kurdistan,”⁵ and the “Second Shamiram,” still circulate widely among Iraqi Kurds and Assyrians. She came to represent a symbol of gender equality in the Kurdish north, yet Martin van Bruinessen suggests that people failed to acknowledge that she was not Kurdish, but Assyrian; in fact, “Kurdish husbands and fathers did not allow their womenfolk to follow in Margaret’s tracks.”⁶ Margaret George, as an Assyrian, and despite her gender, had found empowerment in this extraneous space resulting from the civil war. Although her chosen path was very controversial, she was still respected as a symbol of resistance, and is remembered in the following verse:⁷

*Tālakh Maggie gabartā
 Khzīlā ahā mātākhe tlekhṭā
 Melatakhe Atūraytā
 ʿedyūm peshlā d-lā betā*

Come, oh great Maggie
 Behold your destroyed village
 Your Assyrian Nation
 Became homeless today

peshmerga who was carrying it in his pocket. I.I. phone interview with author, Chicago, Illinois, November 14, 2011; Dana Schmidt, *Journey among Brave Men* (Boston: Little Brown, 1964), 140–1.

⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, “From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History,” in Mojab, *Women of a Non-State Nation*, 105; Christine Allison, “Folklore and Fantasy: The Presentation of Women in Kurdish Oral Tradition,” in Mojab, *Women of a Non-State Nation*, 186.

⁶ van Bruinessen, “From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana,” 105.

⁷ Verse retrieved from Assyrian Voice Net (www.avn.net), Assyrian culture sub-forum, thread entitled “Any info about Margaret George?” posted April 8, 2008.

Yet her life, and especially her death, are very controversial, and numerous conflicting interpretations exist revolving around her militancy, her sexuality, and the events leading to her murder in 1969. Whereas militant women struggle with issues of representation—especially those grappling with the political interests of the group they represent and their personal position as women enmeshed within a patriarchal order—Margaret George has no voice of her own.⁸ She left no memoirs, and her personal letters to other activists were destroyed. Instead, various groups competed to represent George’s memory, each trying to frame her in ways that were beneficial to the construction of their own historical memory and interpretations of the past. The power of memory at play here points to the existence of divergent narratives within the Kurdish uprising that George maneuvered around. These collective memories were “formed by social, economic, and political circumstances; by beliefs and values; by opposition and resistance.” They involved cultural norms and issues of authenticity, identity, and power.⁹ Social or historical memory could be negotiated, contested, forgotten, suppressed, recovered, revised, invented, or reinvented. It could also be cumulative, persistent, and highly resistant to efforts at revision.¹⁰ Margaret George’s life illuminates the role of Assyrians within the Kurdish movement, while also leaving room for a gendered analysis.

⁸ In the 1960s and 1970s, Palestinian activist Leila Khaled attempted two hijackings of airplanes in an effort to focus world attention on the Palestinian cause. On issues of representation for Khaled, see Mohan, “Loving Palestine,” 54.

⁹ Maria Cattell and Jacob Climo, “Introduction: Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives,” in *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Maria Cattell and Jacob Climo (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2002), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

The Kurdish opposition, beginning in 1961 and continuing throughout the rest of the twentieth century, should not be viewed simply through a nationalist lens. Though the Kurdish resistance has constituted a significant portion of the political opposition against the Iraqi state in the north, Iraqi communists and Assyrians of various affiliations were important actors, and are central to an understanding of the history of the uprising. Women like George, and Assyrians in general, found agency within this space controlled by the opposition. Assyrian tribal leaders, often under the influence of Assyrian political organizations operating in Iraq and internationally, became essential to the Kurdish leadership. Assyrians were important in providing *peshmerga* fighters (either willingly or under pressure), and also for their role in the regional and Western foreign relations campaign needed to generate humanitarian, financial, and military support for the opposition. During this period, segments of the Assyrian community had been urbanized, and thus exposed to the vibrant educational and intellectual milieu existing in various Iraqi cities. A secular class of Assyrian intellectuals had been in gestation for most of the twentieth century, and earlier in certain areas. Individuals within this class joined the traditional leaders present in northern Assyrian towns and villages. Added to this mix were Assyrian members of the ICP who were active in northern Iraq, especially following the 1963 coup. Assyrian intellectuals, unable to organize officially under Qasim, moved to the north to re-established Kheith Kheith Allap II (Assyrian Unity and Freedom) in 1961, extending their influence over Assyrian tribal leaders. The Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA), founded by Iranian Assyrians in 1968, used their

connections with the Iranian parliament and among the Western powers entangled in Cold War politics to raise awareness and support for the Kurdish cause, and to ensure Assyrians their share. The communists joined the mix of actors after losing their foothold in central Iraqi cities following the toppling of Qasim. Assyrian communists, often fleeing the Iraqi authorities, moved back to the northern provinces in 1963. These men and women became intertwined in communist, Assyrian, and Kurdish groups.

Within this space, Assyrians were able to gain attention for their concerns, engaging with both the leadership of the Iraqi opposition and foreign regimes. More importantly, this association eventually led to competition between Iraq's opposition forces, particularly the ICP and KDP, who vied for the allegiance of the Assyrian community to increase their political power and influence within the political sphere. In the early 1970s, the role of the Assyrians within the opposition would provide the impetus for the positive policies towards the community enacted by the Ba'ath regime. These alignments and policies were not without repercussions for the regime, as this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

Assyrian villages were beginning to be destroyed during this conflict, beginning in the 1960s, due to infighting between opposition groups and between the opposition and the Iraqi government. As villagers lost their homes and livelihoods, Assyrians began the first of numerous rural–urban migrations. Kurds eventually resettled many of the abandoned villages, and the Assyrians later found it difficult to reclaim their lands. Finally, women were actors in this narrative, but those choosing to lead non-conventional lifestyles faced numerous challenges.

In addition to Ba‘thist and U.S. archives and memoirs, this chapter relies on oral interviews, as other sources on this segment of the population are scarce. Most Assyrians who were involved in the Kurdish uprisings left behind no memoirs or other records; and literature on the Kurdish opposition focuses mainly on the Kurds, taking no account of the intricacy of the northern opposition, which involved Assyrians.

Assyrians and the Kurdish Uprising, 1961–1963

Qasim, like leaders of other post-colonial states in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, initiated strategies of state centralization. This process often spurred ethnic violence, and Iraq’s Kurdish minority were no exception.¹¹ Violence resulted partly from strategies employed by these post-colonial leaders, which “stripped landowning elites, tribes and ethnic minorities of social privileges and corporate status in the name of socioeconomic equality, modernization and national unity.”¹² While undermining the power of Kurdish tribal elites with his land reforms, Qasim established links with Barzānī and invited him back from exile in an effort to win over the Kurdish community.¹³ According to Rubin, the Kurds were “united neither by class interests nor by political allegiances;” but all segments of Kurdish society—tribal leaders, peasants, nationalists, and communists—distrusted the Iraqi state.¹⁴ While some Kurds embraced

¹¹ A. Rubin, “Abd Al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq: Centralization, Resistance and Revolt, 1958–63,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 43: 3 (2007): 345.

¹² *Ibid.*, 354.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 357.

communism because of the ICP's emphasis on egalitarianism, others, like those in the KDP and certain tribal leaders, wanted instead to secure their own interests through Kurdish autonomy.¹⁵

As we saw in the previous chapter, tensions between Qasim's supporters and his pan-Arabist opponents escalated in March 1959, as colonel Abd al-Wahhāb Shawwāf began attacking Qasim's regime and accusing him of subjugating Iraq to "foreign control." Meanwhile, Shawwāf's army and supporters began attacking communists and Christians, aided on March 9 by the Arab Shammār tribe.¹⁶ At the conclusion of this violence, on March 11, between 200 and 5,000 Iraqis were killed.¹⁷ Following this event, Qasim's relations with the ICP and Barzānī improved. The president allotted one thousand machine guns and ammunition to Barzānī and his followers in April, so that they could protect Qasim against his pan-Arabist opponents. Unfortunately, this ammunition would be used by Barzānī to suppress rival Kurdish tribes that refused to accept his own authority or that of KDP, with which he was closely associated.¹⁸

Qasim's patronage of Barzānī deepened the sense of disenfranchisement felt by Kurdish tribal leaders, who were already disgruntled about Qasim's land redistribution policy. The tribes felt that Qasim wanted to impose the "one-man-rule of an 'outsider' [i.e., Barzānī] upon their disparate spheres of influence."¹⁹ The Zībārī, Dīāzī, Aku, Surchī, and Harkī tribes felt especially threatened, as they

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 361, see also Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 362.

had distanced themselves from the Barzānīs in the 1940s as a result of Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī's anti-monarchical opposition, and his role in the short-lived Kurdish state in Iran. When Maḥmūd Zībārī was murdered in 1959 by Barzānī's affiliates, Kurdish tribal leaders either escaped to neighboring countries or began seeking protection from Qasim. Qasim complied, hoping to avoid unrest between the rival tribes, which was attracting foreign interest and interference. To neutralize the conflict, Qasim supplied the Zībārīs with arms in April 1960, and competed with Barzānī for the loyalty of the Kurdish tribes.²⁰

According to Rubin, by the summer of 1961 there was still no unified Kurdish separatist movement that could campaign for autonomy, since power in Iraqi Kurdistan was concentrated within Barzānī's tribe and those of his rivals, not among "urban intellectuals and professionals."²¹ The conflict escalated in July 1961, when the Iraqi government was preoccupied with the Kuwait crisis. As described above, Qasim called for the incorporation of Kuwait into Iraq after Kuwait's independence was granted. This prompted Britain, followed by the Arab League, to mobilize their forces against the Iraqis in protection of Kuwait.²² Taking advantage of this, the Barzānīs burned Zībārī and Rikānī villages, forcing thousands to flee to Iran and Turkey, or to central Iraqi towns. Qasim retaliated in September 1961 by bombing Kurdish towns and villages. The president's actions contributed to the cycle of violence, which had reached a stalemate between the

²⁰ Ibid., 365.

²¹ Ibid., 367.

²² Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 160–1.

Iraqi government, the Kurdish tribes aligned with it, and the Barzānīs. This state of affairs in the northern provinces persisted until the toppling of Qasim in 1963.²³

The Assyrians initially had a lesser role in this conflict, due to their smaller numbers and inability to garner outside support. They were also less likely to join the anti-government opposition, because of the positive relations established between Qasim and the Assyrian community in urban centers. Moreover, Communist Assyrians were supportive of Qasim, though wary of his policies. In 1961 this framework became further complicated when Muṣṭafa Barzānī began recruiting Assyrians to his cause on the eve of the coming civil war—including Margart George’s father.

In the Barwar region, Barzānī’s message to the Assyrians was forceful and firm: “Join the movement or yield weapons for the movement.”²⁴ B.I., a man from an important household of religious elites with political influence in Barwar, was either present at or had firsthand knowledge of important meetings and conversations. He reveals that Assyrians in this region were uncertain which side to join, the government, or that of Muṣṭafa Barzānī.²⁵ In 1961 the Assyrians, along with the Kurds, supported the governor of Barwar, Muḥsin Bek, who was aligned with the Iraqi authorities. A militia of 500 pro-government Assyrians and Kurds from the region of Barwar was assembled, but eventually had to surrender to Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī. The government had sent this militia a message

²³ Rubin, “Abd Al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq,” 368–76.

²⁴ Sargon Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining: Illuminating Scaled Suffering and a Hierarchy of Genocide from Simele to Anfal” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 87.

²⁵ B.I., interviewed by author in Duhok—informant lives in Barwar, Iraq, December 20, 2011.

informing them that Turkey would support them, but the message was not received in time.²⁶

The news of the surrender of the Barwari Assyrians was delivered to Barzānī by Margaret George's father. In turn, Margaret George, the Assyrian *peşmerga* fighter aligned with Mullah Muşţafa Barzānī, escorted Māri Yahb' Alāhā to see the Kurdish leader. Relations were established between the bishop and the Kurdish leader thereafter, delivering Barwar's loyalty to Barzānī. But the Assyrians had placed themselves in a strategic position: by aligning with Barzānī, they might benefit from the support Barzānī had garnered from outside sources; but in struggling alongside the Kurds, they would be able to negotiate for additional rights either from the central government, once a peace treaty had been signed, or from the Kurdish leadership, in the event that the latter won greater administrative autonomy.

Assyrians who chose to remain neutral, on the other hand, suffered the consequences. The heavily populated Assyrian region of 'Amediyya-Duhok "passed from Barzānī to Zībārī hands" in the fall of 1961, and in it "the pro-government forces pillaged and destroyed numerous villages. When Mullah Muşţafa Barzānī's forces returned in December, they accused the Assyrians of treachery."²⁷ In the village of Annūne (also known as, Kanī Māsī), Barzānī's men carried out their revenge by killing "every male above the age of 15 whom they could capture," including two priests.²⁸ In his memoirs, Tūma Tūmās claims that

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rubin, "Abd Al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq," 370.

²⁸ Ibid.

twenty-five Assyrians were killed.²⁹ Survivors of this massacre escaped initially to Turkey, eventually returning to Iraq to settle in Baghdad and other central towns.³⁰ By early January, a total of 4,500 Assyrians had abandoned their villages to relocate in other parts of the country.³¹

In 1961, 5,000 Assyrians and Kurds jointly attacked the Lolānī and Zībārī Kurdish opponents of Barzānī. The Zībārīs retaliated against the Assyrians by demolishing and looting the Episcopal see of ‘Amediyya, and inflicted another massacre on the Barwari Assyrians in 1963. The Assyrians still did not constitute a united front: “being neither entirely for nor against the autonomist movement, they faced repercussions on all sides.”³² As a result, the first martyr of the “Kurdish cause” was an Assyrian from the Barwar region.³³ These facts suggest that the Kurdish movement was not simply an ethno-nationalist autonomist movement, but encompassed other ideological factions active within the northern Iraqi region. Some Assyrians involved in this movement and identifying themselves as *peshmerga* opposition fighters claimed that “they fought as

²⁹ Tūma Tūmās, “Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (2),” *Thekriat*, 2006, <http://www.al-nnas.com/THEKRIAT/19jsf2.htm> (accessed August 23, 2013). The killings, according to him were carried by ‘Abd al-Wahid Haji Malo, his brother Ghazi, and their men. They accused the Assyrians of informing the police force of the whereabouts of their brother ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, when he was in hiding. One of the priests killed during this massacre was Father Dawod, the father of Tūmā al-Qas Dā’ūd, whom Tūmās refers to as a comrade, hence probably an ICP member.

³⁰ Rubin, “Abd Al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq,” 370.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 88.

³³ *Ibid.*

Assyrians for freedom from oppression alongside Kurds, rather than as supporters of a solely Kurdish cause.”³⁴

Rural Assyrians, as well as tribal leaders, sometimes acted under the influence of Assyrian political groups inside and outside the country, as an Assyrian political association with the Kurdish resistance had started to develop in the early phase of Kurdish resistance. Kheith Kheith Allap II was created in 1961 to promote Assyrian cultural and political rights. As discussed in the previous chapter, the party’s permit to register was denied by the authorities in Baghdad. This forced its organizers to shift their activities to the northern Assyrian villages and towns, in order to escape the government’s control. They had succeeded in winning students and intellectuals to their group; in the north they began to attract Assyrian villagers and tribal leaders.³⁵

Hurmizd Malik Chikku

Hurmizd, son of Malik Chikku of Tiyāre, was a formidable Assyrian tribal leader from the village of Koray Gavāna, fighting alongside Barzānī.³⁶ He joined the Kurdish uprising in 1961 along with fifty men “in hopes of promoting Assyrian cultural rights and [of] combating perceived injustices” perpetrated by the Iraqi regime.³⁷ Y.C., one of the founders of Kheith Kheith Allap II, began communicating with Chikku in 1962. They succeed in recruiting Chikku to their

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 90; Y.C. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, February 2010 and November 13, 2011.

³⁶ I.I. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, November 14, 2011.

³⁷ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 91.

cause ideologically, and supported him financially to ensure the independence of the Assyrian resistance from the KDP.³⁸ Chikku was respected in Kurdish and Assyrian circles for his fighting skills and bravery against the Iraqi government forces. His bravery is often acknowledged among Assyrians in northern Iraq to this day. Chikku continued fighting the Iraqi forces over the next two years, and following the fall of Qasim in 1963. Cooperation began between Hurmizd Chikku's forces and the newly formed communist Ansār forces, and more specifically between Chikku and Tūma Tūmās.

At this point the Nestorians, as well as some Chaldeans, living north of Mosul, were “sympathetic to the Barzānī -led opposition against the Iraqi government.” In the Mosul region, however, most Nestorians, Chaldeans, and Jacobites remained neutral, maintaining good relations with the Iraqi government. Alqosh was an exception, probably because of the strong communist influence within it. Under the leadership of Communist leader and native Tūma Tūmās, Alqosh sometimes supported the Kurdish-led opposition, and at other times remained neutral, depending on inclinations of the ICP. Regardless of political changes, Alqosh would be subjected to further attacks and massacres by Kurdish forces loyal to Barzānī, and also by government militias, depending on the political climate. In short, Assyrians in the northern region generally sympathized with the anti-government opposition because it supported equal rights for all citizens.³⁹

³⁸ Y.C. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, November 13, 2011.

³⁹ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 91.

Kurds, Communists, and Assyrians after 1963

Following the 1963 massacre and military trials of thousands of Communists and their sympathizers, in both the capital and other cities across the country, the ranks of the Communist Party were depleted. Its surviving branches were in the northern provinces, and they inherited command of the party, as members of its higher echelons had been either killed or imprisoned. In fact, following the party's plenary session in 1962, the Kurdish branch was instructed to replace the Central Committee in an emergency situation. As a result, members in the northern region were instrumental in advancing the efforts in Baghdad of Bāqir Ibrāhīm al-Mūsāwī—the only surviving member of the politburo in Iraq, who had been in charge of the party's Middle Euphrates section.⁴⁰ Numerous members escaped Baghdad, Kirkuk, Mosul, and other cities to settle in the north, as they were being actively pursued by the National Guard and by new state officials. As the Communist command center moved to the north, it collaborated with Barzānī-led Kurdish forces and the Assyrians in their anti-government activity. The Kurdish resistance of the early 1960s was thus an amalgamation of various groups united in their opposition to the Iraqi state. I.I. was one survivor of the 1963 violence in Baghdad. In an interview, he claimed: “The Kurdish movement became the Iraqi movement”—joined by Communists, academics, democrats, and many others when they escaped to the north.

⁴⁰ Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 114.

Assyrians had been drawn to the anti-government movement for a variety of reasons. Some Assyrian tribal leaders aligned themselves with the Barzānī-led Kurdish forces, joining the resistance because they were dissatisfied with the way they had been treated by the government, while others felt coerced into joining in fear of being associated with the government and attacked by the anti-government Kurdish forces, and still others joined because they were being persecuted by the government for being sympathetic to the Communist Party.

Tūma Tūmās's memoirs shed light on the journey of an Assyrian Communist leader who escaped Kirkuk, where he had been persecuted for his political beliefs. In the north, Tūmās continued to pursue his political aspirations, struggling against the Iraqi government by collaborating with the Kurdish resistance and with Assyrian figures within it. Following the 1959 incident in Kirkuk, the tide turned against the Communists and their affiliate organizations in the city, in favor of the Arab nationalists. At this time, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) leadership incited the Oil Syndicate (*Niqābat al-Naft*) and city security apparatuses to arrest Communist-affiliated IPC workers, leading to the incarceration of all members of the IPC Workers' Committee. Tūmās, who presided over this Committee, was vacationing in his native Alqosh at the time. News of the arrests obliged him to relocate permanently to Alqosh, and tender his resignation to the IPC. In Alqosh, he went into business with his brother-in-law, founding an ice-making plant there and a poultry farm in Sharafīyya, five kilometers south of Alqosh.⁴¹ In the third episode of his memoirs, Tūmās

⁴¹ Tūma Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (2)." *Thekriat*, 2006, <http://www.al->

described the ongoing Communist activity in the Nineveh Plain, ten kilometers northeast of the city of Mosul, indicating the party's resilience and continued attraction for members of minority communities.⁴²

In 1963, as Communists were being persecuted in central towns, the party's nascent military arm was beginning to coalesce in the northern provinces. Tūmās emerged as a military leader within the Communist Party. During this period, his forces were stationed on top of Alqsoh's mountain to fight off government attacks on his town. The National Guard and *juhūsh* pro-government tribes had attacked the town three times that year—on June 30, July 7, and July 9.⁴³ Tūmās was part of a diverse force composed of Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmens, and Yazidis.⁴⁴ In his memoirs, he provided a detailed description of his collaboration with Hurmizd Malik Chikku and his men. Given that Tūmās and Chikku belonged to different ideological factions, their collaboration points to the diversity of associations established between the various camps during this period, and also to the ongoing intercommunal interactions between Assyrians of differing affiliations. The two forces combined into a unified front under the leadership of Āmir al-Hayiz, Ḥasū Mīrkhān,⁴⁵ though this alignment did not last, as some elements opposed Chikku's presence in the area. The most prominent

nna.com/THEKRIAT/15jsf1.htm (accessed August 23, 2013).

⁴² Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (3)," <http://www.al-nnas.com/THEKRIAT/24jsf3.htm> (accessed May 14, 2014).

⁴³ Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (4)," <http://www.al-nnas.com/THEKRIAT/30jsf4.htm> (accessed May 14, 2014).

⁴⁴ Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (4)." The Turkmens apparently left this force due to a split instigated by Musliḥ al-Jalālī.

⁴⁵ Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (5)," <http://www.al-nnas.com/THEKRIAT/5jsf5.htm> (accessed May 14, 2014).

opponent of Chikku was Ghazī Ḥajī Malo, who eventually succeeded in having Chikku transferred to Sharmin, ‘Aqra. By transferring Chikku, Mīrkhān satisfied Malo’s wishes and also supported his forces in ‘Aqra, which needed reinforcement against the opposing Zībārī forces. Chikku’s notorious fighting prowess was essential in providing support to the anti-government forces in ‘Aqra.⁴⁶

Chikku had increased his anti-government activities in the preceding two years, exacerbating the disruption of the patriarchal order which began during the Qasimite period, which gave increased agency to minorities and others at the expense of conservatives and Arab nationalists. While his fighting skills burnished his fame among Assyrian peasants and resistance fighters, the Ba‘thists followed him closely, determined to put an end to his activities against their order. A series of activities were noted in the area between the Ba‘thist forces and various Kurdish tribes that were either associated with the government or considering changing sides. To gain the allegiance of Kurdish tribes, the state made use of economic resources, weapons, and military interventions. Tūmas and his forces were surprised when groups perceived to be their allies secretly changed sides, allowing the Iraqi army and their affiliates, the Zībārī and Brivafī tribes, as well as the Syrian Liwa’ al-Yarmūk (Yarmūk Battalion), to gain ground in their area.⁴⁷ Liwa’ al-Yarmūk consisted of 1,000 Syrian soldiers and was sent to Iraq for a year to assist the Iraqi Ba‘thists in consolidating their power.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ I.I. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, November 14, 2011.

With the assistance of Liwa' al-Yarmūk, the Ba'athists were finally able to eliminate Chikku on November 30, 1963. Accompanied by eight fighters from Tumas's group, Chikku reached the main road linking Duhok and Mosul, setting an ambush for Iraqi military forces southwest of Zawa village, located only five kilometers from the Syrian forces' Aluka camp. Chikku successfully ambushed three large military vehicles that were transferring forty armed Iraqi soldiers returning from their vacations to their posts. One of the cars contained large quantities of food, and other essentials needed by the opposition forces. They had succeeded in restraining the Iraqi soldiers, and retrieving their arms and foodstuffs, when Liwa' al-Yarmūk was notified of the situation by a passing vehicle heading towards the military camp. The Liwa' al-Yarmūk advanced towards the scene, surrounding Chikku and his men, and eventually killing them.

Chikku was highly respected by Christians, Muslims, and Yazidis alike. Following his death, his body was retrieved by Yazidis from the village of Sharia, where he was buried and a monument built in his honor.⁴⁹ Tūmas, on the other hand, claimed that he and his group had retrieved the bodies of the "martyrs" and taken them to the village of Sīnā, where Chikku was buried. The other men's bodies were transferred to Alqosh and buried in the martyrs' cemetery in the monastery of Rabban Hurmizd.⁵⁰ Muṣṭafa Barzānī is quoted as saying: "Should I have to put up a statue in Kurdistan, I would make one for the martyr Hurmizd

⁴⁹ Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining," 92.

⁵⁰ Tūma Tūmās, "Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (5)."

Malik Chikku.”⁵¹ In 1972, when the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs was established in collaboration with the Kurdish opposition, the committee’s battalion would be named, in Aramaic, *Khaylā d’Sahdā Hurmizd*—the “Battalion of Martyr Hurmizd.”⁵²

Following Chikku’s death, Muṣṭafa Barzānī asked Kheith Kheith Allap II to appoint a new Assyrian representative in his place. The organization, which was politically independent but militarily allied with the Kurdish resistance, appointed Ṭalia Shīno, previously an Iraqi Levies officer.⁵³ In September 1965, government officials arrested the leadership of Kheith Kheith Allap, and subjected them to physical and psychological torture during their imprisonment. The organization then ceased to exist, and shortly thereafter, in early 1966,⁵⁴ Ṭalia Shīno was killed by mercenary Kurds associated with the Iraqi government.⁵⁵

The elimination of certain political leaders and organizations did not lead to a significant decline in the numbers of Assyrians within the opposition. The same year that Shīno was killed, Communists in Bahdinān were united militarily and politically, after much internal disagreement. A local committee was elected in the city of Mosul, and a formal conference convened. Twenty-seven members of the Communist Party attended the conference, electing a committee that included Tūmās, who also became a bureau member. Other elected members included Shaikh ‘Alī al-Barzanchī (branch secretary), Ibrāhīm Ḥaj Maḥmud,

⁵¹ “Barzānī as a Leader 1903-1979,” accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.pdk-xoybun.com/modules/Content/print.php?pid=422>.

⁵² I.I. interview by author, Chicago, Illinois, November 14, 2011.

⁵³ Y.C., Interview by author, Chicago, November 13, 2011.

⁵⁴ Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining,” 93.

⁵⁵ Y.K. interviewed by author, Baghdad, December 7, 2011.

Muḥammad Ṣaliḥ Ṣouari, Jum'a Ḥajī Kanjī, 'Abd Ḥannā Jum'a, 'Abd Dinkhā 'Ankawī, Tūma al-Qas Dāwūd, Lāzār Mīkhū Ḥannā, Ṣadīq Darwīsh 'Aqrāwī, Yūkhannā Tūma Bakūz, along with Sha'yā Israel and Salim Yūsif Iṣṭifa as candidates.⁵⁶ Interestingly, at least seven out of the twelve committee members, plus two unelected candidates, were Christians, and probably Assyrians, demonstrating a continuity in Assyrian representation within the Communist Party during this period.

Complementing Assyrian involvement in anti-government resistance on the ground, Assyrian leaders exiled by the Iraqi state began collaborating with the Kurdish resistance from outside the country. They assisted in forging alliances with Western countries and raising awareness of the struggles of their Assyrian community following the toppling of Qasim. Malik Yā'qo Ismā'īl, father of Zayā Malik Ismā'īl, had been involved in earlier negotiations with Western governments on behalf of the Assyrians within the Kurdish resistance. At the time of the Simele massacre, in 1933, the Iraqi government had exiled Yā'qo (see Chapter 1). This would have been approved by the KDP, which was also waging a propaganda campaign in the West to win international support.⁵⁷

The Assyrians were active in the opposition independently, through local and international Assyrian organizations, as well as through tribal associations or membership within Iraqi opposition parties—chiefly the KDP and ICP. This demonstrated how the Assyrians had located themselves in this temporary space opened up by the civil war. Within this space, Assyrian political agitation and

⁵⁶ Tūma Tūmās, “Awrāq Tūma Tūmās (5).”

⁵⁷ Rubin, “Abd Al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq,” 371–2.

tactical alliances empowered them and allowed them to position themselves at center stage, alongside the other prominent actors in the conflict.

During the spring of 1963, in the months following the Ba‘thist coup d’état, the British received numerous inquiries about the status of the Assyrians in Iraq.⁵⁸ Subsequent investigations by the British revealed that the Assyrians had been targeted in the Assyrian quarter in Baghdad, in house-to-house searches of Communists’ homes by the National Guard. As part of the campaign of terror that followed Qasim’s toppling engulfed the capital and spread throughout the country (see Chapter 2).⁵⁹ At the same time, the British investigation revealed that, in the north, the Assyrians were trapped “between two fires.” Some Assyrians had sided with Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī, but, whether they had done so or not, the villages were likely to be “bombed and attacked just like the Kurdish villages in the normal course of the campaign.” Moreover,

Where the Assyrians do suffer disproportionately is when their villages are attacked by the Arab and Kurdish irregulars co-operating with the Government forces. Here, it seems, the irregulars indulge in an orgy of looting and destruction to a greater extent than they would against Kurdish villages, knowing that there is little likelihood of their being brought to account for their actions.”⁶⁰

These remarks prompted further reports and inquiries by members of the Assyrian community in the diaspora, especially in May 1963, in an effort to call in favors

⁵⁸ FO 371/170509, May 17, 1963, letter from Shadrak Skopila, an Assyrian naturalized UK citizen, to Lord Jellicoe, Minister of State, Home Office.

⁵⁹ FO 371/170509, July 11, 1963, “Dear Goodchild,” from R.W. Munro, British Embassy Baghdad, to D.L.N. Goodchild, Eastern Department, Foreign Office.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

from old bosses and acquaintances in the British administration. Malik Yā‘qo, accompanied by his son, presented one such inquiry in his communication with Bob Curson, the Regional Information Officer in Toronto. The message he requested to be passed on to the British Foreign Office was that various Arab governments in the region were persecuting the Assyrians. These same nationalist governments, Yā‘qo argued, did not view Britain in a favorable light. Hence, Britain should instead consider collaborating with the newly formed Kurdish and Assyrian opposition against the Iraqi government. He continued: “[A]lthough small in number, [the Assyrians] were able to put well-trained troops into the field.” In collaboration with Kurdish forces, the opposition could be an indomitable force against the Iraqi government.⁶¹

When the record of this exchange was forwarded to the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) by D.J. McCarthy, the cover letter included information that, in his conversation with the Ismā‘īls, Bob Curson had “no illusions that these people have been left behind by the tide.” McCarthy requested that the London office provide him with instructions on how to proceed, but rightly assumed that “[the Assyrians] were to be avoided wherever possible on the grounds of normal relations with Iraq.”⁶² On June 12, the CRO expressed its general agreement with

⁶¹ FO 371/170509, May 23, 1963, “Note for Record,” from Bob Curson, Regional Information Officer, Toronto, and Mr. Malik Y. Ismail, and his son Jack A. Ismail. The previous Commander of the Royal Air Force (RAF) Iraq Levies, Air Cadre C.J. Luce, D.S.O., was prompted by Athniel Youkhana Narsi, son of a Senior Assyrian Officer in the Levies, to inquire about the status of Assyrians in Iraq on July 2, 1963. FO 371/170509, July 11, 1963, no. EQ1822/3, “Dear Mr Goodchild,” from Civil Defense Staff College, Berkshire, to Eastern Department, Foreign Office, London.

⁶² FO 371/170509, May 28, 1963, from D.J. McCarthy.

McCarthy's comment. It was interested in learning that the Assyrians had "openly declared common cause" with the Kurds. Though it believed the Assyrian community was not generally involved in the revolt, it postulated that Assyrians had "admittedly had a raw deal over the years at the hands of the Arabs in whose eyes they have incurred considerable odium as a result of their connexion with the British (many served in the war as auxiliaries in the RAF and many others worked for British oil companies and other British firms)."

Yet, although Assyrians were nervous following the 1958 revolution, they had been well treated by Qasim, who, according to the report, assured them that they "would not be victims of discrimination and emphasized the importance he attached to religious freedom by attending the opening ceremony of a new Assyrian church in Baghdad and making a friendly speech."⁶³ Redpath recognized that the British government bore a moral responsibility to help the Assyrians—in particular, with resettlement. It had provided assistance in various forms, including the establishment of a building society, which he admitted was in a serious financial crisis. But the Assyrians were not to be encouraged to re-establish relations with the British, lest they "cling like limpets" and complicate relations between the British and the Arabs.⁶⁴ The report concluded that the Toronto office should not currently respond to the Ismā'īls. If they were to press for a response, then the British would consider meeting them informally. In fact,

⁶³ FO 371/170509, June 12, 1963, No. ME.45/32/1, from Commonwealth Relations Office, A. W. Redpath, London, to D.J. McCarthy, Ottawa.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

this was also how the British were treating the various Kurdish leaders who had approached them in May 1963.⁶⁵

Assyrians within the Barzānī Camp

Not all Assyrians involved in the Kurdish uprising were linked to an organized Assyrian political party or other group; some had joined the resistance as individuals part of the Barzānī faction.⁶⁶ The close political association of some Assyrian tribes with the Barzānīs has been attributed to a popular belief that the Kurds had formerly been Nestorians who had converted to Islam in the nineteenth century.⁶⁷

Margaret George

Margaret George was an example of an Assyrian who joined the KDP/Barzānī group with her father and other male kin, though she eventually operated independently of them. She gained respect for her fighting prowess and leadership

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Another example was Franso Ḥariri. Y.C. revealed that Ḥariri was a Communist who, following Qasim's toppling, escaped to the north and joined the Barzānīs. He was also from the house of Mar Yousip, a bishop who represented the Assyrian Church of the East following the exile of the patriarch in 1933. Y.C. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, February 2010.

⁶⁷ Donabed, "Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining," 93. For instance, Robert Betts supports this position: "The leader of the Kurdish separatist forces, Mullah Muṣṭafa al-Barzānī, is himself reputedly of old Nestorian stock, his family (from which sprang twelve bishops of the Church) having converted to Islam only a century ago." Moreover, the then auxiliary bishop for cultural affairs in the Chaldean Church, Father Jack Ishaq, found an inscription dating back to the nineteenth century of a donation given by the Barzānīs to a church in Barwar. As of 120 years ago, the Barzānīs were Christian according to Ishaq. Robert Betts, *Christians in the Arab East: A Political Study* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 186; Father Jack Ishaq interviewed by author, Baghdad, December 8, 2011.

qualities, which broadened her international fame, but also made her an anomaly within the political hierarchy she navigated. As an Assyrian woman, the way she was conceptualized and written about during the period sheds light on the position occupied by women and members of minority communities within the gendered space carved out by the opposition.

For Margaret George, the Iraqi state, the Iraqi opposition, and her family presented a hierarchy of patriarchal levels competing to overpower each other, and in the process subdue her. The Iraqi state was placed highest in this ranking, followed by political opposition groups, whose dominance corresponded with their strength and influence within the opposition. Although members of minorities and women ranked lower, given their limited numbers and political influence, many found agency within political associations with which they affiliated themselves. This was indeed the case for George, who, because of her ethnic and religious background, as an Assyrian Christian, was able to rise to power in combat, a profession generally reserved for men. As Martin van Bruinessen has indicated, Kurdish men did not allow their women to follow in George's footsteps.⁶⁸ This demonstrated the ways in which members of minorities and women positioned themselves within their society during atypical periods that gave them increased agency. Nonetheless, agency for women such as George was still contingent on the patriarchal structures of social order governing them. George was anomalous within this system, as the narrative of her murder makes clear. According to one source, George was killed because the Kurdish leadership

⁶⁸ van Bruinessen, "From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana," 105

realized that “she had Assyrian higher interests in her heart.”⁶⁹ Oral interviews with Assyrian political figures during the period provide further nuance to this characterization. Y.C. provided two reasons for her murder by Barzānī, one that is generally accepted by the Assyrian community, and another that is current among the Kurds. The first suggests that Margaret George was killed because she called for the recognition of Assyrian rights at a KDP meeting, echoing one of the discourses above; the second argues that George was sexually involved with a high-ranking KDP official. Her death is hence classified as an honor crime; the sentence was carried out not by her family members, but by the KDP, to which she belonged.⁷⁰ This latter view seems to enjoy a degree of consensus, as a number of interviewees in this study reported having read two articles published in Arabic-language Lebanese magazines portraying her as “Barzānī’s mistress.”⁷¹ I.I. agreed with both these two narratives concerning George, but added a third: that she had supported Jalal Talabānī during the 1965–66 split in the KDP, which eventually produced the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).⁷²

Thus, George revolted against the Iraqi state by joining the Kurdish opposition, but also threatened the patriarchal order established by the leading authorities during Qasim’s rule, which tried to curtail political activity, especially that of women (see Chapter 1). Whereas conservatives felt threatened by the increased mobility of the Iraqi Women’s League, and its activism within

⁶⁹ Information retrieved on April 10, 2008 from the “Assyrian Information Medium Exchange,” from a web link that has become inactive, or relocated servers.

⁷⁰ Y.C. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, February 2010.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² I.I. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, November 14, 2011.

uncontrolled spaces, George was placed even further from conservatives' reach, undermining the patriarch's authority by operating in direct opposition to the established order associated with the state.

The Iraqi opposition was far from homogenous in the 1960s. The Barzānī/KDP faction continued to enjoy hegemonic influence over the other groups, resulting in collaboration as well as competition. George officially worked within the parameters of the KDP, though she allegedly supported the newly emerging PUK faction, and was vocal on issues around Assyrian nationalism within the KDP. Both of these positions—her support to the PUK and her aspirations for Assyrians—complicated her role, and ultimately contributed to her demise. Until then, George showed support for the Assyrian camp, as is demonstrated in her communication with the leadership of Kheith Kheith Allap II. She refused to join them formally, however. While certain members of her family switched sides when invited to do so by the same group, George refused to submit fully to any authority, antagonizing the various institutions of patriarchal power.

