

The Politics of Minority
Chaldeans between Iraq and America

by

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*To the memory of my mother,
who did not have the luxury to contemplate
her Chaldean identity*

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Abstract

The modern Chaldeans are customarily defined, by themselves and by others, as an Aramaic-speaking Catholic minority from the ancient land of Mesopotamia. Articulations of Chaldeanness in the United States—whether written or oral; popular or academic; public or private—exhibit a recurrent association between the monumentality of their history, the progress of modernity, and the identity label “Chaldean.” This study examines these ancient-modern inflections in contemporary Chaldean identity discourses, and analyzes the cultural mechanisms that augment these processes of collective identity formation, re-formation and maintenance through a discussion of the impact of the uses of history as a collective commodity for sustaining a positive community image in the present, and the uses of language revival and monumental symbolism to claim association with Christian and pre-Christian traditions.

Among the political agendas of such articulations is setting the Chaldeans apart from the Islamic and Arab discourses associated with the contemporary Iraqi ethno-religious majorities (Sunni and Shiite Arabs and Kurds) and bringing them closer to the Christian West, particularly in the diasporic locale of the United States. The first half of the dissertation shows how the ancient identity label “Chaldean” was revived in the sixteenth century and bolstered during the nineteenth century through the establishment of Western archeological and missionary enterprises in Mesopotamia. The second half analyzes the contemporary Chaldean communities through a transnational lens that

reexamines the family, Church and non-religious Chaldean institutions in their capacity as social fields where transnational identities are enacted. The second half also probes the question of ethnic identity formation in the United States through the analysis of a nascent body of Chaldean-American fiction and the dominant identity discourses propagated by an influential elite group of Chaldean culture-makers.

This dissertation employs an interdisciplinary approach that benefits from anthropological perspectives, cultural studies and sociology in combination with fieldwork among multigenerational Chaldean residents of southeast Michigan. It depends on European and American travelogues, missionary reports, church and community histories and Chaldean periodicals as source materials for the analysis of cultural phenomena that shaped Chaldean identities in Iraq and the United States from the sixteenth century to the present.

Chapter One

Introduction

Chaldeans are the foundation of everything important and religious and civil...Everything of importance was discovered by the forefathers of Chaldeans.

Sarhad Jammo, Chaldean Bishop in California 2001¹

The articulations of Chaldeanness in the United States—whether written or oral; current or historical; popular or academic; public or private—exhibit a recurrent association between the monumentality of history, the progress of modernity, and the identity label “Chaldean”. The conception of this dissertation was chiefly prompted by these ancient-modern inflections in contemporary Chaldean identity discourses. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the mechanisms that augment these processes of collective identity formation and re-formation. It seeks to achieve this through discussions of the impact of the uses of history as a collective commodity for sustaining a positive community image in the present, and the uses of language revival and monumental symbolism to claim association with Christian and pre-Christian traditions. Among the political agendas of such articulations is setting the Chaldeans apart from the Islamic and Arab discourses associated with the contemporary Iraqi ethno-religious majorities (Sunni and Shiite Arabs and Kurds) and bringing them closer to the Christian West, particularly in the United States.

¹ Jammo, Sarhad. 2001. Presentation at Orchard Lake Middle School. Orchard Lake: Michigan. Cited in Henrich & Henrich, 2007:77.

In order to demonstrate how the dissertation fulfills the above, the first section below offers an overview of the socio-historical scope of the study, followed by: a) statement of the problems the dissertation aims to tackle, b) clarification of some key terms, c) the contributions and limitations of this study, d) the current state of research on Chaldeans, e) a statement of methodology and methodological limitations, and, finally, f) an outline of the subsequent chapters.

I. Overview: Chaldeans between Iraq and America

Customarily, the modern Chaldeans are defined, by themselves and by others, as an Aramaic-speaking Catholic minority from the ancient land of Mesopotamia (Bazzi, 1991, Chaldean Household Survey, 2007; Henrich & Henrich, 2007; Romaya, 2007; Sengstock 1974, 1982, 1983, 2005; Sheikho, 1992). When it comes to Mesopotamian antiquity, the earliest identifiable Chaldeans were Aramaeans (though nowadays some question this assumption too) who settled in southern Iraq, forming the basis of the Neo-Babylonian revival of the last Dynasty of Babylon. The Chaldean (Babylonian) Empire fell in 539BC, leaving no evidence for tangible racial connections that are exclusive to the ancient and modern Chaldeans. Moreover, when it comes to language, the modern Chaldeans of the Nineveh Plains speak a few varieties of neo-Aramaic, and most cannot read and write the script. For the greater part of today's city-dwelling Chaldeans, Arabic or English are the main languages, depending on their locations.

The recent prevalence of the term "Mesopotamia" in identity discourses that employ it in reference to the originary land of the modern Chaldeans signals a revivalist tendency. This location, literally, the fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,

has not officially existed under a single name for centuries. Historical Mesopotamia comprises parts of present-day Syria, Iran, Armenia and Iraq, whereas the modern Chaldeans which this dissertation profiles all trace their lineage to the Nineveh Plain, a region in northern Iraq, and often, among US-based Chaldeans, specifically to a single village in that region, Telkeif.

Although the term “Chaldeans” seems to have been used interchangeably with other designations such as Syriacs, Nestorians, and Assyrians to refer to the Christians of Mesopotamia before 1445 AD, officially speaking the followers of the present Chaldean Church were called the Christians of the “Church of the East.” This was the name ascribed to them after a split with the Catholic Church that began to take form possibly as early as 325AD, with the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, a council that was prompted by a dispute with the Catholic Church over the definition of Christ’s human and divine natures (Baum and Winkler, 2003). It appears that the term “Chaldean” in the Christian era was officially recognized for the first time in 1445 AD by Pope Eugenius IV. This recognition took place as a group of Mesopotamian Christians joined the Catholic Church following the separation that had lasted more than eleven centuries.

Those referred to as “Chaldeans” continued to populate the villages of the Nineveh Plain region during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Their status as *dhimmi* under the millet system allowed them some protective privileges from the Ottoman authorities as well as some autonomy under the direct leadership of their Patriarchs, who were in charge of organizing the religious as well as the social life of their communities. After World War I, the Chaldeans, along with the other Christian groups in the area, were

granted the status of religious minorities by the newly formed Iraqi monarchy, which they continued to hold well into the twentieth century.

By 1988, the Iraqi Census revealed that approximately 5 per cent of the Iraqi population was Christian, with the Chaldeans comprising the largest of the Christian minorities in the country, and arguably the only Christian body that is native to the land (Bazzi, 1991).² For doctrinal reasons Chaldeans and Assyrians separated and reunited under the same ecclesiastical orders several times over the centuries. For political reasons, the various Iraqi regimes indiscriminately lumped Chaldeans and Assyrians together as a single “religious minority” during the bulk of the twentieth century. More recently, and mainly from their diasporic settlements, both groups have been making several attempts to reclaim their status as ethnic minorities in Iraq and elsewhere. In specific contexts, the two communities have come together under the hyphenated title Assyro-Chaldeans or Chaldo-Assyrians to assert that they form a homogenous and unified community; in other contexts, they have sought to assert their autonomous status as Chaldeans and Assyrians separately (Hanish, 2008). Chaldeans and Assyrians in the American diaspora converge on many cultural and political issues, but also diverge on other issues that involve identity questions and nationalist affiliations in the originary land.

The largest and oldest settled concentration of Chaldeans outside of Iraq can be found today in Southeast Michigan, where approximately 34,000-113,000 individuals are estimated to live (Household Survey, 2007; Sarafa, n.d.; Sengstock, 2005; US Census,

² After the First World War, the Assyrians entered the newly formed Iraqi monarchy as refugees from Turkey and Iran. At that historical point they did not consider themselves natives of Iraq, but a diasporic community that strove to return to its homeland at some point in the near future (John Joseph, 2000; Aubrey Vine, 1937; Fuat Deniz, 1999; Khaldun Husri, 1974).

2000). The first Chaldean immigrant to America had been identified as Zia Attalla, who reportedly arrived to the United States in 1889 (Sengstock, 1983:137; 2005:3), but it was not until World War I and the massacres of the Christian groups that had dwelled in the southern region of modern day Turkey and northern Iraq during the first third of the twentieth century³ (Hidirsah, 1997: 27-30; Matar, 2000:107-117) that the Chaldeans were impelled to seek asylum outside of the Middle East. From the 1920s to the 1960s, political and economic turmoil - the offshoot of alternately falling out of favor with Arab, Turkish, Persian and Kurdish powers in the region – also prompted a number of male members of this Iraqi Catholic minority to seek refuge in the Americas. Most of these individuals and their descendants trace their origins to the northern Iraqi village of Telkeif, (Gallagher, 1999; Sarafa, n.d., Sengstock, 1982, 2005; Survey, 2007). A majority of Chaldeans, who first immigrated to multiple United States destinations, were soon to congregate in Detroit by the 1920s, drawn to the stable wages and the low-skilled jobs made available by Ford’s automobile assembly line. A deteriorating political and economic scene in the homeland continued to prompt later waves of Chaldean migration from Iraq to Detroit. Added to this “push” was the “pull” of favorable modifications to the US immigration laws facilitating family-based chain immigrations, which began to reunite male immigrants with their other family members in the mid 1960s - a classical US migration model observed as early as 1885 by Ernest Ravenstein and embellished later by E.S. Lee’s migration theory in 1966 (Sengstock 1982:41; 2005:6).

Since 1992, in the wake of the first Gulf War, new waves of Chaldean immigrants began to enter the US. A figure of 5,000 Chaldean immigrants was estimated to have entered the US (Betzold, 1992; cited in Gallagher, 1999:5). Another 50,000 Chaldeans

³ These groups were also known as Tiaris and Christian Kurds in reference to their regional affiliations.

were estimated to have fled to Jordan as refugees during the United Nations' economic embargo on Iraq (1991-2003). The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 caused the escalation of Chaldean internal displacement and their search for asylum and refuge outside of Iraq. Many Chaldean city dwellers returned to their ancestral villages in northern Iraq, while alarmed community reports estimated that 200,000 Christians (most of whom are Chaldean) left Iraq between 2003 and 2007 (Warikoo, 2007). While at least half of this number is estimated to be in transit countries such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey, others have relocated to refugee camps in European cities (Harris, 2007). Another segment of these refugees is making its entry to the US to join with family and kinship networks. 12,000 more Chaldean immigrants are estimated to be settled in the US by the end of 2008 (Metzler, 2008).