Finally, though George joined the uprising with her father and male relatives, she quickly established herself independently of them, becoming a prominent fighter and commanding men in battle. Her father appears to have arranged a marriage for her with his business partner shortly after the development of her militancy; yet George did not approve of the marriage, refusing to live with her husband.⁷³ Mohan argues that “the compulsion to

⁷³ Y.M.K, Interview by author in Alqosh—Y.M.K. lives in Telkaif, Iraq, December 21, 2011. Y.M.K was a close relative of Mosūa, Margaret George's husband. According to him, Mosūa was a kātib for Hurmizd Chikku, and

sexualize these women into hyperfeminized objects of male desire and, more significantly, to shepherd them into the patriarchal fold of marriage and heterosexual desire is one indicator of the threat they constitute.”⁷⁴ Pictures of George posing with her father represent other attempts to normalize her, showing her being chaperoned by the patriarch of her family. Moreover, by comparing her to historical figures such as the Assyrian queen Shamiram—a heroic fighter and leader—and Joan of Arc, it seems that intellectuals defending the patriarchal order were attempting to neutralize her distinctive power by resurrecting images of female historical figures who resembled George, in turn generating new gender norms in their societies.⁷⁵ However, though the Kurdish leadership benefited from her image, and her popularity in the Western media, George was difficult to control, and the reputational damage she inflicted on Barzānī by being portrayed by his adversaries (the Iraqi state and the wider Arab world) as his mistress was too contentious for the Kurds to tolerate. Her murder, if, as reported, it was carried out in the guise of an honor killing, would have restored the patriarchal order, normalizing George within culturally accepted gender norms. In short, women who defied the patriarchal order were to be punished.

collected membership fees and food from villages on behalf of Chikku’s group. He described him as being the right hand of Chikku, and worked alongside him until 1963. This adds another dimension to the complicated nature of affiliation within the Kurdish uprising: George belonged to the KDP camp, while her husband was affiliated with Chikku.

⁷⁴ Mohan, “Loving Palestine,” 68–9.

⁷⁵ For instance, Khaled, encountered at the beginning of this chapter (see footnote 8), attempted to present herself as a Palestinian in its “original Canaan definition: a heroic fighter, a warlike person, a selfless fellow.” Mohan, “Loving Palestine,” 63.

George's impact on her immediate society is demonstrated by the funeral ceremony held for her in her village—the funeral of a heroic warrior—and in the folk songs dedicated to her by her community members. I.I and Y.C. gave accounts of Margaret George's imprisonment with her mother by the KDP. In her prison cell, she was shot through a window while asleep. Fifty bullets were found in her body. B.I. sorrowfully chronicled the return of her body to the village of Dūre in the Barwar region, the handling of her corpse, and the burial ceremonies that followed. She was given a hero's burial, during which volleys of shots were fired into the air.⁷⁶ Years after her murder, Y.C. remembered George's mother dedicating Assyrian funeral songs to her daughter at the funerals of friends and family members in Chicago.

Political Opposition under the Ba'ath: 1968–1980

Another prominent Assyrian leader, and a native of George's village of Dūre, was the Episcopal bishop of Nineveh, Māri Yahb' Alāhā (an honorary title that translates to "God has given"), whose life story was narrated to me by his relative, B.I. (b. 1947).⁷⁷ B.I.'s connection to Barwar, where he still lives, and his family's service to the church and community, date back centuries. B.I. locates the lineage of Barwari Assyrians, and of his family in particular, within this region for at least 500 years. By way of emphasis, he makes reference to the ancient church of Mar George, built in Barwar in the fourth century. It demonstrates the importance of

⁷⁶ B.I. interviewed by author, Duhok, Iraq, December 20, 2011—informant lives in Barwar.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

historical memory for the Assyrian community, in the form of the link to their ancestral lands. B.I.'s father was born in Dūre in 1908, and his mother was born in 1918 in the Ba'qūba camp. Although this camp has been associated with Assyrian and Armenian refugee populations escaping the genocidal campaigns pursued in Anatolia, Hakkārī, and Urmia starting in 1915, B.I. indicates that these campaigns reached Barwar, located in northern Duhok, right on the Turkish border. Kurdish tribes living in modern-day Turkey joined Kurds from Barwar in attacking the Assyrians in this region. Assyrian Barwaris in turn joined the refugee exodus, settling in the Ba'qūba camp along with the rest of the refugee population. Most of the Barwari Assyrians seem to have returned to their villages by the early 1930s, though some had difficulty proving that they were "native" Iraqi citizens, and thus in reclaiming their lands.⁷⁸ B.I.'s family inherited the Episcopal seat of Nineveh for the Assyrian Church of the East in 1950. Following the sudden death of the previous bishop, his thirteen-year-old kin was "vowed" (*nedīrā*) to be the Episcopal bishop of Nineveh, following religious education and training.⁷⁹ Once consecrated, he became responsible spiritually and often

⁷⁸ Letter sent by Assyrian Chiefs of Barwar, Zkharya Gewergis, Derwish Dawed, and Hormiz Shimun, August 23, 1923, likely to the League of Nations. The original letter is handwritten in Aramaic, and is accompanied by an English translation from the same period. The three chiefs claim that they are in agreement with the national petition written at Seramadia on June 17, 1932, to the high commissioner and the League of Nations. They concur with the points claimed in the petition, with the exception of land and houses for themselves, as they have their own.

⁷⁹ Shmail Yako, "Mar Yawala Andraws," last modified 2008, accessed June 24, 2014, <http://www.assyriandooreh.com/martyrs1.html>. There seems to have been a disagreement on whom to consecrate as the new Māri Yahb' Alāhā episcopal bishop of Nineveh. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timotheus_Mar_Shallita.

politically for the Nineveh region, which encompassed the districts of Duhok, ‘Aqrā, ‘Amediyya, Barwar, Nerveh, and Rekān.⁸⁰

The next two decades of Māri Yahb’ Alāhā’s episcopal tenure were marked by heightened conflicts and civil war. Eventually his region was incorporated into the Kurdish uprising against the government in the early 1960s. The effects of the civil war were devastating for members of his diocese, including the destruction of their homes and crops, as well as cultural artifacts such as churches. This conflict led to the first of many waves of rural–urban migration, which disrupted the cultural fabric of the community in Barwar. The bishop was involved in various negotiations with the government and the Kurdish resistance movement. In 1965, Māri Yahb’ Alāhā became a member in the Kurdish Revolutionary Council, and remained so until his death in 1973. In 1971 he requested “17 points” from Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī, in his position as the religious and political leader of the Assyrians in the northern provinces. According to B.I., Barzānī replied: “We have nothing to offer you now, but you [Assyrians] are our brothers. Whatever we receive will be extended to you.”⁸¹

When Māri Yahb’ Alāhā died in 1973, he was thirty-six years of age. Many speculate that he was poisoned, either by officials of the government or by the leadership of the KDP. His death highlights the convergence of various narratives during this period, and the engagement of Assyrians with a variety of political factions. The allegations of murder are supported by the fact that the bishop fell ill following two consecutive meetings in April 1973, the first in

⁸⁰ B.I. interviewed by author.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Baghdad with government officials, and the second with the Kurdish leadership in the north.⁸² Following these meetings the bishop's health deteriorated, leading to his death on August 13, 1973. With his passing, the Māri Yahb' Alāhā position ceased to exist. The last bishop to hold this title was buried in Mar Qayoma church (built in 985)⁸³ in Barwar, where seven previous Māri Yahb' Alāhā bishops also lie. Witnesses from the period agree that, with Māri Yahb' Alāhā's death, the Assyrians, and particularly those in his diocese, lost an important spiritual and political leader. He would be one of the last Assyrian iconic figures to play a role in the Kurdish uprising. The following years would see the rise of efforts at political organization by Assyrians within the opposition.

The Formation of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs

During the early 1970s, Assyrians supportive of the Kurdish resistance began to come together and organize formally on a larger scale. This followed multiple fruitful negotiations and conferences between the Assyrian and Kurdish leaderships, the latter headed by Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī. Exiled Iraqi Assyrian leaders, such as Malik Yā'qo, supported these efforts, as did Assyrian political organizations operating in the West and across the border in Iran.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid. B.I. did not take a position on the allegations concerning Māri Yahb' Alāhā's death.

⁸³ Amier Oraha Odisho, "Churches," *Taken from Al-Fikr Al-Masihi*, accessed June 24, 2014, http://www.assyriandooreh.com/church_1.html.

⁸⁴ A recent interview with O.G, Malik Yā'qo's secretary and member of the delegation that accompanied Yā'qo in 1973 to Baghdad—where Malik was pardoned by the Iraqi authorities for his role in the 1933 Simele incident, and renationalized—revealed that Malik Yā'qo met with Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī in 1968. This meeting would have set the stage for the 1969 meeting conducted in

On May 29, 1969, an Assyrian delegation consisting of Zayā Malik Ismā‘īl, Sam Andrews, and William Yonan met with officials from the U.S. Department of State to request assistance for the Kurdish uprising and to share information. The Assyrian delegation comprised significant figures within the North American Assyrian community. Zayā Ismā‘īl was the son of Malik Yā‘qo, the Assyrian tribal leader who had been exiled by the Iraqi government following the Simele massacre in 1933. Yonan and Andrews were president and secretary of the Assyrian American Federation (later renamed the Assyrian American National Federation—AANF), an umbrella organization created in the United States in response to the Simele massacre, in order to address human right abuses against the Assyrians in the Middle East and to develop Assyrian culture, language, and religion.⁸⁵ Sam Andrews was also a member of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA), and would later serve as the president of this organization, indicating the AUA’s influence on the AANF.

During this meeting, the Assyrian delegation gave an account of its recent trip to Iran, in early April 1969.⁸⁶ Andrews and Ismā‘īl had been able to meet with

conjunction with Yā‘qo’s son Zayā, and the two Assyrian organizations. O.G. also possesses Malik Yā‘qo’s diary from that period, and though he refuses to share these notes out of fear of retribution from the Yā‘qo family, he reviews them while providing commentary, which at this point is the closest one can get to understanding Yā‘qo’s perspective. The preservation and limiting of access to these diaries by researchers indicate the power of historical memory and the desire of various sides to control the sources and thereby regulate the interpretation of the past that can be derived from them. O.G interviewed by author, Chicago, January 2, 2013.

⁸⁵ “About Us,” <http://www.aanf.org/about.html>, accessed on February 18, 2014.

⁸⁶ Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, May 29, 1969, “Kurdish Threat Against Kirkuk Oil Installations; Iranian and Israeli Support for Assyrians,” 1.

Iranian government officials through the Iranian Assyrian representative in parliament. In these meetings, the Iranian government had guaranteed that it would extend its support to Iraqi Assyrians alongside the Kurds, in their collective struggle against the Iraqi government.⁸⁷ Moreover, the shah granted the Assyrian delegation permission to travel through Iran and visit Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī in northern Iraq, and the Iranian armed forces arranged for their transportation by helicopter.⁸⁸ The main purpose of their trip was to inquire about the conditions of the Assyrian Iraqi community in the northern provinces, but one can speculate that Andrews and Ismā‘īl also wanted to rekindle their relations with the Kurdish resistance under the command of Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī, and thereby ascertain the degree of collaboration between the two communities.⁸⁹

Following several fruitful meetings with Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī, the Assyrian delegation returned to the United States with an official letter to the State Department and additional information for the U.S. government from the mullah. Barzānī relayed that he was under pressure from his followers to attack Kirkuk’s oil facilities. The rationale behind this tactic was that oil revenues were enabling the Iraqi government to purchase arms used to attack the Kurdish resistance.⁹⁰ He appealed also for U.S. assistance to the people of Kurdistan in all

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2. In Iran the Assyrians also met with an Israeli representative who promised to assist them as well. The Israelis were supplying the Kurdish resistance with arms, while the Iranians provided food and other provisions, Ibid., 2–3. But there is no evidence that Israelis actually extended any form of assistance to the Assyrians.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2.

fields. He described the calamities suffered by the people of the region since the coming of the Ba‘th regime, stating:

In addition to the threat which this war has aimed at the existence and legitimate aspirations of our people, both Kurds and Assyrians, it has brought disaster and affliction upon all its victims, deprived the people of Kurdistan, particularly the Assyrians and the Kurds, of education and health [needs], and rendered tens of thousands of them refugees. All these [calamities] have been inflicted upon us only because we have claimed the basic and legitimate human and national rights, to which we, like any other people, are entitled.⁹¹

Significantly, Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī spoke in this letter of the “people of Kurdistan,” often referring to them as “our people,” which he defined as consisting of Kurds and Assyrians. He described the atrocities committed by the Iraqi government collectively on the Kurdish and Assyrian people. Finally, to indicate the level of collaboration between the Assyrians and Kurds, Barzānī designated Shāfiq Qazzāz, Zayā Malik Ismā‘īl, and Sam Andrews as individuals who “were authorized to speak on my behalf.”⁹²

The above source is significant for the arguments in this chapter in two ways. First, it establishes a transnational network of Assyrians operating in the U.S., Iran, and Iraq to further the aspirations of Iraqi Assyrians. In this network, the AUA was very significant, as it was able to form close ties with the Iranian

⁹¹ Ibid., Attachment, Department of State, Division of Language Services (Translation), LS No. 10056, T-58, Arabic, April 22, 1969, “The Honorable William Rogers, Secretary of State of the United States of America,” 1. See also the memoirs of Yonan Hormoz, an Assyrian fighter with the Barzānīs, in which he identifies a Kurdistanian citizen as being Kurdish, Assyrian, or Turkmen. Yonan Hormoz, *Ayāmī fī Thawrat Kurdistān* (Oak Park, MI: Eastern Graphics & Printing, 1999), 9.

⁹² Ibid., 2.

government and extend its influence over the AANF and other Assyrian organizations in the West. Through such associations, the AUA strived to influence international policy affecting Assyrians in the Middle East, and to elevate the community's concern to international arenas. During the Cold War this became possible as the two global superpowers competed to bring the recently decolonized states and opposition groups of the "Third World" under their influence.⁹³ In addition, it proves that the Kurdish opposition aligned with Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī included the Assyrians in their vision of Iraqi Kurdistan. They perceived the Assyrians as allies in the conflict against the Iraqi government, which discriminated collectively against the people of Kurdistan, specifically the Assyrians and the Kurds. Not only were the Assyrians important as co-belligerents in the anti-government movement, but also because of the international ties they developed with the United States, Iran, and other Western powers. This insight provides us with an alternative view of the Kurdish uprising, and of the Kurdish movement in general, and allows us to venture beyond the conventional interpretations.

The collaboration between Assyrian and Kurdish leaders, and support from regional powers, resulted in new organizational efforts. In 1972 a conference was convened in Sarsink comprising Assyrians from all denominations and regions of the country. The outcome of this gathering was the formation of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs.⁹⁴ The political events of this period

⁹³ Odd Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹⁴ I.I. interviewed by author, Chicago, November 14, 2011.

prompted the return to Iraq of the patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, and also that of Malik Yā‘ qo.⁹⁵ According to I.I., this committee was formed through an initiative of the Assyrians leadership, and in agreement with the KDP. The agreement was that the Assyrians would be granted rights in the Kurdish autonomous region, and would be recognized as a nation, with rights equal to those of the Kurds. I.I. was in charge of the military arm of this committee (Āmer Battalion), which, in honor of Hurmizd Malik Chikku, was named the Battalion of Martyr Hurmizd. This organization incorporated another prominent member of the household of the previous Māri Yahb’ Alāhā bishop in 1974. Rū’el ’Iyūd, the deceased bishop’s brother, headed the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs.⁹⁶

The battalion enlisted 3,000 Assyrian fighters—compared with the 30,000 fighters commanded by the Kurds at the time, according to I.I.⁹⁷ When asked why the Kurds needed the Assyrians, I.I. responded that it was for public relations purposes. Having Christians on their side made them look better, especially to the West, and also showed that they were not alone in their struggle against the Iraqi government.⁹⁸ This resonates with Mulla Muṣṭafa Barzānī’s letter, noted above: a mutual effort at and collaboration by the two communities strengthened resistance against the government.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Some members of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs suggest that Barzānī promised to arm 10,000 Assyrian men, and Georges Malik Chikku enlisted 10,000 men from the districts of Nineveh Plain, Nahla, Duhok, and Irbil. H.S.K interviewed by author, Duhok, Iraq, December 20, 2011.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

In addition to the importance of unifying their forces, the KDP had other issues to worry about. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, which deals with Ba‘thist policies towards the Assyrians, competition existed between the Ba‘th and the KDP for the Assyrians’ support. Ofra Bengio confirms this in her book *The Kurds of Iraq*, demonstrating the efforts made by the government to resolve the civil crisis in the north. The government’s main approach was one of neutralizing the KDP by dissolving its support base among the Yazidis, Fayli Kurds, and—especially—the Assyrians. This approach by the government included exempting Yazidis from military service in November 1972, naturalizing Fayli Kurds born in Iraq in February 1973, and—as illustrated by the example of Malik Yā‘qo—pardoning Assyrians involved in the 1933 incident that had led to the Simele massacre, and re-naturalizing them in January 1973.⁹⁹ Bengio writes that the last of these measures

should be understood against the backdrop of competition between the Baath and the KDP for the support of other minorities, especially the Assyrians. The latter had identified with the Kurdish population and had joined its guerrilla fighters when the Levies mercenary corps to which they belonged was disbanded after World War II.¹⁰⁰

She also cites an article in *Al-Ta’ākhī*, from January 9, 1973, which emphasized the Assyrian community’s support for the “Kurdish national movement, indicating that the Assyrians had fought on the movement’s side since the Kurdish

⁹⁹ Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2012), 72.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

revolution in 1961, which created a strong feeling of solidarity between Christians and Kurds.”

Bengio’s conclusions are consistent with the evidence gathered from interviews and archival research undertaken for this study, but her discussion of the Levies forces needs to be clarified. As demonstrated in this chapter, in the rural Assyrian towns and villages of northern Iraq, leaders were often chosen based on family lineage, tribal connections, and religious appointments. Although people might have gained fame from their association with the Levies forces, this was not necessarily the underlying reason for their advancement either inside or outside the Levies. Previous social standing in the community exerted some influence on the position an individual attained. The Higher Committee for Christian Affairs thus seemed to consist of an amalgamation of Assyrian men from three different groups: traditionalists (tribal and religious leaders); Assyrian nationalists, former Communists, and left-leaning intellectuals; and KDP affiliates.¹⁰¹ Georges Malik Chikku, Hurmizd Malik Chikku’s brother, headed this organization. Five other men had positions of leadership: ‘Abd Razūqī, an Alqoshi KDP member who headed the Committee after Chikku; Paulis Dinkha al-Bāzī, also a KDP member, Mas’ūl Tanthim; Minas al-Yūsifi of Zakho, who was in charge of the military force before abdicating his role to I.I.; I.I. himself, who was a former ICP member and Assyrian nationalist; Rū’el Māri Yahb’ Alāhā,

¹⁰¹ Y.K. interviewed by author, Baghdad, Iraq, December 7, 2011.

brother of Māri Yahb' Alāhā, who was in charge of finances; and Putros Iskharya al-Bāzī.¹⁰²

The interviewee H.S.K (b. 1954 in Sarsink) reported that he was present during the elections of the Committee, held at the employees' club, and became a member in the Committee, and was a fighter in the Battalion of Martyr Hurmizd.¹⁰³ H.S.K noted that Rū'el Māri Yahb' Alāhā became the president of the Committee, Georges Malik Chikku having fled to Urmia with his family in the spring of 1974.¹⁰⁴ Prior to that, Chikku went to Europe in 1973 with his wife to promote the Committee [and the Kurdish resistance], and report that Assyrians were part of the Kurdish front.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, three Assyrians came from the United States to make inquiries and record videos. A man named George informed I.I.: "If you need additional men, inform Barzānī and we will send you support." But according to H.S.K., only 500 men were assigned to the forces, and they were poorly armed.¹⁰⁶ This example illustrates the interactions between Iraqi Assyrians involved in the opposition, diasporic Assyrian organizations, and the KDP leadership.

¹⁰² H.S.K interviewed by author, Duhok, Iraq, December 20, 2011.

¹⁰³ He reported that, before joining the Committee, he had enlisted in the Iraqi army on January 10, 1973, but deserted after only three months. Prior to that he was raised and educated in primary school (grade 5) in Sarsink. He escaped the civil war in Sarsink in 1968 and, having learned Arabic in Baghdad, returned to Sarsink following the Kurdish Autonomous Administration law passed on March 11, 1970, and worked in tourism. He stated that, though he would have liked to continue his education, there was no school in Sarsink, probably due to the ongoing civil war, or perhaps his advanced age.

¹⁰⁴ H.S.K interviewed by author.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Further interviews are necessary to determine the role of the Committee in the Kurdish and Assyrian movements of opposition against the Iraqi government. The Algiers Agreement, signed in 1975 by the Iraqi and Iranian administrations, disrupted the momentum of the resistance and hindered the development of this nascent organization. Due to Assyrian advances and successes within the Kurdish uprising, and their formation of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs, the Ba'athists took note, extending cultural rights to the Assyrians and negotiating with exiled Assyrian leaders and re-nationalized Iraqi Assyrians who had been involved in the 1933 incident. The Ba'ath was clearly concerned at the advances Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī and the Kurdish resistance were making within the Assyrian community, and at the impact of such collaborations on Western and regional propaganda.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that Assyrians were significant actors in the politically charged conflict between the Iraqi state and the opposition. Starting in 1961, the Kurdish resistance, led by Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī, incorporated Assyrians into their uprising against the Iraqi government. This local association between the two ethnic communities expanded beyond Iraq's borders, drawing in regional state actors such as neighboring Iran, as well as the Cold War superpowers. Although a minority, the Assyrians were useful to the Kurds not only in fighting on the battlefield against the Iraqi government and its Kurdish proponents, but also in garnering the international support required by the

opposition. The Assyrians, for their part, hoped to acquire full citizenship and equality in a liberated north. The effects of this partnership were twofold: first, it led to competition between the Iraqi state, the Barzānī-led Kurdistan Democratic Party, and Communists for alliances with the Assyrian community, resulting in favorable outcomes for the Assyrians, as all three sides tried to entice them to their side by making pledges and articulating positive policies; and, second, the civil war resulted in major demographic shifts in northern Iraq that were detrimental to the Assyrians. Because of this ongoing conflict and the destruction of villages that it entailed, rural Assyrians began fleeing to Iraq's central cities, abandoning their ancestral lands and autonomous way of life.

4. Between Reconciliation and Repression: Ba‘thist Policies towards the Assyrians in the 1970s

Following two coups d'état of July 1968, the Ba‘th Party succeeded in consolidating its political power in Iraq.¹ Although governing without significant opposition, it was still wary of its two main political opponents, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP).² Hence, the Ba‘th appeased the KDP with its manifesto of March 1970, and invited the ICP to become part of the National Patriotic Front in 1973.

The manifesto of March 1970 recognized the Kurdish national identity and language, setting a precedent for the establishment of Kurdish self-administration.³ As a result, the KDP ended its association with Iran, and declared an armistice with the Iraqi state. However, hostilities between the state and the KDP resumed shortly thereafter, as the KDP realized that self-administration would not deliver it the finances, oil, and security that had been promised by the Iraqi authorities. Iran, whose policies were influential in Iraq, was happy to

¹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 186–91.

² Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 126.

³ Drawn from the al-Bazzaz Plan, the agreement promised political self-rule and cultural expression within the boundaries of this region. It also added to the Kurdish region in the north a new province called Duhok. Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 57. See also Apram Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āşir* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 2001), 33; Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 189–93.

extend its support to the KDP once again in 1972.⁴ Iran had been wary of the new Iraqi regime's Arab nationalist and socialist principles, its developing ties with the Soviet Union, and the potential for a power struggle in the Persian Gulf between the two oil-producing countries.⁵ Meanwhile, the ICP benefited from the links established between the USSR and Iraq. Following the nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC), Iraq was anxious for Soviet backing to offset its financial losses, given the possibility of an organized boycott by the IPC. In April 1972, the USSR committed to purchasing Iraq's oil in the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation. The warming relations between the USSR and Iraq, combined with Iraq's interest in drawing the ICP closer to its rule, justified the official recognition of the ICP by the Iraqi state and its inclusion in the National Patriotic Front in 1973. The ICP was also permitted to publish, and to resurrect its activities among its affiliated associations and unions.⁶

In addition, the Iraqi government pursued policies favorable to members of minority communities, including the Assyrians. Shapira postulates that the Assyrians were not a direct threat to the Ba'ath party, since they were without autonomous political representation during this period. But he argues that the significance of the Assyrians was realized through their membership in both the ICP and the KDP, and through the transnational networks associated with these two political organizations. In this chapter, two further reasons why the Ba'ath establishment regarded the Assyrians as a threat will be provided to complement

⁴ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 193–4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 200–1.

Shapira's argument. First, in various government reports the Iraqi authorities evinced concerns over issues of Assyrian identity, interdenominational collaborations between different religious communities among the Assyrians, and the influence of transnational Assyrian organizations and diasporic communities on Iraqi Assyrians. Second, the Ba'ath authorities were apprehensive about garnering negative publicity in the West. Given the transnational character of the Assyrian community and the global interactions enabled in the Cold War period, the newly established regime's concerns were valid.

To allay these concerns, numerous positive policies were implemented in the early 1970s to draw the Assyrians, referred to by the state as speakers of the Syriac language, closer to the Ba'ath party.⁷ For instance, the regime guaranteed their cultural and literary rights, and returned important leaders to the community from exile. More importantly, state policies provided the impetus required for an Assyrian literary and cultural renaissance.

Important literary works were produced not only in Arabic, which contributed to cross-cultural hybridization between Iraqis of various backgrounds, but also in Aramaic, the native language of the Assyrians. The production of works in Aramaic, with the modest support of the government, contributed to the revival and standardization of the language across the various Eastern-Aramaic dialects spoken in Iraq (as well as in Iran, and to some extent in Syria). Numerous important works were produced during this short period, and the formation of significant cultural clubs and organizations provided important cultural venues for

⁷ Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic officially identified by the state, in which the language of Law 251 is framed.

Assyrians to interact and socialize, to perform plays, music, and literary works, and to engage in sports. An important intellectual class was formed in cities such as Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Mosul, cities with large Assyrian populations that had migrated to these urban centers in search of better employment and educational opportunities, or to escape the instability and violence experienced in their villages, resulting primarily from the Kurdish uprising that had begun in 1961 (see Chapter 3).

This chapter explores Ba‘thist policies towards the Assyrians throughout the 1970s, mainly using Ba‘thist archives. It argues that the aim of Ba‘thist policies towards urban Assyrians generally shifted from co-optation to conciliation, including the extension of limited cultural rights. While urban Assyrians were benefiting from Ba‘thist policies in cities like Baghdad and Kirkuk, rural Assyrians endured the destruction of their villages during the border clearings that began in the mid 1970s. In this campaign, the Iraqi military destroyed villages and bulldozed farms and churches, which were markers of religious as well as cultural significance, and forcibly moved the villagers to newly established collective towns, referred to as “modern villages.” This chapter will examine the ways in which the Ba‘th regime responded to the effects of the literary movement, especially with regard to Assyrian identity and interdenominational collaborations, and how the regime appeased and reasoned with the Assyrians following the ethnic cleansing carried out in border regions.

Most research on Ba‘thist Iraq focuses on the 1980s and onwards, a period marked by the presidency of Saddam Hussein, war with Iran, and a remarkable

increase in state violence. A concentration on the earlier phase of Ba‘thist rule allows a more nuanced understanding of the regime—which, as I will show, in the early years after its formation was anxious to project a positive image of itself, in order to strengthen its international position and secure allies. As a result, it used less coercion to achieve its goals, deploying methods of negotiation and conciliation with the various communities concerned. This line of argument is not intended to paint the Ba‘th regime in a positive light, nor to suggest that democratic principles were being applied in practice; rather, it is designed to shed light on the historical development of the Ba‘th Party in Iraq. The transformation of Ba‘thist state policies will be discussed further in Chapter 6, in the context of the experience of the Ba‘thification of society in the late 1970s, and especially during the Iran–Iraq war.⁸

During the period addressed in the current chapter, the state’s economic and international standing determined its internal policies towards ethnic and confessional communities, and towards oppositional parties. When the Iraqi state was weak in relation either to its domestic economic position or its international standing, it deployed reconciliatory policies by granting cultural rights and negotiating with exiled Assyrian leaders, as was observed in the first part of the 1970s. When the Iraqi state was strong economically and internationally, it employed repressive policies—especially following negotiations with Iran in 1975.

⁸ See, for example, Dina Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 23.

This dissertation sheds light on the interplay between the ethnic (Assyrian), sectarian (Chaldean, Jacobite, Nestorian), and national (Iraqi) identities present within the Assyrian community. Its chapters trace the developments of these sometimes conflicting affiliations, and identify factors that had an impact on them, both internally and externally. This chapter focuses on the external factors that conditioned Assyrian identity during the period. It explores tacit and explicit government policies, both foreign and domestic, and demonstrates that the Ba‘th regime was concerned by the strengthening of Assyrian identity both within Iraq and internationally, both in neighboring countries and in the West, and the ways in which Assyrian transnational conceptualizations influenced Iraqi Assyrians’ understanding of themselves. Both the Assyrian community and the Ba‘th regime were active transnational agents in the formulation and interrogation of a transnational Assyrian identity, and in presenting and contesting positions of significance to either party. The division was not always clear, and the use of Assyrians both as Ba‘thist informants—starting in the early 1970s—and as representative of Ba‘thist organizations, often without community endorsement, complicated this image both domestically and in Western countries. Exacerbating this complexity was the position of Assyrians in “third parties,” i.e. the ICP and KDP.

I will make use here of Ba‘thist policy documents and decrees, as well as internal reports and investigations conducted by the various security structures established by the regime. References to Assyrian activity—in the form of meetings, publications, radio programs, and the sentiments of ordinary

Assyrians—rely mostly on documents deriving from government agencies. Although this approach plays down the degree of agency exercised by the Assyrians themselves—the actual producers of such programs and activities, after all—it is central to any proper understanding of the role played by the development of government policies and approaches. Whether or not the General Intelligence staff and other state security organizations produced accurate reports and synopses of issues related to the Assyrian community, the information they gathered was nevertheless important both in informing state's policies and reflecting the state's own attitudes towards the Assyrian community. A more thorough analysis of the Assyrian community's intellectual production, both written and oral, will be pursued in Chapter 5, complementing the material presented here.

Ba'athist Conciliation Policies

During this period, the regime also invested in creating an official figurehead to represent the community. Instead of allocating this responsibility to local Assyrian leaders, religious and political figures exiled since the Simele massacre were invited to take it on. The Ba'ath regime wanted to be perceived as a revolutionary movement that was correcting injustices committed by its predecessors. The self-righteous rhetoric associated with this position was used by the government-regulated newspaper, the *Baghdad Observer*, in its interview with the patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, upon his return

to Iraq in 1970.⁹ When the patriarch visited Iraq on April 24, 1970, his Iraqi citizenship was reinstated, and he was treated as an official delegate to the Iraqi government. A crowd of more than 150,000 optimistic Assyrians welcomed him in the streets of Baghdad.¹⁰ The government's efforts to gain the trust of the patriarch failed, however, and he left Iraq in less than a month, refusing to accept subsequent government invitations. He has been quoted as stating that he could not "give empty promises" to his people.¹¹

Three years later, this cycle was repeated with another exiled Assyrian leader, Malik¹² Yā'qo Malik Ismā'īl, who earned the label "Leader of the Assyrian People," officially, *ra'īs lil-qawmiyya al-Athūriyya*.¹³ In Ba'athist sources, this appointment is referred to as having been welcomed by the Assyrian community.¹⁴ It is important to note that Malik Yā'qo was a tribal leader, and it is not clear that Assyrians in the 1970s, especially those who were urbanized, would

⁹ "Mar Shimun: An Injustice Corrected. Lauds Baker [Bakr] and Revolutionary Gov't For Restoring His Iraqi Citizenship," *Baghdad Observer* 3: 696 (April 30, 1970).

¹⁰ Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-'Irāqī Al-Mu'āšir*, 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 37. Mar Eshai Shimun was assassinated in 1975 in California. The Iraqi government is strongly implicated in his death, according to Shapera, 38.

¹² The word "Malik," in this context, means an Assyrian tribal chief. Malik Yā'qo was the leader of the Upper Tyare tribe, which originated in Hakkari, Turkey. *Ibid.*

¹³ Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-'Irāqī Al-Mu'āšir*, 38; ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], August 2, 1973, "al-Sayid Malik Yā'qo Malik Ismā'īl," from Ministry of Interior to the Ba'ath Regional Command Council, Office of the President, and all other Ministries. Like that of Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, Yā'qo's Iraqi citizenship was reinstated, along with that of those Assyrians associated with the Simele massacre. This was in accordance with Laws 249 and 972, issued in meetings held on April 19, and December 25, 1972. *Ibid.*, ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], August 2, 1973, "al-Sayid Malik Yā'qo Malik Ismā'īl."

¹⁴ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 01_3378, March 25, 1974, "The Relationship of the KDP with Syriac Speakers," Internal Ministry, General Directorate of Security—Political Affairs, 207.

have accepted the authority of a mythical leader returned from the West after decades of exile. At the same time, a new government committee was formed, the Committee for Assyrian Affairs, which was concerned with the affairs of Nestorian, Chaldean, Syriac Orthodox, and Syriac Catholic denominations. While the Committee incorporated an Assyrian representative at one point, its appointee seems to have played only a ceremonial role. Yā‘qo died a year later on January 24, 1974, in Baghdad; some claim that he was poisoned by the authorities for not complying with their requests.

More importantly, in 1972, the promulgation of Law 251 extended cultural and linguistic rights to the Assyrians, officially referred to by the government as “Syriac-speaking citizens.”¹⁵ The preface to the law asserted that, by extending rights to minorities, it was abiding by the principles of the Ba‘th party:

[When] national minorities (*al-aqalliyyāt al-qawmiyya*) practice their cultural rights, it is a manifestation of the democratic process that results from our deep commitment to the principles of national brotherhood and patriotic unity ... [Maintaining] the national characteristics (*al-khaṣā’is al-qawmiyya*) of these minorities and protecting their traditions and heritage, and progressively developing their culture and literature ... is a demonstration of [our] concern for increasing their participation in building this country and contributing to its progress ...¹⁶

The cultural rights granted on April 16, 1972, by Law 251 were as follows:

¹⁵ For a portion of the Revolution Command Council Decree No. 251 (April 26, 1973), see UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), State Party Report: Republic of Iraq, 32, UN Doc. CERD /C/240/Add.3 (April 1, 1996), available at [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CERD.C.240.Add.3.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CERD.C.240.Add.3.En?OpenDocument).

¹⁶ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1973, “Declaration Number 251,” issued by Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr, Chair of Revolutionary Command Council.

- (a) The Syriac language shall be the teaching language in all primary schools whose majority of pupils are from speakers in such language, and teaching of Arabic language shall be compulsory in such schools.
- (b) Syriac language shall be taught in intermediate and secondary schools whose majority of pupils are from speakers in such language, and Arabic language shall be the teaching language in such schools.
- (c) Syriac language shall be taught in the College of Arts at the University of Baghdad as one of the old languages.
- (d) Special programmes in Syriac language shall be set up at the Broadcasting Service of the Republic of Iraq and at Kirkuk and Nineveh TV stations.
- (e) To issue a Syriac-language monthly magazine by the Ministry of Information.
- (f) To establish a society for Syriac-speaking writers, and ensure their representation in literary and cultural societies of the country.
- (g) To help Syriac-speaking writers and translators morally and materially by printing and publishing their cultural and literary works.
- (h) To enable Syriac-speaking nationals to open cultural and artistic clubs and formulate artistic and theatrical groups for reviving and evolving their legacy and popular arts.¹⁷

The law permitted the teaching of Syriac in primary and secondary schools where Assyrians were in the majority, and also at the University of Baghdad's College of Arts and Literature. A special television and radio program in Syriac was to be broadcast in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Nineveh, cities with large concentrations of Assyrians, while Assyrian writers and academics were to be supported in various ways, and represented in Iraqi cultural associations. Finally, the establishment of civil society organizations in the pursuit of social, cultural, artistic, and linguistic objectives was now explicitly permitted.

Some of the significant organizations formed included the Union of Syriac Literates and Writers, whose seasonal magazine was entitled *al-Ittihād* ("The

¹⁷ Ibid.

Union”); the Cultural Organization, whose magazine was *Qālā Surāyā* (“The Syriac Voice”); the Assembly of the Syriac Language, which later joined the Scientific Iraqi Academy, whose magazine was *Majma‘ al-lugha al-Suriyāniyya* (“The Assembly of the Syriac Language”); and the Assyrian Cultural Club, which had existed before the passing of the new law, and whose magazine was entitled *Murdinnā Aturāyā* (“The Literate Assyrian”). Shapira suggests that these organizations were not permitted to use their ethnic name (Assyrian), but had to use their linguistic title (Syriac). The Assyrian Cultural Club was thus accused by the authorities of being chauvinistic, and its members were persecuted, as will be demonstrated.¹⁸ Furthermore, although Syriac schools were technically now permitted in areas where Assyrians were the majority, they did not materialize in practice.¹⁹

Contradictory Policies

Shortly after this granting of literary and cultural rights to the Assyrians, policies began to emerge that were in contradiction to this development, undermining the position of the Assyrian community. These new policies were driven by the three major fears mentioned above: the influence of the ICP and the KDP as political opposition parties within the Assyrian community; issues of Assyrian identity at home and abroad; and potential negative publicity concerning the Ba‘th regime, especially in the West.

¹⁸ Shapira, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āṣir*, 42–53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

The Ba‘th continued to be suspicious of relations between Assyrians and the KDP, especially when the war with the Kurds resumed in the early 1970s.²⁰ For instance, a report issued by the Interior Ministry on March 25, 1974, confirmed that Kurdish radio had begun broadcasting a program in Aramaic in the northern provinces. The program could be heard as far away as Baghdad, though the signal was weak in the capital. More seriously, the KDP had sent a delegation with close ties to the Iranian government to make contact with Assyrian clubs and political organizations in the West, seeking their support for the Kurdish cause. This delegation visited Assyrian communities in England, Sweden, Western Germany, Canada, Australia, and Iran, all U.S. allies in the Cold War.²¹ Although the report claimed that the Kurdish delegation had failed in its mission due to the recent enactment of Ba‘thist policies favorable to the Assyrians in the area of cultural rights, clearly there was still some concern internationally. The KDP was already receiving U.S. subsidies, which had begun in 1972, as well as direct military assistance from Iran.²² By opposing the Iraqi regime, the KDP gained favor with the United States. Due to Iran’s “key role in the U.S.-sponsored security system established as part of the Cold War in the Middle East,” its government also protested against the Iraqi regime, and supported the KDP.²³

It appeared that the Assyrians were being used in very much the same way as the Kurds were within Cold War politics, not only by countries allied with the

²⁰ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 203.

²¹ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 25 March 1974, Box 3378, Ba‘th Regional Command Collection, “The Relationship of the KDP with Speakers of Syriac,” Internal Ministry, General Directorate of Security—Political Affairs, 74.

²² Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 203.

²³ *Ibid.*, 203.

United States, such as Iran, but also by the Iraqi Kurds. The Assyrians in Western diasporic communities were able to lobby their countries of residence to support the Kurdish opposition; but the KDP also needed support from Iraqi Assyrians on the ground. For their part, the Assyrians employed transnational networks that included Assyrian organizations in Iraq, Iran, and various Western countries, much as they had in the 1960s. The Interior Ministry report had specifically mentioned the involvement of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA), an important organization during this period, representing numerous Assyrian organizations worldwide.²⁴ Founded in 1968 by Iranian Assyrians, the AUA succeeded in establishing close ties with the Iranian government, and has been credited with influencing Iran to support the Assyrians financially, as they had done the Kurds, to form their own militias against the Iraqi government alongside KDP forces. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs was formed in 1972, and between 3,000 and 10,000 Assyrian men registered to bear arms against the Ba‘thist regime.²⁵

Internally, the KDP was actively soliciting the support of the Assyrian community. It did not view the Ba‘th regime as its only competition, but was also concerned by the influence of the ICP on the Assyrians. Competition for Assyrian support was not the only reason for the rivalry between the ICP and the KDP. The ICP was loosely associated with the USSR, which in turn supported the Iraqi state and supplied it with arms for use against the Kurdish opposition. Hence, it was

²⁴ The Assyrian Universal Alliance, “About Us,” <http://aua.net> (accessed November 20, 2013).

²⁵ See Chapter 3, above.

important for the KDP to gain the support of the Assyrian community in order to increase the opposition's strength in the northern Iraqi region, and to dissuade the ICP from breaking the opposition's ranks. The KDP employed a variety of strategies to accomplish this goal. For instance, in 1973 the KDP's strategies were repressive, and included attacking the Assyrian village of Alqosh because of its close affiliation with the ICP. According to ICP's newspaper *Tarīq al-Shaʿb*, attacks by the KDP in Alqosh and upon near by villages resulted in torture, the killing of women and children, and the displacement of 600 families.²⁶ In 1974 the Iraqi Interior Ministry reported that the KDP was trying to influence Christian religious leaders to denounce communism in their sermons, as Muslim religious leaders had been doing.²⁷ A letter was sent by Ḥaso Mīrkhān Dūlmray, a KDP leader, to the Bishop of Mosul urging him to take control of the city of Alqosh and rid it of communist elements.²⁸ Positive gestures were made by the KDP to gain the support of the community and eliminate ICP influence among them. Suggestions for the co-optation of religious leaders included bestowing salaries on them.²⁹ In addition, Christians who had left their villages, presumably because of the civil war, were asked to return to their homes.³⁰

²⁶ “Al-Intihākāt wa al-Tajāwazāt didd Ḥizbunā wa al-Jamāhīr La Takhdam Qadiyat Shaʿbunā al-Kurdī,” *Tarīq al-Shaʿb* 18 (October 5, 1973), 1, 7.

²⁷ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, March 25, 1974, Box 3378, Baʿth Regional Command Collection, “The Relationship of the KDP with Speakers of Syriac,” Interior Ministry, General Directorate of Security—Political Affairs, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 207. On the influence of communism on the Alqoshis, see the Introduction, Chapter 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

The Ba‘th regime was concerned by the relationship the KDP was trying to cultivate with members of the Assyrian community, and also by the negative publicity that the KDP circulated about the regime in the West. In response, on April 27, 1974, the Iraqi General Intelligence Administration issued a report titled “Holding a Conference,” summarizing the proceedings of a meeting held with religious and secular representatives of the community in France (a priest from the Chaldean Church and the president of the Assembly of the Syriac Language in France).³¹ This meeting sparked the idea of holding a joint conference on the community in Geneva the following year. The report concluded with suggestions from a particular bishop who was president of the Assembly of the Syriac Language in Iraq. According to the bishop, the conference would clarify the humanistic principles of the Ba‘th party exemplified by its extension of justice and equality to all citizens, including minorities.³² After his praise for the regime, he pressed a case for the extension of Assyrian rights beyond the cultural and linguistic domains, to encompass administrative and political privileges. For instance, he requested the formation of a special administrative unit for speakers of the Syriac language, with an armed guard to protect it, and the formation of a higher committee to administer the national issues of the community until a political party had been founded. Given his position of leadership within the community, one can assume that his requests were reflective of the aspirations of the organization he represented, and to an extent of the wider community.

³¹ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], April 28 1974, “Holding a Conference,” issued by the General Intelligence Administration, to the Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council.

³² Ibid.

The staff of the General Central Investigation of the Ba‘th party did not take issue with his demands, and viewed the proposed conference favorably, noting that it would allow the party to clarify its positions, especially following Barzānī’s recent propaganda activity against the regime in the West. This position is further supported by O.G., who accompanied Malik Yā‘qo in a delegation to Iraq in 1973.³³ During the deliberations between Yā‘qo and the Iraqi Ba‘thist authorities, the creation of an Assyrian administrative area was discussed, along with that of a militia supportive of the central government.³⁴ For instance, on March 3, 1973, the Assyrian delegation headed by Yā‘qo met with the minister of the interior, who told them that the Iraqi authorities were ready to extend political rights to the Assyrians. During this conversation, the minister pointed to a map of Iraq hanging behind him, indicating that the area from Mosul to Duhok was for the Assyrians, and that all Assyrians and Kurds would be transferred to Assyrian and Kurdish regions, respectively: “We will work with you until you attain ḥukum dhātī (self-administration).”³⁵ On March 9, 1973, the secretary of general intelligence restated the same offer of an administrative region. O.G. believes that these negotiations, and what appeared to be positive offers by the Iraqi state, were actually intended to destroy relations between the Assyrians and the Kurds—an issue that troubled Yā‘qo, given his intimacy with the Barzānīs and the consequences of the deterioration of relations between the two communities.

³³ See Chapter 3, p. 157, footnote 83, for a background on O.G. and his ownership of Malik Yā‘qo’s diary from that period.

³⁴ O.G. interviewed by author, January 2, 2013, Chicago, Illinois.

³⁵ Ibid.

Yā‘qo therefore attempted to meet with Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī, with the intention of mediating between the three sides: the Iraqi state, the Kurds, and the Assyrians. Barzānī invited Malik Yā‘qo, according to his diary from that period, to be his guest, and Yā‘qo accepted. On May 14, 1973, the Assyrians were celebrating the consecration of a new church in Duhok, a fitting opportunity for Yā‘qo and Barzānī to meet. Assyrian Church of the East clergy were to attend, including Mar Yosip Khnanīsho‘ (1893–1977), the metropolitan of Baghdad and representative of the Church’s Assyrians in Iraq in the patriarch’s absence. Yā‘qo informed the interior minister of his upcoming trip, but the Iraqi authorities refused to sanction the trip. They informed him of their fear that Barzānī would attempt to kill Yā‘qo, and that, since Yā‘qo was the guest of the Iraqi state, they were responsible for his safety. Regardless of the likelihood of this scenario, Yā‘qo reiterated his trust in the Barzānīs, though the government was not willing to allow this meeting to take place.

Relations between the Iraqi government and the KDP had deteriorated in 1972, and Iran resumed its financial support for the Kurdish opposition once again (see Chapter 3). The threat in the Kurdish north was a serious concern to the Iraqi state authorities. Given Assyrians’ collaboration with the KDP in the 1960s and the recent formation of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs, the Iraqi authorities were determined to win the Assyrian community to their side.³⁶

Internal instability and increased oppositional political activity at this early stage

³⁶ In the interview with O.G., I asked him if he thought the Iraqi government wanted a militia in response to formation of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs, formed with the assistance of the KDP/ Barzānī faction. He agreed with this reasoning. *Ibid.*

of Ba‘thist rule was concerning for the regime. To counteract opposition, the Iraqi state employed conciliatory policies towards the Assyrian community, negotiating with the same Assyrian leaders affiliated with the Kurdish opposition, Yā‘qo and the AUA. The Assyrians, though skeptical of the Iraqi regime and wary of taking up arms against the Barzanis, were nevertheless willing to hear both sides.

In the following month, between June 17 and 24, various meetings took place between Yā‘qo’s delegation, the interior minister and the secretary of the general intelligence. The authorities tried to convince the Assyrians to carry arms to protect the lands that would be allotted to them by the government.³⁷ In one meeting, the minister of interior told Yā‘qo in O.G.’s presence: “I have liked you from day one. Give us some time and we [the Iraqi state] will fill lorries with money and Kalashnikovs [to build and guard the Assyrian region].” According to O.G., Yā‘qo replied that they did not need weapons, but peaceful negotiations, requesting a meeting with Mullah Muṣṭafa Barzānī to negotiate a peaceful solution. It seems that Yā‘qo was unwilling to disrupt the peace established between the Assyrians and the Kurds in the northern provinces, and although he conferred with the Iraqi authorities, he seemed skeptical of their offer, given that they expected the Assyrians to form militias and turn against the Kurds. In light of this information, the Ba‘th document referring to the suggestions from the bishop who presided over the Assembly of the Syriac Language in Iraq—for an administrative unit and an armed guard to protect it—seems reflective of the overall political negotiations and discussions between the Iraqi authorities and

³⁷ Ibid.

Assyrian leaders.³⁸ As we will see, the Iraqi state would change its position with regard to political privileges for the Assyrians after the Algiers Agreement of 1975. In addition, stricter limitations would be set on the cultural rights already granted.

The Aftermath of the Algiers Agreement

An apparent shift in the Iraqi regime's internal reports and general attitude was noted following the Algiers Agreement with Iran in March 1975. In consequence of this agreement the two countries resolved their issues, compelling Iran to stop funding the KDP. Shortly thereafter the Kurdish resistance crumbled, and thousands of *peshmerga* fighters surrendered, accepting Iraq's amnesty deal.³⁹

The Iraqi economy benefited from the relative tranquility produced by the positive relations with Iran and the interruption of the internal northern conflict. Iraq's oil income reached eight billion dollars by the end of 1975, allowing the government to fund various social and reconstruction projects.⁴⁰ Iraq also gained numerous Western allies, and, although it kept the Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the USSR, its relations with the USSR and the ICP were undermined.⁴¹ The strengthening of the domestic economy and shoring up of Iraq's international relationships resulted in a decline in the degree of conciliation

³⁸ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], April 28, 1974, "Holding a Conference," issued by the General Intelligence Administration, to the Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council.

³⁹ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 204–5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

it showed towards minority communities, including the Assyrians, and toward opposition groups.

Border Cleansing and the Construction of “Modern Villages”

Still wary of the resistance it had recently suppressed, the Iraqi regime began a massive project of relocating Kurdish and Assyrian villages. In the mid 1970s the Ba‘th regime started to clear a “corridor” along its northern border with Iran, in the hope of blocking further Iranian support to the KDP. Assyrian villagers were evacuated from their homes, and witnessed the destruction of their churches, farms, and houses. Thus, while urban Assyrians were, on balance, benefiting from government policies, many Assyrian villagers were losing their homes and livelihood. The treatment of Assyrian villagers stood in stark contradiction to the positive Ba‘thist policies that were simultaneously being implemented in urban centers. In two months, 28,000 Assyrian families, or approximately 140,000 Assyrians (assuming five people per family) and half a million Kurds were removed from their villages, and eventually resettled in collective towns. Donabed argues that these regions were mainly targeted as part of the regime’s campaign of ethnic cleansing and Arabization. Why else, he asks, were Assyrian regions such as Barwar—located along the Turkish, not Iranian border—also evacuated?⁴²

⁴² Sargon Donabed, “Iraq and the Assyrian Unimagining: Illuminating Scaled Suffering and a Hierarchy of Genocide from Simele to Anfal” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 161–2, 175–6. For more on the uprooting of the Kurdish population, see Tripp, *History of Iraq*, p. 206.

On November 24, 1978, a report from the head of general intelligence to the Ministry of the Interior implicated the regime in the border cleansing operations, stating that the armed forces had destroyed churches in front of villagers during the deportations. The report also suggested ways of alleviating the negative publicity that would result from these campaigns.⁴³

As expected, the Assyrian community in the United States and Sweden began condemning these actions in letters to the United Nations and other human rights agencies. The Iraqi government meanwhile dispensed its own reports contradicting these allegations, hoping to exonerate itself in the Western media. In addition, the Revolutionary Command Council issued new policies on May 13, 1978 mandating the reimbursement of those affected: indemnities for losses of homes, crops, land, and other necessities were to be paid to the evacuees.⁴⁴ A letter was also sent to the recently appointed patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Dīnkhā Khinannyā (1935–2015), who was a resident of the United States. The letter raised a number of important points relating to the Church and community, beginning with the recent border-cleansing activity:

Our revolutionary Government has built modern villages provided with all educational, health, social and cultural services. Modern lines of communication link these villages. The population living in scattered, remote and uninhabitable villages, which cannot be [provided with]

⁴³ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], November 24, 1978, “Evacuation of Christian Families,” from the Chair of General Intelligence to the Ministry of Interior.

⁴⁴ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], “Propaganda against the country,” from Foreign Ministry to Revolutionary Command Council, Presidency of the General Intelligence.

services due to their remoteness and because a few families inhabit them only, have been settled in those modern villages.⁴⁵

Efforts were being made to co-opt the Assyrian Church of the East. The letter concluded with promises to build a Patriarchate, along with other new churches to replace those destroyed in the border clearing operations. The patriarch was invited to visit Iraq to oversee these new projects. With this letter, the regime tried to preserve the ambiguity of its position, combining its strategic interest of suppressing community-based opposition with the ideological project of modernization. This illustrates the discrepancy between the avowed Ba‘thist project of secular modernization and the way in which, in practice, it dealt with ethnic, sectarian, and tribal conflicts.

The Ba‘thification of Society

Apram Shapira, an author and literary figure during this period, argues that as early as the mid 1970s, the Assyrians began to see the reversal of these promised strategies. The turnaround coincided with the Ba‘th regime’s consolidation of power over its political opponents, chiefly the ICP and the KDP.⁴⁶ As the strategic significance of Assyrians in opposition groups was no longer a reality, Ba‘thist generosity towards the Assyrians was automatically withdrawn. All established Assyrian civil social organizations were either closed down or placed under the

⁴⁵ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], November 25, 1978, from Shlīmun Malik Bakū, head of the Central Administrative Committee for Assyrian Affairs, submitted to minister of interior. There is no record of compensations being made to the Assyrian villagers.

⁴⁶ Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āšir*, 53.

direct control of the state, and its Assyrian media outlets became organs of state propaganda.⁴⁷

There is evidence to support such arguments in Ba‘thist documents. For instance, in the Spring of 1977 the president of the government’s Committee for Assyrian Affairs, ‘Āmir ‘Abd al-Bāqī, sent a letter to the Iraqi General Intelligence informing them that the committee had received a request for financial assistance from the president of the Assyrian Cultural Club in Baghdad, for the purpose of buying the property it then occupied.⁴⁸ ‘Āmir ‘Abd al-Bāqī supported the Assyrian Cultural Club’s request in his letter to the Iraqi General Intelligence, and suggested that certain conditions should be attached to the financial contribution. Most importantly, the regime would direct the activities of the Club according to cultural and social frameworks that “serve the party and the revolution.”⁴⁹ Increased oil production, cordial relations with Iran, and a waning opposition in the aftermath of the 1975 Algiers Agreement in 1975 all strengthened the Iraqi regime, making it less willing to negotiate. Placing both the border-clearing operations in the north and the regime’s Ba‘thification efforts during this period in context throws important light on the power dynamics associated with the contradictory policies being pursued by the regime.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53–4.

⁴⁸ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1977, “To the Honorary Vice-Chair of General Intelligence,” from ‘Āmir ‘Abd al-Bāqī, Chair of the Committee for Assyrian Affairs.

⁴⁹ Ibid. This policy of increased Ba‘thification of society will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5, relying on both Ba‘thist sources and the Assyrian Baghdadi press.

Issues of Identity

While the Ba‘thists pursued policies that supported literacy and cultural rights, in practice they were wary of implementing these policies fearing that they would strengthen the Assyrian identity. An internal report on the activities of the Assyrian community in Mosul provides evidence of this. The report, issued on February 4, 1979, stated that a joint committee had been formed comprising Chaldeans, Syrian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, and Roman Catholics, along with the Mesopotamian Club. In the report, the word “national,” when referring to minorities, which had been used in earlier government declarations, was replaced with “denominational,” even when the reference was being made to the community as a whole, rather than any one religious denomination. Among the activities about which the report expressed anxiety was the teaching of “Syriac,” even though Law 251 had explicitly sanctioned it in 1972. The report states: “[T]he Christian denominations have lately increased their activities, starting with the formation of committees for Christian youth that teach them the Assyrian (Athūrī) language.” These activities would have “a significant impact on sectarian tendencies and the promotion and strengthening of their national spirit.”⁵⁰ The formation of a committee that included Assyrians from different religious denominations was concerning to the Iraqi regime, which now perceived the teaching of the Aramaic language as a catalyst for the assertion of Assyrian identity and nationalism.

⁵⁰ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1979, “Activities of the Christian denominations in Mosul,” submitted to Mr M. Sh. S., 38.

These local concerns in Mosul were echoed in the higher echelons of the regime, and accompanied by the development of methods of resolving this interdenominational collaborations among members of the Assyrian community. This was demonstrated in the minutes of a meeting held by the Committee for Assyrian Affairs in the spring of 1979. This committee was an official government organization, formed in the early 1970s, and originally headed by a member of the community, and later by non-community members. The organization was meant to represent all of the religious denominations within the community in an official capacity within the Iraqi state, and also to interested international bodies. It submitted studies on the Assyrian community internally to other government agencies, and responded to requests and orders submitted by these agencies. This was true in the case of interdenominational collaborations, discussed above. The minutes of a meeting from the spring of 1979 reveal classified letters issued by the Revolutionary Command Council and the Iraqi General Intelligence that provide guidance to the committee and others on how to deal with Assyrian activity that the government considered hostile to the state.⁵¹ The guidelines of these two agencies can be extrapolated from a letter issued by the committee in which it agrees with the findings of these departments, that Chaldeans were of Arab descent. Furthermore, the committee suggested that financial resources and programs be extended to radio and television stations in Detroit that were in line with Ba‘thist policies.⁵² The Iraqi General Intelligence

⁵¹ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1979, “Highly Classified and Personal,” from Muḥammad Fakhrī—Chair of Committee [for Assyrian Affairs].

⁵² Ibid.

was concerned about the intimacy between certain religious figures within the Chaldean Church in the United States and Assyrian political organizations, specifically the Assyrian Universal Alliance and the Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party.⁵³ This was especially alarming given the deteriorating relationship between the patriarch of the Chaldean Church, Mar Shaikho, and the Ba‘th regime.⁵⁴ Patriarch Shaikho, according to the report, had been unofficially blocking any Chaldean Christian activity that was in line with Ba‘thist policies.⁵⁵ In response, various methods of co-optation were suggested by the Committee for Assyrian Affairs, including holding a special meeting between the patriarch and the Iraqi president to discuss the community’s concerns, and to return schools belonging to the Chaldean Church to its administration.⁵⁶ The Ba‘th regime was wary of interactions between Assyrian denominational communities. One way of differentiating between the Assyrians and Chaldeans was to define the latter as Arabs, and have the Assyrian committee, originally representing Assyrians from various denominations, agree with this designation. At the same time, the regime was concerned about deteriorating relations between the government and the Chaldean patriarch, which might lead to increased political collaboration between the various denominations. The state therefore had to mend its relations with the patriarch and pursue various conciliatory policies to win him over.

⁵³ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], July 22, 1980, “The Chaldean Denomination,” to chair of Presidential Offices, from Revolutionary Command Council, Chair of General Intelligence.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1980, “al-sayid al-Mu‘awin al-Siyāsī al-Muḥtaram,” from the Committee for Assyrian Affairs, submitted by the chair of the Committee for Assyrian Affairs.

The government also feared the transnational interactions between Assyrians in Iraq and neighboring countries, along with the influence of Assyrian diasporic communities residing in the West. The Rī'āsāt Dīwān Rī'āsāt al-Jumhūriyya, Presidential Office, issued a report to the Iraqi Foreign Ministry titled "Anti-Iraqi Assyrian Activity," on August 19, 1978. It suggested that the Foreign Ministry take the necessary steps to contact the Iranian administration regarding their "Iḥtiḍān," i.e., embrace of the "Assyrian denomination and their care for it, as advised by their imperialist leader." The shah, according to the report, was moving the Assyrians in a direction opposing Iraq's revolutionary march.⁵⁷

In a subsequent report, the specific concern of the Iraqi authorities was revealed. The Iranian authorities had authorized Iranian Assyrians to broadcast a radio program that aired daily for forty-five minutes at 10 p.m. in the Aramaic language, and Iraqi Assyrians could hear this program across the border. The Iraqi authorities characterized the program as "Unṣurī, Ṭā'ifi" ("racist and sectarian"), and they believed it was geared towards Iraqi Assyrians.⁵⁸ The Iraqi authorities decided to jam the radio signal.⁵⁹ In 1978, a translation of the program was provided to establish the type of content included. Numerous episodes focused on the lives and works of various Assyrian literary figures and their publications. Some of these writers had traveled and lived in Iraq, especially following the

⁵⁷ ADM-BR [Al-Andiyya folder B], August 19, 1978, "Anti-Iraqi Assyrian Activity," from Rī'āsāt Dīwān Rī'āsāt al-Jamhūriyya (chair of Presidential Offices) issued to the Iraqi Foreign Ministry.

⁵⁸ ADM-BR [Al-Andiyya folder B], August 19, 1978, "Anti-Iraqi Assyrian Activity," from Chair of Presidential Offices to Ministry of Defense.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

events of the First World War, and had interacted with Assyrian writers in Iraq. One such figure was Benyamin Arsānūs. Born in 1909, in his literary works he called for “Love, unity, and a strong bond (*Shadd Qawmī*) between [Assyrians].”⁶⁰ He also believed that activism (*taharruk*) in Assyrian villages was the only way to ensure the progress the Assyrian nation.⁶¹ Other programs focused on Assyrian history, both ancient and modern, and provided reasons for the migration of Assyrians to Iran. A connection was also made between the words Ashūrī and Athūrī.⁶² This connection suggested that the modern Assyrians were the descendants of the ancient Assyrians—a claim Assyrians had been making since at least the late 1800s, which seemed to concern the Iraqi authorities greatly.⁶³ The Iraqi translator of the document characterized such a connection between the ancient and modern Assyrians as a “dangerous historical distortion.”⁶⁴

This last point was raised once again by the Iraqi authorities in relation to an Iranian Assyrian magazine. The Ba‘th administration provided information on an Assyrian Iranian youth magazine whose Aramaic title was *Rosh* (“Awaken”). A number of concerns were highlighted in this government report, one regarding the above-mentioned association between the words Athūrī and Ashūrī. The magazine claimed that both words represented the same community, which

⁶⁰ ADM-BR [Al-Andiyya folder B], translation of the Assyrian section from the broadcast aired on 1978.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² ADM-BR [Al-Andiyya folder B], 1978, “The Assyrian Broadcasting in Iran,” from Administration of Information and Censorship, 8th division.

⁶³ Refer to the identity section in the introductory Chapter, 1.

⁶⁴ ADM-BR [Al-Andiyya folder B], 1978, “The Assyrian Broadcasting in Iran.”

encompassed both the modern Assyrians and their ancient ancestors. In Iraq, the state made a clear distinction between the two words, precisely to avoid this association: the modern Assyrians were referred to as “Athūriyyūn” and the ancient Assyrians as “Ashūriyyūn.” This distinction came to be more assiduously policed by the Iraqi regime after 1975 (see Chapter 5). The Iraqi authorities were concerned by this, and according to various reports were sensitive to its repercussions within the Iraqi Assyrian community.

Discussing the way in which the Assyrians were referred to by the Iraqi state, Apram Shapira notes the shift from the Arabic letter “shin” to “tha’” in reference to them. He argues that Assyrians were called “Athūriyyūn” instead of “Ashūriyyūn” by the state in order to erode their rights as the indigenous people of the country, and also to distinguish them from their ancient ancestors, “Ashūriyyūn.”⁶⁵ Iraqi Assyrian intellectual writings had used the two terms interchangeably at the onset of the decade in which Law 251 was issued, but this changed, mainly as a result of government regulations, as the decade progressed.

It is striking that the Iraqi state was beginning to make similar connections with the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, including that of the Assyrians. Eric Davis’s use of the term “hegemony” in Iraqi context seems applicable in this instance, where the state’s own narrative, and that supported by elites associated with it, is deemed acceptable, while an alternative one used by the Assyrian community is not—though the Assyrian community’s spontaneous association with the ancient Assyrians pre-dated the Iraqi state. The state was concerned not

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15–16.

only with the way the Assyrians in Iraq understood themselves and their history, but also with how Assyrians in other countries did so. Iraq had clear reasons to be concerned about the Iranian Assyrian community in the 1970s, as the two states were not on good terms and Iran had financed the Iraqi Kurdish opposition, enabling it to pose a serious threat to the Iraqi government. There was also concern about the influence the Iranian Assyrian community had on Assyrians across the border. It should be borne in mind that Iranian Assyrians had originated in Urmia, an area situated in northwestern Iran, and geographically close to the Assyrian villages of northern Iraq. Iranian Assyrians had also acquired cultural capital as a result of their advanced intellectual culture, partly enabled by the presence of Western missionaries in Urmia in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Iranian Assyrians thus had a significant influence on Iraqi Assyrians, given the relative ease with which literature, radio signals, and cassette tapes permeated the border. One wonders, however, why Iraq did not take advantage of the way Assyrians associated themselves with the ancient Assyrians in order to integrate the community further into the official narrative of the Iraqi state itself.

Indeed, around this time, the Ba‘th regime had begun juxtaposing pan-Arabism with Mesopotamian motifs as part of a project intended to create a “new Iraqi man,” with a specific national memory and direct ties to the state he was

⁶⁶ See two articles on Iran that focus on Assyrian press and drama in Urmia prior to the First World War: Eden Naby, “The Assyrians of Iran: Reunification of a ‘Millat,’ 1906–1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8: 2 (1977): 237–49; Eden Naby, “Theater, Language and Inter-Ethnic Exchange: Assyrian Performance before World War I,” *Iranian Studies* 40: 4 (2007): 501–10.

ruled by.⁶⁷ According to Eric Davis, the deployment of Mesopotamianism served a central purpose in Iraq's regional campaign for leadership of the Arab world. Iraq was able to stand on equal ground with countries such as Egypt, with its ancient civilization; Iraq was now able to highlight its own ancient history, and to take pride in the contribution to humanity of its historic civilization. Davis further argues that embedding Arab nationalism in Mesopotamianism within the state narrative served to unite Iraqis of various backgrounds, and allowed them to feel proud of their folklore and ancient heritage.⁶⁸ For the Ba'athists, however, it seems

⁶⁷ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 148. The study of Semitic languages had gained great momentum in Germany and Holland during the seventeenth century and onwards. The study of languages eventually sparked interest in Semitic peoples and their origins. One popular hypothesis, the Winkler–Caetani theory, proposed that the original home of the Semites was the Arabian Peninsula. According to this theory, due to a change in climate in the region, its inhabitants emigrated to the Fertile Crescent. Arab intellectuals began applying this theory with more certainty following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Arab nationalists eventually used the pre-Islamic past to legitimize political frameworks. When these theoretical academic studies appeared in political newspapers, they were presented as legitimate facts, pointing to the importance of the ancient past in the construction of modern identity. See Nimrod Hurvitz, "Muhibb Ad-Din Al-Khatib's Semitic Wave Theory and Pan-Arabism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 29: 1 (1993): 121–4.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Memories of State*, 150–1. Strikingly, Saddam Hussein constructed a continuous line of succession between ancient Mesopotamian rulers, the Abbasid caliphs, and himself (Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 217). This campaign of the rewriting of history was so prominent that in 1980 a portion of the economic benefits of oil production was dedicated to this task, Davis, *Memories of State*, 157–8. To perpetuate this agenda, efforts were made to create new journals (in Arabic and English), international conferences were held, ancient Mesopotamian cities were reconstructed, and museums and festivals were created (ibid., 164). In addition, the state influenced and sponsored the production of cultural manifestations by publishing ideological speeches (i.e., those of Saddam Hussein), promoting books based on state ideology, and allowing the publication of work by intellectuals who produced texts aligned with the state's agenda (ibid., 170).

that Davis's second argument does not apply to the Assyrians, whose own Mesopotamian heritage was denied by the state.⁶⁹

Assyrians were still regarded as foreigners by the Iraqi state. If they were not native to Iraq, and did not claim Arab identity—which was integral to the Mesopotamian narrative propagated by the state—neither could they claim Mesopotamian heritage. The narrative of “natives” versus “foreigners” was often deployed in reference to the Assyrians in the first decades of the twentieth century (see Introduction,), especially following the Simele massacre of 1933. The narrative of indigenosity to which Assyrians were laying claim would have been especially alarming to the government, given that various non-Iraqi Assyrian communities were claiming Iraq, which incorporated the territory of historic Mesopotamia and Assyria, as their homeland. Certainly, Assyrians around the world were raising important issues for Assyrians in Iraq in their various publications, but they were also, thereby, exacerbating concerns nursed by the Iraqi state.

The government report on the Assyrian youth magazine *Rosh* went on to summarize other articles of significance. Articles touched on various themes, including the longing for one's ancestral village, that were illustrated by allusions to characters such as shepherds, and involved scenarios connecting humble figures with mighty Assyrian kings. In such articles, Assyrian identity was reinforced and associations made between contemporary Assyrian villages and

⁶⁹ This was also because the Assyrians did not share the views propagated by the state based on so-called “Semitic wave theory,” which asserted that all Semites were of Arab descent. Hurvitz, “Muhibb Ad-Din Al-Khatib's Semitic Wave Theory and Pan-Arabism,”

the mighty empire.⁷⁰ One can assume that, in these articles, the Iranian Assyrian writers of *Rosh* were taking a position on the destruction of villages that had been occurring in northern Iraq since the 1960s but with particular intensity following the Algiers Agreement. It seems probable that this would have offered a clear means by which Iranian Assyrians could show their solidarity with their Iraqi counterparts. This suggestion is reinforced by the themes of many articles in *Rosh* that are referred to in the government report. An example is an article titled: “Through Uniting We Can Resist and through Division We Will Vanish” (*Bi al-waḥda naṣṭaṭi ‘ al-ṣumūd, wa bi al-tafrīqa sanaḍī*”). Its author criticizes the internal divisions in the community along denominational and political lines, resulting from the unwillingness of Assyrian leaders to agree on a set of goals for the nation. The author, according to the Ba‘thist report, called upon the various Assyrian leaders and organizations to unite, solidify their position, and salvage themselves from the chaos they were facing. He concluded by reiterating the importance of having a single leadership for a unitary Assyrian nation (*qiyada wāḥida wa sha’b athorī wāḥid*).⁷¹

Due to the association made between the words “Athūrī” and “Ashūrī,” the Iraqi state became more concerned about the use of this terminology by Assyrian organizations, such as the Assyrian Cultural Club, which had the word “Athūrī” in its title (see below).

⁷⁰ ADM-BR [Al-Andiyya, folder A], 1978, Translation of ‘Adnan Husain Muhammad.

⁷¹ Ibid. The language used by the author may refer to AUA political rhetoric.

Shapera described the effects of this state of affairs on the Assyrian Cultural Club of Baghdad, of which he was a member. In 1977, the executive committee of the Assyrian Cultural Club received a letter from the government informing it to refrain from using “racist and chauvinistic” words and actions. Upon further investigation, the official in charge specified that the word “Assyrian,” which appeared in the Club’s title and publications, entailed chauvinistic and racist connotations. Moreover, the Ministry of Internal Affairs refused to allow them to raise their membership fees from 250 fils (a quarter dinar) to 500 fils, for the same reasons. Finally, three Assyrian singers were imprisoned and tortured for singing “racist” songs during a performance at the Club.⁷²

The Iraqi regime remained wary of international activities on the part of Assyrians, on which it worked to gather information. An example of this is a report on the 11th Congress of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, held between November 2 and November 11, 1978, in Sydney, Australia.⁷³ The Congress was attended by twenty-four representatives from Iraq, Australia, Iran, Greece, the United States, and the UK. A large gathering of Assyrians was present for the opening ceremonies of the Congress, along with official representatives of the Australian government.⁷⁴ An informant remarked that, during the opening ceremonies, only the Australian and Assyrian flags were raised. Nine

⁷² Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āşir*, 43.

⁷³ The Assyrian Universal Alliance, “The 11th Congress, Sydney, Australia, November 2nd–11th 1978,” <http://aua.net> (accessed April 17, 2015).

⁷⁴ ADM-BR [four folders], 1978, No. 7149, from Revolutionary Command Council, Head of General Intelligence, media, 1–2.

representatives were clearly identified as antagonistic to the positions of the Iraqi government. One of these was Gīwargis Malik Chikku, brother of Hurmizd Malik Chikku, who headed the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs. This committee was part of the political opposition to the government in the north, and supported the KDP (see Chapter 3). It is believed that funding for this committee was provided by the Iranian state under the influence of the AUA. Five points to be discussed at the Congress pertained directly to Iraq:

1. Giving the Iraqi authorities the demands of the Assyrians officially
2. The expulsion of Assyrians from northern Iraq
3. Forcing Assyrians to register their nationality as either “Arab” or “Kurd” in the 1978 Iraqi census.
4. The attendance of Gīwargis Malik Chikku, chair of the Higher Committee for Christian Affairs, in the Iraqi northern region.
5. Preventing the teaching of the Syriac language in Iraq.

The informant claimed that these issues had been resolved in a manner generally favorable to the Iraqi state. On the first point, communication was to be established with the Iraqi embassies directly, with a copy forwarded to the United Nations.⁷⁵ With regard to the second and third points, the informant claimed to have clarified these issues to the attendees, and no action was taken as a result of their interference. The informant used the plural form, probably indicating that the whole Iraqi delegation, with the exception of Gīwargis Malik Chikku, who attended separately, supported the Iraqi state’s position.⁷⁶ The Iraqi delegation was subsequently successful in including two of its members in the newly elected

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 3–4.

executive committee of the AUA. They took issue with the presence of Gīwargis Malik Chikku, and succeeded in having him removed.⁷⁷ The Iraqi delegation also succeeded in foiling plans to form a reconciliation committee to resolve issues between a number of Assyrian organizations.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the informant's remarks on the teaching of Syriac are not legible, although other sources indicate the reaction of the Congress on this matter (see below).

According to the Iraqi government informant, the Congress was concluded with numerous resolutions: first, in favor of obtaining a homeland (*Mawṭin*) for the Assyrians, in Iraq or elsewhere— as indicated by the AUA, “the continuous aim of the Assyrian Universal Alliance is a National Homeland for the Assyrians in their ancestral homeland”;⁷⁹ second, in favor of guaranteeing Assyrians equal access to Iraqi citizenship, military college and the police force, equal opportunity for jobs in ministries, and administrative and general management.⁸⁰ The informant concluded his report with a few suggestions to the Iraqi authorities. He asked that, in future, the Iraqi delegation should be sent with a decree or letter proclaiming that “Assyrians in Iraq enjoy various rights as citizens. There are no differences between them and the Iraqi people. We do not accept any faction, organization or association to represent Iraqi Assyrians outside of Iraq in any capacity.”⁸¹ As successful as the Iraqi delegate claimed to have been, the AUA's opinion of the Iraqi state was quite negative. For instance, the AUA claimed that

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁹ “The 11th Congress, Sydney, Australia, November 2nd—11th 1978.”

⁸⁰ ADM-BR [four folders], 1978, No. 7149, from Revolutionary Command Council, Head of General Intelligence, media, 5.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

its members were poisoned during the commencement ceremonies using sweets provided by the Iraqi government.⁸² Also, noting the change of policy towards the Assyrians by the Iraqi regime, the AUA stated:

Be it finally resolved that the 11th congress of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, in accordance with the temporary constitution of Iraq, wishes to convey to the Government of Iraq its proposal to re-open negotiations on the basis of the 1973 resolutions presented to the Iraqi government by the late Malik Yacoub De Malik Ismail accompanied by the Assyrian committee in Iraq and a delegation from the Assyrian Universal Alliance.⁸³

This resolution refers to the deliberations between the Iraqi authorities, Malik Yā'qo, and the AUA in 1973. It also asserts that the Iraqi state and the Assyrians had agreed upon certain principles.

Islamic Religious Education

In the late 1970s, Islamic religious education became a mandatory subject in Iraqi public schools, and was required of students from all religious backgrounds. This requirement was probably an extension of the government's official adoption of an Islamic rhetoric during this period.⁸⁴ A detailed analysis of how Assyrians perceived this matter as Christians was set out in a government report. It included an informant's summary of the perceptions of various segments of the Assyrian

⁸² Assyrian Universal Alliance, Australia Chapter, "Assyrian Universal Alliance To Hold 26th World Congress In Sydney," *Assyrian International News Agency*, March 4, 2009 on <http://www.aina.org/news/20090303200505.htm> (retrieved May 15, 2015).