Chaldeans have been continuously entering the US in waves since the first pioneers began to form a visible cluster in Detroit in the 1920s (Sengstock, 1982). With these multiple waves of migration, Chaldean migrants who leave Iraq today to reside in the US encounter multiple options for reconfiguring, consolidating, and negotiating their ethnicity in a host country where their family and kin are already established. While new Chaldean migrants engage in negotiating their new identities and reconfiguring their economic status, the socio-cultural structures in the US spark the ambition of the established diaspora Chaldeans to gain recognition from the national and international communities and to maintain reinvented and imagined links with the originary land. In this manner, the various generations of Chaldean immigrants have exhibited assimilative tendencies, refurbished traditions they or their families brought from the native homeland of Iraq, and forged new identities that combine processes of innovation and renovation in

a fashion that reveals multiple inflections of the hyphenated identity “Chaldean-American”. Some of these inflections—whether or not they could be subsumed under the categories of “reactive” ethnicity, “symbolic” ethnicity, or “linear” ethnicity (Gans, 1979, 1992; Waters 1990; Alba et al., 2003)—reveal a continuous disparity between the conceptual mechanisms of identification employed by US-based Chaldeans and the Chaldeans who still constitute the ethno-religious enclaves of the originary land.

As members of this Catholic Iraqi minority initiated their immigration to the US around the turn of the twentieth century, some began to strongly assert their Chaldean identity, promote their Aramaic language, and disfavor affiliations with Arabs and Arab culture. Another tendency that was making itself felt among a large number of Chaldean immigrants was their growing eagerness to assimilate into the narrative of the “melting pot” of American society. Yet, although they wanted to be considered “American” and although the second generation’s capacity to speak the language of heritage—be it Arabic or Aramaic—generally diminished and their physical ties to the homeland weakened, active affiliation as Chaldean continued across the successive generations of immigrants. This assertion of identity became a mode of denouncing Arabic-Islamic heritage as well as an exercise in linking the Chaldean community to a reconstructed past of a homeland whose civilization and glory outshine those of contemporary Iraq. After looking at Chaldean history in the originary land more closely, this dissertation will analyze the stakes and efficacy of taking on such identity positions in the particular location of the United States.

II. Clarification of Terminology

There are several terms that recur frequently in the chapters. Because some share slightly overlapping historical or conceptual developments or are complex and have been used to denote multiple meanings in previous scholarship, it is best to introduce these terms here, along with the working definitions that I shall develop further in the course of the discussions of the chapters.

I use the term *Assyrian* not to denote a racial or ethnic distinction between contemporary Assyrians and Chaldeans, but to point out the cultural divergence of the two groups after their multiple theological schisms that began in the fifteenth century. Pointing to the historical corollary of this, I also treat the US-based Chaldeans and Assyrians as two collectives to succinctly reference their contemporary denominational divergence and their separate geographical concentrations in suburban Detroit and Chicago respectively. When and how the two groups segregated and became schismatic is a key issue in Chapters Two and Three. In these chapters also the terms *West*, *Western* and *Westerner* appear capitalized to stress the cultural and conceptual disparity experienced by Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and the Chaldeans and Assyrians whom they encountered in nineteenth-century Mesopotamia on the other. I continue to capitalize these words to indicate the conceptual prevalence of this divide in shaping contemporary Chaldean identities.

My use of the term *identity* is inspired by Stuart Hall's understanding of the term as a "process of identification," and as a "structure that is split" between contesting affiliations, and therefore one that "always has ambivalence within it" (Hall 1991a:15). As such, I employ the term *identity* in reference to the products of historical, religious

and social events or processes that get assigned the identification *Chaldean* in a number of intersections, diachronically and synchronically.

By *Chaldeans* I refer to the individuals or groups who choose this designation for themselves, situationally or essentially, or for whom this designation has been chosen by another authority, such as the Roman Catholic Church or the public discourses of modern diasporic Chaldean institutions. Unless I refer to individuals as Chaldean *by descent* to refer to their origins in modern-day Iraq and to the set of conditions that makes them socially perceived as Chaldeans (language, race, religious affiliation), I treat the ingredients of the term *Chaldean* as fluid and changeable. When an internal or external agency tries to dictate the Chaldean identity by fixing and stabilizing the term's contours, I use the word *Chaldeanness*, to signal the essentialization to which fluid identities are subjected in certain representational modes. I also use the term in a collective reference to certain variables when they appear as essentialized and stylized components to constitute a symbolic reference to a putative collective Chaldean identity. These variables are most commonly Mesopotamian antiquities, the Aramaic language, and the Chaldean village of Telkeif, among others.

To point out how these components are often lumped together in authoritative discourses that aim to fix and stage the Chaldean identity favorably, I use the phrase "*who the Chaldeans are*" in reference to a prevalent *official Chaldean narrative*. My choice of this parenthetical phrase stems from having come across numerous US-based Chaldean media representations that engage in auto-ethnographic projects and that share a propensity to instruct the world about who the Chaldeans are using monolithic terms, a stable package of Chaldean values and recurrent delineation patterns. I call this narrative

official because it fronts public representation of Chaldeans and exhibits the power to repress alternative narratives of identity.

My approach to the term *ethnicity* resembles my approach to *identity* in that I treat it as an open-ended construct capable of encompassing multiple and changeable definitions of individuals and collectives. The term ethnicity becomes particularly important in my text as I discuss Chaldean identity in representations of the collective that take place in the US. In the particular contexts of English-language Chaldean fiction and US-based authoritative articulations of “who the Chaldeans are,” my use of the term ethnicity associates it with identification processes which evolve specifically in this country, and which involve negotiations between notions of “descent” and “consent” (Sollors 1986:6). In this fashion, my understanding of Chaldean ethnicity is heavily colored by Warner Sollor’s definition of “American ethnicity” as “a matter not of content but of the importance that individuals ascribe to it” (Sollors 1986:35). This understanding is elaborated on in the relevant chapters.

The term *minority* appears in the title of the dissertation and in other contexts to denote something analogous to ethnicity. The main reason why I chose to incorporate both terms is because using the term ethnicity in reference to the Chaldeans of Iraq would prove problematic when the group was not permitted to express its difference from the majority as an ethnic or racial minority, but rather only as a religious minority (*aqallīyyah dīnīyyah*), during the greater part of the twentieth century. Moreover, ethnicity (as opposed to race, *‘irq*, or nationality, *qawmīyyah*) in the Arabic language is still a fairly recent coinage (*ithnīyyah*) that has yet to become integral to the modes of self-articulation in Iraqi societies. Therefore, uniform use of the term ethnicity in

reference to the Chaldeans of multiple locales would not result in an accurate representation of the Chaldeans who have not adopted American modes of identification.

My reference to the *Chaldean Community* traces the use of the expression by Chaldean individuals and groups who posit the presence and stability of such a collective delineation of their group. I use *community* when I examine the imagined site where Chaldeans view themselves as sharing and reproducing the same cultural values for a group larger than their immediate family and kinship networks; where they view themselves as being pressured to belong by a collective agency larger than their face-to-face Chaldean network; or where they see themselves as agents in charge of raking up, standardizing and certifying the collective for the recognition of those who stand outside it. The latter group I call Chaldean *culture-makers*, to signal their active role in dictating the ingredients of Chaldean identity not only for themselves but for the entire imagined community. My usage of the term *community* is then strongly influenced by Benedict Anderson's understanding of the imagined quality of communities, which, according to him, "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1991:6). Accordingly, I examine the Chaldean community as a conceptual site in which identification becomes a practice, and in which values are produced and enacted through the coming together of resistance and agency to form the multiple tensions that yield various inflections of Chaldeanness.

Finally, it should be noted that the Arabic term *jāliyah*—which is used by US-based Arabic-speaking Chaldeans to refer to their community⁴—is not used to refer to

⁴ *Jāliyah* literally means colony, delegation or a group of people leading a temporary life away from home. It was borrowed because the Arabic language does not have a term that translates perfectly into 'community' in the English sense of the term. See also Andrew Shryock's use of the term in the context of Detroit's Arab communities' collective self-references (2000:485).

Chaldeans in Iraq, either by them or by others. Because communities are often extended groups that share familial ties in Middle Eastern societies, the term is simply dropped. Chaldeans refer to themselves as *al-Kildān*, or simply as *ahal*, the colloquial term for ‘closely related people’. The fact that the expression *al-jāliyah al-Kildāniyyah*, understood as ‘the Chaldean community’, was appropriated in the American diaspora should signal the identification practices that were derived through encounters with the prerequisites of the host culture.

III. Statement of Problem: the Forming and Reforming of Chaldeanness

To what extent is the appellation “Chaldean” transmitted from antiquity, revived, invented and reinvented in modern times? These are the overarching questions of this study. The principal objective of the dissertation’s multifaceted examination is to chart out the various articulations of Chaldean identity, both as communal identity constructed and imposed by authoritative members of the community or as a free expression of individual belonging, in Iraq and the United States. The dissertation also attempts to identify the contours of US-based Chaldeans’ transnational activity. In light of the roles played by fiction writers, culture-makers and private individuals in negotiating identities through an analytical framework, it also aims to highlight the discursive value of notions of “descent” and “consent” in the construction of American ethnicities, using the particular paradigm of the Chaldeans (Sollors, 1986).

In pursuit of understanding the mechanisms of Chaldean identification, this study begins by interrogating a set of suppositions. It first tests the assertion that modern and ancient Chaldeans are related. The historical continuity between ancient and modern

Chaldeans is frequently cited by various Chaldean and non-Chaldean sources, yet it remains disputable among other Chaldeans. What power mechanisms sanction the posited ancient-new continuity in modern Chaldean discourses? What factors drive other segments of Chaldeans (and Assyrians) to dispute this continuity and provide alternative versions of continuity that are equally disputable? As the dissertation attends to the ancient-new question, the issue of whether or not the modern Chaldeans and Assyrians are historically the same people necessarily comes forth. This is so because the cultures and languages of the ancient Chaldeans and Assyrians are to some extent conflated, and because the languages and religious cultures of their modern counterparts also exhibit similarities. For this reason, the discussion interrogates the assertion that modern Chaldeans and Assyrians are historically, racially, linguistically and ethnically one people, and that they could be traced to the same religious line whose followers once comprised the Christians of the Church of the East (also known at some historical junctures as the Nestorian Church, and as the Church of St. Thomas).

In the course of examining the history of the Church of the East, it becomes evident that the modern revival of the appellations “Chaldean” and “Assyrian” was due to a set of socio-religious encounters with the West that took place in recent history, mainly during the nineteenth-century. Consequently, the dissertation turns to the scenes of Western missionary and archeological enterprises in nineteenth-century Mesopotamia to examine the extent to which they have prompted a certain collective identity discourse among the modern Chaldeans whereby notions of *firstness*, *continuity* and *lastness* came to animate their posited link with Chaldean antiquity.

Thus, delineating the origins and modern connotations of the appellation “Chaldean” is the task of the first three chapters. The remaining three chapters, or the second half of the dissertation, turn to the contemporary scene to examine how Chaldeans express and enact their identities today. The chapters seek to tackle the questions of where modern Chaldean identities are enacted, in what kind of discourses and to what socio-political ends. Part of the discussion therefore traces the development of discourses of Chaldeanness across national boundaries, in conceptual and physical locales that are best construed when viewed in their capacity as transnational social fields.

What conceptual sites do modern Chaldeans utilize to express identity? This question prompts the search for identity articulations not only in social fields that form transnational nodes, such as the family, the ethnic business, transnational marriages, the institution of the Church and lay institutional circuits, but also prompts the search for these identity articulations in fiction, in an attempt to be inclusive of other possible modes and sites of Chaldean identity articulation that might fall outside of the confines of everyday expression and social participation.

If nascent Chaldean fiction is predominantly produced by US-based Chaldeans, as research points out, the questions that emerge are, first, what prompts the emergence of attempts to articulate identity through fiction in diaspora rather than in the originary land? And second, what are the overarching social concerns of these works of fiction? Accordingly, the dissertation explores identity issues from the perspective of a set of Chaldean literary works to see how they contest certain elements in the official narrative offered by Chaldean culture-makers with whom they coexist in the same diasporic communities.

The dissertation concludes by demonstrating how modern Chaldean identities are diverse and plural, with some coming together to form an official narrative of “who the Chaldeans are,” and others moving away from collective rhetoric to form the discursive peripheries of this official narrative. In addition to contestations in fiction, individual unofficial voices in non-fictional contexts appear occasionally to contest the official version of “who the Chaldeans are,” and by so doing they form the representational balance between the public and private spheres where Chaldeanness is enacted. Together the official and unofficial versions of Chaldeanness negotiate the group’s entry to ethnic America.

IV. Contributions and Limitations of the Present Study

By way of investigating the foregoing ideas, the dissertation endeavors to make the following theoretical contributions:

- 1) Introduce and contextualize a set of identities that circulate among members of Chaldean social groups in order to show how “Chaldeanness” is constructed as a discourse.
- 2) Provide a new case study that affirms some anthro-sociological formulations with regard to the functions of symbolic identity and culture formatting in the discourses of ethnicity in the US.
- 3) Examine formulations and implications of Chaldean transnational life.
- 4) Establish conceptual frameworks for the study and correlation between the politics of appellation, communal power, the agency of ethnic fiction and the rhetoric of Chaldeanness.

The general contribution of this study is furnishing an analytical framework that encompasses the contours of Chaldean past and present. In pursuit of this, the dissertation focuses on the processes that go into the making of collective identity and communal agency, and on the discrete processes that offset communal power.

As non-Muslim yet oriental, the Mesopotamian Christian minority stood out from the surrounding Muslim Arab majority. During the nineteenth-century they came to represent a special category that mediated the conceptual Orientalist divide between “East” and “West.” I probe the development of this special mediated-mediating status in the present by examining how contemporary Chaldeans view their affiliations with the West while *being* in the West. Because contact with the “West” as the *Savior Other* is at the root of the current articulations of collective Chaldean identity, transnational and trans-regional relations were essential for my study. They helped me broaden the scale of my investigation in order to situate the formation of Chaldean identity in a multi-locational, multi-generational order.

These issues have not been addressed by the literature available on the Chaldeans today, the contributions of which will be outlined in the next section. With the current dearth of critical perspectives that combine the study of contemporary Iraqi-Christian communities in Iraq with those of the diasporic communities, my project constructs an interdisciplinary framework through which to examine the cultural and sociopolitical status of the modern Chaldeans in Iraq, the US and other transit countries, and to furnish sufficient historical backdrop for these discussions.

One site where Chaldean identities are formed and reformed today is the Internet. While my chapters make ample use of the community websites where Chaldean

organizations articulate their Chaldeanness, conduct their networking and promote their agendas, I have not included a chapter that exclusively analyses identity formations through the phenomenon of cyberspace fora. Initially, I had proposed this chapter in my prospectus. I still believe that the current study would have benefited from exploring these fora in their capacity as a method and a channel for globally disseminating Chaldean culture and conferring about identity issues more rapidly. However, limitations of time and space with the current study necessitate that I pursue this in a separate project in the future.

I also hope that the current study has furnished the necessary ground for pursuing further projects that examine Chaldean identity with a more nuanced perspective on gender and sexuality, two critical identity issues that are chronically understudied in the case of the Chaldeans and which have mostly fallen out of the frameworks of the present investigation. While I tried to highlight some of the urgent issues of gendered identifications by way of examining communal pressures in the second half of the dissertation, I still think that an analysis of identification mechanisms that is informed by feminist theories would make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the Chaldeans and the overarching Iraqi society in which they have been situated in modern history.

V. Present State of Research

Publications on the modern Chaldeans of Iraq, the transit countries and the United States so far exist in isolation from one another, focusing on the life of the groups or subgroups in one country but not in the others. Moreover, these publications do not interrogate the

modern history of the Chaldeans, even though several publications from previous centuries have detailed the life of the communities to which their lineage can be traced.

The earliest appearance of what was taken to be the land of the biblical “Chaldees” and its modern inhabitants can be found in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European travelogues (Biddulph & Lavender, 1612 [1608]; Ray, Rauwolf, Staphorst & Belon, 1693; and Maundrell, 1836 [1697]), whereas accounts of the modern Chaldeans as newly discovered communal enclaves of “primitive Christians” became popular in the nineteenth century, through an assortment of publications, such as travelogues (Boré, 1840; Buckingham, 1827), popular archeological accounts (Layard, 1849), and missionary reports (Smith, Dwight, & Conder, 1834; Shedd, 1895). These works and numerous others from that period were not considered in any of the modern studies on Chaldeans. This fact has caused a conspicuous hiatus in the understanding of Chaldean history today, which is often traced back to antiquity while bypassing more recent historical episodes.

Added to this insufficiency in the current state of research on Chaldeans, during the twentieth century academic scholarship in Iraq had to be curbed for the censors until the fall of the Ba‘thist regime. It thus provided no critical scholarly accounts of this ethnic group. During that period, the only surviving local studies on the Chaldeans were produced by personnel of the Chaldean Church, such as Louis Cheikho’s *Twentieth-Century Chaldeans* (1992)⁵ and, Abdullah Marcus Rabi’s *The Modern Chaldeans and the Search for a National Identity* (2001),⁶ among others who sought to document the religious history of the community, and Chaldean lay people whose purpose was to depict

⁵ شيخو، لويس، 1992. كلدان القرن العشرين: دراسة مجملّة عن المجتمع الكلداني.
⁶ رابي، عبد الله مرقس، 2001. الكلدان المعاصرون والبحث عن الهوية القومية: دراسة سوسيوانثروبولوجية. عمان: دار الشروق.

and document the Chaldean villages of their descent. These works were mostly written in Arabic and (re)published or distributed in the US among Chaldean immigrants who trace their descent to these villages. Examples of such works are Mikhael Bazzi's *The Town of Telkeif, its Past and Present* (2003 [1969])⁷, Yusif Jammu's *The Remains of Nineveh, or the History of Telkeif* (1993 [1937])⁸ and Nouel Ballu's *Significant Events in Alqush's Recent History* (2003).⁹

In the US, public awareness of the existence of Chaldeans as a distinct ethnic group in Michigan began in the mid-1960s. In the *Detroit News*, for example, the first article about the Chaldeans appeared in 1966. During this same decade, the few scholars who have dealt with the modern Chaldeans to some critical degree tended to present generalized statements that depict Chaldean identity more or less as a linear, stable social denominator with predictable future transformations paralleling those of other ethnic groups in the US.

The earliest American scholar to study the Chaldeans of Michigan was Mary C. Sengstock, who began her research in Detroit in 1962, and subsequently published numerous articles and books (see Sengstock, 1970, 1974, 1982, 1983, 2005). Sengstock should be credited for charting the terrain of Chaldean studies. During that period, she was the first and only scholar to document Chaldean immigrants' testimonies about their origins, migration, residential patterns, Catholic religiosity and business ethics. Her accounts were so influential that they not only came to foster Michigan-based Chaldeans' understanding of themselves, but also were often transmitted as facts without being

⁷ بزّي، ميخائيل ججو، 2003 (1969). *بلدة تلكيف، ماضيها وحاضرها*. مشيغان: كنيسة مار يوسف الكلدانية (الموصل: مطبعة الجمهورية).

⁸ جمو، يوسف هرمز، 1993 (1937). *آثار نينوى أو تاريخ تلكيف*. مشيغان: المطبعة الشرقية (بغداد: مطبعة الأمة).

⁹ بلو، نوئيل قيا، 2003. *حوادث مهمة في تاريخ القوش الحديث*. مشيغان: البيغرا ديجتال.

adequately interrogated in subsequent scholarship on Chaldeans. For instance, Sengstock was the first to single out the village of Telkeif as the stronghold of Chaldeans in Iraq and the originary land of Chaldeans in America. She was also the first to characterize Chaldeans as a churchgoing people, family- and business-oriented.

Qais al-Nouri is another scholar who worked among the Chaldeans of Michigan during the 1960. His dissertation, *Conflict and Persistence in the Iraqi-Chaldean Acculturation* (1964), explored migrant Chaldeans from the perspective of communal persistence and conflict with regard to acculturation, an issue that was gaining momentum in the US during that decade. While the contemporary studies of Sengstock stressed the similarities between Chaldean migrant generations, al-Nouri emphasized “in-group conflict, segmentation, competitiveness, separation and like elements” (1964: xii). His critical assessment that focused primarily on revealing the interfamilial clashes did not gain the popularity among Chaldeans that Sengstock’s confirmatory accounts of Chaldean life had gained.