⁸³ The Assyrian Universal Alliance, "The 11th Congress, Sydney, Australia, November 2nd–11th 1978," <http://aua.net> (retrieved on December 2, 2013).

⁸⁴ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 208–9.

community on the matter, as well as recommendations provided by numerous government officials, including members of the Committee for Assyrian Affairs, in light of the Assyrian community's negative reactions to the policy. The report demonstrated that the government was concerned by how its policies were perceived by the Assyrian community. Although it is not clear whether a new policy was enacted to excuse Christians formally from Islamic religious education following the investigation, most government officials did recommend the discontinuation of the policy in relation to Christian students.

The investigation was initiated on October 11, 1979, by an informant who issued a report to the chair of General Intelligence regarding the teaching of Islamic religious education to all students, including Christians. The informant stated that, through his recent casual interactions with Christians, he had noted that the community generally had a negative perception of the teaching of the "holy Quran" indiscriminately to all students, and at all levels of education. Those Christians who were religiously devout, including the elderly and the less well educated, but also some intellectuals, claimed that the state "wants to eventually Islamize us," and asked, "How can we let our children learn the Quran? The Quran is for Muslims and not Christians." Others wondering what had driven the administration, which had until then been better than previous ones, particularly in its policies towards the Christian population, to adopt such positions.⁸⁵ On the other hand, young people, intellectuals, and the highly educated presented a

⁸⁵ ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1979, "Information," name of informant omitted, to the Chair of the 7th Division, Chair of General Intelligence, Administration of General Anti-Espionage, Administration of Political Affairs.

slightly different argument. This group argued that they would not object to the teaching of the Quran to higher-level students, for whom it would be beneficial both scientifically and intellectually (“*Ilman wa Fikran*”), as well as strengthening their Arabic linguistic skills, since the Quran was the source of the language.⁸⁶ But they insisted that younger students were more malleable, and that introducing Islamic religious education to them would compel them to leave their Christian faith and become Muslims.

In short, teaching the Quran to students had caused a “big turmoil” among the Christians, which had two possible repercussions, according to the informant. Internally, groups politically opposed to the Ba‘th Party, especially the Communist Party, were using the policy to their advantage, accusing the Ba‘th of favoring Islam and discriminating against Christians. The informant made clear that the ICP claimed not to distinguish between religious communities as a method for gaining support, while in reality, according to his account, it was opposed to all religions.⁸⁷ Externally, various hostile intelligence agencies were also taking advantage of this policy, especially the CIA and Mossad, which were presumably making similar accusations against the Ba‘th as those leveled by the ICP. The informant expressed concern that Mossad would quickly spread this information to the international community and “poison their thought.” Moreover, the Egyptian intelligence service would use this to “brainwash Egyptian Christians” and win them to Sadat’s side. The informant therefore suggested

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

excluding Christian children from learning the Quran: if it was to be taught in schools, it should only be in advanced classes.

Following the publication of this report, chairs of various divisions within the General Intelligence provided their input on the matter. It was generally agreed that the teaching of the Quran to Christian students had been negatively regarded by the community, and might contribute to negative Western press and be used by adversaries of the Ba‘th Party. The vice-chair of the Anti-Espionage Committee disagreed with the cautionary tone adopted by his comrades. He believed that those opposing the Ba‘th would maintain their opposition whether the law was amended or not. He postulated that it was the duty of Ba‘thists as nationalists (*qawmiyyn*) to continue the policy of teaching the Quran to Christians, who were one of the religious groups in the Arab world (*Waṭanuna al-‘Arabī*). Learning the Quran would strengthen their Arabic language and increase “their patriotic feeling” (*Iḥsasuhum bi al-Muwaṭana*). The latter point, especially, was a problematic one, since most Christians were emigrating because they were not nationalistic enough, according to this official.⁸⁸ The vice-chair of the General Intelligence Affairs suggested that they seek the advice of the Presidential Office (*Rī‘āsat al-Dīwān*), and that, although the Ba‘th seriously valued Arab and Islamic cultures, the “current stage might be considered the stage of religions (*al-adyān*) and nationalities (*qawmiyyāt*).” Though the vice-chair did not supplement his quote with an explanation, he was likely refering to religious extremism

⁸⁸ Ibid., ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], November 14, 1979, “Conclusion and Suggestions.”

resulting from the Iranian Revolution. Other committee members agreed that the Presidential Office should be involved.⁸⁹

Hence, a letter was sent to the chair of the Presidential Office on November 20, 1979, asking it to reassess this issue. The chair of the Presidential Office replied to the chair of General Intelligence on November 25, informing him that the Ministry of Education had issued a new policy on this issue. Unfortunately, there is no record of the new policy or what it might have entailed, but one can assume that the original ruling on compulsory Islamic religious education was loosened for Christian students, as this issue is not taken up by Assyrian intellectual or religious figures in their publications. The Ba‘th regime was clearly still concerned about the influence of the ICP, and probably of the KDP, on the Assyrian community. Given the possibility of communist advances within the community, and previous concerns about their relations with the Chaldean patriarch, the regime was willing to change its policies in a pragmatic direction.

Conclusion

A number of Assyrian academics were able to take advantage of the literary and cultural rights granted in 1972. They not only formed organizations, but energetically published newspapers and magazines, and also produced radio and television programs. This literary and cultural movement was sustained by the collective efforts of Assyrians from various religious denominations, who

⁸⁹ Ibid.

collaborated on editorial boards and in social and cultural clubs. An interview conducted in Iraq with Benyamin Haddad, an important literary figure from the period who presided over numerous editorial boards, confirmed this, and provided the insight that the literary movement not only brought Assyrians from various religious denominations closer together, but also enabled them to develop a common, standardized dialect of Aramaic.

Ba‘thist policies towards the Assyrians in the 1970s reflected the regime’s approaches to the internal and external pressures exerted on it. For the state, the role of Assyrians in the ICP and KDP, and their interactions with Assyrians in neighboring countries, as well as with regional governments, were concerning. Externally, it was also wary of the influence of diasporic Assyrian organizations on Western governments. In an effort to bring members of this community closer to the party, it granted cultural and linguistic rights to its members. Although these rights were not fully implemented, Assyrians still benefited from them significantly. To offset the influence of the KDP in Western countries, the regime sought to host conferences to cultivate relationships with Assyrians in the diaspora—especially following the bad publicity it had received in response to its border-cleansing operations.

In response to these concerns, the government established the Committee for Assyrian Affairs, headed by an Assyrian. This organization was mainly used to establish communication with community members and religious figures, especially in the West, and also to communicate with human rights organizations inquiring about the circumstances of the Assyrians. Though this organization,

created in the early 1970s, was designed to represent Assyrians of all religious denominations, the government began to grow wary of interdenominational links, specifically, those between the Chaldean Church and Assyrian political organizations; the government feared, as one report put it, “the strengthening of their national spirit.” To overcome this, various strategies were implemented, including the co-optation of a number of religious and secular community leaders, and the use of economic resources to support those leaders to enforce Ba‘thist policies.

The use of terminology in Ba‘thist internal reports and policy documents also underwent a shift. For example, in the preface of Law 251, which in 1972 granted the Assyrians some cultural and linguistic rights, the community was referred to as a national minority (*aqalliyya qawmiyya*), whereas by the late 1970s it had come to be regarded as a religious denomination. This shift was not only influenced by Assyrian conceptualizations formed transnationally, and especially across the Iranian border, but also internally, by Iraqi Assyrians (see Chapter 5). Assyrians outside Iraq had become more hostile towards the regime by the late 1970s. This hostility surfaced in literature and popular culture, as exemplified in 1979 by the *Assyrian Sentinel*, the political publication of the Assyrian Universal Alliance, which published an article titled, “Genocide Iraqi-Style,” in which it charged the Iraqi government of closing down 138 Assyrian Christian schools, churches, and private clubs, and “thereby den[ying] humanitarian rights of the Assyrian people to perpetuate their language, heritage, and religion as a cultural

identity.”⁹⁰ The article not only provides community figures on Assyrian associations affected by the reversal of state policies (e.g., number of Assyrian schools closed), but also demonstrates how far relations between the state and Assyrian diasporic organizations had deteriorated since the early and mid-1970s.

Inside Iraq, it is safe to assume that, although Assyrians benefited from the cultural rights accorded to them by policies that they generally regarded positively, the destruction of many of their villages left them suspicious of the new regime.

⁹⁰ “Genocide Iraqi-Style,” *Assyrian Sentinel* 4: 6 (1979).

5. Between Compliance, Negotiation, and Resistance: Assyrian Press and Popular Culture (1970s–1980s)

During the 1970s Assyrian intellectuals promoted their culture and negotiated¹ for political rights with the government, often framing their concerns using accepted Ba‘thist narratives. Negotiation was a process in which Assyrians tried to understand themselves as a community, and reach internal consensus, both within the ecclesiastical communities and between tribal, religious, and secular leaders. The community also negotiated by trying to position itself within Iraqi society, in relation to both the state and the opposition, and also transnationally, with the Assyrian diaspora and human rights organizations. Eric Davis argues that “savvy” non-elite or subaltern groups like the Assyrians began to subscribe to historical narratives propagated by the state to avoid provoking state authorities by expressing unauthorized ones. Alternatively, he concludes, when these non-elite members of society tried to acquire certain privileges, they accepted those same state narratives: “state sponsored understandings of the past informed Iraqis outside the corridors of power how they needed to conceptualize Iraqi history and

¹ Comparable uses of the term can be found in the field of education, and pertain to minority students. The term “negotiate” is generally not defined in these studies. See, for example, Maria Veronica Oropeza, Manka M. Varghese, and Yasuko Kanno, “Linguistic Minority Students in Higher Education: Using, Resisting, and Negotiating Multiple Labels,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 43: 2 (May 7, 2010): 216–31; Jasmin Zine, “Negotiating Equity: The Dynamics of Minority Community Engagement in Constructing Inclusive Educational Policy,” *Cambridge Journal of Education* 31, no. 2 (2001): 239–69.

cultural heritage in order to navigate the pathways of everyday life.”² But memories propagated by the state were also challenged. The Assyrians, among other Iraqi communities, used countermemory in their textual or oral productions to challenge the state’s interpretation of the past.³ Assyrians, like other Iraqi intellectuals, were often successful in subverting the state’s narratives by incorporating multiple layers of meaning into their texts to challenge a particular position propagated by the state.⁴ In Chapter 4 I examined Ba’thist policies towards the Assyrians using archival documents that featured internal communication between various Ba’thist agencies during this same period. Here I will shed light on Assyrian intellectual production by analyzing press and popular culture to understand how Assyrian intellectuals negotiated their own interests and related to a state growing in strength and influence. One of the main sources for this chapter is *Mordinna Atouraya*, a magazine published by the Assyrian Cultural Club from 1972 to 1985.

Following the passage of Law 251, Assyrians were cautiously optimistic about the cultural rights granted by the government. In the first half of the 1970s,

² Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 10. Davis’s book is informed by Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, whereby large portions of society come to accept the control and social and political organization of their society by a small, strategically located group of people (*ibid.*, 2–3); see also Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 189–221. Davis focuses on the role of historical memory in achieving hegemony. A central argument in his book is that many intellectuals inside Iraq cooperated with the Ba’thist regime in superficial ways, while at the same time “struggling in subtle ways to nurture forms of historical memory and consciousness that subverted the state’s goals by pointing to a more participatory society” (*ibid.*, 22).

⁴ Davis, *Memories of State*, 11.

they negotiated for rights within a Ba‘thist system, constructing historical narratives that integrated themselves into the social fabric of Iraqi society since Abbasid times. Assyrian communists used more modernist theoretical conceptions, drawing on socialism and Marxism to argue for Assyrian rights within the current system, a function of the temporary alignment between the Ba‘th and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). During this period, Assyrian intellectuals celebrated these policies, but probed the system by pushing its boundaries while maintaining their support for Ba‘thism, at times superficially, and integrating Ba‘thist principles to justify cultural and political rights for their community. The regime, for its part, temporarily engaged in reconciliatory practices, pursuing policies that drew the community closer to it, and worked on implementing laws that projected it favorably in the West, and meanwhile penetrated Assyrian institutions.

Some scholars argue that the Ba‘thification of society did not begin until the Iran–Iraq war, in 1980.⁵ This chapter supports this position, but points to a change of state policy towards the Assyrians, and perhaps all Iraqis living in the northern provinces, following the Algiers agreement of 1975, and particularly in 1978, in Baghdad and other urban centers. This chapter therefore complicates the traditional scholarly view of the Ba‘th regime, which often presents Iraqi society

⁵ See, for example, Dina Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Chapter 5, above.

under Ba‘thist rule as a closed authoritarian system with limited space for interaction between the state and society.⁶

The Assyrian Cultural Club was founded in the late 1960s in Baghdad, and became a secular intellectual hub invested in the cultural and nationalist revival of the Assyrian community in Iraq. It is partly credited with the re-establishment of the Assyrian nationalist movement, given its secular stance, its ability to attract Assyrians from various denominations, and its influence on young people who became nationalist leaders and joined the Iraqi opposition in 1982. This analysis will further contribute to the often absent narrative of the secular urbanite Assyrian. A close examination of the Club’s magazine reveals that it highlighted cultural and linguistic concerns because of their primary importance for the Assyrian identity, and because they were accepted mediums of discourse. The secular position of the magazine gave it access to a large membership of Baghdadi Assyrian academics and professionals who had a shared vision of Assyrian identity, produced by their common experiences and exposure to this magazine, among others. The Arabic section of the magazine would have interested non-Assyrian Baghdadi readers as well because Assyrian intellectuals also wrote in more popular Arab Iraqi newspapers. This led to a cross-fertilization of texts and narratives in a contact zone marked by complicated and asymmetrical relationships of power between the state, Baghdadi intellectuals of various ethnic,

⁶ Achim Rohde argues that Ba‘th polices should be conceptualized as specific choices appropriated under changed circumstances. He therefore emphasizes “historical specificity” over “ideological continuity.” Achim Rohde, “State–Society Relations in Ba‘thist Iraq Facing Dictatorship” (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

sectarian, socio-economic, and ideological backgrounds.⁷ Regardless of the regime's motives, production in Aramaic, with some support from the government, contributed to the revival and standardization of the language, resulting in the production of important literary works and the formation of cultural, athletic, and political Assyrian organizations. The magazine's Aramaic-language section also attracted numerous submissions from Assyrians in Kirkuk, whose highly intellectual and often politicized communications succeeded in producing an Assyrian primary school and numerous clubs.⁸

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first will introduce Simele as it was remembered by Assyrians in the 1970s. Though it was still a contentious topic, intellectuals could not ignore Simele after Assyrian leaders associated with the massacre were reintroduced into Assyrian circles by the government. In addition, recalling the suppressed memory of Simele proved valuable to the community. Second, the theme of language will feature heavily in this chapter, as it was heavily addressed both in print and through cultural and academic events. Language was an important medium of discussion for numerous reasons. Not only were the cultural rights granted by the government framed around the theme of language, but the community was officially labeled on the basis of the language it spoke. In addition, the Aramaic language was an important component of

⁷ For instance, Binyamin Haddād Benyamin (discussed in this chapter) was also editor of the Assyrian page in *al-Ikhā'*, a Kurdish newspaper appearing in Arabic, that was published in Baghdad. He also wrote in other Iraqi newspapers. Haddād interviewed by author, Duhok, Iraq, December 2011.

⁸ Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Assyrian identity, and a unifying element for all factions of the community.⁹

Generally, intellectuals used established narratives of integration to negotiate with the state, but sometimes subtle and more defiant forms of resistance were used.

These strategies of compliance, negotiation, and resistance will be addressed directly. Finally, I will examine changes observed in *Mordinna Atouraya* towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, changes both in the design and appearance of the magazine and in its contents, as the regime became more authoritarian.

***Mordinna Atouraya*: Background**

There are numerous reasons why the magazine *Mordinna Atouraya* provides an excellent case study for this period. The magazine was widely and regularly circulated, with a new issue appearing every three months. Two thousand copies were printed and distributed in Baghdad, Kirkuk, the northern provinces, and Basra, as well as in regional and Western countries.¹⁰ The letters to the editor sent from various Iraqi provinces, Lebanon, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Yugoslavia illustrated the magazine's broad readership.¹¹ Moreover, an interview with the president of the Club, Ephraim Mansūr Gewargīs, in 1984, at a time when the magazine had become a shadow of its former self, reported that

⁹ For the importance of print culture and the standardization of language on the basis of certain dialects, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1991), 37–46.

¹⁰ O.A. interviewed by author over the phone, Netherlands, January 4, 2015. If the Club experienced financial troubles, two editions would be combined and published together.

¹¹ "Letters to the Editor," *Mordinna Atouraya*, March 6 and 7, 1975, 44.

500 copies of *Mordinna Atouraya* had been sent outside Iraq to organizations, clubs, and individuals residing in North America, Britain, France, Italy, Greece, Australia, and some Arab countries.¹² The overall finances of the magazine determined the number of copies the editorial board could afford to print.¹³ The magazine cost 1,000 dinars to produce, while each copy was authorized to sell for 250 fils by the Ministry of Internal Affairs; no profits were made from copies distributed outside the country.¹⁴ Fees for membership of the Assyrian Cultural Club (250 fils) contributed to the overall cost of the magazine, along with social events—chiefly the Club’s Christmas party, which generated 1,000 dinars in profit. The Club had other expenses besides the magazine, including an annual rental fee for its facilities (500 dinars) and the cost of its social, artistic and cultural events.¹⁵ The editors received submissions from various Iraqi provinces, and from regional and sometimes Western countries as well. Contributors straddled generational divisions, those writing in Aramaic generally being older, while those writing in Arabic tended to be more mixed in age-group. This

¹² Apram Shapira, “Muqābala ma‘a al-Sayid Ra’īs al-Nādī,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 31 (1984), 12.

¹³ O.A. interviewed by author.

¹⁴ Ibid. According to Apram Shapira, the Ministry of Internal Affairs refused to allow them to raise their membership fees from 250 fils to 500 fils. See Chapter 3, above, and Apram Shapira, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āšir* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 2001), 43.

¹⁵ Apram Shapira, *The Assyrian Cultural Club: March of Challenges and Achievements 1970–1980* (Chicago: Alpha Graphic, —), 65. Shapira claims that the cost of one issue of the magazine was between 500 and 750 dinars. The cost of 1,000 dinars indicated by the editor, O.A., in his interview with the author, refers to the cost of multiple issues produced per year.

diversity extended to ideological leanings as well, though the magazine tended to express secular, leftist, and progressive ideals.¹⁶

Women's and gender-related issues were also covered in both the Arabic- and Aramaic-language sections of the magazine, with some marked differences. Famous Assyrian female athletes and honorary students were featured in the pages of the magazine—for example, Regina Shemshon, an Assyrian engineering student at the University of Baghdad, who had come first in the Iraqi women's chess tournament, held in the capital. *Mordinna Atouraya* featured an interview with Shemshon in its Aramaic-language section, and had previously run an article on her that appeared in the Ba'athist Iraqi newspaper *al-Thawra*.¹⁷ The magazine's reports on the activities of the Assyrian Cultural Club, and other organizations across the country, included stories about women. Finally, both male and female intellectuals engaged in gender-related discussions, negotiating the role of Assyrian women in the Club, as well as community-driven agendas such as cultural and linguistic revival, along with women's role in the country.¹⁸ These issues were sometimes featured in the Arab Iraqi press as well.¹⁹

For instance, a contribution titled “Fatāt Jāmi‘iyya” (“A University Student”) was a short story about a young woman named Evelyn. Evelyn had a

¹⁶ Description based on an in-depth analysis of the magazine by the author.

¹⁷ “Regina Shemshon,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 3 and 4 (April 1974), 18.

¹⁸ Apram Shapira, “al-Mar’a wa mas’ūliyatuha fī al-Nādī,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 15 (1978), 29–30.

¹⁹ For instance, the Iraqi women's magazine *al-Mar’a* included a few articles on Assyrian women and their communities. One article compared the village of Ainkawa to the city of Paris, and commented on acceptable dating relationships between men and women. Hāla al-Badrī, “Bārīs Saghīra,” *Al-Mar’a* 70 (1977), 22–3.

secret that was consuming her thoughts and leading to internal tension and self-doubt. She was ashamed of facing her society, and particularly her family. The writer intertwined elements that led the reader to understand her shame to be honor-related, and question whether she had been involved in sexually illicit activity or other culturally unacceptable forms of conduct between men and unmarried or unrelated women. Yet, to the surprise of the reader, Evelyn's nightmare passed as she awakened from sleep to jubilant news from her mother informing her that she had passed her university exams. Evelyn's shame was based on her fear of failing her exams. The author of this story seemed to suggest that education and success were as important as traditional societal expectations of women.²⁰

Other pieces focused on the role of mothers as the preservers of culture and language, especially during periods when the standardization and modernization of the Aramaic language were being discussed. In the Aramaic-language section, an article by bet-Benyamin d'Ashīta, "Modī 'īla Yemma?" ("What is a Mother?"), painted a positive image of motherhood, and elevated mothers' immeasurable value. He elaborated on the responsibilities shared between a mother and son engaged in a healthy relationship. When describing a mother's duties, he went beyond the immediate issue of nurturing and caring for children, and included the task of instilling the right values, and raising a righteous son who loved his family, nation, and church.²¹ This narrative

²⁰ Koriyal Sham'oūn, "Fatāt Jāmi'iyā" *Mordinna Atouraya* 1 (June 1973), 33.

²¹ bet-Benyamin d'Ashīta, "Modī 'īla Yemma?" *Mordinna Atouraya* 8 (August 1975), 8–10.

contrasted with that of “A University Student,” where the first story complicated traditional interpretations of the role of women in society, while the second entrenches them further. It also points to the diversity of opinion in *Mordinna Atouraya*, and alludes to the inter-generational nature of the body of intellectuals contributing to the magazine.

Finally, *Mordinna Atouraya* and its associated Assyrian Cultural Club appeared in numerous Ba‘thist government archives, and have been written about by intellectuals from the period. This indicates the importance of the magazine in the eyes of both government agencies and the Assyrian community.²² When I was consulting sources in Iraq, publishing houses concerned with digitizing the Assyrian press had begun scanning *Mordinna Atouraya* first, the ability of these archivists to find and collect all of its issues underlining the significance of the magazine, and—most importantly—allowing me to conduct a nuanced study of *Mordinna Atouraya* throughout the decade of its publication.

Negotiating Simele

Mordinna Atouraya’s Interview with Yā‘qo

Using the topic of language as a point of departure, intellectuals challenged the authority of the state in subtle yet notable ways, and negotiated for additional political rights by weaving their community into Ba‘thist-propagated historical

²² ADM-BR [1970s and 1980s folder], 1977, To the Honorary Vice-Chair of General Intelligence, from ‘Āmir ‘Abd al-Bāqī, Chair of the Committee for Assyrian Affairs.

narratives of socialism and Abbasidism. Through less censored forums of popular culture, Assyrians were to show greater resistance. Recalling Mary Louise Pratt's contact zones, defined as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination,"²³ Jacob Climo and Maria Cattel posit that language became the field in which subordinate as well as dominant groups confronted each other, since language was a significant symbol of "personal and political identities and the means to define or redefine identity through the languages spoken."²⁴ Language thus enabled memories to be rehearsed and expressed in the urban Baghdadi contact zone, where power relations derived from a hierarchy of citizenship marked the engagement of Iraqi intellectuals with each other and with the state.²⁵

In 1972, shortly following Malik Yā'qo Ismā'īl's return to Iraq, Mīkhā'īl Marwakil, a journalist with *Mordinna Atouraya*, conducted an interview with him, presenting him to their readers as the "head of the Assyrian Nation (*qawmiyya*). The interview focused on the theme of language, framing its discussion of literature and his role as an author. Yā'qo's political memoirs, historical works, and diaries were significant for understanding the political situation of the Assyrians. Framing their arguments as a discussion of literature,

²³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2008), 7.

²⁴ Maria Cattel and Jacob Climo, "Introduction: Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives," in *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Maria Cattel and Jacob Climo (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2002), 19.

²⁵ See the Introduction, Chapter 1 of this dissertation for a nuanced understanding of the hierarchy of citizenship.

Mordinna Atouraya approached sensitive topics such as the community's response to the Simele massacre and issues of identity. This interview was reflective of the strategies used by urbanite Assyrian intellectuals between 1972 and 1978 in public forums accessible to the state authorities.

Marwakil utilized Ba' thist rhetoric to refer to the issue of the Simele massacre indirectly when introducing the interviewee. Yā'qo was presented as a proficient military figure during the British imperialist period and the "regressive" monarchical rule that followed it. Simele was referred to as "the raging hurricane in 1933" that Yā'qo had desperately struggled against. Marwakil then delicately proceeded to describe the events leading to Simele, and the "persecution, displacement and hunger" of the Assyrians, by placing the blame on imperialism and the Iraqi monarchy—institutions the Ba' th took credit for dismantling through their revolution and subsequent corrective revolutions (1958, 1963, and 1968). Although the term "massacre" was avoided, it was significant that the Simele massacre was mentioned in the Baghdadi press at all, four decades after the event.²⁶ The fact that Assyrians gave such primacy to the Simele massacre, subtly in written sources, but more forcefully in songs and other works of popular culture, was reflective of the community's enduring historical memory of the event itself, and of a desire for it to be expressed, in combination with the Assyrians' positive perceptions of what turned out to be a temporary space for discussion afforded to the community by the regime.

²⁶ Mīkhā'īl Marwakil, "Ra'īs al-Qawmiyya al-Athūriyya yataḥaddath 'an ḥayatihi al-adabiyya," *Mordinna Atouraya* 2 (October 1973), 37.

Collective or social memories are “formed by social, economic, and political circumstances; by beliefs and values; by opposition and resistance.” They involve cultural norms and questions of authenticity, identity, and power.²⁷ Obviously, social memories may be negotiated, contested, forgotten, suppressed, recovered, revised, invented, and reinvented. They may also be cumulative, persistent, and highly resistant to efforts at revision. Subordinated groups often cling to numerous aspects of their history, culture, and traditional practices, while dominant groups try to alter this counter memory, especially in repressive and authoritarian states.²⁸ Moreover, memory is socially constructed, so that, when composing a song or writing a memoir, an author’s individual memory is affected by the various social memories formed around him or her. These social memories, expressed through song, legend, and other forms, enable memories to be transferred to generations yet to come.²⁹

In the early 1970s, the Assyrians were aided in remembering the Simele massacre when religious and political figures who had experienced it, and were exiled by the Iraqi state in 1933, were invited back as official state dignitaries. But the state failed to address the memory of the Simele massacre and the events leading to their exile. The Assyrians found the omission of these facts problematic, and called for the resurrection of their memory. In the absence of an official government narrative of the massacre, the Assyrians were cautiously transgressive, referring to Simele only subtly in print. In this asymmetrical contact

²⁷ Cattell and Climo, “Introduction,” 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

zone, subordinate groups resisted the control of their memory through silence, or else confronted it in overt and subtle ways.³⁰ Language—and, more specifically, *the print and popular culture to which it had given rise*—provided a medium in which issues could be addressed that were ignored or suppressed by the state.

Marwakil skillfully intertwined linguistic with contemporary political issues, a method often used by *Mordinna Atouraya*'s contributors, who did not shy away from negotiating with the government on issues they deemed significant. Yā'qo was asked about his impression of the terminology used in Law 251, which referred to the Assyrians as the “speakers of the Syriac language.” Yā'qo criticized the use of a language to depict a nation: “The designation in its actuality, as it has been received, is incorrect because whoever coined it depended on the element of language on its own without contemplating the spirit of nationality [*dūn al-ta'ammul fī rūḥ al-qawmiyya*].” He was puzzled by the designation, having never heard peoples (*sha'b*) referred to as “the speakers of the *alfulaniyya*,” or a certain language: “Although we might be divided denominationally, you will find us united ‘nationally’ (*qawmiyyan*) on ‘being Assyrian’ [*alā innanā Ashūriyyūn*].”³¹

When asked about his motivation for writing, Yā'qo emphasized his concern for “guarding” his memories and those of the community by documenting their contemporary history. Expressing the community's suppressed memory was a primary discourse Assyrian intellectuals were engaged with during this period. Previous state persecutions, the ongoing civil war, and the subsequent

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³¹ Ibid., 39.

rural–urban migrations threatened Assyrian cultural traditions in large Arab urban centers. This new space allowed Assyrian intellectuals and popular artists to document and express their version of history. Yā‘qo conveyed this in the interview, claiming that he had witnessed a history marked by “pain and tears” and “persecution and torment,” and that his consciousness therefore drove him to transmit to the reader accurate occurrences. He saw it as one of his “primary duties,” and was prompted to write and “record it as history” (*lil-kitaba wa tadwīnihi ka-tarīkh*), emphasizing that his accounts of events were historically accurate. For instance, his book *Al- Ashūriyyūn wa al- Harbān al- ‘Ālamīyatān* (“The Assyrians and the Two World Wars”) was written while he was still living in the homeland, and was free of the emotions he would experience in exile (*ghurba*).³² This points to the power of historical memory and the efforts of individuals, communities, and the state both to control and assert their version of it. Yā‘qo also benefited personally by giving prominence to his book’s accurate portrayal of events (*bi-Kull diqqa wa bi-dūn taḥrīf*), given his military background and the nature of his expulsion from Iraq in the 1930s. He realized the importance of negotiating with the current Iraqi regime, but was cautious about providing his own accounts of the past. Exiled for four decades, depicted as a traitor by the Iraqi monarchy, and blamed by some factions within his own

³² Yā‘qo lived in Khabour, Syria, after being expelled from Iraq in 1933. He later moved to the West, residing in Ontario, Canada, before returning to Iraq in the 1970s.

community for his failed political leadership in the events leading to Simele, Yā‘qo needed to offer his own version of history.³³

The interview concluded by returning to the subject of literature. Yā‘qo was asked when Assyrian literature could be elevated to the rank of world literature. In his response he located Assyrian writers in the context of the contemporary period, declaring that “the literature of every nation, small or large, reflects the hopes and ambitions of its people.” In effect, for Yā‘qo the writer’s status was intertwined with the social, cultural, and political conditions of his or her nation. Therefore, “if our rights are approved and we are given true stability” that encompasses all fields, then “we”—Assyrian national leaders—would be able to care for the “Assyrian writer who struggles to complete his mission and elevate his literature.”³⁴

Here Yā‘qo and his interviewer, Marwakil, were able to accomplish several tasks. First, through a discussion of language and cultural rights, an Assyrian military commander and political leader was given a venue from which to argue for Assyrian rights, question certain aspects of government policy, and give prominence to his account of the Simele massacre and the events leading to his exile forty years earlier. In this interview he was able clearly, though subtly, to demonstrate to his community that, although he was an official government guest, working largely within the state apparatus, he had not lost his independent position, and was capable of campaigning for the Assyrian cause and freely

³³ See, for example, Ronald Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1935), 123–34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

opposing circumstances he disagreed with, as in the case of his objection to the official designation of the Assyrian community in terms of their language. Moreover, he showed his hesitancy about these cultural rights in his last comment, demonstrating to readers of *Mordinna Atouraya*, and probably also to government officials, that he was not entirely convinced that the promised rights and stability would be fulfilled. Finally, he outlined a hierarchy, based on a corporatist leadership vision, in which urban intellectuals and writers would be dependent on political leaders, namely Yā' qo, to act as intermediaries between them, the Assyrian community, and the state.

Simele Remembered in Popular Culture

The memory of Simele was expressed with subtlety in written sources, but Assyrians commemorated the event in their songs more openly. Music has always been an important vessel of oral history for ethnic minorities in the Middle East when their language, cultural rights, and ethnic identity have been suppressed by their state of residence. Music and singing became major means of resisting the status quo, curating social memory by disseminating a community's own understanding of its history.³⁵ Thus, when people were not allowed to learn their language in a school setting, or standardize it appropriately, only a smaller percentage of its speakers were able to read their native tongue. Those able to read constituted a "reading public," as opposed to the people who did not read,

³⁵ Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour, "'The Morning of Freedom Rose Up': Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival," *Popular Music* 15: 3 (1996): 325–43.

who constituted a “listening public.”³⁶ Since the listening public did not need advanced reading and writing skills in their native tongue to be able to compose or listen to music, music became the medium through which the culture was revived and the community’s identity and social memory reinforced. With the flow of music across borders, its influence extended beyond the zone of its creation.³⁷

Popular Culture and Songs of Defiance

The Assyrian Cultural Club was a prominent hub for the development of Assyrian literature and popular culture, which gave voice to its national aspirations.³⁸ Numerous singers were drawn to the Club, and began their singing careers performing at one of its functions. Shlemon Bet-Shmoel, for example, was a recent high school graduate and an active member of the Club. He lifted the veil from the Simele massacre by presenting a song entitled “Simele” in August 1973, on the third anniversary of the opening of the Assyrian Cultural Club in Baghdad.³⁹ This song captured the community’s social memory of the Simele massacre, committed by the Iraqi army in August 1933.⁴⁰ Given that two Assyrian leaders associated with the Simele massacre— Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See Chapter 6, section on “Cult of Martyrdom,” below.

³⁸ Apram Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fīkr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āṣir* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 2001). See Appendix 1 for the song lyrics.

³⁹ Esha Emmanuel Tamras, “Biography,” at <http://www.shlimonbetshmuel.com/biography.html> (accessed April 9, 2011).

⁴⁰ See Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82–3. See also R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (1935), available at Assyrian International News Agency website, at <http://www.aina.org/books/tota.htm> (accessed December 11, 2007).

Malik Yā‘qo Ismā‘īl—had both recently been welcomed back by the Iraqi government, and treated initially as honored official guests, Assyrians felt the need to engage publicly with the contentious memory of the massacre. The song was ultimately a product of the space that had been negotiated and opened up by improved relations between the state and the Assyrian community.

The song began with a background sound of chaos, and the screams of people apparently anticipating the massacre, wondering what to do. “Shall we stay or escape? Is this not our country?”⁴¹ This foreshadowed what was to come: the word “massacre” is repeated eleven times throughout the song. The lyrics include symbolism associated with brutality, chaos, death, and survival. For instance, “Children are crying on the bodies of their dead mothers”; “Silent corpses”; “Plains and mountains have turned crimson” with blood. The clear description given by the singer, reflecting the social memory of the community, is that a massacre of innocent children and women had taken place, not the killing of rebellious armed men. This would have contradicted government accounts from the 1930s, which represented the massacre as the suppression of a militia challenging the sovereignty of the Iraqi state.

Chaos, the second theme, was depicted through an alteration of the assumed natural order: relatives renouncing each other to save themselves, children dying before their parents, people screaming, the dead mourning on behalf of the living who will soon be killed. All these depictions paint a vividly

⁴¹ The record for this song was produced and released a year later in Tehran, Iran. Shlimon Bet Shmuel, “Simele,” in *Simele* (Tehran: 1974), at <http://www.qeenatha.com/albums/ShlimonBetShmuel/Simele/1027> (accessed August 16, 2013).

chaotic image of the massacre of Simele. Finally, the motif of survival was presented in two ways. First, Simele was labelled a “sacrifice” for the cause of national aspirations: “A thousand Simeles and the sacrifice is small for the one who wants to see the blessed day.” Second, the motif of survival of the nation was clearly stated in the following verse: “Say that Assyria is alive and will continue to be. Let all creation hear this call.”

So, whereas the subject of Simele was mentioned indirectly in *Mordinna Atouraya*’s interview with Malik Yā‘qo, in this song the community’s perspective was given prominence, and the singer did not shy away from calling it a massacre.

However, Shlimon Bet-Shmuel suffered repercussions for performing the song at the Assyrian Cultural Club in 1973. After being harassed by the Iraqi authorities, he was led to “seek refuge” in Iran, according to his biography. It was there that his career as a musician flourished. He enrolled at the University of Tehran and studied music and English literature, and produced records with the support of the Iranian Assyrian community, chiefly the Assyrian Council of Tehran. His first record was released at the Assyrian New Year, on April 1, 1974, and featured his now infamous song, “Simele.”⁴² It is highly likely that his records became available simultaneously in Iraq with relative ease, given that the civil war was still going on, and that Iran was funding the Iraqi opposition. Shmuel was physically removed from Iraq, but, through his music, his voice was in effect amplified, and conveyed back to his community in Iraq.

⁴² Tamras, “Biography.”

Language: A Medium for Discussion

Identity: Athūriyyūn or Ashūriyyūn?

Intellectuals at the Assyrian Cultural Center were vigorously engaged with these narratives in *Mordinna Atouraya*. In pursuing such discussions, they were concerned with informing not only the general Iraqi public, but also their own community members.

The cultural rights granted by the government and the new space they opened up allowed Assyrians to discuss many of these unresolved issues once again. What were the characteristics that defined their collective community? What historical narratives could they agree upon? Should they identify as “Assyrians”? If so, how should they deal with the various religious and linguistic designations? Assyrian secular intellectuals associated with *Mordinna Atouraya* engaged with these questions in the pages of the magazine. The shared inheritance of a Syriac Christian past, venerated Syriac martyrs and saints, a common Aramaic language and cultural traditions. All of these elements undoubtedly tied the various Assyrian religious communities together. The Ba‘th government accepted discourses concerning all of these factors, but official state narratives were less willing to tolerate community associations with an ancient Assyrian past. Nevertheless, immediately after these rights were granted, because of the political climate and the large numbers of Assyrians in diaspora and within political groups, Assyrians had a space to celebrate their Assyrian, Mesopotamian heritage alongside their Syriac faith and language. State officials had not fully

absorbed the ramifications of these cultural rights for the Assyrian community in the early 1970s. It was in relation to this period of semi-regulated state censorship of the magazine that one can retrieve the Assyrian community's own, somewhat unregulated perceptions of itself.