The 1970s witnessed another study on the Chaldeans of Michigan. Doctoroff’s dissertation, *The Chaldeans: A New Ethnic Group in Detroit’s Suburban High Schools* (1978), is an empirical study that focused specifically on surveying the academic performance of Chaldean high-school students. Subsequent studies of the Chaldeans of Michigan appeared in the late 1990s, conducted predominantly by scholars from Wayne State University in Detroit. Theresa Shikwan’s dissertation (1997) examined the relationship of the socioeconomic status of Chaldean parents and their children’s education, while Barbara Gallagher’s dissertation (1999) offered an ethnographic assessment of the experiences of Chaldean immigrant women, with an emphasis on the

issue of gender and the social role of the family. These scholars took a heuristic approach that examined Chaldeans within a sociological framework that does not interrogate the overarching inflections of history interpretation and their impact on Chaldean identities and subjectivities. With the exception of Gallagher's study which demonstrates ethnographic work among Chaldean women, other texts reveal a minimal engagement with contemporary human subjects on a meaningful level. Recent Chaldean immigrants who speak little English remain ignored or marginalized in these studies, while the Chaldean communities in Iraq remain completely out of the picture. These empirical investigations also do not seem to address Arabic and Chaldean sources or local community publications. Chaldean creative writings have also stayed out of the scope of the foregoing studies, which continue to focus on neatly delineated conceptions of society, such as the family, the ethnic business and the church.

Surveys such the Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS) conducted during the summer of 2003 by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR), and the Chaldean Household Survey from Walsh College and United Way, Michigan (2007), do offer data from communications with members of the community. Yet these surveys are detached, anonymous and oriented toward making broad generalizations to support or refute predetermined models of understanding socio-racial behaviors in the US. They cannot offer a discursive, historicized account of how Chaldean identities have evolved diachronically. Moreover, as I discuss in the conclusion, the results of these surveys exhibit quantitative discrepancies that make them unreliable.

In addition to studies on the contemporary Chaldeans in the US, a number of studies and reports featuring Chaldean refugee clusters in Jordan, Syria and Greece also

appeared in the aftermath of the first Gulf War. Studies such as *Iraqi Forced Migrants in Jordan: Conditions, Religious Networks, and the Smuggling Process* (Chatelard, 2002), *An Assessment of the Iraqi Community in Greece* (Wanche, 2004), *The Silent Treatment: Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan* (Human Rights Watch, 2006), and *Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon* (International Crisis Group, 2008) have all been informed by analytical frameworks couched in the fields of refugee or migration studies. While they provide useful time-sensitive characterizations of a set of immediate settlement problems faced by a specific section of refugees in specific locales, they contribute little towards understanding Chaldeans and their lives beyond recommendations of potential urgent solutions to their settlement problems.

To summarize, then, whether in Iraq, a transit country or the US, publications on the modern Chaldeans tend to be narrow in theoretical thoroughness, socio-historic scope, or ethnographic minutiae. If contrasted with scholarly works of the same tenor conducted on the modern Assyrians¹⁰—the second major Iraqi Christian minority a large segment of which has resettled in Chicago and its suburbs¹¹—one finds that the Chaldeans have not been studied sufficiently yet, although their size is at least twice as large as that of the Assyrian communities in Iraq and the US alike.

¹⁰ For example: John Joseph's excellent book, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East: Encounters with Western Christian Mission, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers* (2000); Madawi al-Rasheed's *Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London: The Construction of Ethnicity* (1998); and Fuat Deniz's *The Odyssey of a Minority: the Assyrian Example, and A Life Between Two Worlds* (1999).

VI. Methodology

Sources and Theoretical Frameworks

This project was carried out by means of an interdisciplinary approach that benefited from anthropological perspectives, cultural studies and sociology in combination with fieldwork among multigenerational Chaldean residents of southeast Michigan. Because I analyze a wide range of materials and phenomena that encompass different genres and time periods, there is no unified body of literature that deals squarely with the set of problems I tried to bring together from multiple disciplines and multilingual primary sources. I relied primarily on the analytical concepts that emerged from the primary sources themselves, to which I only applied theories sparingly when there was a need to test the validity of certain assumptions or to set expedient analytical frameworks.

My project draws on Arabic, English and French publications. These include European and American travelogues, church and community histories and historiographies, Chaldean periodicals and fiction, among other publications that appeared in Iraq, the United States or Europe. They date from the sixteenth century to the present. In Chapters Two, Three and Four, which set the historical backdrop of the development of the Chaldean identity, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century missionary periodicals, travelogues and archeological journals were consulted as primary sources, in addition to other European histories of Mesopotamia. In Chapter Four, I look particularly at the French and English literatures of the Roman Catholic Mission, the Jesuits, the Anglican and American Protestant Missions to retrace the earliest Western formulations of “Chaldeanness.”

Chapter Five, which deals with the transnational context of Chaldean life, relies upon personal testimonies from US-based Chaldeans and on textual materials and Internet sources from the websites of Chaldean-American institutions. The secondary sources that inform the discussion of this Chapter include Levitt and Schiller (2004), Schiller (1995), Bourdieu (1992) and Faist (1998, 2000). Chapter Six analyses six works of Chaldean fiction (Marshal Garmo, 2002; Deborah Najor, 1988, 1992; and Weam Namou 2004, 2006, 2008) from a perspective that relies on American ethnic studies, particularly that of Warner Sollors (1986, 1989).

In most chapters, but primarily in Chapter Seven, the conclusion, I look at Chaldean community periodicals, church newsletters, ads, and websites. The last two chapters are also guided by theoretical perspectives on diasporic subjectivity, collective formations, post-9/11 Arab studies such as the works of the Detroit Arab community ethnographer Andrew Shryock (2000, 2004), anthropologist Nadine Naber (2002, 2005, 2006) and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1991a, 1991b). Through insights offered in these scholars' works my project looked at the transformations in the discourses of Chaldean-American fiction, in periodicals and in other secular and religious community publications. In the concluding chapter, I relied as well upon recent trends in museum and archeology studies (Holloway, 2006; Larsen, 1996; Graham, Ashworth and John E., 2005) to bolster the discussion of the role played by monumental history in constructing a collective image of the modern Chaldeans for themselves and for outsiders.

Field Site

The ethnographic portion of the study was conducted among Chaldean and Assyrian groups in France, Syria, and Jordan, but predominantly in southeast Michigan, where 34,000-113,000 Chaldeans live (depending on the sources consulted). Southeast Michigan is home to the largest and most visible concentration of Chaldeans outside of the Middle East. In this location the Chaldean communities are also situated among the oldest and largest population of Arabs in North America, where most nationalities, religions and ethnicities from the Middle East are represented (Baker, et al., 2004). It is estimated that 58 per cent of the Middle Eastern population in Michigan is Christian, and that 35 per cent of this population is from Iraq. These figures place the Chaldean community as a majority within the Middle Eastern religious and ethnic population of the state. As a Christian group in Michigan, Chaldeans also experience belonging to the religious majority. This fact marks a significant contrast between the Chaldean communities in the US and those in Iraq and other Middle Eastern transit countries, where they have always been part of the religious minority.

Ethnographic Interviews

The methods I used to interact with my informants and their environs were open interviews, group interviews, family interviews, and participant observation. The collection of the empirical data in the fieldwork was carried out between 2004 and 2008. All the interviews were recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed. If the interviews were in Arabic, I transcribed and then translated them to English. The latter is what appears in my text citations.

The analysis was based on these transcribed interviews as well as on formal or informal follow-up conversations and email exchanges with the informants, their friends, family and referrals, and on observations made during social and cultural events or religious ceremonies. During the course of my fieldwork, about 70 individuals and 12 institutions contributed to my data collection. The informants were first- and second-generation Chaldean men and women whose ages ranged between 14 and 82. However, they are not equally represented in the overall analysis of this dissertation. The intention was to let the informants tell their life stories in an open-ended fashion in order to understand the ways in which they construct their personal and collective identities, and the ways in which they relate to the overarching Chaldean majority. Since some revealed more interest in articulating these issues, their contributions received more space in the study.

Ethics and Methodological Limitations

All informants appear in my dissertation under pseudonyms, unless the information they provided is cited from a published text or the informants had expressed a desire to reveal their real identities. Sometimes other personal details have been slightly modified or omitted to ensure the anonymity of the informants. First priority has been given to the interests and safety of the informants, many of who expressed concern over their personal or family “name” or “reputation” in what some of them characterized as a “heteronormative, conservative Chaldean community” in southeast Michigan. Before the initiation of each field observation or ethnographic interview all the informants, or their

parents if they were minors, gave their written consent to the anonymous use of the interview data for publication of the final results.

There was a chief methodological concern underlying this research. As a migrant Chaldean in the diaspora of southeast Michigan, I had a lot in common with many of the individuals I spoke with for my project. Due to this shared past or present, the boundary between professionalism and familiarity was constantly shifting. Echoing debates on ethnographic authority, so often the subject of native anthropologists' concern, (Naber 2002; Ghorashi: 2003, 2007), I was constantly self-conscious about the power relations attending to the production of (auto)biographical ethnographic texts. I had to pay attention to my own role in the production of narrative data and the representation of lived experience as text. In this manner, I continually had to keep reshaping the boundary of my insider/outsider relationship with my informants. In most situations it was best not to conceal my position both as a Chaldean who has participated in the interactions of the community as an insider, and as a researcher who did not subscribe to some fixed notions of Chaldeanness. Interestingly, within this area of tension, I was in fact speaking to a wide range of Chaldean individuals some of who were more willing to share information based on assumptions of our common points of cultural confluence, and to others who were more careful *not* to express their viewpoints based on the selfsame assumptions.

VII. Chapter Outline

I divide the remainder of my dissertation into six chapters. In each of them I consider different representational modes of Chaldeanness. The first three chapters reconstruct the historical backdrop of the evolution of the dominant version of modern Chaldean identity, which involved external agency, while the discussion in the remaining three

chapters focuses on the identity articulations and inner power dynamics of communities and individuals who identify themselves as Chaldeans today. Together these six chapters will be organized as follows.

Chapter Two, *On the Politics of Appellation: the Case of “Who are the Chaldeans?”* examines recent identity debates within the Chaldean and Assyrian communities and retraces their historical origins and political or religious motivations. The objective of this section is to show that different notions and beliefs about descent, appropriate identity labels, social definitions and interpretations of the past were in conflict with each other since the earliest recorded usage of the appellation Chaldean in modern history.

The concepts in Chapter Two appear in two main sections. *Section I* outlines the pre-Christian context of the ancient Chaldeans and Assyrians, to point out the origins of the monumental imagery from which the modern groups draw their associations and symbolic affiliations with the past. *Section II* looks at the Christian contexts responsible for the complex evolution of the appellations “Chaldean” and “Nestorian” and their interchangeable use in ecclesiastical contexts until a splinter group reaccepted the authority of Rome in 1551, which eventually also gave rise to the appellation “Assyrian” in the nineteenth century in reference to those remaining followers of the Church of the East who refused communion with the Catholic Church.

The chapter retraces the origins of the appellations “Chaldean,” “Nestorian,” “Aramean” and “Assyrian,” demarcates the historical periods or events during which the labels overlapped or diverged, and attempts to link these historical beginnings of the four appellations to the contemporary public debates about Chaldean and Assyrian identities.

The objective of this Chapter is to reveal the complexity, instability and confusion that accompanied the construction of the Chaldean appellation during different points of its formative history. It seeks to do so by demonstrating how the term was often appropriated for various religious, social or political benefits rather than being linearly transmitted through a bloodline or religious doctrine.

As a chronological continuation of Chapter Two, Chapter Three, *Contact with the West: the Missionary Enterprise in Mesopotamia*, continues to probe nineteenth-century missionary publications, among other literary sources from the period, to underscore one of two critical contacts between the local Christians of Mesopotamia and the West that took place in the nineteenth century. This is the encounter with the American Protestant Mission, the Mission of the Church of England, and the reinforcements of the Papal missions in Mesopotamia. The chapter examines how these missions fostered new associations between the enclaves of Christians among whom they proselytized or worked in Mesopotamia and the ancient Chaldeans and Assyrians whom they knew through Biblical accounts.

The Catholic mission is analyzed in its capacity to inaugurate Chaldeanness in official religious discourses and to fortify the position of the Chaldeans, as a *dhimmi* minority, within the Islamic Ottoman state. The Anglican mission is examined to discuss the notion of “discovery,” whereby mountaineer communities of Eastern Christians came to the attention of the missionaries as “primitive” enclaves of “protectors” of “pure” faith. It also traces the historical events that resulted in bestowing the Christian mountaineer communities with the Assyrian title. The discussion of the American Protestant mission demonstrates how this encounter with the West resulted in the consolidation of “Biblical

Syriac.” The last mission among the Eastern Christians to be discussed in this chapter is that of the Church of Tsarist Russia, which deemed itself the guardian of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter traces the shift from sectarianism to ecumenism that changed the shape of the missionary enterprise in Mesopotamia during the twentieth century and brought together the two schismatic Churches of the Chaldeans and the Assyrians in historic “Consultations” toward the end of the century. The aim of this Chapter is to show how Christian missionary enterprises contributed to reshaping both the modern Assyrian and Chaldean identities. With both groups claiming to be speakers of the “language of Christ” today, this Chapter seeks to establish the earliest missionary foundations of this assertion.

Chapter Four, *Victorian Chaldeans: the Modern History of Ancient Chaldean History*, interrogates the second critical encounter between the Christians of Mesopotamia and the West, namely, the French and British archeological missions of the mid-nineteenth century. The chapter examines these missions and their groundbreaking discoveries of the sites of ancient Assyria and Babylonia in order to situate the formative years of the ancient-new Chaldean and Assyrian identities within the parallel context of the significant cultural transformations that were taking shape in European societies during the Victorian era. In this Chapter, I am concerned with the ways in which these excavations aroused popular, literary and institutional interest in contemporary Christian Mesopotamian communities among the European publics who construed them as the purported continuation of the ancient empires that were being uncovered and displayed in the Louvre and the British Museum.

Through an examination of the writing of some of the pioneer archeologists, such as Austen Henry Layard, Emil Botta and a number of their contemporaries, the chapter discerns the threefold task the Victorian context predicated upon these pioneer excavators of Assyria and Babylonia; namely: 1) to search for the very beginning of history, or *firstness* 2) to establish a link between (European) modernity and the ancient civilizations represented by these ruins, and 3) to dissociate the local Muslim Arabs, the majority of Mesopotamia's contemporary inhabitants, from their land's antiquity. In the course of contextualizing each of these ideological developments, the chapter examines the encounters of two influential Mesopotamian Christians with Western culture *in the West*. These are the Assyriologist Hormuzd Rassam, Layard's field apprentice and assistant, and Maria Theresa Asmar, the author of *Memoirs of a Babylonian Princess* (1844), the text where the earliest native articulations of ancient-new identity appear.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to view Chaldeans and Assyrians' refurbished understanding of themselves in light of the Victorian conception of the triangular correlation "Mesopotamian Antiquity – the Bible – Contemporary Chaldeans/Assyrians," which, I argue, surfaced inevitably in the European public imagination and was transported back to the native representatives of this corollary.

After Chapters Two, Three and Four chart the key cultural transformations that yielded and reinforced Chaldean identity prior to the contemporary context, Chapter Five, *Conceptualizing Chaldean Action: a Transnational Social Field Perspective*, moves to the present context to synchronically examine the Chaldeans as an ethno-religious minority with active multi-national affiliations. Specifically, the chapter is concerned with the question of Chaldeans' transnational identity as a diasporic community in the

United States. Instead of examining the US-based Chaldeans as a transnational community, the Chapter adopts a transnational social field perspective to examine the particular social and conceptual locales where transnational activity is situationally enacted. The traditional identification sites of the family, church and coethnic institutional networks are examined here in their overlapping capacity as transnational social fields. Through this framework the chapter then examines the US-based Chaldean community in light of undertakings such as the ethnic business, transnational marriages and religious networking. It also examines the community in light of political projects such as voting in the Iraqi elections, the Nineveh Plain Settlement for Christians in Iraq, and the campaign to change US immigration policies to provide a special asylum category for Chaldean refugees.

Through an examination of the transnational projects listed above, the chapter underscores the transnational life of the US-based Chaldean community and also stages the emergence of an elite Chaldean class capable of marshaling its resources and networking successfully on the local level to publicize and carry out large-scale projects on the global level. The discussion also highlights the emergence of a body of “culture-makers” among these elite. These culture-makers, as Chapters Six and Seven emphasize, are the main producers of the official, publicly-authoritative versions of “who the Chaldeans are.”

Chapter Six, *Representations in Fiction/Fiction in Representations: Enacting Chaldeanness*, explores the ways a nascent body of Chaldean fiction negotiates identity. It takes six recent works by Chaldean-American authors as the basis for analysis (Marshal Garmo, 2002; Deborah Najor, 1988, 1992; and Weam Namou 2004, 2006,

2008). As unofficial, contesting and contestable articulations of Chaldeanness, these works are examined as a cultural development that offsets, but also reinforces, the official communal discourses perpetuated by Chaldean culture-makers.

While the previous chapters examine the multiple formations that converge to make the collective, standardized version of “who the Chaldeans are,” this chapter examines individual articulations of the communal, and the tensions that they engender between individual Chaldeans’ understanding of self and the identities they feel imposed upon them by an overarching communal Chaldean authority. The discussion is prompted by the following questions: a) are there countervailing expressions of what it means to be Chaldean? b) Are there alternative conceptual spaces where individual Chaldeans express their identities and articulate communal identities differently from the official public version? And, c) how does the diasporic emergence of a Chaldean literature negotiate the US-based Chaldeans’ identity as an American ethnic group? This Chapter engages these questions to demonstrate that Chaldean fiction in its present state both perpetuates and protests representational fixities that dominate the official narrative of Chaldeanness.

Finally, Chapter Seven, *Center and Peripheries of Chaldeanness in The Age of (Re)Invented Ethnicity*, concludes the dissertation by bringing together all the identity components that go into the making of the present official version of “who the Chaldeans are,” recapitulates their historical origins, and details the omissions that result in the process of unifying and stabilizing communal identity into an official public narrative. To illustrate these omissions, the conclusion draws from testimonies of individuals and groups who consider their identifications problematic or peripheral to the official prerequisites of Chaldeanness. The aim behind this parallel presentation of central and

peripheral modes of Chaldeanness is to accentuate the power dynamics that animate the US-based Chaldean collective and inflect it with the manifold shades of Chaldeanness it exhibits publicly and negotiates privately today.

Chapter Two

On the Politics of Appellation: the Case of “Who are the Chaldeans?”

Any Chaldean who calls himself Assyrian is a traitor, and any Assyrian who calls himself Chaldean is a traitor.

Emmanuel Dally,
Chaldean Patriarch of Babylonia
2006

Introduction

Disputes, negotiations and resolutions regarding the representatively “accurate” appellation are not confined to the above statement made recently by the Chaldean Patriarch. They dot the diasporic history of the Chaldean and the Assyrian communities throughout the twentieth century, and have found their way into various contemporary religious and political discourses. What accounts for this contentious history?

“One name [Assyrian] for one nation, one language for one nation, one leadership for one nation, and a homeland for our nation” was the slogan with which the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) summarized its nationalist ideology in 1968 during its first congress convention in Pau, France (AUA official web page). In addition to those who identified as Assyrian, the “one nation” envisioned by the AUA also subsumed individuals and communities who otherwise identified as Nestorian, Chaldean, Jacobite, Aramean or Telkeifi, among other identifications.¹² What these groups have in common

¹² For a detailed analysis of the propensity to categorize the Assyrians as a “nation” that subsumes other denominational titles, see Andrea Irene Laing-Marshall’s dissertation (2001), *Modern Assyrian Identity and the Church of the East: An Exploration of Their Relationship and the Rise of Assyrian Nationalism, from the World Wars to 1980*. Toronto: University of St. Michael’s College.

is 1) a claim to the Aramaic language, 2) a distinct Christian liturgy, and 3) a place of origin in contiguous or overlapping regions of historical Mesopotamia.