During this period, Assyrian intellectuals were also engaged in standardizing and modernizing the Aramaic language, based on the modern Assyrian dialect, which had its origin in Urmia. The privileged influence of the Assyrian Urmian dialect has been recorded since the mid-to-late 1800s, partly as a result of the modernization efforts of Western missionaries. It was also a product of the introduction of the printing press, which had the effect of promoting the spoken dialect of Aramaic at the expense of Classical Syriac, Bibles being published, for example, in vernacular Assyrian Aramaic.⁴³ Iranian Assyrians retained some influence in Assyrian literary circles, having designed some of the first modern Assyrian language curricula that were used in Iraq, as well as numerous other literary works. Many Assyrians originating from Urmia had escaped to Iraq following the massacres and displacements of the First World War. Those Urmian Iraqi Assyrians (known in Aramaic as *Ūrmijnāyyeh*) continued to play a role in the production and modernization of Aramaic literature. Efforts at standardization were therefore influenced by their dialect until at least the early 1990s, when a new standardization scheme was intended to advance the language and establish Aramaic school curricula for students in the newly established Kurdistan Regional Government.

⁴³ Eden Naby, "The Assyrians of Iran: Reunification of a 'Millat,' 1906–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8: 2 (1977): 237–49.

The February fire: preserving rural traditions

In the pages of *Mordinna Atoraya*, Assyrian intellectuals discussed cultural, linguistic, and historical topics related to the community. Within such areas, they grappled with contemporary issues facing the community, including the consequences of rural–urban migration and the likelihood of preserving cultural traditions in large Arab urban centers. In Chapter 4, Ba‘thist reports were cited that demonstrated serious government concern over Assyrian identity, and particularly with the modern community’s avowed connections with the ancient Assyrians. Some scholars reported that Assyrians were restricted by the government to calling themselves “Athūriyyūn” rather than “Ashūriyyūn,” to distinguish them from their ancient ancestors, whose descendants they thought of themselves as being. A careful examination of articles from the early 1970s reveals that this distinction was not yet being enforced.⁴⁴

In 1974, an article appeared focusing on the subject of a rural cultural tradition known as “Fire of February” (*Nār Shubāt*),⁴⁵ questioned, what was the tradition of February Fire. In the mountainous northern regions of the country, Assyrian villagers experienced heavy snowfall and extremely low temperatures in the winter, especially during February. As a result, the tradition of February Fire was practiced, which required that each resident family collect pine branches and place them in a designated area in the village. This continued throughout the

⁴⁴ “Min al-Turāth al-Ashūrī: Nār Shubāt,” *Murdina Atouraya* 3, 4 (April 1974), 7–8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

month, beginning with the church personnel who were in charge of collecting branches on the first day of the month. During the last days of February, the villagers gathered and set their large collection of tree branches on fire to mark the end of the coldest month of the year.⁴⁶ In celebration, they shouted like “soldiers overcoming a fierce battle,” while women ululated in delight. The following refrain was repeated throughout the ceremony: “Māta Shubaṭ wa li-ya’ ti Athār” (“February has passed, let March commence”).⁴⁷

The article’s author used the term Ashūriyyūn to refer to ancient and modern Assyrians interchangeably. He substantiated this usage by weaving a cultural thread tying Assyrians to their ancestor villages since “time immemorial.”⁴⁸ In those villages, Assyrians had remained observant (*muḥāfiẓīn*) of their language, tradition, and practices, continuing their cultural renditions with “complete pride ... considering [them] an important and living (*ḥayyan*) part of their national immortal culture and humanitarian existence (*Turathihim al-qawmī al-khālīd wa wujūdihim al-insānī*).”⁴⁹ He reminisced about the disruption of village life that had resulted from the emigration of Assyrians to Iraqi towns, such as Baghdad, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Basra, but remained hopeful, believing that these traditions had followed Assyrians to these urban centers, where they remained “preserved in their hearts.” The author stressed the importance of safeguarding these traditions and not allowing them to become extinct due to the waves of immigration and exile of recent times: “As long as we live in our beloved country,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8. The author does not provide the Aramaic equivalent for this verse.

⁴⁸ “Min al-Turāth al-Ashūrī,” 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Iraq, which seeks the progress, modernization and happiness of its sons,”⁵⁰ these traditions could continue.

In describing the cultural practice of February Fire, the author established a few tasks. He addressed the issue of emigration, which had begun following the civil war of 1961, and which was ongoing in the early 1970s, and had led to immigration to Western countries. It rooted the Assyrian community in Iraq, refuting the “foreigners” argument that had been raised in earlier decades, especially following the First World War, and stressed the importance of Assyrian cultural traditions and the likelihood of their loss in the large urban centers to which Assyrians were flocking. The article also demonstrated some threads of continuity between Assyrian culture in the rural areas throughout the centuries, as expressed in the tradition of February Fire.

The great fires that Assyrians light in Iraq on the last day of the month, the author explained, represented the battle between good and evil, which commenced with the victory of good. It also represented the eternal struggle of humans against natural elements. The author notes that we do not know when this tradition began, though it perhaps derived from pagan times. But it had certainly been practiced for centuries, over many generations, and probably originated in the period following the escape of the Assyrians from their ancestral homeland after the invasion of Timur Lang in the fifteenth century.⁵¹ The author also comments that the February Fire celebration was a festival no less significant to its participants than religious ceremonies such as Palm Sunday, Easter, and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Nusrdayl.⁵² While offering an interesting account of village life, the author also intertwines significant contemporary issues such as emigration, and also associates the tradition of February Fire with pre-Christian times. An emphasis on non-religious cultural holidays allows the author to link the community to an ancient Mesopotamian past, highlighting culturally secular traditions. Both of these themes were highlighted frequently in the pages of *Mordinna Atoraya*.

Meanwhile, the staff of the magazine invited contributions in an article titled “Akhī al-Ashūrī,” again, without distinguishing terminologically between the modern and ancient Assyrians. The language was also referred to, interchangeably, as either Athūrī or Ashūrī. The article would include historians’ contributions based on their research findings, and translators were invited to submit their translations of works in European languages to Arabic or Assyrian (*al-Athūriyya*). Their appeal to linguists read as follows: “To my linguist brother: the seeker of the niches [*arkān*] of the Assyrian language [*al-Ashūriyya*]. The magazine is in need of your works on grammatical specifications and vocabulary of this ancient language for the purpose of its purification [*tanqiyatihā*] from all [foreign] words [*jamī‘ al-kalimāt al-dākhila*].”⁵³ These calls were answered with numerous contributions, as will be discussed below. The language used in this call for papers again suggests that the authorities were not restricting the use of the

⁵² Ibid. Nusrdayl is an Assyrian cultural feast with religious undertones. The feast is celebrated seven Sundays after Ascension. On this day, Assyrians splash each other with water and celebrate with various social activities. William Piroyan and Eden Naby, “Festivals: Assyrians,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, originally published on December 15, 1999, last updated on January 26, 2012, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/festivals-ix-assyrian>, Vol. IX, Fasc. 6, 561–3 (accessed March 4, 2015).

⁵³ “Akhī al-Ashūrī,” *Murdina Atouraya*, June 1973, 30.

term Ashūriyyūn in the early 1970s, as has been suggested by other scholars. It also sheds light on projects that Assyrian intellectuals were engaged with internally, chiefly the standardization and modernization of the language.

Modern Assyrian

The discourse on language was one in which Assyrian intellectuals were deeply engrossed. They used language as a medium to conduct various discussions related to their culture, history, and identity. It was an accepted rhetoric, given that cultural rights were framed around language and the community was designated as “speakers of the Syriac language.” Shlīmon ʾĪshuʿ Khoshāba, an editorial secretary at the magazine, published an article in 1973 on the modern Assyrian language, in which he set out to correct various misconceptions related to the language and its classification.

He began by posing a question: “If you asked an Assyrian [*Athūriyyan*]—in the Assyrian language [*bi-al-lugha al-athūriyya*]: What is the name of your language? He would reply: Sūrith.”⁵⁴ Khūshābā proceeded to explain that the word “Sūrith” was derived from “Sūryāniyya,” reflecting the fact that the Assyrians differentiated between “old” and “new” Sūrith. This classification was incorrect, according to Khūshābā, and was based on an assumption partially conceived in the nineteenth century by Protestant missionaries. These misconceptions proposed that the “new,” spoken language of the Assyrians was a

⁵⁴ Shlīmon ʾĪshuʿ Khoshāba, “al-Athūriyya al-Ḥadītha—al-Sūrith,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 1 (June 1973), 35.

vernacular version of the “old” Sūryāniyya, or Classical Syriac.⁵⁵ Instead, the presumed “new” dialect was in fact a dialect of the Aramaic-Akkadian language (*al-Athūriyya*).⁵⁶ Khūshābā noted that the Syriac language was a dialect of Aramaic originating in Mesopotamia during a time when Urfa (Aramaic: Urhai) was its capital. The Aramaic language entered Mesopotamia in 800 AD, and began spreading widely because of the simplicity of its alphabet. When Christianity appeared and spread in these areas, it adopted Urfa’s Aramaic dialect as its liturgical language. Thereafter, Syriac became the language of the evangelizers that spread Christianity from within Syria.⁵⁷

Khūshābā then proceeded to explain that “al-Sūryān” was derived from “Assūr” or “Assūrāya” (“meaning Athūr,” he wrote in Aramaic as well) according to the Greek pronunciation.⁵⁸ As a reference, Khūshābā cited the work of nineteenth-century Syriac Orthodox Bishop Iqlīmes Yūsif Da’ūd, a native of Mosul and an important scholar and religious authority who had published numerous theological and historical works on the community. According to Khūshābā, Bishop Da’ūd had argued that the Aramean name was incorrect when referring to the Eastern Syriac community (Sūryān al-Sharqiyyūn), because the community descended from the tribe of Assūr, not Aram.⁵⁹ Consequently,

⁵⁵ Ibid. The author is referring to K. Matafif, *The History of the Assyrians*, based on the translation of Ussama Na‘man, 18.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. The author is citing Dr. Murād Kāmel and Dr. Hamdī, *Tarīkh al-Adab al-Suryanī*.

⁵⁸ Ibid. The author here is referring to the writing of Bishop Iqlimis Yousip Dawood, *al-lam‘a al-Shahriyya*.

⁵⁹ Ibid. The author is referring to the writings of Dr. Pera Sarmis, *Who Are We?*, 24, in Assyrian. See also Simo Parpola, “National and Ethnic Identity in the Neo-

Khūshābā inferred that Christians in Mesopotamia were descendants of the ancient Assyrians, who had also inter-mixed with Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Arameans following the fall of Nineveh. The ancient Assyrians spoke Akkadian, which became infused with Aramaic, as Aramaic gained popularity and influence.⁶⁰ Though Syriac, as the liturgical language of the Church, had its influences on the Assyrian language (Aramean-Akkadian), numerous grammatical differences existed between the two. Syriac, the author concluded, was in essence a dead language, exclusively used in liturgy, while Assyrian “al-Athūriyya” was a living language occupying a primary place in Assyrian culture and literature.⁶¹ In short, the author established that the Assyrian “al-Athūriyya” was a dialect of Aramaic Akkadian, and not of Syriac.⁶² Elevating the modern “living” language of the community, as opposed to the liturgical dialect of Syriac, was important for the secularly minded members of the Assyrian Cultural Club. This served to complicate the authority of the Church, but also to garner support for Aramaic being spoken by the people, since state-sponsored conferences highlighted the works of Classical Syriac scholars such as the fourth-century Saint Ephraim. This article was also an example of the use of the accepted medium of language to

Assyrian Empire and Assyrian Identity in Post-Empire Times,” 18: 2 (2004): 5–22.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Khoshaba published a more elaborate version of this article a few years later in *Mordinna Atouraya* 6 and 7 (March 1975), 6–8.

highlight identity issues and establish linguistic as well as historical links to ancient Mesopotamia.⁶³

The subject of language continued to be significant in both the Arabic and Assyrian sections of the magazine throughout most of the decade. Numerous articles featured various aspects of language, ranging from grammatical and linguistic elements to questions of history and identity, and efforts at modernization and standardization, as well as highlights from conferences dealing with the subject.⁶⁴ By the end of the first year of the magazine, the Assyrian language section had doubled. However, it appeared that many contributions to this section were from the older generation of Assyrians, notably those residing in Kirkuk.⁶⁵ The Assyrian section also advertised locations where Assyrian was being taught in Kirkuk, Baghdad, and other cities.⁶⁶ The magazine celebrated the value of enhancing the language using modern technology, such as radio. This, for example, was noted in a short story dialogue between a father and son. When the father commended his son for his enhanced language skills, the son credited the new Assyrian radio program for his educational development.⁶⁷

⁶³ For claims of primordialism within the Coptic Christian community, see Annette Evans, "Hellenistic and Pharaonic Influences on the Formation of Coptic Identity: General," *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* 86 (2004): 292–301.

⁶⁴ See, for example, "Our Language, How Should It Be Treated and What Should It Be Called?" *Mordinna Atouraya* 8 (August 1975), 22–5.

⁶⁵ *Mordinna Atouraya* 5 (August 1974), 26. This is issued in reply to a reader's request, where Aprim Bet Benyamin is notified that the Assyrian section of the magazine has doubled, as per his request.

⁶⁶ *Mordinna Atouraya* 6 and 7 (March 1975), 13–15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

In standardizing the language, Assyrian intellectuals gave primacy to the Assyrian “al-Athūriyya.” In 1977, from September 3 to September 8, the Assyrian Cultural Club hosted a linguistic conference focusing on the history, roots, grammar, and modernization of the Assyrian language (“al-lugha al-Athūriyya”). A few of the papers from the conference were in turn published in *Mordinna Atouraya*. The first article, “Lughatunā ila Ayna?” was submitted by an important literary figure, Benyamin Ḥaddād. Ḥaddād founded various organizations, and was on the editorial board of numerous periodicals during this time.⁶⁸ He was also on the board of the Assyrian radio and television channel (Baghdad TV).⁶⁹ Ḥaddād was born in Alqosh, and belonged to the Chaldean denomination. In his article, Ḥaddād advocated the standardization of the language based on the al-Athūriyya dialect, instead of other spoken dialects, such the Alqoshi one that he spoke himself. This was based on what he considered the ability of the modern Assyrian language to act as a linguistic medium for the expression of modern literature, due to its increased use by young people at the time.⁷⁰

Ḥaddād recognized that similar efforts were made with the Alqoshi dialect, and listed a few important works in this dialect from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Yet Alqoshi had not succeeded in gaining al-Athūriyya’s prominence. Ḥaddād recognized the difficulty in making this transition in the

⁶⁸ Benyamin Ḥaddād interviewed by author, Duhok, Iraq, December 20, 2011.

⁶⁹ I examined the magazine of the Radio and Television Broadcasting in Baghdad, *Al-Idā‘a wa-al-tilifīzyun* (1977). There were no articles pertaining specifically to the Assyrian program on this network, though numerous articles featured or included Assyrian workers at the network.

⁷⁰ Benyamīn Ḥaddād, “Lughatunā ila Ayna?,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 13 and 14 (November 1977), 11.

hopes of standardization, and admitted to being impeded personally as a writer by his efforts to approximate his writings to the Assyrian dialect; but in his opinion it was a worthwhile struggle.⁷¹ Like Khoshāba and others, Ḥaddād argued that modern Assyrian (al-Athūriyya al-Ḥadītha) was equal to Aramaic (al-Arāmiyya al-Fuṣḥa), and not a vernacular derivative of it.⁷² It should be noted that Ḥaddād was a secular figure, identifying as an Assyrian ethnically, though he belonged to the Chaldean Church. His designation of “al-lugha al-Athūriyya” probably referred to the Urmiyyan Aramaic dialect, though he would have agreed with Khūshābā on its classification as an Aramaic dialect influenced by Akkadian.

The language discourse occupied Assyrian academics, and this was clearly expressed in publications including *Mordinna Atouraya*. Using the medium of language, they strived to modernize and standardize Aramaic, and also to pursue discussions relating to their culture, history, and identity.

Narratives of Integration

Co-optation and negotiation between socialism and the Abbasids

The Iraqi government supplemented legislative policies with financial assistance to Assyrian cultural organizations. *Mordinna Atouraya* became the beneficiary of a “large donation” from the Ministry of Information (Wizārat al-I‘lām) and the Union for Iraqi Scholars. In addition, cultural organizations and individuals

⁷¹ Ibid., 12.

⁷² Ibid.

contributed a collection of over 2,000 books to the Assyrian Cultural Club's library, increasing their holdings to 830 books in Arabic, 550 in English, and the remainder in Assyrian (al-Athūriyya), with many that had not been catalogued, according to the magazine.⁷³

Government agencies also engaged the community by facilitating international academic conferences that featured classical Syriac intellectuals, and invited Western scholars to participate. In February 1973, a festival was organized to honor St. Ephraim, a fourth-century hymnographer and theologian of the School of Nisibis,⁷⁴ and Ḥunayn bin Ishāq (d. 873/877), physician, translator, and director of the House of Wisdom in Abbasid Baghdad.⁷⁵ The men were described by the magazine as prominent intellectuals in the field of translation, composition, and service to humanity, somewhat downplaying Ephraim's role as a saint of the church—was held by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Inquiry, under the supervision and organization of Mujma' al-Lugha al-Sūryaniyya. Shamsūn Kasu, the author of the article, characterized this conference as an embodiment of the cultural rights granted to "Assyrians and Chaldeans and Syriacs" by the Revolutionary Council. The Revolutionary Council had dedicated over 10,000 dinars to cover the expenses of the festival, which was a significant first step in demonstrating to the community the practical outcome of its

⁷³ "Our Library," *Murdina Atouraya* 1 (June 1973), 31.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Adam Becker, *Sources for the History of the School of Nisibis* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Sebastian Ephraem, *Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1990).

⁷⁵ David Lindberg, "Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning," in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 57.

policies.⁷⁶ Shamshun Kasu briefly described the significance of these two historical figures in paving the way for the emergence and advancement of an intellectual renaissance. This renaissance had contributed to the emanation of Islamic civilization, which in turn had influenced world civilizations.⁷⁷ Here Shamshun Kasu departed from this general historical background of St. Ephraim and Ḥunayn bin Ishāq, contextualizing these historical figures in contemporary affairs:

The emergence of the Arab state and the spread of its influence in central Asia following the fall of the Persian Empire was an important factor in granting the Church of the East safety, peace and security during that period. In the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs the Church of the East gained recognition so that its Christian citizen [*mūwaṭṭinīn*] followers could enjoy their full national rights [*ḥuquqihim al-waṭaniyya*] within the auspices of the state [*dawla*] and its official protection.⁷⁸

Shamshun Kasu used modern political terminology that defined the relations between state and society (“citizenship,” “national rights”) to construct a narrative of inclusion and plurality between the Assyrian community and the ruling authority from medieval to modern times. He indirectly equated the current Ba‘thist administration to the Rightly Guided Caliphs of the golden age of Islam. During this time, the Ba‘th regime was itself propagating a historical memory that fused Mesopotamianism with Iraq’s Abbasid Islamic heritage, and at the same

⁷⁶ Shamshun Kasu, “Min I ‘lām al-Sharq fī Wadī al-Rāfidain: Afrām wa Ḥanīn,” *Murdina Atouraya* 3 and 4 (April 1974), 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

time demonstrating support for pan-Arabism.⁷⁹ Shamshun Kasu embedded the Assyrians within a historical narrative that catered to Arab nationalism, with an emphasis on the Abbasid past.⁸⁰ Within this discourse, Kasu highlighted the intellectual contribution of Assyrians to Islam and humanity, framing Assyrians as an integral, native component of the country, deserving of full national rights as citizens.

The Abbasid discourse was addressed in succeeding issues as well, where Assyrians appropriated Ba‘thist language celebrating the Abbasid period as the golden age of Islam.⁸¹ For instance, in “The Assyrians in Abbasid Times,” Şlīwo highlighted collaboration between the Assyrians and incoming Arab armies during the Islamic conquests of Mesopotamia. Şlīwo chronicled Assyrian migrations from Mesopotamia and Syria to Persia during the Byzantine conquests, in the fifth century. According to Şlīwo’s narrative, the Assyrians escaped the violent clutches of the Byzantine forces; yet, though they were welcomed in Persia and allowed to join the Church of the East, the situation of the Assyrians did not improve until the Arab conquests, two centuries later. Şlīwo then stressed the role of the Assyrians in the Abbasid caliphate, which incorporated numerous members of the Assyrian community, as court physicians, translators, and educators, among other roles. This article once again

⁷⁹ Davis, *Memories of State*, 11.

⁸⁰ This narrative closely resembles nationalist discourses. See, for example, Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932–1941* (London: Routledge, 2006); Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 138.

⁸¹ Also discussed in Chapter 3, above.

demonstrated the efforts of Assyrian intellectuals to highlight the history of their community during the Abbasid period, for the purpose of incorporating their narrative within officially recognized ones.⁸²

The international conference focusing on Saint Ephraim and Ḥunayn bin Ishāq deployed accepted narratives, and exemplified what was permissible according to Law 251. The amount of money spent on the conference was significant even by today's standards, and reflected the scale of the cultural project the government was engaged in. This investment was potentially beneficial to the state in two ways. First, the conference attracted important Western scholars, with whom interviews appeared in *Murdina Atouraya*.⁸³ This was important because the Kurdish opposition, which included Assyrians, was actively seeking international support in its campaign against the Iraqi state. The presence of Western scholars and publicity could assist the newly formed Ba'athist state in portraying itself in a positive light, especially given the conference's emphasis on Christian minorities. Second, the government was actively seeking the support, and indeed pursuing the cooptation, of the Assyrian community. This conference sought to demonstrate to the community that the regime was willing to implement Law 251 and promote the Syriac language and culture.

⁸² Warda Daniel Şlīwo, "Al-Athūriyyūn fī al-'Ahd al-Khilafa al-'Abbasiyya," *Murdina Atouraya* 2 (October 1973), 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 27–31.

Socialism

Assyrian intellectuals continued to employ discourses that enabled them to highlight minority rights. They negotiated for the cultural and political rights they were entitled to within ideological frameworks used by the regime, such as narratives of cultural and religious pluralism and coexistence under the Abbasids, and socialism. The latter was exemplified in an article by an Assyrian communist figure, Johnson Aghājān, entitled “Al-thaqāfa wa al-Insān.”⁸⁴ Aghājān used socialism, an integral element of the Ba‘thist political ideology, to negotiate for cultural rights to which the Assyrians were entitled as a small nation. The author began by stating that although every nation or nationality (*qawmiyya*) had its own unique culture, the essence of all cultures was the same despite cultural differences based on competing dialectics inherent in society: progression versus regression.⁸⁵

Aghājān advanced a Marxist historical chronology, beginning with feudalism, a regressive cultural orientation that was eventually overcome by a progressive, bourgeois one, which in turn began exploiting nations (*qawmiyyāt*) and peoples (*shu‘ūb*), giving rise to capitalism and imperialism.⁸⁶ These developments eventually necessitated the rise of the socialist movement, which liberated human beings, including minorities.⁸⁷ Aghājān focused on minorities in various instances in the article, portraying the socialist system as the vanguard of

⁸⁴ Johnson Aghājān, “Al-thaqāfa wa al-Insān,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 1 (June 1973), 37–42. In an article recently published by Aprim Shapira on Ankawa.com, he named a few Communist Assyrian leaders including Johnson Aghājān.

⁸⁵ Aghājān, “Al-thaqāfa wa al-Insān,” 37

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

minority communities, as well as workers. For instance, he posited that, unlike bourgeois cultures, which allowed majority nationalities to “swallow minority nationalities” and “suck their blood,” socialist culture called on majority nationalities to care for minority nationalities and provide them with their full rights.⁸⁸ He equated the successful progress of the country (*al-waṭan*) with the success of humanity, and every success for humanity was in turn the success of the country (*al-waṭan*).⁸⁹

Aghājān reprimanded narrow-minded individuals who opposed the socialist project while boasting with nationalist rhetoric. Such individuals, he said, claimed that socialist culture destroyed the nationalist spirit (*al-ruḥ al-qawmiyya wa al-waṭaniyya*), and attacked anything nationalist (*qawmī*), such as language and culture, and other forces, that caused the melting of smaller nationalities (*qawmiyyāt*) into the larger one.⁹⁰ Aghājān rejected such assumptions, and explained that, although socio-economic forces necessitated that minorities learn the language of the majority, the requirement of “nationalist melting,” stipulating that minorities should learn the majority language, was found in societies based on bourgeois cultures, where people were divided in an effort to implement imperialist methods against them. In contrast, the purpose of the socialist culture was a classist, humanist, and not a nationalist (*qawmī*) one, but nationalist issues had imposed themselves on the culture due to their practical presence in society, a problem that the bourgeois system was not able to solve. The socialist culture was

⁸⁸ Ibid. The author also went on to discuss and advocate worker rights in the socialist system (38–9).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

a progressive culture, according to Aghājān, which continually grappled with issues and new ideas as required by the new era.⁹¹

The rights the socialist culture argued for had a humanistic tendency, and called for the demise of special privileges for certain nations (*qawmiyyāt*). Aghājān envisioned rights for minorities in a socialist culture that supported their nationalist rights (*ḥuqūqiha al-qawmiyya*), including the right to gather peacefully and the right to political self-determination. This would allow minorities to put their guard down, and develop the necessary confidence to unite and contribute towards the cause of humanity.⁹² Aghājān argued that socialism served humanity, and that Assyrian rights—though he never directly referred to the Assyrians—were not just cultural or nationalistic, but humanitarian.⁹³ He argued that a socialist culture was “a progressive nationalist culture; at the same time it is a humanist culture. It does not differentiate between socialist and nationalist [*qawmiyya*] issues because the nationalist human being is a human who is not stripped of his freedom or his humanity.”⁹⁴ The socialist culture called for administrative districts that were consistent with the historical national communities (*tarkīb al- qawmiyya*) in each area. He argued that this would ensure the rights of the smallest minorities, even if their numbers were in the tens. This could be accomplished by the establishment of independent villages and districts (*mustaqilla dhatiyyan*), and it would be the right of all individuals from this nationality (*qawmiyya*) scattered throughout the country, and the world, to gather

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. 40.

⁹³ Ibid. 41.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 42.

in these villages and districts and form free relations within their community (*wa iqāmat ‘alaqāt ḥurra fi mā baynahā*).⁹⁵

The articulation of a socialist discourse to negotiate for Assyrian social and political rights was not repeated often, given that it was advocated most strongly by Assyrians with communist leanings. As relations between the ICP and the Ba‘th deteriorated in the mid 1970s, such narratives became subdued, though the Assyrian Cultural Club continued to be somewhat influenced by leftist ideology.⁹⁶ It remains striking that Assyrians from various ideological camps were hopeful that their rights would be extended beyond the cultural realm to encompass political and administrative rights. At the time, Yā‘qo and his affiliates were in the midst of negotiations with Ba‘thist authorities for an Assyrian administrative area. In his article, it appears that Aghājān supported Yā‘qo’s position, arguing that administrative rights should be granted to the Assyrians on the basis of socialist and humanistic principles, rather than on the political gains that the Ba‘th regime expected to accrue—which was what seemed to be transpiring behind closed doors.

While the socialist narrative began to be silenced as the Communist Party lost favor with the Ba‘thists, the Abbasid narrative continued to be propagated, and was resurrected during the Iran–Iraq war as references to Qādisiyyat Saddam became popular. Assyrians reinvented arguments they had made in the 1970s, discussed above, that portrayed the Persians more negatively, by accentuating the Assyrians’ persecution under their rule following the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Y.K., interviewed by author, Baghdad, December 7, 2011.

and during the medieval period as Christians. They accomplished this by drawing on hagiographic literature of the Church of the East.⁹⁷

Beyond Negotiation: Subtle and Defiant Forms of Resistance

In negotiating for their rights, Assyrians did not confine themselves to accepted narratives. They also showed discontent by resisting subtly in the press and more defiantly in other media, as we saw in the case of the Simele song. For instance, following the conference honoring Ḥunayn bin Ishāq and St. Ephraim, a number of intellectuals associated with *Mordinna Atouraya* showed their dissatisfaction with the way the conference was organized. In the same issue of the magazine that praised the conference and featured interviews with Western scholars, a one-page article appeared anonymously, attributed to the “Editorial and Press Committee,” offering constructive criticism.⁹⁸ After showering praise on the event and its organizers once again, the authors listed six points they took issue with. First, the president of the Assembly of the Syriac Language had forgotten to mention the Assyrians, “Athūriyyūn,” in his opening speech for the conference. They reminded him that Assyrians, had been at the forefront of those who cherished Saint Ephraim’s poetry and religious homilies, and had used them continually from the time of St. Ephraim until the present. Second, the authors recommended that the master of ceremonies use Aramaic alongside Arabic, since the Assembly of the Syriac Language was established to revive the Aramaic

⁹⁷ “‘Unsuriyat al-Furs wa Mu’ādatuhum lil Shu‘ūb,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 28 (May 1981), 3.

⁹⁸ Editorial and Press Committee, “Mahrajān ‘Ephraim and Ḥunayn’ wa Mulāḥadhāt ‘ābira,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 3 and 4 (April 1974), 26.

language, and since most of the audience members were “Athūriyyūn, Chaldean and Syriac.” Third, the conference needed to be more organized, which could have been accomplished through the formation of subcommittees with specific duties, such as welcoming guests. The fourth and fifth points were related to the absence of lectures in the Aramaic language of Saint Ephraim, and the absence of translations of any of the lectures into Aramaic, though many lectures appeared in Arabic and Western languages. Finally, they were surprised that Ittiḥād al-udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb al-Nāṭiqīn bi al-Suryānīyya had not been officially called to give a speech, while the Ittiḥād al-udabā’ al-Turkūmānī and the Mūrja’ al-ilmī al-‘Iraqī along with the Kurdish one had been.⁹⁹

The magazine’s criticism seemed innocuous, in that the editors took no exception to having other minority intellectual groups present, but questioned the bypassing of Ittiḥād al-udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb al-Nāṭiqīn bi al-Suryānīyya. Their criticisms were provocative, however, in raising numerous concerns about an event organized and promoted internationally by the government. This was one of the few instances when the dissatisfaction towards the authorities of the Assyrian intellectuals associated with the Assyrian Cultural Club was exhibited in their magazine. The fact that no single author’s name was associated with this article indicates that they either feared repercussions from the authorities or did not know what to expect. However, the act of publishing this article proves in itself that, at least temporarily, a complicated space marked by asymmetrical power relations existed, enabling intellectuals to negotiate and resist the official state narrative.

⁹⁹ Ibid., *Mordinna Atouraya*, 26.

The article also invited readers to engage critically with *Mordinna Atoraya*'s publications. Clearly, there was disgruntlement among Assyrian intellectuals, who were not completely convinced by the regime's outwardly positive policies concerning the Assyrian community. Their position was also highlighted in the magazine's interview with Yā'qo, described above.

Kirkuki Assyrians—Celebrating a Ba'thist Holiday?

Assyrians resisted by means of different strategies, some more symbolic and less direct, that nevertheless allowed Assyrian intellectuals to be subservient to the hegemonic state narrative while incorporating layers of meaning that contradicted what was visible on the surface. For instance, a report in the Aramaic section of the magazine highlighted a celebration in honor of the Ba'th revolution by the Assyrians in Kirkuk. However, a closer examination of the program indicates that Assyrians overwhelmingly focused on Assyrian cultural and nationalist themes, as opposed to highlighting the Ba'thist revolution. On September 27, 1973, the Assyrian Athletic Club in Kirkuk held a literary conference in honor of the revolution (Aramaic: *l-tishmishta d'thawra*).¹⁰⁰ Most of the events during this conference featured poetry and plays in the Aramaic language on themes focusing on Assyrian culture. During the first half of the event, poetry and speeches were delivered, while the second half featured plays and songs by local Kirkuki Assyrian singers. The opening speech, "What is a Poem?" was by Aprim Bet Benjamin, followed by nine other poetic performances on topics including

¹⁰⁰ Aprim bet-Benjamin, "Shawtapūta Atliṭayta d'Atorāye b'Kirkuk," *Mordinna Atouraya* 3 and 4 (April 1974), 14.

language, freedom, emigration, and love. Two poems were related to the Ba‘th Party, one of them celebrating “Gabārūta d’Thawra,” the “Greatness of the Revolution.” Interestingly, the founder of the Assyrian Democratic Movement,¹⁰¹ Yousip Toma Zaibari, who was later executed by the Ba‘th regime, participated by reciting a poem in Aramaic entitled “‘Ar‘a bedrāya qaleh bar shawqānoh” (“The land is calling for its deserter”), probably denouncing both the rural–urban migration of Assyrians within Iraq and the immigration of Assyrians to the West. In the second half, none of the plays or songs focused on the Ba‘th; instead, Edward Mama turned “Rūsh Jwanqa,” or “Awaken O Youth,” a famous Assyrian patriotic song composed by Katie Hakim Shmo‘el in the early 1920s, into a theatrical play. Nabil Jamīl led fourteen youth in this play, while Ewan Shamdinaneh performed the song, “Rūsh Jwanqa.” There were seven other performances in this second half, one entitled “Shima Atūr” (“The Assyrian name”).¹⁰² During this event, Assyrians successfully managed to blend various artistic elements together, highlighting the themes of emigration, culture, and nationalism, while signaling subservience to the state by dedicating the event to the honor of the Ba‘thist revolution.

¹⁰¹ The Assyrian Democratic Movement was a political party founded in 1979 by mainly educated men and women who were raised in urban centers, and influenced as young people by organizations such as the Assyrian Cultural Club, which will be discussed in Chapter 6, below.

¹⁰² bet-Benyamin, “Shawtapūta Atliṭayta d’Atorāye b’Kirkuk,” 14.

Maneuvering around a Ba‘thist Agent: “Taṣarrufāt Maṭrān”

Negotiation was not always so subtle, and at least in one case involved the employment of more aggressive tactics by a religious figure. A report titled “Taṣarrufāt Maṭran” (“Actions of a Bishop), retrieved from the Ba‘thist Regional Command Collection, demonstrated the actions of a bishop of the Syriac Orthodox denomination in Mosul, a charity association affiliated with the church, Jam‘iyyat al-Iḥsān al-Orthodoxī (“The Orthodox Charity Association”), and parishioners in maneuvering around a government agent trying to infiltrate their community. The agent, a Ba‘thist who also happened to be a member of the community, will be discussed in Chapter 6.¹⁰³ In February of 1973 the Syriac Orthodox community hosted a celebration in honor of Syriac Literature, including a dance party and a conference. Based on a report written by a Ba‘thist agent to his superiors in Mosul’s Ba‘th party branch we learn about the different tactics used by this community and particularly its bishop in resisting the efforts of a government agent to infiltrate their community.

The narrative, according to the agent, began with the opening ceremonies failing to mention the cultural laws passed by the government. The conference was hosted shortly following the promulgation of those laws, and the agent was alarmed that the Orthodox Charity Association refused to mention, even after being reminded, laws he considered crucial to a conference celebrating a culture the government had just promised to support. The following day, the agent reported that the staff of the Association had muttered a few words on Law 251.

¹⁰³ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 2522_0473, February 19, 1973, “Taṣarrufāt Maṭran” The Ba‘th Party, 436.

Not satisfied with their dismissive attitude, and having been granted permission by his superior, the secretary of the Nineveh branch of the Ba‘th party, he approached the bishop for permission to complain at the Syriac Youth Conference to be held the next day. Unfortunately for the agent, the bishop’s reaction was aggressive. First, the bishop supported the actions of the Orthodox Charity Association, and proceeded to accuse the agent of trying to turn a religious conference into a contentious, partisan one. The bishop then contacted many community members and “forced” them, according to the agent, not to attend the conference as long as the agent was in attendance. Some young people attended regardless of that instruction. The bishop also accused the agent of plotting to sow chaos within the Syriac Orthodox denomination by disseminating political ideas in its ranks. The agent, who continued to communicate with some of the young people, ignored the bishop’s demand that he refrain from interfering in their affairs. As a final measure, the bishop called off the youth conference to eliminate the agent’s influence in his parish. In his report to his branch superior, the agent related his efforts to stress the importance of directing young people to the nationalist front of the country and the Ba‘th party. But the bishop refused to comply, going so far as to close the doors of the Maṭranīyya and the church for three weeks, preventing the conference from reconvening. He also refused to allow the conference to take place elsewhere, outside his administration.

Moreover, the bishop continued to support members of the Orthodox Charity Association while exhibiting hostility towards politicians, and especially Ba‘thists. The agent therefore recommended that three actions be taken by the

Ba‘th regime to defuse the situation: dissolving the Orthodox Charity Association; forcing the bishop to replace it with another, democratically elected body; and ordering the bishop to allow the conference to convene once again.¹⁰⁴ The agent forwarded the report to the Ba‘th General Security, Amin al-‘Amma, but it is not clear from the report whether any action was taken against the bishop by the Ba‘thist headquarters in Mosul, or by other state officials.¹⁰⁵

The actions of this bishop are unique in their bold, confrontational manner, and would certainly have been sanctioned by the end of the decade—especially if they had emerged from within the ranks of the clergy. Perhaps the bishop felt more able to oppose the agent because he was a religious figure; power relations within this contact zone were more equal therefore, as far as the bishop was concerned. Nevertheless, the bishop’s actions testify to the existence of a limited and provisional space in the 1970s which allowed certain figures in society to negotiate with a state whose power was nevertheless on the rise.

Changes in the Magazine

As early as the mid 1970s, the Assyrians were beginning to see the reversal of Ba‘thist policies. This turnaround coincided with the subsidizing of political opponents of the Ba‘th regime following the Algiers Agreement (see Chapter 4).¹⁰⁶ By the end of the 1970s, changes were being detected in the magazine as well. The most obvious changes were visual, with the cover page of the first

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 2522_0473, February 25, 1983, 431. The Ba‘th Party, to General Security.

¹⁰⁶ Shapera, *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āšir*, 53.

fourteen issues featuring photographs of ancient Mesopotamian imagery integrated with modern Assyrian cultural images, thus reflecting the community's understanding of its identity.