In 1998 officials from the AUA and the Assyrian American National Federation (AANF) attended a meeting organized in Detroit by the Chaldean Federation of America (CFA) where diaspora Assyrian and Chaldean nationalists unanimously agreed that the former official US Census designation “Assyrian”—which encompassed individuals and groups who otherwise identified with one or more of the aforesaid titles—be changed to “Chaldean-Assyrian”.¹³

While satisfactory to the participating officials, the proposed hyphenated appellation generated unfavorable responses among some other groups of Chaldeans and Assyrians. Less than one month after the “Chaldean-Assyrian” title was proposed, the influential online Assyrian magazine “Zinda” responded in a provocative article that argued against the new name claiming that it excluded Assyrians who did not affiliate with the Chaldean Catholic Church, and that identifying Assyrians in the US as Chaldean-Assyrian was “against our [Assyrian] century-old political and cultural progress made toward a decisive ethno-linguistic victory.” The article concluded its arguments by affirming that the “only initiative must be to enumerate nearly half a million *Assyrians*, both *Chaldean and non-Chaldean* [emphasis added], in the 2000 census” (Zinda Magazine, 1998 March 9).

In the context of the fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003, and employing an oppositional agenda, the Chaldean National Congress (CNC) and the United Chaldean Democratic Party (UCDP) issued a joint press release protesting the lack of Chaldean

¹³ “ChaldoAssyrian” was also the term agreed upon as a national designation in a Baghdad Conference in October of 2003, sponsored by numerous political bodies and organizations. (Dekelaita, 2004, April 30).

representatives in the Temporary Iraqi Ruling Council. California-based Ghassan Shathaya, General Secretary of the CNC, promised a major campaign inside and outside Iraq to “protest the injustice against the Chaldeans.” With the assertion that the Chaldeans constitute more than 80% of the Christian population in Iraq, Shathaya categorically rejected any claims by any other group, including the Assyrians, to represent them. His conclusive demand was, “Chaldeans must be represented by Chaldeans and no one else.”¹⁴

That same year the California-based Chaldean bishop Sarhad Jammo joined the nationalist efforts of the CNC and the UCDP by formalizing a religiously colored Chaldean separatist pronouncement. At the same time a letter was sent to Paul Bremer, the Civil Administrator of Iraq at the time. Drafted through the Chaldean Patriarchate and cosigned by a group of Chaldean bishops, the letter petitioned for greater inclusion not only of the Chaldean people, but also of the Chaldean Church in the emerging Iraqi Council. It argued that the Chaldeans comprised 75% of the Christians in Iraq and constituted a distinct ethnicity from the Assyrians. Subsuming the Chaldean people under the Assyrian category was, according to Bishop Jammo and his cosigners, “an injustice against our people, for which we protest here explicitly and insistently.”¹⁵

Implications

The disputes of 1968, 1998 and 2003 outlined above represent three of a handful of ways the appellation confusion manifests itself today. The confusion and contentiousness they

¹⁴ “Chaldean National Congress Demands Inclusion of Chaldeans in Iraq’s Leadership Council.” http://www.chaldeansonline.net/chaldeanews/iraq_council.html

“Chaldean Groups Protest Lack of Chaldean Representation in Iraqi Ruling Council.” http://www.chaldeansonline.net/chaldeanews/cnc_cdu.html

¹⁵ “Chaldean Bishops’ Letter Undermines National Unity.” (2003, June 10). AINA, <http://www.aina.org/releases/iraqbishops.html>

reveal can be traced back to previous centuries. A host of church documents, annals and history books reveal that until a splinter group joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1552, the Chaldean and Assyrian Christians constituted a single Mesopotamian ethno-religious group, the Apostolic Church of the East (Baum & Winkler, 2003), that sometimes also adopted the appellation “Nestorian” in its formal interactions with foreign powers and outsiders to the community.

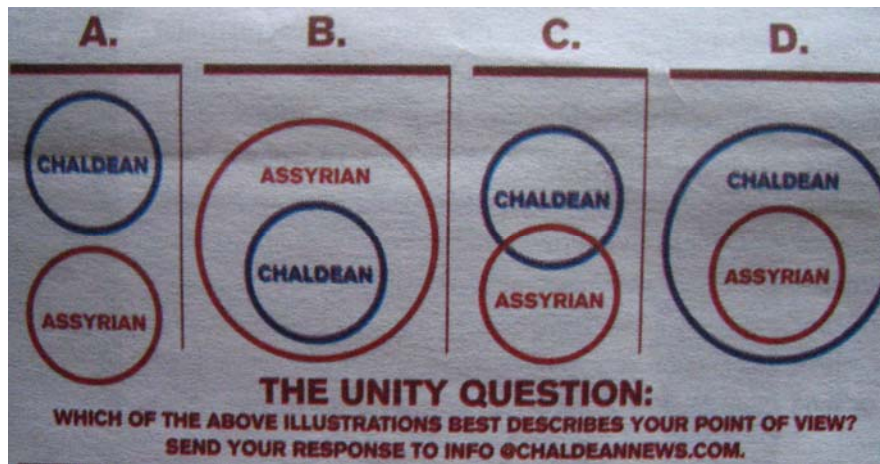


Figure 1. Visual illustration of the current four major Chaldean/Assyrian identity debates. “All One People? Will – and should – Chaldeans and Assyrians Unite?” *Chaldean News* 4:6: 2007, p. 28. Caption: “THE UNITY QUESTION: WHICH OF THE ABOVE ILLUSTRATIONS BEST DESCRIBES YOUR POINT OF VIEW? SEND YOUR RESPONSE TO INFO@CHALDEANNEWS.COM”

The revival of ancient identities—Chaldean and Assyrian—generated lasting disputes between their appropriators. “Eastern”, “Syrian”, “Nestorians”, “Chaldeans”, and “Assyrians” are terms that were used interchangeably prior to the First World War depending on the political or religious preference. However, Mesopotamian Christians who remained in what came to constitute the Iraqi nation-state of the twentieth century (founded 1921) underwent various political and social pressures to confine the Chaldean, Assyrian and Nestorian appellations to the religious context and adopt the Iraqi identity as an ethnonym. For this reason, among others, the debate over choosing the right

appellation continued to cause a major confusion, but mainly in the Western Diaspora (Joseph, 2000:xiii).

While some modern political and religious diasporic groups try to bolster certain images of separate or unified Chaldeans and Assyrians, others emerge to challenge these identity assumptions. “Was it the general will of our people to seek a single name, purpose, and leadership or did you wish that upon them instead?” a new generation of European-Assyrians—with leftist political agendas focusing on individual liberty, democratic reforms and gender and minority issues—challenged the founders of the AUA in a recent congress convention in Europe (“What if I am Not Chaldean-Assyrian?” 1998, March 9).

Aside from their current sociopolitical driving forces, these identity assertions and counter-assertions have their origins in sixteenth- and nineteenth-century events. Part of what this Chapter seeks to establish are the motivations and powers that have historically sanctioned Chaldean and Assyrian individuals and institutions to make identity assertions on behalf of entire communities even as these communities became spread over five different continents, speaking a wide array of languages and affiliating or disaffiliating with various denominations of the Christian Church. Later Chapters will look at how new generations of Diaspora Chaldeans and Assyrians deal with such collective identity assertions through creative writing and other practices.

This Chapter also seeks to fulfill another purpose. One of the factors that have perpetuated the dispute over the identity label has to do with the ambiguity and complexity of the history that envelops the ethnic link between the ancient Assyrians and Chaldeans and the modern communities that have adopted their names. The dearth of

knowledge about the exact historical origins of the modern Chaldeans and Assyrians has empowered individuals with particular nationalist or religious inclinations to employ the Chaldean and Assyrian appellations in ways that are consonant with their agendas. This Chapter aims to locate the links, or missing links, between the ancient and modern Assyrians and Chaldeans. It retraces the occurrences of the appellations “Chaldean,” “Nestorian” and “Assyrian” in pre-twentieth century texts, and punctuates the historical periods or events during which the names overlapped or diverged up until the present context. Three questions direct the inquiry into the appellation dispute:

- 1) How did the name “Assyrian” become attached to a Church that materialized in 431AD, when the last—needless to say *non-Christian*—Assyrian kingdom began to dissolve in 612BC? That is, who are the modern Assyrians, who today affiliate with the “Assyrian Church of the East,” in relation to the ancient Assyrians from whom they claim descent?
- 2) What is the relationship between the ancient Chaldeans of southern Mesopotamia and the modern Catholic Chaldeans of the Nineveh Plains and Detroit suburbs, followers of the “Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans”?
- 3) How are ancient and modern Chaldeans and Assyrians related or unrelated to each other? That is, how did the “Nestorian” appellation that used to apply to both groups fall out of use, and how did its former holders become the ancient-turned-modern Chaldeans and Assyrians?

Nineteenth-century travelogues, missionary heralds and journals of archeology offer partial answers to these three questions. These answers, together with the statements obtained through a selection of contemporary local histories and personal testimonies,

address the question “Who Are the Chaldeans?” and render it less problematic, albeit revealing multiple layers of its complexity.

The next Chapter will discuss foreign missions in nineteenth-century Mesopotamia, while the ensuing discussion in this Chapter will outline the Pre-Christian and the Christian contexts that formed the conceptual backdrop against which nineteenth-century missionaries and excavators of antiquity perceived the modern Chaldeans and Assyrians upon their arrival in Mesopotamia. This Chapter will also link these ancient contexts to the identity debates among contemporary Chaldeans and Assyrians to be examined in the next Chapter.

I. Chaldeans and Assyrians: the Pre-Christian Context Ancient Assyrians¹⁶

Popular encyclopedic sources¹⁷—and less straightforwardly the Old Testament¹⁸—concur that the term “Assyrian” refers to the various, mostly Semitic, ethnic groups that occupied the region on the Upper Tigris River, or Assyria, or Assur, until the fall of Nineveh to the combined forces of Medes and Babylonians in 612BC. On the other hand, academics prefer to use the term “Assyrian” to refer to a language rather than an ethnicity. Similarly, the term “Semitic” is used outside of the popular context to refer to a family of languages, not ethnic groups.

¹⁶ See Appendix B for a chart of the various appellations and languages that will be discussed in this Chapter.

¹⁷ See for instance: *Wikipedia*, *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Encarta*.

¹⁸ Fifteen books in the Old Testament contain direct reference to the Chaldeans and the Assyrians, while the Arameans are mentioned sixty-two times, and the Aramaic language or script twelve times. The chronology of the events and succession of kingdoms found in the Bible differ significantly from the Chaldean and Assyrian chronologies handed down by Greek historians such as Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus. This discrepancy between the two ancient sources was one of the causes behind the confusion encountered by the first English and French men who attempted to decipher the Assyrian cuneiform script in the mid-nineteenth century (Larsen, 1996: 166-172).