In the first issue, for example, an image of cuneiform script served as the background of the cover image. On top of the cuneiform script, the acronym for the Assyrian Cultural Center was displayed in Aramaic: Shen Mem Allaph. The Assyrian star adorned the center of the image. The second issue featured Mesopotamian men engaged in a discussion. On the right-hand panel of the cover, a photograph of of Malik Yā'qo Ismā'īl was displayed. The cover images in the third and fourth issues showed what appeared to be images of ancient Nineveh, with the subheading: "Mesopotamia between Old and New." The first photograph showed the ancient city in ruins; the second depicted a construction site in Nineveh, with a crane and a man rebuilding the city; and the third showed the rebuilt ancient city.

A few cover images did not display ancient Mesopotamian imagery, but still related to the content of the magazine and its overall theme: cultural and linguistic progress, and revival—and, more subtly, national and political rights. For instance, issues 9 and 10 (1976) bore cover images of athletic men exercising, with their bodies shaped into the twenty-two letters of the Assyrian Aramaic alphabet. Again, progress was combined here with modernity, youth, and the language revival. An Iraqi government official only appeared on the cover of issue 11 (1977), which was appropriate given that the new patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Dīnkhā Khinannyā, was visiting Iraq. The cover

featured an image of Saddam Hussein, who was vice chairman of the Revolutionary Council, and Mar Dīnkhā Khinannyā shaking hands. As was noted in Chapter 4, Mar Dīnkhā Khinannyā was approached by the regime following the border-clearing operations that saw Assyrian villages in the Barwar region destroyed by the Iraqi state. Iraq engaged other Assyrian leaders in the diaspora to ameliorate the negative publicity that the regime's actions had produced among human rights organizations and Western governments.

Starting with issue 15 (1978), the cover images became less Assyrian-specific, reducing references to the ancient past and to cultural heritage, and including more general and religious imagery. This change was reflective of government restrictions against explicit associations with the ancient past. In issue 15, a melancholic painting appeared featuring a sorrowful face, fallen on the ground. Issue 16 (1978) bore an image of young Assyrian girls dressed as brides for the cultural and religious celebration of Kalo Sulāqa commemorated during the Feast of Ascension. Issues 17 and 18 (1978), 19 and 20 (1979), and 21–27 (1979–81) featured a female villager standing in a field, a photograph of a child, and the monastery of St. Hormizd, respectively. The next three issues, from 1981 to 1984, exclusively focused on Saddam Hussein and war-related imagery. Issue 28 (1981) was dedicated to Qadisiyyat Saddam, and included his image against a background of the first Qadisiyya, from the medieval period, with the caption “Al- Qādisiyyatān bayna al-Ams wa al-Yawm” (“The Two Qadisiyyas: between yesterday and today”). The issue featured an article that incorporated the Assyrians into both the medieval and contemporary Qādisiyya, and highlighted

Persian persecution of the Assyrians since the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, and then as Christians in the medieval period, drawing on hagiographies based on the genre of martyrdom of the Church of the East. Issue 30 (1984) included an image of the Monument to the Martyrs of Saddam's Qādisiyya (Nasb Shuhadā' Qādisiyyat Saddām), which was an important symbol created during the Iran–Iraq War by the government in 1983. It was meant to glorify Saddam Hussein and his regime, and mobilize public support behind them by appropriating cultural symbols.¹⁰⁷ Issue 31 (1984) depicted a smiling Saddam in the midst of an ancient naval battle scene, and a Mesopotamian royal female holding flowers and bravely charging forward.

These visual changes were reflective of changes in the content of the magazine. The tone of the articles altered, less negotiation was observed, and subtle challenges to the official government line were more limited. In the Aramaic more than the Arabic section, articles on culture, language, and Mesopotamian heritage were featured, and some articles and poetry could be taken to have double meanings; but the discourse became less dynamic and interactive. More articles appeared on general-interest topics such as scientific discoveries (e.g., computers),¹⁰⁸ war propaganda, and the role of Iraqi women in Qādisiyyat Saddam.¹⁰⁹ More issues were addressed together in a single issue of the magazine. This was indicative of financial difficulties that the magazine was experiencing, which meant that it was published less frequently, appearing once

¹⁰⁷ Davis, *Memories of State*, 193–5.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Birūta, “Taṭawwur Istikhdām al-Hāsibāt al-Alaktrūniyya,” *Mordinna Atouraya* 30 (1984), 20–1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Dr. Ilhām Khalīl Jawād, “al-Mar’a al-‘Iraqiyya wa Qadisiyat Saddam,” 5–9.

every six months or so.¹¹⁰ An English section was added during the war period, comprising a few pages of cultural article. For example, a toned-down account of the “February Fire,” with a reduced emphasis on Assyrian identity, was reprinted in issue 31 (1984), along with Ba‘thist and war propaganda.

As the strategic influence of Assyrians within opposition groups had evaporated following the Algiers Agreement, conciliatory Ba‘thist policies towards them were reduced—especially following the onset of the war with Iran. These developments had repercussions for *Mordinna Atoraya*. In fact, all established Assyrian civil society organizations were either closed down or placed under the direct control of the state, while media outlets simply became tools of government propaganda.¹¹¹

Conclusion

In the early 1970s, urban Assyrian intellectuals took advantage of Law 251 to promote their culture in periodicals associated with their clubs, as well as in more popular cultural formats. They negotiated for political rights by deploying accepted Ba‘thist ideologies of socialism, and integrated themselves into state-constructed narratives of Abbasidism. They placed their concerns within the context of the accepted medium of language, since law 251 permitted the exercising of rights within cultural and linguistic frameworks. Using language, they approached sensitive issues such the Simele massacre and Assyrian identity, tracing a continuous thread of cultural existence from ancient Mesopotamia to the

¹¹⁰ O.A., phone interview with author, Netherlands, January 4, 2015.

¹¹¹ Apram Shapera *Al-Ashūrīyūn Fī Al-Fikr Al-‘Irāqī Al-Mu‘āṣir*, 53–4.

medieval Syriac heritage, and ultimately the modern period. In the early 1970s, Assyrians not only negotiated but also resisted government policies they disagreed with—though this approach was much more prominent in popular culture and song than in more formal media. By the end of the 1970s, and especially following the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the Ba‘thification of society and of Assyrian institutions became more visible, restricting intellectuals from negotiating with or resisting the government in the pages of *Mordinna Atouraya*, or other cultural outlets.

During this period, and particularly in 1978, changes began to be detected in both the appearance of *Mordinna Atouraya* and the tone of the articles it published. Cover images combining elements taken from ancient, medieval, and modern Assyrian heritage gave way in 1978, and especially during the war with Iran, to religious and Ba‘thist -influenced symbolism on the magazine’s covers. This change was reflective of the contents of the articles, which saw a reduction in the prevalence of challenge to official state narratives. Instead, the articles highlighted positive developments in the community, propagated Ba‘thist rhetoric, and expressed support for the war effort. In the Assyrian section, double meanings could be discerned in certain poems and articles. But the formerly dynamic and interactive nature of the magazine, which had confronted government propaganda narratives both subtly and more directly, was now absent.

6. The Re-Establishment of the Assyrian Nationalist Political Movement

(1970s–1980s)

The cultural rights granted in 1972 by the Ba‘th regime became the impetus for the consolidation of the Assyrian intellectual class, and within ten years led to the establishment of the Assyrian political movement as a uniquely separatist group operating within the northern Iraqi opposition. With those cultural rights, the Assyrian intellectual class gained both a temporal space to celebrate its culture and identity and a medium to negotiate for increased political rights. Rural–urban migrations in the second half of the twentieth century had given rise to a generation that considered itself relatively Iraqi and Assyrian, urban and educated, and was widely employed in modern professions. In the 1970s many of the politicized intellectuals believed in the integrity of the state, but realized that the attainment of political rights was required to ensure the maintenance and preservation of their cultural practices and identity.¹ This was largely a reaction to the destruction of rural Assyrian communities during the civil war (1961–75) and the border cleansings and forced displacement of Assyrian villagers by the Iraqi army in 1977 and 1978. Rural–urban migrations threatened the survival of Assyrian communities in their historic lands, and led to the erosion of vernacular cultural traditions. This reversal also coincided with the increased Ba‘thification

¹ Lincoln Malik, “Assyrian Democratic Movement—Strategy for Leadership.” This article, with some modifications, was published by the Assyrian Foundation of America in *Nineveh Magazine* 17: 1–2, last modified 1994, at <http://www.atour.com/adm/docs/strategy.htm> (accessed January 7, 2015).

of society and of Assyrian organizations—a process that began in the late 1970s and escalated during the Iran–Iraq War. It included suppressing Law 251, which had permitted Assyrians to teach their language in public schools, and torturing and imprisoning political leaders and singers who had performed patriotic songs. During the Iraqi census of 1978, the Assyrians felt betrayed for being denied the right to register as Assyrians, and forced to choose between Arab and Kurdish ethnicities.² The regime’s goal of detaching the Assyrians from the Iraqi opposition parties was not achieved, as Assyrians continued to play a role in the northern Iraqi opposition. They were active not only through direct association with the ICP and KDP, but increasingly within politically independent Assyrian parties. Within the Iraqi opposition, each group vied to achieve hegemonic power over the other, by co-opting the Assyrian element to their side as well.

The Iraqi National Arena

As the 1970s came to a close, the Iraqi government began to sever its ties with the Soviet Union and moved closer to the Western sphere.³ The period was also

² Assyrians resisted this in different ways. Some insisted on being registered as Assyrians, and census-collectors at times allowed them to do so, but changed the entry to Arab or Kurd upon leaving the family home. Moreover, the Ba‘thist membership forms of Assyrians show some as registering “Assyrian” under the Qawmiyya field. For instance, an Assyrian female high school student from Sarsank, born in 1973, submitted a membership application (level: sympathizer) to the Ba‘th party on January 1, 1983, and registered her nationality as Assyrian. Hoover, IMF, NIDS, 647450/40527, 1980s, Ba‘th Party, Duhok Leadership Branch, Sarsank Leadership Section and Division, “Transfer Slip,” to women’s division. See also “Mumārasāt al-Nizām al-Hākim,” *Bahrā* 3 (1982), 3; Vahram Petrosian, “Assyrians in Iraq,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 10 (2006): 127.

³ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 179.

characterized by the ascent to power of Saddam Hussein, who succeeded Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr in July 1979. Hussein consolidated his rule over the party and state, even striking at his trusted Tikriti circle of kinship when certain of its members exhibited signs of defiance or excessive ambition. The party and state apparatuses had in effect fused together since 1977, as members of the Ba‘th Regional Command became members of the Revolutionary Command Council.⁴ This merger had given the Ba‘th hegemonic influence over the state; combined with increased oil revenues, which had been strengthening since the early 1970s, this provided a new economic basis upon which the Iraqi state had been able to increase its power. The resources it relied upon were partly allocated to social security, housing, education, and health.⁵ Oil revenues allowed Hassan al-Bakr and later Saddam Hussein, and those closely associated with them, to create networks of patronage centered on their persons that extended throughout the country.⁶ By the mid 1970s, the Ba‘th party had become “an efficiently organized and powerful apparatus, increasingly penetrating every possible sphere of life.”⁷ Given expansive government revenue, enthusiastic development programs, and sponsorship of entrepreneurs in the country, it was natural for Iraq to align with Western countries in preference to the Soviet bloc, due to what the Iraqis perceived as superior Western technologies.⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 206.

⁶ Ibid., 207.

⁷ Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, 184.

⁸ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 207; Sluglett-Farouk and Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*, 180.

Around the same time, the relations of the Iraqi with the Soviets began to decline, and the Ba‘thists’ political association with the Iraqi Communist Party was also severed. In March 1978, the Communists had published articles in their newspaper, *Tarīq al-Sha‘b*, criticizing the Ba‘th regime for its policies towards the Kurds and its warming relations with the West. A few months later, the Ba‘th executed twelve Communists for reportedly carrying out political activity in the army—a breach of the terms specified by the National Front, which had limited political organization in the armed forces to the Ba‘thists only.⁹ With the expulsion of the ICP—its final remaining group—the National Front, which had originally encompassed three political entities (the Ba‘th, the KDP, and the ICP) was officially dismantled.

In 1979, the ICP joined the Iraqi opposition in the north, which consisted mainly of the Kurdish movement, now divided between the KDP and the newly formed Popular Union of Kurdistan (PUK) headed by Jalal Talabani. Following the fall of the Shah in February 1979 and the Iranian Revolution, the Algiers Agreement was nullified. Iran began supporting the Iraqi opposition once again, especially following the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War in 1980, and given the willingness of both the KDP and PUK to assist the Islamic revolutionary government of Iran.¹⁰ As relations with Syria worsened, the Iraqi opposition was also able to leverage the support of the Ba‘thist Syrian regime, eventually using

⁹ Ibid., 185–6.

¹⁰ Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 187–8; Dina Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013) 23.

Iran and Syria to promote its political agenda, which included anti-Iraqi Ba‘thist propaganda.¹¹

A transformation of Ba‘thist state policies took place both before and after the Iran–Iraq War. In the 1970s, the state’s social policies of development and corporatism inspired government planning. In Ba‘thist Iraqi society, the people were directly linked to the state and motivated by the political party, as well as by professional and labor organizations, to support the social state programs.¹²

According to Khoury, the one-party system “framed rights of access to citizens’ social and economic rights in both negative and positive terms.” Those who were not seen as threatening to the security of the party and the state enjoyed rights and services. Those excluded from this system of privileges were citizens belonging to illegal political parties and their relatives, as well as members of particular ethnic communities.¹³ No longer able to fund development projects during wartime, the Ba‘th had to reorganize itself away from pursuing development and corporatism to become a national security and counter-insurgency state.¹⁴ This reorganization entailed changes in administrative techniques, along with an increase in the bureaucratization of the Ba‘th Party, which was a change affecting the lives of ordinary Iraqi citizens.¹⁵ During the 1980s, the Ba‘th continued to govern society and generate methods of surveillance to regulate the lives of its citizens, especially those most directly affected by war. The party arbitrated between the

¹¹ N.P. interviewed by author, Ainkawa, Irbil, Iraq, December 21, 2011.

¹² Tripp, *History of Iraq*, 187–8; Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 5.

¹³ Khoury, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

families of the soldiers, prisoners of war, and martyrs, on one hand, and the state institutions, on the other, for rights and entitlements.¹⁶ Resistance to the regime was limited, and was most visibly observed within the organized Iraqi opposition, among army deserters and, more subtly, at Shi‘a rituals of mourning.¹⁷

The Ba‘thification of Society: A Case Study

A document released in the 1980s by the Ba‘th party, probably internally, laid out a comprehensive work plan for disseminating Ba‘th ideology within society through partnership between party and civil organizations.¹⁸ The document introduced its intention in the first paragraph, stating that the party’s revolutionary and scientific qualities had been employed in a systematic and scientific manner based on past successes and failures during the revolution, enabling it to draw up a new plan that was consistent with current progress within the regional and international arenas. The goal of this plan was defined as follows:

The depth of its revolutionary coup is ensured, and connected voluntarily and dialectically, with the movement and struggle of the people [*jamāhīr*] so that a solid bloc [*kutla ṣaliba*] can be created from the party and the people from a fabric [*nasīj*] that is unified and homogeneous in ideology and practice.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 025-5-5-0476 to 0497, 1980s, Ba‘th Party, “Mashru‘ Khuṭat ‘Amal lil Tansīq Bayn al-Munazamāt al-Ḥizbiyya wa al-Jamahiriyya fi Majāl Tab‘īth al-Mujtama‘”

¹⁹ Ibid., 025-5-5-0478.

It went on to claim that “Saddam and the Iraqis have unified in one body created by the Qadisiyya.”²⁰ This reference to the Qadisiyya identified the Iran–Iraq War as an important impetus for the Ba‘thification program that was to characterize the Ba‘th state throughout the 1980s.²¹ In some twenty pages, the program methodically detailed information-gathering, the utilization of civil and professional organizations for the purposes of Ba‘thifying society,²² and the formation of a Ba‘thification Committee (Lajnat al-Tab‘īth) in each province to steer these organizations accordingly.²³

In an investigation launched on May 25, 1985, a Syriac Orthodox Ba‘th party member²⁴ revealed the intricacies involved in monitoring the activities of Ba‘th members and civil organizations by the Ba‘th state apparatuses. His file contained a record of his activities, detailing his political life from the 1970s to the 1990s. We were introduced to this Ba‘th party member in Chapter 4: he was the agent who encountered resistance from the bishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the early 1970s, in the city of Mosul. The file demonstrated how the regime implemented its program to Ba‘thify the Assyrian community. At the time of the investigation, this man was a Ba‘th branch leader and president of Nadī Al-Anwār in Baghdad, a social club belonging to the Syriac Orthodox Assyrian

²⁰ Ibid., 025-5-5-0480.

²¹ Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*.

²² Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 025-5-5-0481 to 0484.

²³ Ibid., 025-5-5-0484 to 0485.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 114. The investigation committee was launched by the Ba‘th Party Secretariat (Maktab Amānat Sir al-Qutr) and Bureau Structure of Baghdad and the Directorate of General Security. According to Sassoon, every major Ba‘th party decision was channeled through the Party Secretariat. Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11–12.

community, whose property was owned by the church.²⁵ The investigation committee recommended that all committee members of Nādī al-Anwār be replaced, and asserted further that, since they had committed accounting errors, they qualified for criminalization according to Law 11 of the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969. It was therefore recommended that they be brought to justice.²⁶ In addition, the agent's Ba'athist membership was to be temporarily "frozen."²⁷ He was accused of not spreading Ba'athist ideology among his minority community, mishandling the club's money, and making a donation to the Assyrian Cultural Club in the amount of 600 dinars without attaining permission from the Ministry of Interior.²⁸ Although he was disgraced at the end of his political career as a Ba'athist, his case presents an interesting profile of an Assyrian Ba'athist during this period.

An Assyrian Ba'athist in context

This person's life and membership within the Ba'ath calls into question the usual impression of the community's involvement within the party. It is clear that Assyrians, along with Kurds, Shi'is, and other communities, were part of the Ba'athist system and involved in its daily operations and intelligence-gathering

²⁵ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 2522_0473, 1975-1991, Ba'ath Party, "Name of Ba'ath member omitted." I thank Dr. Fadi Dawood for providing me with information on Nādī al-Anwār.

²⁶ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 2522_0473, 115.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 125, 133, 154. Mishandling of money seemed to involve an unapproved donation to the Assyrian Cultural Club, and also finances involving his son's engagement party.

activities.²⁹ There are records of Assyrians in the northern region being recruited as sympathizers of the Ba‘th Party as high school students in the 1980s.³⁰ Also, a large number of workers employed at the presidential palaces, totaling more than 1,300, were Assyrians.³¹ According to Sassoon, the implantation of ethnic minorities in palaces and security apparatuses was a method used not only by Saddam Hussein, but by Stalin before him, who realized that such minorities, “even in senior positions, cannot constitute a threat for the regime, given their lack of a power base.” Sassoon continues: “In Iraq, as Assyrians have the reputation of being tidy and punctual and of having no political ambitions, they were a natural group to employ.”³²

Although the lack of the “political ambitions” within the Assyrian community is debatable, Assyrians ranked lower on the hierarchy of citizenship and were less threatening to the regime, but it is also true that those employed in such professions usually ranked lower socio-economically. It is well known that many of those employed had recently been displaced from their villages in the north and settled in large urban centers. Of those, a considerable number were middle-aged Assyrian women who worked as cleaners and cooks, being perceived as “tidy and punctual.” Though this was paradoxical, given that they were working in close proximity with leaders responsible for their displacement and the destruction of their livelihood, these women’s skills were generally non-

²⁹ Ibid., 11.

³⁰ See, for example, NIDS, 341649/34997, 1269448/16063, and 647442/40527.

³¹ Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba‘th Party*, 102.

³² Ibid., 103.

transferable to urban centers, and their knowledge of Arabic limited, making such forms of employment desirable.

The same logic used by Sassoon applied to community members occupying senior positions, for example Tariq ‘Aziz. The Revolutionary Command Council, which operated as the executive arm of the government, directing the bureaucracy and implementing laws, comprised ten members in 2001, but had included the same four men for decades: Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, Taha Yasin Ramadan, Tariq Aziz, and Ali Hasan al-Majid. These four men had accompanied Saddam Hussein throughout his political life, and were thought to represent no political threat (al-Majid was related to Hussein, Aziz was Christian, Ramadan was half Kurdish, and al-Duri lacked a power base).³³ When considering why the party was successful in recruiting a large number of Kurds, Sassoon cites the privileges and rewards associated with membership, as well as the threat of loss of employment without it, and the avoidance of punishment if a family member had left the country or become affiliated with the opposition.³⁴ It is safe to assume that, like the Kurds, the Assyrians joined the party for these same reasons. Although this Assyrian Ba‘thist was an outlier, his life story reveals important facts about the period and the position of Assyrians within the party.

On July 1, 1982 he submitted a three-page summary of his political biography. He began his account in the 1950s, recalling the visit of ‘Abd al-Salam

³³ Ibid., 230.

³⁴ Ibid., 73.

‘Arif to Mosul in 1958, which left a positive impression on him.³⁵ Being in the political and ideological minority in the Assyrian town of Ba‘shīqa, he joined the Ba‘th with only one other person, and both struggled to combat communism—which, according to him, was overwhelmingly supported in his community. He faced restrictions under Qasim, and was sent deliberately into a remote area to work as a teacher.³⁶ In 1965 the tide began to turn in his favor, with the political ascent of Arab nationalism. He became a Ba‘th party member, and in 1966 was given responsibility for the Ḥamdaniyya region (Nineveh Plain). He worked to combat *shu‘ūbiyya*—the internal enemy working to undermine Arab unity and progress³⁷—in the region, which included towns and districts with large concentrations of Assyrians, including Ba‘shīqa, Telkaif, Ḥamdaniyya, Shaikhān, and ‘Aqra.³⁸ In 1970 he became a member of the division leadership, and dedicated his time to party affairs, again focusing on areas with high populations of Assyrians. In 1972 he claimed without elaboration to have eradicated communism in Ba‘shīqa, Telkaif, Alqosh, and Karamles, and led student elections in support of the Nationalist Union for Students in Iraq. In 1973 he won the

³⁵ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 2522_0473, his report to the Party Secretariat, “My Political Life,” 336.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 337.

³⁷ Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (London: Hurst, 2011), 44. The term originally referred to Arabized Persian Shi‘is who were centrally involved in the Abbasid bureaucracy and worked to undermine the empire from within, eventually causing its downfall. Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 4. According to Haddad, in the mid twentieth century the term came to refer to members of the Iraqi Communist Party, as well as the Shi‘a community, because of the ICP’s perceived anti-Arab positions, and connections to international communist organizations (*ibid.*, 44).

³⁸ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 2522_0473, 337.

elections as a member in the leadership of the Nineveh branch, and became a member in the eighth regional (Qutrī) conference.

Among his activities and tasks during this period was observing the activities of the group (*zumra*) of the Assyrian “denomination,” along with other “chauvinistic factions” and Christian denominations.³⁹ He participated in spoiling the plans of “the Assyrian and the Chaldean gatherings” in Duhok and Nineveh, and prevented secret conferences from taking place aimed at “planting the seed of denominationalism.” The term denominationalism within the community at the time would have referred to nationalist political activity. As earlier chapters have mentioned, the Ba‘th had labeled the Assyrian community among “national minorities” in the preface of Law 251 issued in 1972, yet by the late 1970s, they were referred to as a “denomination.” In 1975, he moved to Baghdad and assumed many new positions within the Ba‘th Party, including secretary of the National Council for Peace and Solidarity. In 1977 he moved to the office of *Munazammāt khārij al-Waṭan* (“Organizations Outside the Country”), in the Ba‘th National Command. These countries included Italy, France, Britain, the United States, Austria, Spain, Belgium, Holland, the Scandinavian countries, Greece, Turkey, India, Pakistan, and Australia. Finally, in 1981 he was transferred to the Central Office of Students and Youth.⁴⁰

It is important to keep in mind that this member crafted his report with the purpose of advertising his political biography in a way that would have impressed his Ba‘thist colleagues and superiors in the early 1980s, which is why he used

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

terminology such as “denomination” to refer to the Assyrians and political actions or groups that were out of favor with the Ba‘thist regime at the time (such as communism or independent Assyrian political activity). But it is nonetheless interesting that the party used him, throughout most of his career, within his own community—for example, in his interactions with the bishop discussed in Chapter 4—and that many of the foreign countries he listed were home to large Assyrian diasporic communities. His knowledge of Aramaic and of the community in general was an important resource; and his membership in the community meant that he could be planted inside clubs and associations that had been authorized to function independently, but were now used by the regime in its Ba‘thification campaign. Having a community member present at the functions of such organizations and involved in the recruitment of members was crucial for the regime, especially during wartime when the Iraqi opposition, which included Assyrians as active populations in the north, had been resurrected.

This individual benefited personally from his membership of the Ba‘th Party, not only using it as a source of employment after 1977, but also when he fell into financial difficulties. For instance, the Ba‘th Party gave him 10,000 dinars to build his house, though when he asked for more when he ran out of money, he was denied a second payment.⁴¹ At the end of his career, he was reprimanded for mishandling money in misappropriations that included donations to an Assyrian organization that the party regarded with suspicion. He was also accused of not attracting enough Assyrians to the party. These accusations were

⁴¹ Ibid., 242. For his personal letter asking for financial support, see p. 245.

eventually leveled at all of the board members of Nadī Al-Anwār, who were to be investigated and potentially incarcerated. Involvement in a social club became a liability during the 1980s, and failing to toe the various party lines could have serious repercussions.

The Resurrection of Assyrian Political Organizations: Towards Armed Struggle

The destabilization of the Iraqi state, starting in the 1980s, engendered new circumstances and possibilities enabling the emergence of Assyrian political organizations. In areas under the control of the Iraqi opposition, referred to as “liberated” territories by opposition parties, Assyrian political organizations found a space to operate and spread their ideology. The Ba‘th regime’s persecution, imprisonment, and execution of members of Assyrian political parties, specifically those associated with the Assyrian Democratic Movement, allowed the ADM to coalesce, form a grassroots movement, and garner support for its cause both inside the country and, in time, internationally.

The increased Ba‘thification of society, the practical abandonment of Law 251 by the authorities, and the use of Assyrian organizations and periodicals for party propaganda were all heightened during wartime. In addition, contradictory policies, most visibly in rural centers of Assyrian population, provided the necessary impetus for the resurrection of new Assyrian political entities in Iraq. Although a number of such Assyrian political parties existed outside Iraq, including the Assyrian Democratic Organization (Syria, 1957) and the Assyrian

Universal Alliance (internationally and in Iran, 1968),⁴² the 1970s saw their first successful attempt to organize inside the country. Earlier groups had had limited success; for example, Kheith Kheith Allaph I, “Khuba w Khuyada Athōraya” (“Assyrian Love and Unity”), was formed in the 1940s, but was forced to operate within the constraints of British colonial rule in the Ḥabaniyya camp. The British eventually cracked down on its activities, putting an end to the group.⁴³ In 1961, Kheith Kheith Allaph II, formed in Baghdad, established a foothold in the north influencing Assyrian leaders who had cooperated with the Kurdish opposition. The group was disbanded under the Ba‘thist regime after being discovered, and officially persecuted. Individual members of Kheith Kheith Allaph II continued to be influential as intellectuals, operating from within organizations such as the Assyrian Cultural Club.

A new generation of Assyrians—mostly born in the 1950s, raised and educated in urban centers, and employed in modern professions—began organizing during this period. There appeared to be an important transition among this generation, whose members were likely to be more embedded in Iraqi society than their parents, as a result of their exposure to urban milieux. They were generally disappointed with the failures of an earlier generation of Assyrian nationalists in securing the rights of the population, including some degree of autonomy, or even in improving the everyday lives of the community.⁴⁴ They also

⁴² Petrosian, “Assyrians in Iraq,” 133, 135–6, 127.

⁴³ Mikhael K. Pius, “Khet Khet Allap,” *Nineveh* 22: 3 (1999).

⁴⁴ For more on the generational gap between the disgruntled Young Effendiyya of Iraq and the older generation of Effendiyya (for example, Sharifian Officers), see

thought that Assyrian involvement in larger Iraqi parties or movements, such as the Communist and Kurdish movements, yielded little result for the Assyrian community. For them, fusing Iraqi patriotism with Assyrian nationalism laid the necessary groundwork for a successful political movement. These men and women were able, as things turned out, to transform the Assyrian political struggle into a mass movement that eventually drew in large numbers of both urban and rural Assyrians.

The path of an Assyrian urbanite intellectual towards armed struggle

N.P. was born in 1954 in the Ḥabbaniyya camp, and raised in the Dora district of Baghdad. In 1971 he joined the Assyrian Cultural Club, and later that year became a founding member of the Akhunwāte d'Aturāye (from Aramaic translates as, Assyrian Brotherhood), known by the acronym Allaph Allaph. This pseudo-political underground organization had approximately forty to fifty members, most of whom were students, but with a few older members acting as advisors. During the organization's eight years of existence, it managed to establish branches in Kirkuk and Baghdad. N.P. recalls that its goals included re-establishing Assyrian nationalism by awakening Assyrians to its importance, and uniting the various segments of the nation, including its churches, hence the choice of the word "brotherhood." He admits that the group was not politically

mature enough at the time to set its own goals for the nation.⁴⁵ Consequently, its activities involved supporting the Assyrian Cultural Club and ensuring that suitable candidates were elected to its executive committee. The group also supported the study of the Aramaic language in various churches and clubs. Although the Assyrian Cultural Club was important in its cultural and nationalist development, it also worked in other clubs, as well as in the Chaldean and Nestorian Churches.⁴⁶ When asked why it had felt the need to establish a new politically orientated group, N.P. reasoned that it was a result of the fact that Kheith Kheith Allaph II did not exist as an organization, though its former members were still active as individuals. He noted that Kheith Kheith Allaph I, which had been formed in the 1940s, still retained some influence—his own family contained a former member. As far as parties that were not exclusively Assyrian were concerned—such as the ICP, the KDP and the Ba‘th party—N.P. did not think they were interested in preserving and promoting Assyrian culture and language. For instance, Arab nationalist parties “belittled” the teaching of

⁴⁵ N.P. interviewed by author, Ainkawa, Erbil, Iraq, December 21, 2011. In 1977 the Assyrian Patriotic Party was formed, when the Assyrian Universal Alliance and Malik Yā‘qo Ismā‘īl came to visit Iraq. During this time, the APP also took control over the executive committee of the Assyrian Cultural Club for two years. Allegations over the APP’s close ties with the Ba‘thists circulated partly because their co-founder, William Shaoul (Benjamin), was arrested by the FBI for allegedly working for the Iraqi Intelligence Service in the 1990s. Nimrud Baito, APP’s current secretary general and minister in the KRG, clarified this in an interview, claiming that once APP had discovered that William Shaoul was working with the Ba‘thists, they expelled him, on August 5, 1974. Speculations on APP’s ties with the government decades after its foundation affirm the sensitivity of collaboration with the government for Assyrian political activists. Paul Isaac, “An Interview with the Assyrian Patriotic Party,” *Zinda Magazine* XII: 23 (November 20, 2006).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Aramaic, he suggested, because “Arabic was the language of the country, [and] teaching Sūrith [Assyrian/Aramaic], as far as [Arab nationalists] were concerned, was racist.”⁴⁷

In 1977, Allaph Allaph began discussing how to solidify the political movement and unite the various Assyrian groups that existed. Members prepared over a period of two years, identifying intellectual and political concepts and consulting the political by-laws of independence movements such as those of the Palestinians and the Vietnamese.⁴⁸ These discussions led to the convening of a general conference, held secretly in Kirkuk, Mosul, and Baghdad. This led to the formation of the Assyrian Democratic Movement on April 12, 1979,⁴⁹ from an amalgamation of Allaph Allaph and a few other political groups.⁵⁰ During the conference, both a constitution and a political program were defined, and it was also decided that the ADM would partake in armed struggle, alongside the Iraqi opposition, against the Ba‘th regime.⁵¹ This party would become “the most successful Assyrian political movement” in Iraq, and hence will be examined as a case study in independent Assyrian political activism during the 1980s.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Al-Ḥaraka al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Ashūriyya—Zowaa,” Al-Ḥaraka al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Ashūriyya, last modified February 14, 2014, at http://www.zowaa.org/index.php?page=com_articles&id=293#.VKxcL8aT5-E (accessed January 6, 2015).

⁵⁰ M. J. interviewed by author, Chicago, Illinois, February 6, 2015. M. J. provided information on the other groups that combined with Allaph Allaph to form the ADM.

⁵¹ N.P. interviewed by author.

⁵² Petrosian, “Assyrians in Iraq,” 136.

Case Study: The Assyrian Democratic Movement—“Progressive Pragmatism”⁵³

The ADM—commonly referred to as “Zowaa,” meaning “movement” in Aramaic—identifies the repressive policies of the Ba‘th regime as the motivation for its formation, beginning with the denial of Assyrian national identity and progressive cultural activities, and including the arrest and execution of Assyrian political activists.⁵⁴ It situates itself within the Assyrian nationalist movement that dates back more than a century and a half, but focuses on the situation of Assyrians in Iraq. It identified the destruction of Assyrian villages and cultural heritage in northern Iraq as a strong impetus for the group’s formation. This had begun with the Simele massacre, but gathered pace with the Kurdish uprising in 1961, and the subsequent Anfal campaign.⁵⁵

The ADM characterizes itself as politically leftist without sectarian tendencies, and as seeking to represent Assyrians from various religious denominations and factions.⁵⁶ It proposes upholding majority rule while protecting minority rights, in a democratic system protected by regulatory bodies.⁵⁷ The ADM understood the two axes of “Qawmī” and “Waṭani”—identifying the Assyrian nation and the Iraqi state, respectively—to be dialectically connected, as is disclosed in its two founding slogans: 1) for a free, democratic Iraq, and 2) for the recognition of Assyrian national identity.⁵⁸ In this regard, the party distinguished itself from the Assyrian political movement of the

⁵³ Malik, “Assyrian Democratic Movement.”

⁵⁴ Al-Ḥaraka al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Ashūriyya—Zowaa, “Al- Ḥaraka.”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; N.P. interviewed by author.

⁵⁷ Al-Ḥaraka al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Ashūriyya—Zowaa, “Al- Ḥaraka.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.; N.P. interviewed by author.

past. In 1994, Dr. Lincoln Malik, then representative of the ADM in the United States and Canada, characterized the ADM's political program as "progressive pragmatism":

Zowaa offer[s] a progressive and pragmatic political program for achieving our legitimate national rights. It begins with the proposition that we are one people, [that] our homeland is Bet Nahrain [Mesopotamia], [and that] our inalienable human, cultural, political and administrative rights in our homeland must be recognized constitutionally. We condemn and reject the historical and present injustices imposed on our people, and shall struggle resolutely against them. We are also patriotic Iraqis and shall struggle for peace, progress and democracy for our country.⁵⁹

Reflecting on earlier political parties, N.P. noted that they had tried to learn from earlier groups, and took pride in their struggles for the Assyrian nation. But he believed that earlier groups lacked a political ideology that could be continued into the future, relying instead on external powers, such as the Soviet Union, in their quest for political rights. This had turned out to be unwise, since the Assyrians were not numerous enough, and the territory they occupied was of insufficient strategic importance, for their allegiance to be of use to the larger powers.⁶⁰ Moreover, failing to consider neighboring communities that lived with the Assyrians was a mistake, in his opinion. Malik, in his turn, criticized what he termed "wishful solutions," including the search for benefactors who would grant Assyrians their rights, noting that "national rights are never given, they are gained." While he acknowledged the importance of approaching the United Nations and foreign governments, this was simply for the purpose of declaring, as

⁵⁹ Malik, "Assyrian Democratic Movement."

⁶⁰ N.P. interviewed by author.

the ADM had established, that “Assyrians are engaged in a just struggle for their legitimate national rights and are worthy of support to continue their struggle,” rather than in order to plead for their rights from these powers.⁶¹ The ADM strived to intertwine Assyrian rights with those of Iraq; in essence they argued that, within a democratic system, minority rights would be protected. As N.P. noted, “If these rights are achieved, then as a living nation we can modernize ourselves. This modernization or progress can eventually lead to a federal region, a state, etc. This is not to be decided now or by the ADM, necessarily; yet progress is important.”⁶²

The agenda of the ADM can be seen as one of striving to attain minority rights for Assyrians within a democratic Iraqi state. These rights would have encompassed the cultural, social, and political arenas and, most importantly, would recognize Assyrians as an ethnic group, and not merely a religious denomination, as they came to be conceived of by the state in the 1970s and

⁶¹ Malik, “Assyrian Democratic Movement.”

⁶² Ibid. In 2003 the ADM held a conference where it called for the formation of the Nineveh Plain Administrative Unit. This became constitutionally possible in 2005 according to article 125 of the Iraqi constitution. Assyrian Democratic Movement, “Final Declaration of the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian General Conference (2003),” <http://zowaa.org/news/news/english/pr4eng.pdf> (accessed December 7, 2007); *Zinda Magazine*, “Five-Parties Memo on Draft Kurdistan Region Constitution,” November 20, 2006, http://www.zindamagazine.com/html/archives/2006/11.20.06/index_thu.php#goomorningassyria (accessed December 7, 2007); ISDP, “Proposing the Operationalization of Art. 125 Solution: Establishing the Nineveh Plains Administrative Unit,” <http://www.iraqdemocracyproject.org/pdf/NPAU-policybrief.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2007). In January 2014, the Iraqi prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, agreed to the formation of three new provinces, including the Nineveh Plain. Although the new prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, has stated his support for this policy, the discussion has been on hold since the displacement of Assyrian and Yazidi residents of the Nineveh Plain from their region in August 2014 by Islamic State forces (ISIS).

1980s. In terms of political rights, an administrative area based on Malik Yā‘qo Ismā‘īl’s negotiations with the Ba‘thist state in the early 1970s would have been conceivable to the group. However, the ADM did not explicitly state its intention in relation to a designated area for the Assyrians, given its “progressive-pragmatic” position; as N.P. noted, it negotiated within its practical means, depending on the political circumstances of the Assyrian population at the time.

Yousip Zebarī and Yonadam Kanna, two founding members of ADM with family roots in the north, were placed in charge of organizing activities in the region. It took them three years to organize and coordinate with established opposition groups in the north, mainly the KDP and ICP, following which the ADM sent its first group, on April 14, 1982, to join in the armed struggle officially.⁶³ In the “liberated” areas, the ADM, along with other Iraqi opposition groups, found the necessary space to operate and spread their ideology while also fighting against the Iraqi state. This initial ADM group had started with only four individuals, but it quickly attracted Assyrians from neighboring villages, growing to twenty individuals in just a few days. The capacity of the mainly urbanized movement to attract Assyrian villagers would be essential in its future success. The numbers of its members would continue to grow, and in the early 1990s it was reported that thousands of Assyrians had “organized in military formations, irregular forces (freedom fighters) and village militia,” to participate in the armed struggle against the Ba‘thist regime in conjunction with the Iraqi opposition, and

⁶³ N.P. interviewed by author.

to protect Assyrian villages.⁶⁴ During the 1990s pictures and VHS recordings circulated documenting the movement's freedom fighters, known as "Qrawtāneh d'Zowaa" in Aramaic. Numerous others were composed about them, boosting the movement's popularity.

After the ADM established its base in the north, relations began to form spontaneously between them and Assyrian members of the ICP and KDP, who had been part of the opposition for decades in some cases. In the early 1980s, the ADM office was a twenty-minute walk from the Communist Party office, and N.P. enjoyed regular communication with the Communist leader Tūma Tūmās, who had escaped Kirkuk in 1959 and since joined the Iraqi opposition. According to N.P., Tūmās visited the ADM office daily, providing moral support and advice on, for instance, where to purchase ammunition. Although a communist, Tūmās—according to N.P. and other communists interviewed—was supportive of the ADM.⁶⁵ N.P. described him as "nationalist in spirit but communist in activism."⁶⁶

Abu Baz (b. 1933), an important communist leader and military commander who had joined forces with Tūmās in the 1960s, argued that the Assyrian nationalist movement had disintegrated following the murder of Hurmizd Malik Chikku in 1963, and only recovered with the formation of the ADM. He believed it was important that there should be an Assyrian nationalist political party for two reasons: the significance of the Assyrian nationalist position; and a fear of communism within the community following the 1959

⁶⁴ Malik, "Assyrian Democratic Movement."

⁶⁵ Abu Baz interviewed by author, Alqosh, Mosul, Iraq, December 18, 2011.

⁶⁶ N.P. interviewed by author.

Shawwāf uprising and the 1963 toppling of Qasim. In both cases, many Assyrians associated with communism had been killed. He declared that communists supported all nations struggling for their freedom.⁶⁷ Although a couple of Assyrian communists joined the ADM, the ADM seemed to have relatively good relations with ICP Assyrians, and some KDP Assyrians as well.⁶⁸ For instance, N.S. (b. 1961), who was raised mainly in the rural north, joined the KDP in 1979, around the time when the ADM was forming in urban centers. N.S. reported that he also supported the ADM, and had befriended an Assyrian member whom he liked for his honesty and strength. When this member had asked him to join the ADM, N.S. had turned the question around and asked where he could be most useful to the ADM and the community in general, as a member of the KDP or of the ADM. In the KDP, with its greater resources and better connections, N.S. reasoned, he could extend arms, food rations, and useful advice to Assyrians.⁶⁹ This points to a general fluidity and permeability of the borders between the parties, regardless of their defining convictions. Although the KDP and ICP contained Assyrian members, the ADM was exclusively composed of Assyrians.

Meanwhile, two months after establishing its base and joining the Iraqi opposition, the ADM began issuing its official newspaper, *Bahrā*, in June 1982. The attraction of the party was enhanced with the spread of its newspaper, which was written and edited in the ADM's headquarters in the north, and then spread underground to various parts of the country, and eventually in other countries.

⁶⁷ Abu Baz interviewed by author.

⁶⁸ N.S. interviewed by author, Toronto, Canada, July 9, 2013.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

During the armed struggle the newspaper had very limited resources, and comprised only about six pages in its first issues. The number of copies published at the ADM's headquarters depended on the amount of paper and printing material available. Usually between 200 and 500 copies of the newspaper were printed initially, followed by second editions published in unknown numbers throughout the numerous receiving locations around the world.⁷⁰ The rate of publication was set at one issue every two months, but this also depended on the security conditions in the "liberated" areas of the north from which the opposition operated. Regular government attacks on opposition bases also affected the production rate.⁷¹

Topics addressed by the paper ranged from updates on the party's role in the Iraqi opposition, crimes committed by the Ba'athist regime against Assyrians and other Iraqis, and clarifications of the ADM's political positions and ideology. A series of articles appeared between 1982 and 1987⁷² on the subject of Assyrian national identity. Every issue in this series covered a different theme relating to the subject of identity, under titles including: "The Assyrian National Identity and Its Historical Developments,"⁷³ "The Assyrian National Identity and the

⁷⁰ N.P., email communication with author, February 6, 2015.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² The 1987 edition is the last issue of *Bahrā* that I have. Following the Anfal campaign in 1988, the Iraqi opposition was temporarily dismantled, establishing its bases in Iran and later Syria (interview with N.P.). It can be presumed that the newspaper was halted temporarily during this chaotic period, until the central committee re-established its bases. Otherwise, *Bahrā* has been continuously published, with few interruptions, up to the present.

⁷³ "Al-Wūjūd al-Qawmī al-Athūrī: Māhiatuhu wa Ussus Taṭawurahu al-Tārīkhī," *Bahrā* 1 (June 1982), 1–2.

Conditions of True Democracy,”⁷⁴ “The Assyrian National Identity: An [Iraqi] Patriotic [*waṭaniyya*] Necessity,”⁷⁵ and “The Assyrian National Identity and the Problem of Emigration.”⁷⁶ The Assyrian national identity, or existence (*wujūd*), was defined as “encompassing all that forms the Assyrian character. It is not based on a law issued by a certain regime, in a certain place. It is the product of a period of struggle lasting thousands of years; it is inextricably linked dialectically to history.”⁷⁷ The current struggles of the community—against, for example, the denial of the Assyrian identity by the Iraqi regime, in the context of its powerful sense of historic belonging—inflicted a state of continuous internal conflict on the Assyrians.⁷⁸

The essence of the paper’s approach was to establish that Assyrians alone were capable of defining who they were. This effort was important, as the regime had begun classifying Assyrians as a religious denomination, and hence stripping them of their association with their cultural and ethnic roots. This addressed the community’s problematic designation in linguistic terms in Law 251, and in the Iraqi census, in which Assyrians had to choose between Arab and Kurdish identities, an issue discussed in *Bahrā* as well.⁷⁹ Another *Bahrā* article focusing on the subject of democracy claimed that Assyrians felt oppressed because they

⁷⁴ “Al-Wūjūd al-Qawmī al-Athūrī wa Zurūf al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Ḥaqīqiyya,” *Bahrā* 3 (1982), 1.

⁷⁵ “Al-Wūjūd al-Qawmī al-Athūrī wa Zurūra Waṭaniyya,” *Bahrā* 8 (May 1983), 1, 5.

⁷⁶ “Al-Wūjūd al-Qawmī al-Athūrī wa Mushkilat al-Hijra,” *Bahrā* 7 (March 1984), 1, 5.

⁷⁷ “Al-Wūjūd al-Qawmī al-Athūrī: Māhiatuhu wa Ussus Taṭawurahu al-Tārīkhī,” *Bahrā* 1 (June 1982), 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “Mumārasāt al-Nizām al-Ḥākim,” *Bahrā* 3 (1982), 3.

were subjected to a government representing a social class or group whose interests were removed from the interests of the Iraqi people of which Assyrians were a part. Their oppression was leading to a state of despair. In their despair, the author commented, Assyrians were emigrating in search of a better future, attracted by bogus promises of democracy offered by organizations associated with capitalist countries that were, in turn, searching for a cheap labor force to exploit.⁸⁰ The article advocated a democratic Iraq in which freedoms thrived as the “foundation for building an Assyrian national identity that connects the Assyrian human being with his country.” Therefore, the existence of a political movement representing the Assyrian people in their struggles and current predicaments was necessary for the preservation and advancement of Assyrians’ culture in their ancient homeland.⁸¹ Hence, the essence of true democracy was to be established in the homeland, and would lead to the liberation of all Iraqi citizens, as well as Assyrians. The article also inveighed against emigration, a theme that began to be mentioned subtly in Assyrian periodicals in the 1970s, and was reflective of a concerning trend within the community, as far as intellectuals and community leaders were concerned. The article also associated the Assyrian struggle with the Iraqi national struggle, advocating the implementation of democratic principles and a representative government as practical measures.

⁸⁰ “Al-Wūjūd al-Qawmī al-Athūrī wa Zūrūf al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Ḥaqīqiyya,” *Bahrā* 3 (1982), 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Ba‘thist Reports on the Iraqi Opposition and the Assyrian Movement

The ADM’s activism in the liberated areas started to attract the attention of state agencies, as is revealed by the information those agencies collected about the movement and the profile of those attracted to its armed struggle.⁸² A report submitted on February 14, 1984, claimed that a skirmish had erupted three days earlier between the Iraqi military and the ADM in the villages of Shīzī and Hajarkī, both in the district of Simele. Two members of the ADM were killed, and their bodies transported to hospital. One of the bodies remained unidentified, by the other was identified as that of Shabā Hamī Ishū‘, “the Assyrian.” He was a single man who had enlisted as a soldier, but escaped to join the ADM a month and a half before. His deceased father had been a farmer, while his two brothers—a teacher-turned-soldier and an engineer in Duhok—were listed on the army reserve list. The report concluded by requesting more information on his brothers as well as on their wives, children, and paternal uncles. This demonstrated how dangerous a personal decision to join the ADM could become, as it carried serious repercussions for immediate and extended family members, who would find their status within the hierarchy of citizenship curtailed, and their access to various privileges closed off.⁸³ Socially, however, such families began to acquire capital, as their deceased family members were identified as martyrs for freedom who had struggled and died for the Assyrian cause. They were commemorated along with those killed in 1915, and at Simele in 1933 (see below).

⁸² NIDS, 31506/serial numbers 29360 and 29361, KDP 002, February 14, 1984. Illegible handwriting, submitted to an official in Duhok.

⁸³ Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 5, 73.

Following such confrontations, the Iraqi regime began to take notice of Assyrian activism within the Iraqi opposition. In archival documents pertaining to Iraqi opposition groups, archival reports appeared focusing on the ADM and other Assyrian organizations. A study authored on July 5, 1984, was put together shortly prior to the first waves of arrests of members of the still-underground movement in urban centers. The study reported that the ICP was trying to incorporate sectarian fronts (*wājihāt*) such as al-Tajammu‘ al-Dīmuqrātī al-Athūrī and the Assyrian Democratic Party. The report claimed that the ICP had begun relying on elements within these “denominations”—meaning Assyrians who had been affiliated with the ICP at one time.⁸⁴ The report demonstrated that Assyrian political parties like the ADM were drawing the attention of both the Ba‘thist regime and of other opposition parties, given their recent activities in the north.

A few pages further on, the study reported specifically on the Assyrian political parties. It described the primary orientation of Assyrian political parties, including the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP) and the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) as well as the ADM, as working to establish an Assyrian *dawla*, or, country in the province of Nineveh.⁸⁵ This characterization did not accurately describe all three groups, but related more specifically to the BNDP.⁸⁶ The report further claimed that the BNDP and the AUA had recently formed the “Assyrian National Front,” through a declaration issued in Chicago, in the United States.

⁸⁴ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 027-3-5-0318-0326, “Study on Enemy Parties Operations 1984–1987,” Ba‘th Party, Regional Leadership, Party Secretariat (classified and personal), to ‘Ali Ḥasan Majīd, director of General Security, Fāzel al-Brāk, director of the Iraqi Intelligence Services, December 26, 1984.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 027-3-5-0335.

⁸⁶ Petrosian, “Assyrians in Iraq,” 136.

The purpose of this Front, the study concluded, was to show that “minorities are against our leading political party [Ba‘th] and our great revolution.” This demonstrated once again the influence of diasporic Assyrian political organizations on Western countries’ fitful attitudes towards the Iraqi state, and how much the Iraqi authorities worried about such attitudes, especially since they had begun to lean closer towards Western governments. They reported that the purpose of these organizations was to gain the support of Assyrians from various countries, and that they had gained the allegiance of the “sabotaging Kurdish clique in the northern region, the ICP, and Persian enemy, and the Syrian regime.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, the report discovered that the ADM had begun issuing its newspaper, *Bahrā*.⁸⁸ A few weeks later, *Bahrā* would be used as incriminating evidence leading to the first arrest of an ADM member in Baghdad, Youbert Benyamin.

It is not clear whether the ADM was collaborating with diasporic Assyrian political parties. It is more likely that, at this stage, it was devoting more effort towards fostering relations with the Iraqi opposition parties, and establishing working relations particularly with those parties operating in the north. At the same time, it was crucial for the ADM to garner support from Assyrian villages and towns in or near the liberated area, and to continue spreading its ideology by underground means in Iraq’s urban centers. For the government, the political leanings of the Assyrian community inside Iraq and in its diaspora were becoming problematic. As Assyrian political parties gained more support within their own

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

communities and mobilized alongside the Iraqi opposition, their threat to the regime increased, as did their ability to attract army deserters from within the Assyrian community, as was demonstrated by the case of an ADM member killed fighting the Iraqi military.

Imprisonment, torture and execution of ADM members

On July 13, 1984, the first wave of arrests of ADM members began in Baghdad,⁸⁹ and continued within the week in Kirkuk and Mosul. A total of forty-eight people were arrested—twenty-five from Kirkuk, twelve from Baghdad, and eleven from Mosul.⁹⁰ The profile of the forty-eight individuals provided in *Bahrā* offers a glimpse of the nature of those attracted to the movement. Thirty-nine of those arrested were in their twenties and thirties, two were in their forties—and six designated as “hostages,” probably because of their connections to an ADM member, were between fifty-one and seventy-five years of age.⁹¹ In terms of their occupations, sixteen were engineers; three were university students; eleven were soldiers, some with technical skills; and three were accountants. The total was made up by a businessman, a doctor’s assistant, in addition to two wage-earners. Those termed “hostages” were either housewives or retired. Five of the forty-eight were women.⁹²

⁸⁹ “Al-Shahīd Youbert Benyamin Shlīmūn,” http://www.zowaa.org/index.php?page=com_articles&id=287#.VMIS5saT5-E (accessed January 28, 2015).

⁹⁰ *Bahrā* 10 (November 1984).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

Eighteen of the arrested men were eventually imprisoned and tortured for further information. On November 19, 1984, they were summarily brought to the Maḥkamat al-Thawra, or Revolutionary Court, where an attorney notified them that he would represent them. The trial of all eighteen men lasted just fifteen minutes, during which all pleaded not guilty. Each man was then given thirty seconds to prove his innocence. Motives they offered in their defense included protecting their villages and preserving their culture and language.⁹³ Yousip Tūma Zebārī, Youbert Benyamin, and Youkhana Isho‘ Jaju were sentenced to die by hanging, and were executed on March 2, 1985. Of the remaining accused, one received a sentence of fifteen years, another a sentence of five years, and the rest received life sentences. The movable and immovable funds and property (*amwāl*) of all men, with the exception of the one sentenced to five years’ imprisonment, were to be confiscated.

Those sentenced to execution and life in prison were prosecuted according to the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969, Article 175, Number 2, and Article 204, Number 1-A.⁹⁴ Article 175 encompassed Articles 156–174, and prescribed a sentence carrying either the death penalty or life imprisonment. These laws related to the foreign security of the state, and included among the offenses identified communicating with or aiding a foreign country in war with Iraq.⁹⁵ Law 204, 1-A,

⁹³ Interviews by author with several of the imprisoned men, conducted in Baghdad, Toronto, and Chicago, between December 2011 and January 2015.

⁹⁴ “Qirār,” November 19, 1984, issued by the Revolutionary Court, signatory’s name and title illegible.

⁹⁵ Iraq Penal Code, 1969, no. 111, 8th edn (2005), at http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=244213 (accessed February 2, 2015), 48–53.

in turn, encompassed articles 200–2002, and related to the formation of political organizations.⁹⁶ During wartime the law speculated that armed struggle against the government also related to foreign security, and hence incriminated the ADM, given that it was part of the Iraqi opposition. Furthermore, because the ADM had relations with the KDP and the ICP, and since those two parties had relations with Iran and Syria, respectively, the ADM was by extension associated with those two foreign powers. However, no evidence of foreign relations or outside funding was collected by the ADM at the time. It would have been more appropriate to prosecute them according to Law 204 only as it related to the formation of a political party without official consent.

The state reaction to these convictions of ADM members was in accordance with its treatment of opposition activity and dissent in general. As far as the state was concerned, an example had to be made of those convicted, so that the Assyrian community would be dissuaded from joining or supporting the ADM. But the ADM's transgression consisted not only in its joining the opposition, taking up arms against the state, or forming a political party without permission. It also engaged communally in activities that were counter to the state's policy since the 1970s. Even during earlier more conciliatory periods towards the Assyrians, the state had ensured that it did not encourage the development of Assyrian identity on an ethnic basis. The state had used linguistic parameters to define the community, and had then come to identify it as a religious denomination. The ADM had not only joined the opposition, but

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61–3.

elevated the issue of identity, enunciating it in one of its two slogans. Hence, because of the ADM's two slogans—calling for a free, democratic Iraq and for recognition of Assyrian national identity—the state's issues with the party were twofold.

The imprisonments and executions of the men discussed above were devastating to their families, who not only had to deal with the loss of their loved ones, but also faced investigation themselves—as requested by the General Security apparatuses on December 26, 1984.⁹⁷ These investigations would have been psychologically stressful for the wives, parents, siblings, and other family members of those convicted, who would, as a consequence, have been allocated to a lower position in the hierarchy of rewards and punishments established by the Iraqi state during wartime (Khoury). Moreover, the families of the convicted men would have faced financial strain, as orders were issued by the Ministry of Finance to confiscate all their property and savings.⁹⁸

As far as the ADM was concerned, however, the execution and imprisonment of young Assyrians, who were mostly educated and urbanized professionals, elevated the status of the ADM both domestically, within the Iraqi opposition, and internationally among Assyrian communities and political organizations. The party was not only embarking on a new political phase, but

⁹⁷ ADM-PR, Ba'ath Party Archives, telegram issued from General Security to the provincial security offices of al-Ta'mmīm (Kirkuk), Nineveh, Baghdad, and al-Anbar, December 26, 1984.

⁹⁸ ADM-PR, Ba'ath Party Archives, issued from the Ministry of Finance, November 27, 1984, to all ministries and including the Iraqi Central Bank, State Real Estate, Al-Rafīdain Bank, and the Agricultural Cooperative Bank, among other agencies.

also becoming the benefactor of Assyrian popular culture, highlighting its accomplishments and elevating its executed members, like those killed during combat, to the status of new martyrs for the Assyrian nation.

The Cult of Martyrdom

Through their use of popular culture, Assyrians began resisting the Ba‘th regime’s cult of martyrdom and challenging it with their own. The community had employed similar tactics since the 1970s by producing “Songs of Defiance,” as demonstrated by Shlemon Bet-Shmoel’s “Simele” song. In the early 1980s the Ba‘th party, in conjunction with various cultural institutions, embarked on a project to “sanctify the deaths of soldiers by developing rituals that gave meaning to their deaths within the narrow confines of a secularized reading of martyrdom in Islam and a Ba‘thist interpretation of Iraqi Arab nationalism.”⁹⁹ The intention of this undertaking was to “depersonalize and routinize death,” and to promote unity among Iraqis of diverse backgrounds, sustaining support for the war by honoring the sacrifice of the families of the martyred men and, in turn, the generosity shown towards the families by the Ba‘th regime.¹⁰⁰ Assyrians sought and found answers to these state attempts to establish hegemony over the commemoration of the dead.

During the early 1980s, news circulated both inside and outside the country of Assyrian men taking up arms against the government. As noted above, two ADM members were killed fighting the Iraqi army in January 1984 (Fig. 5.1).

⁹⁹ Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 219.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 219–20.

Six months later, forty-eight Assyrians were arrested, eighteen of whom were convicted, and some executed, because of their membership in the party. News of these events galvanized diasporic Assyrian organizations, prompting them to alert human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, which consequently condemned the Ba‘th regime for the executions in a statement issued on April 3, 1985.¹⁰¹

Assyrian artists and poets also reacted, producing songs that contradicted the Ba‘th regime’s image of the executed men—whom it painted as criminals and traitors—as well as the regime’s cult of martyrdom itself, which sanctified the memory of those killed fighting in the Iran–Iraq war. These popular forms of production were consistent with what the ADM was already asserting in its newspaper, *Bahrā*. The ADM had begun identifying its members who had died as a result of their association with the organization as martyrs, and commemorated their sacrifice by holding annual memorials for them, and publishing articles both about them and by them in *Bahrā* (see Figs A1, A2 and A3, Appendix 3). A poem accompanying articles on the martyrs, and images of them, read:

Whoever strives for his nation
Though he might descend to the grave
His name will be remembered
Throughout the generations.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ “Munazamīt al-‘Afū al-Duwaliyya Tadīn I‘dam Rifāqina,” *Bahrā* 13 (August 1985), 1.

¹⁰² *Bahrā* 19 (February 1987).

Another text asserted: “And by our martyrs we are inspired with lessons.”¹⁰³ This type of language was also visible in Assyrian popular culture, most readily preserved in cassette recordings released during the period in North America, where large Assyrian communities were congregating, and to which most Assyrian singers had escaped following their intimidation and even persecution by the Iraqi Ba‘th authorities for performing songs that it deemed seditious.¹⁰⁴

In U.S. cities such as Chicago, as well as in California, Iraqi Assyrians as well as Assyrians of Iranian and Syrian backgrounds continued to produce songs that reflected on the community’s experiences in the Middle East, and particularly in Iraq. Ṣā’ib Ḥabāba, the owner of a Baghdad recording and production studio in 1972, testified to the ease with which cassette tapes were able to cross Iraqi borders. In his quest to collect cassette tapes of Assyrian singers outside the country, Ṣā’ib Ḥabāba would ask Assyrians visiting Iraq to bring new tapes to pass on to him instead of requesting them through the mail, since the government prohibited certain singers and songs from being sold.¹⁰⁵ Once inside the country, the tapes were easily reproduced using a regular double-deck recorder, allowing prohibited tapes to be distributed secretly among the Assyrian population in Iraq.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, in 1977 David Esha was arrested with two other singers, Sami Yaḡo and Albert Oscar. Phone interview with David Esha, Chicago, Illinois, October 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Abū Ashūr, “Ṣāḥib tasgīlāt Barāq Ṣā’ib Ḥabāba,” *Bayt Nahrayn*, December 2011, 6.

¹⁰⁶ See Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, “Small Media for a Big Revolution: Iran,” *Politics, Culture and Society* 3: 3 (1990): 347–57. The reproduction of a piece of art via new technology in the form of a cassette tape used to oppose a

Popular culture strengthened a new international dimension of Assyrian identity, addressing the immigrant Assyrian community residing in the United States. In previous chapters of this dissertation the theme of emigration appeared in Iraqi Assyrian periodicals and showcased the concern of Iraqi Assyrian intellectuals about this trend. These songs shed light on the perspective of Assyrian immigrants living in the United States, and show how they related to their counterparts living in Iraq. Spatiality is recalled as music becomes a site for the “imagined negotiations among national, regional, and hemispheric identities.”¹⁰⁷ Singers, producers, and production companies created “itinerant processes [that] constitute[d] a contact zone of transnational proportions.”¹⁰⁸ Music and its practitioners enabled a transnational exchange and negotiation between the Assyrian communities in Iraq and the United States, on one hand,

Middle Eastern state in our time frame is best presented through the example of Iran. In the 1970s the censored, state-dominated mass media began to be challenged by the traditional network of the bazaar and mosque, with their adoption of new technology. Serberny-Mohammadi explained that media technologies such as audio tapes and xerography allowed “multiple points of production and distribution so that they are almost untraceable and irrepressible,” and therefore were difficult to control by the state (ibid., 357). Cassette tapes became special favorites of Ayatollah sKhomeini, the religious scholar instrumental in toppling the Iranian monarchy in 1979, and Iran’s first Supreme Leader thereafter. While Khomeini was placed under house arrest in 1964 by the monarchical regime, and when exiled in Iraq in 1977, and later in Paris, he used cassette tapes to disseminate his anti-monarchical messages. Such tapes were easy to produce, and would be carried by travelers or recorded by phone. Once reaching Iran, the cassette tape would be reproduced and distributed in the bazaars and mosques.

¹⁰⁷ Sartorius and Seigel, “Introduction” in *Dislocations across the Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 8.

¹⁰⁸ I am using Perez Megosa’s description of film along with “directors, actors, actresses, technicians, as well as technology and producing companies,” in Sartorius and Seigel, *Dislocations across the Americas*, 8; also see Melgosa’s “Cinematic Contact Zones,” 125.

and within the nation-state on the other. In this contact zone marked by asymmetrical relationships, Iraq's state authorities and its cultural production agencies, deployed to reinforce its own cult of martyrdom, constituted the dominant group. But, while the Assyrian community in Iraq—and particularly those associated with opposition movements—was subordinate to the state, it found agency in the liberated areas under the authority of the Iraqi opposition, and in its adoption of new technology.

The first song associated with the Assyrian armed struggle was produced in 1984 by a prominent singer Ashur Bet-Sargis, and was called “Riqdā d’Ghālibūtā” (“The Dance of Victory”).¹⁰⁹ This song made reference to the battles underway in the “mountains,” i.e., northern Iraq, where the Assyrian opposition was active. It summoned Assyrians—from the “mountains and the plains,” denoting the various Assyrian denominations and tribal affiliations—to unite in the national struggle:

Like the soaring eagle, the roaring lion
Like the igniting fire, the Assyrian is shouting:
“Come sons of this nation, it’s time for victory
Its trees are full of bounty, the flag high in the sky.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ashur Bet Sargis, “Riqda D’Ghaliboota,” on *Riqda D’Ghaliboota*, lyricist, Ashur Bet Sargis, 1984, <http://www.qeenatha.com/songplayer.php?albumid=2523> (accessed February 4, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

A song by Fatin Shabo, produced in 1985, dealt specifically with the memory of the Iran–Iraq war.¹¹¹ The singer depicted the journey of an Assyrian mother who, at the beginning of the song, learned that her son had been called to join the army, and concluded with the mother receiving her son’s corpse. In simple language, Shabo conveyed the mother’s emotion using melancholic lyrics and melody, and convincingly portrayed a mother’s grief at the loss of her son—a feeling familiar to many Iraqis, who either experienced loss of family members themselves or witnessed relatives and neighbors go through such suffering as the war dragged on. But the mother’s anguish was not caused only by the death of her son and other Assyrians in the war, but was also due to their loss for an unworthy cause:

Woe unto you, young Ninevites
You are first in self-sacrifice
You lose your life for the cause of foreigners
Who deny you as Assyrians.¹¹²

Here the singer mourned the loss of her son, arguably for fighting for a regime that did not represent the interests of Assyrians and denied their ethnic identity, a probable reference to the 1977 census mentioned above. Had her son died fighting for the Assyrian nation’s cause, the mother would have been proud, and rejoiced in his death. She would have refrained from wearing the traditional black of

¹¹¹ Fatin Shabo, “Ktawā Kheshana,” on *Ktaoet Khoba*, lyricist Yatron Darmoo, 1985, <http://www.qeenatha.com/songplayer.php?albumid=449> (accessed January 26, 2015).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

mourning, the song continued, and encouraged his younger brother to follow in his footsteps. This last line is repeated, and the singer-mother concludes the song by continuing to argue that, had her son fought for his own nation, in her old age she would have fought beside him.

Another song, produced by Syrian Assyrian singer Juliana Jendo on her first cassette recording, was released in 1986. Though Jendo still had a long journey towards stardom, the Iraqi Assyrian poet Ninios Nirari composed this song for her. The following verse summons the community to action:¹¹³

Great eagles let us break the shackles
To enlighten the path of the mighty martyrs
Let us knock on the doors of the United Nations
To show the universe that courageous ones still remain.

In a plural voice, the singer then collectively lamented the failure of the community in forsaking the original battle and surrendering the nation to “foreigners,” a regime that did not represent the Assyrians. The singer then prompts the hearer to recall earlier battles, beginning in the First World War, and suggests a link between the contemporary armed struggle and those of the past. The song concludes with a call to unity for the greater cause, and an affirmation that national resurrection can only be achieved with the “loss of blood,” in other

¹¹³ Juliana Jendo, “Mardita,” on *Mardita, lyricist*, Ninios Nirari, 1986, <http://www.queenatha.com/songplayer.php?albumid=3104> (accessed February 4, 2015).

words, armed struggle and martyrdom. The 1990s saw more songs being produced on this subject, some specifically dedicated to the ADM.¹¹⁴

These songs confirmed Assyrian men killed in armed struggle against the Iraqi regime as heroes, and elevated them to the status of martyrs. The title of martyr had previous been reserved for only to those killed during the events of the First World War and the Simele Massacre of 1933. By conferring the status of martyrdom on these men, it also elevated the ADM and increased its popularity. Assyrian men joining the party and bearing arms on its behalf were considered heroes, and songs were dedicated to them. This would have led to an increase in membership in the party and enhanced its attraction among rural Assyrians; thousands joined its militia in the 1990s.¹¹⁵ Moreover, it would have elevated the social status of the martyred and imprisoned members' families—whose rank, as we have seen, would have plunged correspondingly within the Ba'athist regime. For the Assyrians residing in the United States, the songs point to a new trajectory in which their identification as a transnational community began to supersede their identification as Iraqis or Iraqi Assyrians.

¹¹⁴ Ashur bet-Sargis, "Dwikh Nawsha D Zawa'a," on *The Mighty Proud Assyrians*, lyrics by Orahim Lazar, 1992, <http://www.qeenatha.com/songplayer.php?albumid=2512> (accessed February 5, 2015); Juliana Jendo, "Zowaa Kasheera," on *Wardeh Deesheh*, 1993, <http://www.qeenatha.com/songplayer.php?albumid=736> (accessed February 4, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Malik, "Assyrian Democratic Movement."

Movement Activities in the Wake of Government Suppression

Government reports on the ADM's secretary, Ninos Pithyou, from April 14, 1985, detailed the movement's increased levels of activity among rural Assyrians at a time when a significant number of their members were behind bars. The report stated that, at the end of April 1985, Ninos Pithyou (born Giwargis Rasho Zayā), known as "Ninos," attended the house of the mukhtār of a certain village to participate in the customary commemoration of the fortieth day after burial of the martyrs of a hostile bombing in Baghdad. He was accompanied by a number of ADM members carrying light weaponry. More information was requested about the activities of what were identified as a "hostile Assyrian organization," so that it could be targeted with a strong and swift attack.¹¹⁶ The report not only demonstrated that the ADM was still considered a threat by state security, though many of its members had been arrested, but also highlighted the increased acceptance of the organization by village elders—its members, for example, being guests of the mukhtār—and its popularity among Assyrian villagers. Both factors were legitimate causes of concern for the Iraqi authorities.

During this period the ADM began to collaborate with Assyrian organizations both inside and outside Iraq. This was probably due to the heightened popularity it enjoyed following recent events. Its adoption of armed struggle against the Iraqi regime proved that it was serious in its convictions, while the imprisonment of a large number of its members, and the execution of

¹¹⁶ Hoover, IMF, NIDS, 01865/serial number 745833, Puk005, General Security, August 19, 1985, "Information," by Colonel [director of?] security in Erbil. A fold or tear in the middle of the document makes some words illegible.

others, highlighted the group's dedication. In short, it had garnered the respect of Assyrian political colleagues. It is important to remember that the ADM's leaders, and probably the majority of its members, were still in their thirties, considerably younger than those of other, more established groups. Although they had established their own vision for the Assyrian nationalist movement, it was crucial for them to receive support and endorsement from regional and diasporic Assyrian organizations. The government crackdown on its members in urban centers had garnered publicity and respect for the group, but it also reduced the base from which its membership was drawn.

During a meeting held by the Assyrian National Congress in Ceres, California, from March 21 to 23, 1986, the ADM was able to advocate its cause. *Bahrā* later reported that members of all Assyrian political parties and organizations had been in attendance, as well as the secretary-general of the ADM. The meeting discussed the status of Assyrian communities around the globe, and especially in the Middle East, with the attendees protesting at the dire situation of the community in the Middle East. They denounced the "barbarian policies" of certain dictatorial regimes in the region, which included the closing down of Assyrian schools, the Arabizing (*Ta'rib*) of Assyrian institutions, the bombing of churches, and the intentional (*munaẓim*) destruction of Assyrian villages, with the purpose of forcibly displacing Assyrians [to urban centers].¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ "al-Mu'tamar al-Qawmī al-Ashūrī al-Thani Yu'lan Musānadatuhi li-Ḥarakatuna," *Bahrā* 16 (August–September 1986), 1. Moreover, a government report stated that, on February 21, 1985, the Assyrian National Front, which was formed by the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party and the Assyrian Universal Alliance, had stalled in the current period due to a recent disagreement regarding the

The attendees agreed to align the Assyrian national struggle with that of democratic national movements of opposition within various other countries. The ANC approved, supporting the Assyrian national struggle in general, as well as its “vanguard representation by the Assyrian Democratic Movement” and ADM affiliates in Iraq.¹¹⁸ The ANC also decided to support the cause of other struggling nations that supported the Assyrian struggle.¹¹⁹

Indications of internal collaboration were also described in a government report. On August 19, 1986, the state agencies retrieved a bulletin entitled: “A declaration (*Bayān*) to the Assyrian struggling (*munāḍila*) Masses.” It was issued by the Preparatory Committee for Dialogue between the ADM and al-Tajammu‘ al-Dīmuqrāṭī al-Athūrī, with information on a new martyr ADM, killed by the state authorities. The report discussed the formation of a preparatory committee to discuss the amalgamation of the ADM with the al-Tajammu‘ al-Dīmuqrāṭī al-Athūrī. The declaration stated that the “scattered and torn reality” that Assyrians experienced due to “ethnic, classist and religious discrimination” was one in which the most basic human and civic rights were absent, leaving it eager for any form of salvation to rescue it from its present state. Unity was and continued to be a national (*qawmiyya*) necessity, required in light of the community’s suffering.¹²⁰

presidency of a recent conference organized by both parties. This could be an indication that, during the ANC’s second conference, the AUA was not on good terms with the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party, and perhaps did not attend.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁰ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 027-3-5-0070 to 71, Party Secretariat (classified), August 19, 1986, “The Activities of Hostile Movements,” submitted to ‘Ali Ḥasan Majīd, director of General Security, Kāmil Yāsīn Rashīd, general director of the Party Secretariat, and Fāḍil al-Barāk, director of Iraqi Intelligence Service.

Al-Tajammu' al-Dīmuqrātī al-Athūrī was reportedly created by the KDP to offset the activities of the independent ADM. It was mainly composed of former Assyrian KDP members, and existed for only two years. Notwithstanding its associations with the KDP, it was indicative of an increased effort at collaboration between various Assyrian groups.¹²¹

A second government report, issued on April 4, 1985, was submitted on the subject of “non-Muslim denominational organizations.”¹²² It indicated that cooperation continued between the ChaldoAssyrians, i.e., Chaldeans and the Assyrians (those of the Nestorian denomination), specifically in the United States, due to the high concentration of the Assyrian community there. Concern was expressed in the report about Iraqi oppositional parties, and their efforts in winning Assyrians to their camp. For instance, the Ba‘thist splinter group al-Zumra al-Munshaqa was reportedly expressing increased interest in these Assyrian organizations, joining them in order to use them as a vehicle to conduct activities against the Iraqi state and to increase its organizational base in western Europe and the United States.¹²³ This new interest in Assyrian groups was aroused within this Ba‘thist splinter group to weaken the role of the ICP in its ranks. For instance, according to the report, the group had recently accused the Communist Party on numerous occasions of starting to organize denominationally based political groups (*tajamu'at*), in order to increase its political and moral

¹²¹ N.N.I. interviewed by author, Toronto, Ontario, January 3, 2015.

¹²² Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 027-3-5-0241, Iraqi Intelligence Service, April 29, 1985, “The Activity of Hostile Movements: Non-Muslim Denominational Organizations,” submitted to Party Secretariat.

¹²³ Ibid.

standing within two Iraqi opposition groups, known by the initials JWD and JWQD.¹²⁴ The report expanded on information provided previously about the patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Dīnkhā Khinannyā. It confirmed that he had left Iran permanently in 1984 and was residing in the United States. His relations with the Iranian government were deteriorating, and various Assyrian circles were critical of the Iranian regime because of the pressure it placed on the Assyrians (presumably inside Iran).¹²⁵ On the other hand, Assyrian religious leaders were more in favor of the Iraqi regime, and did not support the political approach of Assyrian parties, especially that of the ADM. In the last religious conference held in 1984, the Church had reported stating that it did not support any oppositional parties to the Iraqi state, calling for a separation between religion and politics. This position seems to have been taken by most Assyrian churches, at least in public. Forming relations with groups opposed to the regime would have adversely affected their activities inside the country and hampered their access to their members.