Roughly since the third millennium BC, popular sources hold, Assyrian forces had spread out to form an empire that came to include the northern half of Mesopotamia, the southern portion of which was Babylonia. The Assyrian kings reigned over various ethnic groups and controlled a large kingdom at three different periods in history. These are called the Old, Middle, and Neo-Assyrian kingdoms. Academic sources, on the other hand, hold that it is the Assyrian language that is divided into Old Assyrian, Middle Assyrian, and Neo-Assyrian, and that there was no Old Assyrian kingdom. Also according to these sources, there was no Assyrian empire before the first millennium B.C. Assyria was the northern part of Mesopotamia while Babylonia the southern part.

Ancient Chaldeans

Popular sources also refer to the ancient Chaldeans as semi-nomadic tribes that settled in Southern Mesopotamia in the early part of the first millennium BC. Chaldeans appear in texts as early as the ninth century BC, yet their names could also be considered Babylonian ones. Chaldeans were the dominant ethnic group in that area during the eighth and seventh centuries BC. The Chaldean dynasty, the last of the Babylonian dynasties, assumed power after the fall of the Assyrian Kingdom in 612 BC, and until the Persian invasion of 539 BC.

The town of Ur Kaśdim (traditionally rendered in English as “Ur of the Chaldees”) is presented in the Hebrew Bible, Old Testament and other related literature as the birthplace of Abraham (see Genesis 11:28, 11:31, 15:7; Nehemiah 9:7; Jubilees 11:3). Although traditional sources such as Josephus and Maimonides locate Ur Kaśdim in northern Mesopotamia, early twentieth-century archeology identified the place with

the Sumerian city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia, which was under the rule of the Chaldeans. “Chaldea proper” writes Shak Hanish (2008: 34), “was the vast plain in the south, though the name came to be commonly used later to refer to the whole of Mesopotamia.”

Early Linguistic Context

While the early Assyrians spoke what came to be known as Akkadian or Old Assyrian, evidence suggests that the contemporaneous Chaldean tribes mainly spoke a dialectal subset of the same language. Their dialect came to be known as “Babylonian” in reference to the Babylonian region these Chaldean tribes populated (Shathaya, 2001b:3). Around 2000 BC, Akkadian, with its Assyrian and Babylonian dialects, was the *lingua franca* of Mesopotamia. One millennium later, Aramaic began competing with and absorbing Akkadian (Hanish, 2008:34). By the mid-eighth century BC, both Chaldeans and Assyrians were speaking Aramaic, whose relatively advanced Phoenician-based writing system was introduced by the Arameans, another Semitic, semi-nomadic and pastoral people who originated and populated Upper Mesopotamia after 1100 BC. Aramaic was made the second official language of the Assyrian Empire in 752 BC. It eventually supplanted the Akkadian that had been spoken among the Chaldeans and Assyrians at an earlier point, and it gained the status of a *lingua franca* among the various ethnic groups within the Assyrian Empire, as well as in most of the Near East and Egypt.

From a *lingua franca* Aramaic mushroomed into an array of dialects, some mutually intelligible and some not. They were roughly classified into *Western* and *Eastern* dialects according to their geographical location in relation to the Euphrates

River. Of these dialects one gained a particularly prestigious status later. It came to be known as “Biblical Aramaic” in relation to the sections of the biblical books of Daniel and Ezra—along with the Talmud—that were written in this dialect. Another variety of Aramaic was believed to be the mother tongue of Jesus as well as the language of the New Testament. As the Eastern Rite Christian communities, with the help of the Western missionaries, began to introduce the Syriac Alphabet as a writing system for Aramaic, the Aramaic variety they spoke eventually came to be known as “Neo-Syriac.”¹⁹

A number of Aramaic—or Syriac—dialects died out, while a few transformed and survived. Those that are spoken by contemporary Assyrians and Chaldeans are known interchangeably as “Neo-Aramaic” and “Neo-Syriac”—*Sūreth* in the native tongue.²⁰ Later on, in Chapter Three, we will consider the role of the Christian missions of the nineteenth century in reviving Biblical Aramaic and consolidating the living Aramaic dialects through providing a writing system, a printing press and new font types.

Assyrian and Chaldean Continuity?

The heated appellation dispute among contemporary Chaldean and Assyrian nationalists does not revolve around the question of whether or not the ancient Assyrians and Chaldeans survived. There is no proof that the ancient Assyrian and Chaldean populations vanished after the fall of the Empire in the seventh century BC, and no one disputes the assumption that some indigenous population or populations continued. The survival of some versions of the Aramaic language attest to that, as does the fact that

¹⁹ A chronological classification and a chart of the alphabets representing the subsets of the “Syriac Language” can be found in Ramond Le Coz (1995). *Histoire de l’Eglise d’Orient: Chrétiens d’Irak, d’Iran et de Turquie*. Paris: édition du Cerf, 107-110.

²⁰ See Appendix B for the various communal titles and the languages associated with them.

Mesopotamia continued to be populated throughout the centuries that followed the destruction of Nineveh.

Rather, the current oppositional debates center upon discourses of *monumental* history,²¹ a history from the point of which the present is the last link in a chain that unites kindred humans across the millennia. As we shall see through a number of examples in this dissertation, monumental history as portrayed and preserved by contemporary Chaldeans also exhibits an *a-historical*, if not an *anti-historical*, quality that compensates for the missing continuity in the community's ethnic or national history through magnifying, inventing or distorting certain elements in the official version of the group's collective history.

Contemporary Chaldean and Assyrian discourses that draw from *monumental* history appropriate the past in terms of a) *power*: in this case, was it the Chaldeans or the Assyrians who invented artifacts, ruled the other ethnic groups the longest, instated a particular doctrine, language, built certain monuments, etc.?; b) *first-ness*: was it the Chaldeans or the Assyrians who are racially older, had settled in the region first, had introduced certain features to the region and its people first, were the predecessors of other ethnic or linguistic groups, etc.?; and c) *last-ness*: was it the Assyrians or the Chaldeans who supplanted the other groups, survived the fall of the Assyrian Empire, preserved a language, an ethnicity and a culture, etc.?

It is most likely that the Assyrians and the Chaldeans were assimilated into the mainstream Aramean culture after having adopted the Aramaic language, although no

²¹ In 1874 Friedrich Nietzsche distinguished between *monumental*, *antiquarian* and *critical* history in his essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." He argued that people who seek to "do something great," preserve or revere their cultures in the present revert to history as a monument, a reconstructed past that deceives by analogies and seduces with the similarities that inspire fanaticism.

textual evidence attests to this concretely. We have a record of a recurring pattern of assimilation in Mesopotamia, before and after the Assyrians. The Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, and Hurrians had all merged into the other dominating cultures when their empires declined. According to Georges Roux, a historian of ancient Iraq, the ancient Assyrians culturally “disappeared” when they forgot their Akkadian mother tongue, and a “nation which forgets its language forgets its past and soon loses its identity” (Roux, 1964). The same can be said of the contemporaneous Chaldeans, and also of the other ethnic groups that populated the area during that period, including the Arameans whose culture and language were being transformed by the other ethnic groups that adopted them.

We can safely assume that a hybrid culture evolved in Mesopotamia after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. This culture retained certain Assyrian and Chaldean features. It is from these features that modern Chaldeans and Assyrians are selectively drawing to craft distinct identity narratives of power, firstness and lastness.

One of a handful of innovative racial interpretations of ancient Mesopotamian history is that of Detroit-based historian Amer Fatuhi. His major publication, bearing the title *Chaldeans Since the Early Beginning of Time*, was self-published and locally promoted through the showcases of most Chaldean Churches in Michigan. In this book and in numerous articles Fatuhi repeatedly argues that Chaldeans are the only indigenous people of ancient Iraq, and hence its *first* inhabitants. Moreover, he argues that the Chaldean appellation “ethnically and nationally” unified all the inhabitants of the region despite their racial differences, and therefore was the most prominent (Fatuhi, 2004:14, 15, 21). Such identity construction evades the arguments against the survival of a

Chaldean identity. Chaldean identity per Fatuhi's definitions, which set "Chaldean" as the umbrella term that unified the original inhabitants of Mesopotamia despite variations in ethnicity or nationality, is the only identity that could have survived the blurring of racial lines and the collapse of the administrative units after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. As such it is one about the *firstness* and *lastness* of the Chaldean identity.

In contrast with Fatuhi who labors to raise the status of the Chaldean identity to the rank of an umbrella ethno-national identity that encompassed all other racial groups, some Assyrian nationalists try to single out the Assyrian identity as distinct, continuous and culturally superior, albeit at the expense of misinterpreting or dismissing extant information that is at variance with their statements. Assyrian Edward Odisho, professor at Northeastern Illinois University, for instance, selectively interprets Roux's text in his publication *The Sound System of Modern Assyrian (Neo-Aramaic)*. He cites Roux's statement that "Assyria was literally resurrected" during the Parthian period (ca.129 BC-224 AD) (Roux, 1964). Odisho exploits this statement in order to elaborate on how a "strong native Assyrian aristocracy" carried out this resurrection by rebuilding Assyria anew, while completely brushing aside Roux's overarching argument that no Assyrian involvement was noted in the reoccupation and reconstruction of the towns and villages that "had been lying in ruins for hundreds of years" prior to the Parthian period. Odisho also takes no note of Roux's emphasis on the contrast between the revived settlements in the Nineveh Plains and their Assyrian and Babylonian antecedents.²²

Yet arguments diverge and complicate one another as other Chaldean and Assyrian nationalists attempt to neutralize the discourses of power and firstness in an attempt to consolidate the two appellations in a hyphenated or hybrid new title, usually

²² A more detailed account of Odisho and Roux's arguments can be found in Joseph, 2000:28-9.

with the aim to create a larger unified *lastness* (i.e., the ancient line, *our* line, survived, irrespective of which group had historically supplanted the other) based on a discourse that I shall dub *size-for-power*, viz., the assumption that the larger and the more continuous the imagined community is, the more likely it would be perceived as socially, culturally and politically powerful.