Like other Iraqi opposition groups, the ADM achieved access to regional and international arenas through neighboring Iran and Syria. In these two countries, they were eventually able to campaign for their cause, collaborating with political parties whose ideologies were similar. For instance, a government study on Iraqi opposition parties indicated that, in 1987, Syria had issued 40,000 fake Iraqi passports for leaders of the Iraqi opposition, at a cost of U.S. \$300

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

each.¹²⁶ Syria had officially recognized the ADM as an Iraqi oppositional party in 1983, and allowed it to engage to some degree in public relations with regional and Western powers. This became especially useful in the ADM's interactions with Assyrian political parties such as the AUA, the BNDP and the ADO.¹²⁷ In Syria the ADM was also able to form relations with Arab leftist parties, particularly the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Algerian Liberation Front. The PLO was instrumental in winning them access to leftist conferences, though this was less true of the Algerian Liberation Party, due to its relations with the Iraqi state.¹²⁸ The ADM's relations with Iran were deepened following the Anfal campaign, which began in 1988. At this time, the Iraqi army successfully crushed the Iraqi opposition, carrying out vicious campaigns against civilian populations in the region. Those members of opposition groups who survived escaped to even harsher mountainous areas bordering Turkey, eventually entering Turkey, and later moving to Iran. In Iran, they were allowed offices, but not centers where they could bear arms and dress in their military uniforms. They eventually returned to Iraq when the country invaded Kuwait in 1991, and embarked on a new phase of political activism under the security of the safe haven established in the northern region, which came to be known as the Kurdistan Regional Government.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Hoover, IMF, BRCC, 027-3-5-0005, covering years 1984–1987, “Study on Enemy Party Operations.”

¹²⁷ N.P. interviewed by author.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

In the 1970s, a politicized, urban class of Assyrian intellectuals successfully established an independent movement to partake in the Iraqi opposition, joining existing Assyrians active within the ICP and KDP. The success of the main Assyrian group, the ADM, was realized through its fusion of Iraqi patriotism with Assyrian nationalism, and its mobilization of progressive pragmatic principles. The execution and imprisonment of its members by the Ba‘th regime provided it with the credibility necessary for it to spread its bases domestically and externally, as well as enabling it to attract Assyrian villagers previously supportive of either communism or the Kurdish movement. Moreover, the three main concerns exhibited by the Ba‘th regime in the 1970s relating to the Assyrian community became more prominent throughout the 1980s: 1) Assyrians’ role within the Iraqi opposition; 2) Assyrian identity issues, interdenominational closeness, and the influence of diasporic Assyrian organizations on Iraqi Assyrians; and 3) negative publicity for the Ba‘thist regime in the West. This was to be expected, given Iraq’s long-lasting war with Iran and its need for regional and Western support.

Conclusion

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Assyrians migrated to urbanized centers, moving to larger Iraqi cities in search of modern professions—primarily in the expanding oil industry—and better educational opportunities. Within these newly politicized urban spaces, Assyrians were attracted to intellectual and political movements that allowed them to emerge from the peripheries of their society, temporarily discarding their minority status to engage with other Iraqis of their socio-economic background. Within these secular and often leftist political spaces, Assyrians found room to maneuver and form strategic alliances, both as individuals and as a community, in order to advance issues that were often beneficial to the community as a whole. Assyrians in urban centers were rarely disconnected from their community members in the rural centers they had migrated from. Urbanite Assyrians, and movements they were affiliated with were often interested in attracting rural Assyrians, which allowed for a dynamic relationship involving Assyrians of different backgrounds.

The Assyrians discussed in this dissertation were generally active within oppositional parties, though especially in the early 1970s they found room to negotiate with the Iraqi state using historical narratives that were accepted by the Ba‘thist regime, and that allowed Assyrians agency in pursuing issues they deemed significant. The creative employment of popular culture and modern forms of technology to produce and disseminate music enabled Assyrians to

celebrate their culture, engage in transnational interactions with Assyrians outside Iraq, and counter the official narrative more assertively in songs than the press.

The Ba‘thist state’s policies towards the Assyrians were often reflective of internal and external pressures the state was confronted with. The role of Assyrians within oppositional parties necessitated the state’s attempt to attract Assyrian political and religious leaders into cooperation, with propositions that mimicked advances made in the Kurdish north by opposition groups. These promises included an autonomous area and an Assyrian militia supportive of the state. Moreover, the promulgation of Law 251 in 1972, with its promises of cultural and social rights, was meant to attract Assyrian intellectuals. The Assyrians were significant not only for their role within the opposition, but also for the opposition’s transnational character. During the Cold War period, they employed transnational networks that benefited the community and those political entities affiliated with it by lobbying Western governments and human rights organizations, through Assyrians living in the West.

In these urban and politicized spaces, Assyrians were able to look beyond the sectarian divisions that had emerged within their communities in the mid-nineteenth century. By living in shared neighborhoods, agitating in labor unions and political parties, and cooperating as intellectuals in common clubs and newspapers, they socialized outside the constraints of religious institutions. This interdenominational closeness experienced by Assyrians in the second half of the twentieth century resembled earlier attempts made in the wake of the First World War. Those early efforts were shattered, along with the Assyrian nationalist

movement, especially following the Simele massacre of 1933. As described in the introduction, the Simele massacre had initially united Assyrians, but its aftermath created divisions across denominational lines, since the blame for those events was placed by government officials on Nestorian Assyrians. It took the passage of a few decades and new urban conditions for Assyrians to move effectively beyond such sectarian tendencies. In urban settings, Assyrians married across denominational lines, spoke a similar *koiné* of the Eastern Aramaic language, and mingled as neighbors and community members. These kinds of interactions are evident from the writings of Assyrian intellectuals during the 1970s, who were vigorously engaged in discussing their ethnic identity, reviving their language, and preserving their vernacular cultural tradition in the face of the now mostly forced urbanization of villages, and the first waves of immigration of community members to the West in the 1970s and 1980s. Although sectarianism emerged at various points, and especially during the 1980s, it is problematic to impose a structured analysis based on church affiliations that were not applicable to the period under study.

During periods of violence or when the state was strong economically and in its foreign relations, conciliatory efforts towards Assyrians and oppositional groups were abandoned, and various levels of state repression employed. During these periods, the hierarchy of citizenship that ranked Iraqi society according to ethnic, religious, socio-economic, gender, political, geographical, and other criteria, which was adjusted in each socio-political context, was enforced more openly. State policies towards the Assyrians were not always applied consistently:

rural Assyrians witnessed the destruction of their villages, while urban Assyrians were granted cultural and social rights; Assyrian political leaders were promised administrative and political rights, while policies that enforced divisions between different Assyrian denominations were encouraged, and later enforced; Assyrians opposing the state or veering away from accepted state narratives were punished, while those supportive of the state were co-opted and supported.

The cultural renaissance espoused in the 1970s combined with the urbanization and integration of the community in Iraqi society, as well as the increased Ba‘thification and oppression of the Iraqi state, gave rise to Assyrian national political groups in the late 1970s. One group that succeeded to garner mass support was the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), which combined elements of Iraqi patriotism with Assyrian nationalism, and joined the northern Iraqi opposition in armed struggle against the Ba‘th regime in 1982.

In areas liberated by the Iraqi opposition, Assyrians, with other groups, found a space from which to launch an international campaign against the Iraqi state and increase their grassroots base. This space was temporarily destroyed during the Anfal campaign, starting in 1988. During this period the Iraqi army engaged in a vicious campaign that led to the destruction of Kurdish and Assyrian villages and the extermination of thousands of citizens. The Iraqi opposition was left in a shambles; many surviving members escaped to neighboring countries, especially Iran, while others surrendered to the Iraqi authorities, accepting the pardon order issued by the Iraqi regime.

From a broader perspective, the intellectual and social movements studied in this dissertation contribute to our understanding of leftist radical movements of the 1960s in the Middle East. The study shifts the focus from the center, Baghdad, which has been the object of most academic inquiry, to highlight relations between the center and the periphery. In particular, the study deepens our understanding of Iraqi provincial history, since Iraqi Assyrians engaged within leftist movements were active not only in urban centers but often in rural areas as well. Moreover, given that the Assyrians were geographically concentrated in the north, a new story of the Iraqi north has also been told—one that complicates our understanding of the intricate and diverse relations existing between political actors, tribal affiliations, and ethno-religious communities. By including an account of events of the Iraqi north, a rich history is revealed of bilingualism, and often multilingualism, thereby challenging the idea of the monolingual Arabic language advanced by the Iraqi state and its associated intellectuals. The individuals whose actions are described in this dissertation employed Arabic, Aramaic, Kurdish, and Turkish, not only in their private homes and community centers, but also in their interactions with other political players, intellectuals, and state officials.

Moreover, this dissertation sheds light on the history of Iraq in the 1970s, a decade that is often overlooked in favor of succeeding periods marked by the ascendancy of President Saddam Hussein (late 1970s), and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). In studying the early republican period in Iraq, and particularly that of the Ba‘th regime of the early 1970s, I have foregrounded the relations that existed

between the Ba‘thist regime, the opposition, and the Assyrian community. An in-depth analysis of the hierarchical relationships between these three entities reveals that the regime was resolved to negotiate and compromise during this earlier period, demonstrating its weakness in the Iraqi north and within the opposition. These types of strategic conciliatory relationships pursued by the regime stood in stark contrast to its policies during subsequent periods—often highlighted in Iraqi scholarship—that were marked by an increase in its Ba‘thification policies and violence towards its citizens.

Finally, as the following subsection will reveal, the current situation that Assyrians and other minorities have found themselves in, particularly after 2003, emphasizes the importance of this dissertation. By contextualizing the Assyrian community within Iraqi and Middle Eastern studies, I have attempted to shift the paradigm of inquiry usually used with regard to minorities in the region, and particularly Christian minorities. This approach represents an attempt to move away from the popular representation of Middle East minorities as either persecuted communities or agents of Western colonial powers, and has instead acknowledged their agency as actors who are often well integrated within their societies. It also highlights their intercommunal relations, both within Iraq and across its borders, that came to divide Assyrians from one another in the newly formed nation-states. This study thus proposes a model incorporating an understanding of transnational history in Middle Eastern studies. Finally, it makes a contribution to women’s and gender studies by highlighting the role of Assyrian women in leftist movements and intellectual circles.

Assyrian Activism and Intellectualism in Iraq's Northern "Safe Haven" (1991–2003)

In spite of the limitations of academic studies dealing with Iraqi minorities, and particularly the Assyrians, following the Anfal campaign and in the 1990s, I have been able to shed some light on this period using field research conducted in 2007 on grassroots organizations, followed by subsequent online and phone communications with numerous informants until the summer of 2010. This approach has allowed for a partial examination of the legacies of the Assyrian intellectual movement fostered in the 1970s. Indeed, many of the intellectuals and politicians active in the 1990s and 2000s either began their activities in or were strongly influenced by this earlier period covered in the dissertation.

Following U.S.-led attacks on Iraq in 1991, the Iraqi opposition in the northern and southern parts of the country led an uprising against the Iraqi regime that was violently crushed by the Iraqi army and National Guard. As opposition forces withdrew from cities they had temporarily captured, such as Kirkuk, a mass exodus of Iraqis followed. Nearly 2 million people from the northern provinces escaped to the Iraqi–Turkish border, fearful of a recapitulation of the Anfal campaign. As a result, UN Security Council Resolution 688 was issued, leading to the establishment of a “no-fly zone,” a region free from the restraints of the Ba‘th regime, protected by coalition forces, in northern Iraq.¹ Although the region reinforced the “distinct Kurdish ethnonational identity,” there was room for the

¹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 244–8; Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

emergence of Assyrian civil society organizations alongside Kurdish ones.²

Kurdish and Assyrian voluntary associations were formed as a result, including the Assyrian Student and Youth Union,³ the Assyrian Women's Union, the Assyrian Aid Society (AAS), and the Assyrian Cultural Center. These organizations were quickly established between 1991 and 1992, and officially registered with the newly formed Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

Perhaps the most successful Assyrian organization during that period was the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq (AAS-I). This humanitarian organization was established to address the needs of thousands of Assyrian refugees who had escaped to the border of Iran and Turkey following the U.S.-led attacks in 1991.⁴ The group came together under the supervision of the ADM to distribute food and financial aid.⁵ The ADM had participated in the 1991 uprising against the Iraqi state, and secured four of the five seats allocated to Assyrians in the first KRG elections in 1992. The AAS-I was also one of the first five humanitarian organizations in the country to work in coordination with the United Nations

² Natali, 64.

³ The Assyrian Student and Youth Union was renamed the ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Union in 2003, in accordance to the Chaldean Assyrian Syriac General Conference held in Baghdad on October 22–24, 2003. Due to the urgency of the political situation in Iraq, the conference delegates agreed upon the compound label “ChaldoAssyrian” to unite Assyrians of various denominational labels constitutionally. Assyrian Democratic Movement, “Final Declaration of the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian General Conference,” <http://zowaa.org/news/news/english/pr4eng.pdf> (accessed December 7, 2007).

⁴ Frederick Aprim, *Assyrians: From Bedr Khan to Saddam Hussein: Driving into Extinction the Last Aramaic Speakers* (United States: F.A. Aprim, 2006), 239–50. What also led to the success of this organization was its formation by a group of refugees, rather than elitists.

⁵ Assyrian Aid Society of America, see under “About AAS-A” and “About AAS-I,” <http://www.assyrianaid.org> (accessed May 12, 2015).

agencies. As the no-fly zone was officially imposed on northern Iraq, humanitarian work expanded and advanced, elevating this organization's commitment from the supply of basic foodstuffs to the rebuilding of indigenous Assyrian villages destroyed by the Ba'ath regime during the Anfal campaign, thus reviving the language and ensuring the survival of Assyrian culture and national identity.⁶

The main financial support for AAS-I was provided by Assyrians in the diaspora, and sister organizations that sprang up in the early-to-mid-1990s on almost every continent adopted its name and objectives. The transnational nature of the Assyrian community was more freely expressed in this new space recently envisioned. The AAS-I worked in solidarity with other Assyrian organizations⁷ including the ADM, to push for the formation of Syriac educational schools throughout the KRG. Many of the members of these organizations had been active in the 1970s, when Law 251 was passed by the Ba'ath regime. The teaching of the Aramaic language was a policy espoused by this law, though never implemented. It is not surprising that one of the first policies the ADM lobbied for in the newly formed Kurdish National Assembly (KNA) pertained to the teaching of Aramaic. In March 1993, its efforts were met with success, and an official law permitting the teaching of Aramaic was passed.⁸ Assyrian intellectuals began a to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See, for example, the internal by-laws of the ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Unions, as per the fifth conference, conducted in Nineveh, Karamlesh, in 2003, and the Assyrian Women's Union's by-laws, as per the Fourth General Conference, conducted in Duhok, August 10–12, 2006.

⁸ Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 64.

translate the Iraqi elementary curriculum into Aramaic, which was a demanding process, given that the language had not been used as a medium of instruction for decades, and even centuries in some areas.⁹ With the successes met at the elementary level, the new educational approach was applied in secondary schools: in 2010, eight secondary schools and thirty-eight elementary schools were teaching every subject in Aramaic, in addition to numerous other schools that taught Aramaic as a language.¹⁰ Until 2004, the schools were fully funded by the AAI-I and its sister organizations. In 2010, the ministries of education in both the KRG and the central government provided partial support to the Syriac educational system.¹¹

The best-established women's organization within the Assyrian community during this period was the Assyrian Women's Union (AWU). Founded in 1992 in northern Iraq, its branches could recently be found in most Assyrian villages and cities around the country, attracting over 1,000 members.¹² The AWU's main objectives included:¹³

⁹ Dr. Edward Odisho, "Syriac Educational Schools," paper presented at the Syriac Studies Symposium V, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, June 2007.

¹⁰ Interview conducted on August 29, 2007, in Duhok.

¹¹ In a report issued in 2004, the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq divided its relief projects into five distinct areas: aid to refugees and internally displaced people; health and medical services (i.e. charity-run clinics); the reconstruction of villages (sewage systems in Alqosh, clinics in Nahla, irrigation channels in Bendway, Alqosh, among other services); education and teaching (i.e. the building and repairing of schools, building of dormitories, and the covering of living expenses of students and teachers in dormitories, and of teachers' salaries); and supporting "social societies" (civil society organizations). Assyrian Aid Society Iraq, "Activities Report," 2004.

¹² Interview conducted on August 27, 2007, in Ainkawa, Erbil.

¹³ To view all sixteen objectives, see Assyrian Women Union's by-laws, as per the fourth general conference, conducted in Duhok, August 10–12, 2006.

- empowering women with an awareness of their full rights in all areas of life, and activating women's roles in the national march and struggle of the nation (Assyrians) and country (Iraq);
- supporting and encouraging women to achieve their rights (such as freedom of thought and political freedom, and the right to run for positions of political, social, and economic leadership);
- ensuring constitutional rights for females and working on correcting current inequalities;
- supporting Syriac schools;
- eradicating violence against women.

AWU activities were in line with Nadjé Al-Ali's description of women's organizations in the region, gearing towards modernization, development, and educational and political participation.¹⁴ To assist women in participating in the public sphere and the workforce, they turned parts of their centers into daycare facilities for children. Furthermore, numerous educational seminars (on computers, language, sewing, and so on) were offered especially to non-urban women in the Nineveh Plain. In strategically aligning itself with the ADM, the AWU gained access to the central Iraqi parliament and the KNA.¹⁵

¹⁴ Nadjé Al-Ali, "Gender and Civil Society in the Middle East," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 5: 2 (January 2003): 216–21.

¹⁵ Although Assyrian national issues are more often advocated before women's rights, the past president and minister of immigration and refugees in the Iraqi interim government, Pascal Esho Warda, has been a strong international voice for

Although, according to Fredrick Aprim,¹⁶ Assyrians reported cases of persecution and marginalization, specifically by members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, compared to the period of Ba‘th rule during the 1980s and 1990s and the post-2003 period, these years can be regarded as a high-water mark in the capacity and performance of Assyrian civil society.

The Nineveh Plain Predicament: Historicizing Cultural and Political

Ramifications

With the fall of Ba‘th rule following the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, civil society began a fearless attempt to re-emerge. Within a short period of time, over 4,000 organizations were registered around the country, and another 9,000 unregistered organizations were also recorded. A range of print publications, radio stations, and twenty television channels were available, broadcasting the diverse voices of the country’s various communities.¹⁷ One of these communities was the Assyrians. Organizations established in Iraq’s Kurdish north (such as the ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Union), and working

Iraqi women. For instance, on International Women’s Day, she attended a women’s conference in India:
<http://www.hindu.com/mag/2008/04/06/stories/2008040650150500.htm>. As a minister, she played a critical role in supporting the ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Union in their struggle against Mosul University’s inaction over the leaflets Assyrian females were given by Islamists instructing them to adopt Islamic dress code. The AWU president, Galawesh Shaba Hojji (known as Galeta Shaba), was consecutively appointed to the Kurdistan National Assembly as well.

¹⁶ Aprim, *Assyrians*, 252–63.

¹⁷ Thabit Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq* (Harlow, UK/New York: Longman, 2011), 106–7.

underground in Mosul University,¹⁸ began to extend their branches officially to Baghdad, Kirkuk, the Nineveh Plain, and other places.

The Nineveh Plain, located in the northeastern portion of the Ninawa province, has a special significance for the Assyrians, constituting the heartland of their ancient homeland. Its proximity to Nineveh (the Assyrians' historical capital), and the various historical artifacts found near its villages and monasteries dating back to the earliest period of Christianity, strengthens its connection to the region. For instance, the Assyrian inhabitants of the Nineveh Plain proudly display family trees that reach back over centuries.¹⁹ This continuity, combined with the surrounding material culture, deepens their sense of collective memory and strong association to their towns and villages.²⁰ The Nineveh Plain is also home to other minorities, including Yazidis and Shabaks.²¹

On October 22 and 23, 2003, Assyrian academics, politicians, and religious and civil-society leaders came together in Baghdad and agreed on the constitution of the Nineveh Plain as an administrative unit. In the conference's public declaration, the ADM stated:

¹⁸ ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Union—Bartella branch. Interview by author, August 26, 2007, Bartella, Nineveh Plains, Ninawa.

¹⁹ Ibid. Also, various residences, including that of my host in Alqosh, were able to trace seven generations of ancestors who had all inhabited this town.

²⁰ Y. Babana, "Alqūsh 'br al-tarīkh" (Alqosh over the centuries) (Baghdad: Office and Printers of the East, 1979).

²¹ ISDP, "Proposing the Operationalization of Art. 125 Solution: Establishing the Nineveh Plains Administrative Unit," <http://www.iraqdemocracyproject.org/pdf/NPAU-policybrief.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2007).

The conference stresses the need to designate an administrative region for our people in the Nineveh Plain with the participation of other ethnic and religious groups, where a special law will be established for self-administration and the assurance of administrative, political, and cultural rights in towns and villages throughout Iraq, where our people reside.²²

This claim came to be adopted by other Assyrian political party members, including Sarkis Aghajan, the previous finance minister of the KRG (2006-2008).²³

After the completion of the new Iraqi Constitution, it became evident that the Nineveh Plain's administrative claim was constitutionally viable. According to Chapter 4, Article 125, titled: "The Local Administrations": "This Constitution shall guarantee the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various nationalities, such as Turkomens, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other constituents, and this shall be regulated by law."²⁴ But the draft Constitution of the KRG, in its Article 2, included the Nineveh Plains portion of Ninawa province, and specifically the districts of Al-Shaykhan, Sinjar, Telkaif, Qaraqush, and Ba'shiqa, within its regional boundaries, which gave rise to the "Nineveh Plains predicament:"

²² Assyrian Democratic Movement, "The Chaldean Assyrian Syriac General Conference," October 2003, Retrieved on December 7, 2007, from: <http://zowaa.org/news/news/english/pr4eng.pdf>.

²³ *Zinda Magazine*, "Five-Parties Memo on Draft Kurdistan Region Constitution," November 20, 2006, http://www.zindamagazine.com/html/archives/2006/11.20.06/index_thu.php#goodmorningassyria (accessed December 7, 2007). See also M Lattimer, "In 20

Years, There Will Be No More Christians in Iraq," *Guardian*, October 6, 2006.

²⁴ Iraqi Constitution, at http://www.export.gov/iraq/pdf/iraqi_constitution.pdf (accessed December 10, 2007).

Iraqi Kurdistan consists of the governorate of Dohuk in its current administrative boundaries; the governorates of Kirkuk, Al-Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil; the districts of ‘Aqra, Al-Shaykhan, Sinjar, Tall Afar, Tall Kayf [or Telkaif], and Qarqush [known as Baghdeda to the Assyrians]; the subdistricts of Zammar, Ba‘shiqah, and Aski Kalak, in the governorate of Ninawa; the subdistricts of Khanaqin and Mandali, in the governorate of Diyala; the district of Badra; and the subdistrict of Jassan, within the administrative boundaries of the governorate of Wasit until 1968.²⁵

This tug of war between the central government and the KRG compromised the rights of minorities such as the Assyrians, and undermined their efforts at self-administration, as prescribed in the Iraqi constitution. The contested status of the Nineveh Plain had socio-political ramifications that expressed themselves in various ways. For instance, the creation of the Nineveh Plain local police force was stopped twice by the KRG, in May 2005 and June 2006, with the second attempt gaining the central government’s approval.²⁶ Electoral ballot boxes were prevented from reaching the towns of this region during the first national elections, in 2005, and political pressure to sway voters using undemocratic methods continued in the following years.²⁷

²⁵ Text of the Draft Constitution of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (August 22, 2006). National Assembly of Iraqi Kurdistan, prepared by the Committee of the Reconsideration of the Draft Constitution of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

²⁶ ISDP policy briefing. “Creating a Nineveh Plain Local Police Force: Overcoming Ethno-Religious Minority Insecurity,” September 2007, <http://www.iraqdemocracyproject.org/pdf/Minority%20Policing%20-%20policy%20brief.pdf> (accessed December 13, 2007).

²⁷ “Declaration of the Assyrian Democratic Party regarding National Elections,” January 31, 2005, http://www.zowaa.org/news/news/arabic/declaration_chaldoassyrian_discrimination_31012005.pdf (accessed December 11, 2007). See also AINA, “Assyrians Prevented by Kurds from Voting in Northern Iraq,” January 31, 2005, <http://www.aina.org/releases/20050131003708.htm> (accessed December 11, 2007). Other articles were also published in *Zinda Magazine*’s February 2, 2005

My field research showed that the independent civil society organizations that had developed so rapidly after 2003 became marginalized politically and economically. Besides political pressures associated with the contested status of their region, such organizations had to contend with campaigns of ethnic and religious cleansing carried out by Al-Qa'ida. These campaigns' vicious impact was observed on many levels, ranging from the destruction of churches to the beheadings of religious leaders, ransom abductions, rapes, killings of civilians, and the mass ethnic cleansing of certain areas.²⁸ This campaign not only limited the types and locations of minorities' activities in the Nineveh Plain, but also affected the physical existence of some groups, including the Assyrian Women's Union branch in Telkaif, which refrained from displaying its name out of a fear of Al-Qa'ida cells in their city.²⁹ In particular, Assyrian women and women of other minority communities came under enormous psychological stress. They were expected to juggle their occupations and households, the deteriorating situation of the country, their physical safety, and gender issues. This was a fate they shared

issue, http://www.zindamagazine.com/html/archives/2005/2.1.05/index_tue.php (accessed December 11, 2007).

²⁸ See, for example, Taneja P., "Iraq's Displacement Crisis: The Search for Solutions," *Forced Migration Review* (June 2007); "Assimilation, exodus, eradication: Iraq's minority communities since 2003," *Minority Rights Group International, UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, Human Rights Report* (November 1–December 31, 2006); "Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom," *U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom* (Washington, DC: May 2006).

²⁹ Interview by author, August 29, 2007.

with other Iraqi women, who in some cases became the matriarchal heads of their households when their husbands were killed or went missing.³⁰

Fast-Forward to 2014

In January 2014, it seemed that the “Nineveh Plain Predicament” was finally going to be solved, as the Iraqi Council of Ministers approved a plan to designate the Nineveh Plain as one of three new Iraqi provinces. In the same month, Syriac and Turkomen became official languages of the state, alongside Arabic and Kurdish. Many locals expected greater representation in their local councils and an increase in basic services such as electricity, road construction, school provision, and much-needed hospital facilities. More importantly, they had hoped to see an end to the political tension associated with their contested status, which had adversely manifested itself in various aspects of their lives.

But all of these hopes were dashed five months later. The political pressures associated with the Nineveh Plain’s contested status had been devastating to the area on many fronts, but the prevention of a local police force was perhaps the most damaging. When the central government and *peshmerga* forces retreated from the Nineveh Plain, locals were left without security,³¹ and

³⁰ Ernesto Londoño, “Iraqi Women Take On Roles Of Dead or Missing Husbands,” Foreign Service, *Washington Post*, April 23, 2008.

³¹ The withdrawal of the central and regional armies— especially of the *peshmerga*, which was stationed in these areas—as ISIS forces drew nearer is currently a contentious topic that is still being debated. Many residents of the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar have expressed feelings of betrayal at their abandonment by their country’s security forces, and have questioned their position as minority communities in today’s Iraq.

the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) quickly seized their towns and villages and destroyed their way of life.

As ISIS took over Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in June 2014, many expected mayhem to ensue. Yet, for a short period, minorities seemed to be unaffected. Outside Mosul there were warning signs, however. Clashes between ISIS and the *peshmerga*, who had moved their forces into the Nineveh Plain on June 14, escalated near the Assyrian town of Qaraqush (Baghdeda). While ISIS and the *peshmerga* forces attacked each other, most of the 50,000 residents of Baghdeda fled to neighboring villages and to Erbil. However, as many as 80 percent of the townspeople returned when things settled down, only to flee once again in the following weeks.

In Mosul, Christians were beginning to be prevented from receiving their pay and food rations, and faced many other limitations. For instance, community reports indicate that some Christian women were killed for not dressing appropriately. But the violence soon went beyond these individual cases, concertedly targeting the entire community. The homes of Christians and other minorities, including Shi'ites, began to be publicly marked as the "property of the Islamic State." Christians were then given four choices: convert to Islam, pay *jizya* taxes, leave, or be killed. Almost all of Mosul's Christians escaped the city, leaving behind their homes and livelihoods, in an exodus that swept up approximately 40,000 people. Interviews with these displaced persons indicate that militants at ISIS checkpoints stripped them of all belongings, including personal identification cards, foodstuffs, money, and even children's food and

toys. Many had their cars confiscated and were forced to walk to the Nineveh Plain, 20 kilometers away.

As anticipated, on August 7, ISIS forces advanced to the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar. In the absence of central and regional security forces, residents had no choice but to flee. A mass exodus of hundreds of thousands ensued. Most villagers escaped in horror on foot, first to the neighboring villages and monasteries further north, and eventually to the cities, towns, and villages in the KRG.

In light of this catastrophe, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed a strong resolution on August 7 that was tabled by Yazidi MP Vian Dakheel in cooperation with Assyrian MP and the Secretary-General of the ADM, Yonadam Kanna, and a Turkmen representative. In this resolution, the Iraqi government called atrocities committed against native ethnic and religious minorities in Mosul, Sinjar, the Nineveh Plain, and other areas a genocide, and asked for international support in the creation of safe havens and the provision of humanitarian aid, among other things.³²

Recent interviews conducted with local political organizers in Iraq, combined with reports on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), reveal that Assyrians lack confidence in the current political system. While both the central Iraqi government and the KRG have taken positive measures in issuing strong

³² Scholars engaged in the study of the cultural heritage and language of the Assyrians, have also petitioned Britain, the European Union, the U.S. government and the international community to interfere. Their petition was published in major international newspapers, including the *Daily Telegraph*: “To stop genocide, Britain must help set up a safe haven for Iraq Christians,” (August 18, 2014).

resolutions to protect minorities, they need to put these policies into practice and empower minorities, by involving them in the decision-making process and incorporating them at all levels of government, including security. A phrase commonly repeated by Iraqi Assyrians was reiterated by Archbishop Nicodemus Sharaf in a recent CBS documentary on the ISIS persecution of Iraqi Christians. When asked what had been lost by the community, he responded: “They lost our dignity here. I’m sorry to say that. We don’t have dignity in our country, in our land.”³³

Ishtar TV, an Assyrian channel broadcasting out of the KRG began conducting interviews with Assyrian IDPs who had escaped from Mosul and the Nineveh Plain, and were now living in camps and unfinished buildings in Erbil and Duhok. One such interview was conducted with an eighty-year-old woman who was too ill to leave her village, Karamlesh, when ISIS forces advanced and most of the villagers escaped.³⁴ She stayed behind with her sister-in-law, both of them elderly and alone, until they were also forced to leave by ISIS militias. At the very end, she recited a folk song in Aramaic mourning Karamlesh’s current status. She reminisced about life before the attacks, her home, and young men and women strolling its peaceful streets. She painfully recalled that no one remained to celebrate mass in Mar Gewargis church and partake in Karamlesh’s cultural

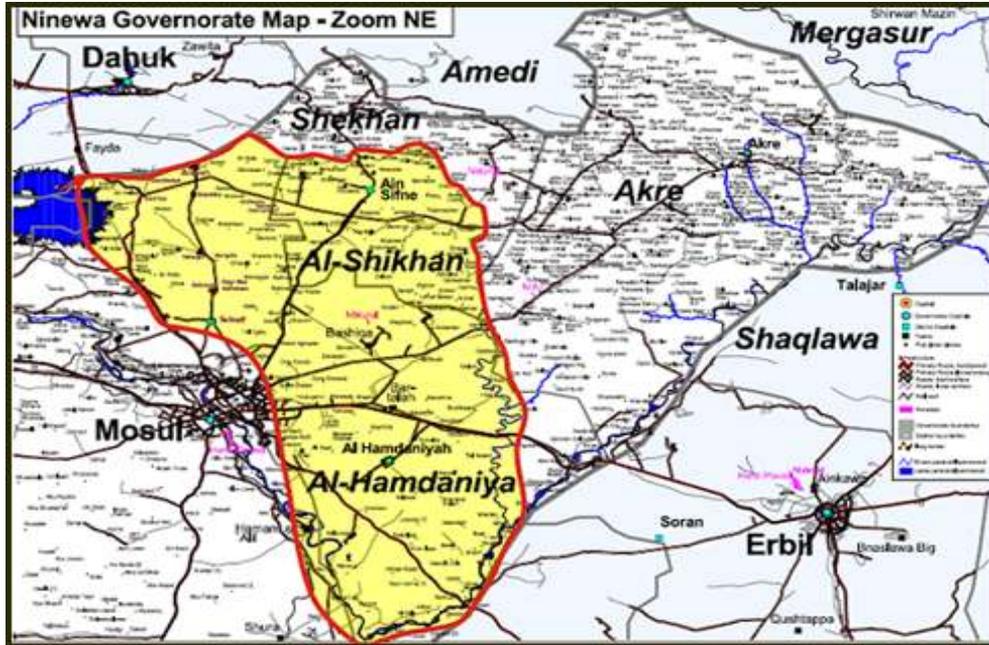
³³ Lara Logan, “Iraq’s Christians Persecuted by ISIS,” *60 Minutes* episode, *CBS News*, broadcast on March 22, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/iraq-christians-persecuted-by-isis-60-minutes> (accessed March 27, 2015).

³⁴ Ishtar TV, “Akhir al-Ashkhāṣ al-Mughādiriyyn min Qaryat Karamles,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBnhBaFZlOE> (accessed March 27, 2015).

life. She mourned the destruction of her village and the displacement of her people, concluding: “What a horrid fate.”

Beyond the sheer humanitarian crisis and despicable crimes committed against civilians, cultural heritage sites have been damaged and thousands of ancient and modern manuscripts destroyed. With the destruction of monuments, religious institutions, and documents, vernacular forms of art and cultural production in Aramaic will eventually disappear. Most importantly, the wonderful mosaic of Iraq’s pluralistic society, a vibrant reality only a few decades ago, has been swept away and forgotten in the wake of the bitter sectarianism of recent months and years.

Appendix 1: The Territorial Boundaries of the Nineveh Plain



Source: Iraq Democracy Project Policy Project Policy Briefing, “Proposing the Operationalization of the Art. 125 Solution: Establishing the Nineveh Plain Administrative Unit,” Iraq Democracy Project Policy Project, October 2007 (updated February 2008), http://www.iraqdemocracyproject.org/policy_brief3.html (accessed April 19, 2015).

Appendix 2: The 'Simele' Song

Singer: Shlemon Bet-Shmoel

Title: 'Simele'

Originally sang: 1973

Background talking:

“Shall we stay?” “Whose country is this” (i.e., are they citizens of it)

Song:

A thousand Simeles and the sacrifice is little
For the one who wants to see the blessed day

Young children are crying on the bodies of their mothers

Bonded groups
All screaming
Screaming about the massacre in Simele

Massacre, massacre, massacre

Behold corpses are silent as rocks
While the dead are crying out on their behalf

Over there a young child is killed and lies bodiless (i.e without life)
Beside him, his father is dying a sour death
Screaming about the massacre in Simele

Massacre, massacre, massacre

Plains and mountains have turned crimson
Blue water has become reddened

Relatives have renounced relatives
Each person worried about him/her self
Screaming about the massacre in Simele

Massacre, massacre, massacre

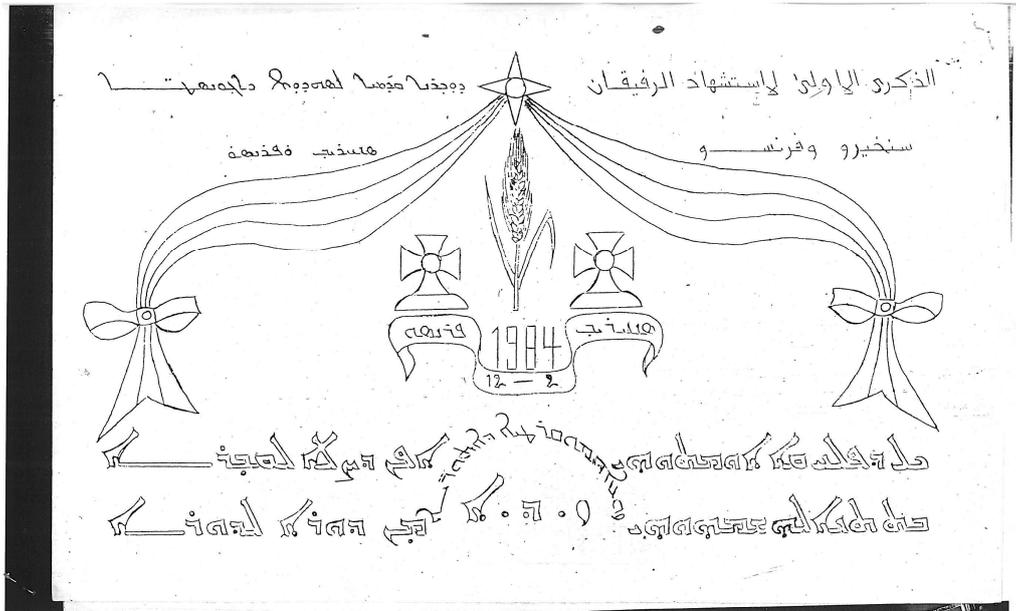
Oh what spirit
Is bringing our nation to this presence?

Say that Assyria is alive and will continue to be
Let all creation hear this call.

Appendix 3: Cult of Martyrdom

Bahrā, issue 11, year 3 (January 1985)

Figure A1



Top statement in Aramaic and Arabic: “The First Anniversary for the Martyrdom of our Comrades Sankhīrb and Fransu (February 2, 1984)”
Bottom verse in Aramaic frames “Assyrian Democratic Movement, ADM”

*Whoever strives for his nation
Though he might descend to the grave
His name will be remembered
Throughout the generations*

Figure A2



Statement above images: “And from our Martyrs we are inspired with lessons”

Images: first five martyrs of the ADM

Image retrieved on February 1, 2015 from
<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/BqZIYLpCUAAINCB.jpg>

Figure A3



A wall of memorandum: Celebrating ADM's anniversary
while commemorating its martyrs (April 12, 1990).

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Informants included politicians, religious figures, activists, and other actors involved in the period under study. The names of most informants have been omitted.

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