General Secretary of the Chaldean National Congress Ghassan Shathaya, for example, argues that the origin of the Assyrians as a racial group is obscure. He does so in order to advance the hypothesis that they were either an offshoot of the Semitic Babylonians, like the Chaldeans, or coexisted with them during the same period, thus undermining the possibility of an argument of *firstness* on behalf of the Assyrians (Shathaya, Ibid, 4). Although politically Shathaya argues for an autonomous Chaldean self-rule in Iraq as was touched upon in the beginning of this Chapter, Shathaya creates a neutral zone of Chaldean and Assyrian power and lastness in an attempt to ethnically consolidate the two groups in the US (Shathaya, Ibid, 8):

The Chaldean as well as Assyrian names have been used by our people interchangeably to indicate the last native Mesopotamian Empire, that of the Chaldeans, as well as the longest running Empire, that of the Assyrians. We all should be proud of both those names.

The examples of Shathaya, Fatuhi and Odisho characterize three persistent trends in contemporary Chaldean vs. Assyrian appellation debates. Later chapters will reveal the imminent political agendas that mobilize erratic appellation discourses among Chaldeans and Assyrians. Generally speaking, Assyrian and Chaldean propagandists have both exploited the ambiguity inherent in the ethnic continuity and contiguity of post-Assyrian-Empire Mesopotamians. These examples suggest the hybrid evolution of the Assyrians

and the Chaldeans, their gradually diversified cultures and their adopted Aramaic language.

So far the discussion has focused on the pre-Christian Assyrians and Chaldeans and their place in contemporary identity discourses. Seven centuries after the fall of Nineveh, these hybrid Aramaic-speaking settlers of Mesopotamia who were beginning to mingle culturally and politically were further unified by a common religion, Christianity (Joseph, *Ibid*, 30). What follows is an examination of how the incorporation of Christianity— with its immense confessional convolutions—as a decisive component of the group’s communal identity, has augmented the identity disputes among modern Chaldeans and Assyrians.

II. Nestorians, Chaldeans and Assyrians: the Early Christian Context

Of the five major groups that comprise the Christian minorities of the modern Middle East, the Chaldean Uniates (converts to Roman Catholicism, later known as “Chaldeans”) and the Nestorians (followers of the Church of the East, later known as “Assyrians”) are the subject of this section’s discussion.²³ The term “Uniate” refers to the six Eastern Churches who were excommunicated or deemed heretical by Papal Rome on separate occasions, but who at some point abjured the schismatic doctrines and accepted Papal supremacy with regard to Christological issues. Thus, the Nestorians of the nineteenth century were *not* Uniates because they did not join the Church of Rome, whereas the Chaldeans were Uniates by virtue of being converts from Nestorianism to Roman Catholicism. Not only did the Chaldeans become Uniates when they converted to Catholicism, but this is precisely how their titular transformation from merely “Eastern

²³ See Hourani’s classification in 1947:4-6; and Ellis, 1987:201.

Christians” or pejoratively “Nestorians” to a prestigious, legacy-laden “Chaldeans” was effected. We will look at the details of this conversion briefly.

The notion of “rite” also developed around the Uniate groups, to the effect that each of these rites formed part of the mother church in Rome, but was allowed patriarchic and liturgical autonomy. These rites, such as the Chaldean rite, were formerly under the central jurisdiction of the “Congregation de Propaganda Fide,” and are currently under that of “Eastern Congregation.” Today, the only Uniate rite with a noticeable presence in Iraq is the Chaldean Rite. According to contemporary nationalist and religious Chaldean publicity, Chaldeans have constituted the largest group of Iraqi Christians ever since the East Syrian schism with Rome in 431 AD.

When the American and English missionaries and the pioneer excavators arrived in Mesopotamia in the first third of the nineteenth century, they encountered three representatives of the Church of the East: the Jacobites,²⁴ the Nestorians and the Chaldeans. In particular contexts all of these three groups used the title “Syrian Christians” to refer to themselves, but applied the other titles to differentiate their filiations in more formal settings. The title “Assyrian” as a referent to a living group of Mesopotamian Christians had not been coined yet. Much later it came to replace the term “Nestorian.” Nonetheless, the appellation disputes were already set in motion before this coinage due to the interchangeable use of the other titles.

Both terms, Chaldean and Nestorian, originated in convoluted contexts. To complicate matters, the groups that adopted these appellations converged, overlapped or

²⁴ Also known in English as “Syrians” and “West Syrian Orthodox”. In Arabic they are known as “Ya‘aqibah”, or “Siryān Orthodox”, in contrast with the “Siryān Catholic”. The Jacobites are one of three Monophysite groups who formulated a doctrinal reaction against Nestorianism and continued to uphold their orthodoxy in relating to the Roman Catholic Church.

divided among themselves at various historical periods and geographical locations, and over a number of doctrinal and political issues. Following is a sketch of how they roughly evolved.

The Nestorians

“Nestorius,” wrote Aubrey Russell Vine of the Anglican Church in 1937, “has provided a name for a heresy which he did not originate, possibly did not even hold, and for a Church which he did not found” (Vine, 1937:21). Yet Nestorius’ name and the Christological heresy became firmly associated with one another. We know from an Arabic manuscript written by Slewa ibn Yohannan of Mosul and dated 1332 A.D. that the Nestorian appellation was supposed to be a stigmatic title. It was applied to the Eastern Christian followers of the excommunicated Nestorius (c.386AD-c.451AD). This Patriarch of Constantinople is generally reputed to have claimed that Christ existed as two persons, Jesus and the divine Son of God, or Logos, rather than a unified person.

Whether or not Nestorius was the originator of this doctrine, he was at any rate condemned in the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD and the Christological dispute resulted in the “Nestorian schism”, with the consequence of the enduring separation between the long-anathematized Nestorian Church of the East and the Byzantine Church. In time, Nestorius’ anathematized followers began to be referred to as Nestorians by their adversaries. This trend continued throughout the nineteenth century until, thanks to the support of the Anglican Church, Nestorius’ followers appropriated the term “Assyrian.”

To offer a partial justification for his Anglican Church which had newly conjured up the “Assyrian” appellation, Vine pointed out that the early Eastern churches who

espoused the new Christological doctrine “never officially used the title Nestorian to describe themselves, though they have not usually objected to it; their own designation is ‘Church of the East’.” But through the term “Nestorian,” emphasis had shifted from the geographical to the theological designation of these churches, which only became unified and independent from the Roman Empire in Persia in the early sixth century (Vine, *Ibid*, 21-2).

Pronounced a flagrant heretic, Nestorius was banished to Arabia in 435. Little is known about his life in exile, yet his legend contributes an anecdote of practical utility to the pool of contemporary narratives of appellations. Among modern Chaldeans, this anecdote associates the non-Catholic Assyrians with a heresy greater than their non-Catholicism. It presumes Nestorius’ doctrinal affinity with Islam while tacitly justifying the Catholic Chaldeans’ otherwise censured departure from the Nestorian Church and their acceptance of the lucrative offers of the Roman Catholic Church, as we shall see briefly.

As a child I had encountered this point of view a number of times, but I only recorded the following version in 2004 when Murkus Hanna, one of my Chaldean interviewees, instructed his American-born grandchildren about the differences between themselves as Chaldeans and the Assyrians:²⁵

We are Catholic, which means we believe in the purest and oldest form of Christianity, the one that did not change the teachings of Christ. They [the Assyrians] just sprang out of Nestorianism, which is as false as Islam. Yes! Because Nestorius was exiled to Saudi Arabia before Islam. There he preached his doctrine of one-man-God to the Arabs and it eventually became the doctrine

²⁵ Mr. Hanna, 68, migrated from Telkeif to Detroit in the 1960s. He identified himself and his family interchangeably as Telkeifi and Chaldean. Interview, April 2005.

of Islam. And besides, you should know that Mohammad's first teacher was Assyrian.²⁶

The Chaldean identity, the source of Hanna's firm conviction about the antiquity and purity of his Catholicism, was officially bestowed upon a group of Nestorians that joined the Roman Catholic Church no earlier than the sixteenth century. Yet the confusion is common among lay Chaldeans today due to the ancient derivation of the term "Chaldean," on the one hand, and to the Chaldean Church's attempt to promote a discourse of its own "firstness" by way of creating a positive self-image among its followers.

There are sources that suggest the facetious use of the term Chaldean and its derogatory connotations before modern times among the Jacobites, the Nestorians' neighboring rivals (Joseph, 2000:6, 7). The thirteenth-century Catholicos Ibn al-'Ibri, for instance, referred to Nestorians as "descendants of the Chaldeans," and "children of the ancient Chaldeans" in a derogatory manner that equated these "wonderful Easterners" who spoke "unintelligible" dialects of Aramaic with the biblical "magician" and "sorcerer" Chaldeans who appear in Daniel (2:2, 10). Ibn al-'Ibri even defined "Kaldayutha" (Chaldeeism) as "astrology and the art of magic," thus creating evidence for one of the earliest textual conflations of the ancient Chaldean tribes with a religious group that materialized nine centuries after the demise of the Chaldean Dynasty.

It is mainly particular readings of the Old Testament that are responsible for these erroneous associations between modern and ancient Mesopotamians. These associations can be witnessed through an observation made by the American missionary Asahel

²⁶ The prophet of Islam had had a Nestorian (not yet called Assyrian) teacher by the name of Sergius Bahira at one time. This was documented as early as the eighteenth-century by the Maronite theologian Assemani (Assemani, 1719-28).

Grant, who interpreted the Chaldean title as a name “used to express their [Nestorians’ and modern Chaldeans’] relation to Abraham, who was from ‘Ur of the Chaldees’” (Badger, *Ibid.*, vol I:179). Although the pre-Christian and Christian Mesopotamians appear in different biblical contexts, the Old Testament unintentionally evokes the geographical association between a pre-Christian group (the ancient Chaldeans of Babylonia) and a Christian group (those who consider themselves descendents of Abraham) that occupied the same region in different times.

Irrespective of whether or not the Christian Chaldeans whom Grant met in the mid-nineteenth century are the progeny of Abraham, the Chaldean Church as such did not materialize until the mid-sixteenth-century. It remains to be seen what happened to the followers of Nestorius and their Church in the interval between the exile of Nestorius in 435 and the Church of the East’s—the Nestorian Church’s—first wave of conversions to Catholicism in the 1550s. The history of the Nestorian Church and its followers up until the institutionalization of the Chaldean title will be the subject of what follows.

The Church of the East under the Islamic State

The relevance of the history of the Church of the East under the Islamic state to the question of appellations lies in the convergence of Nestorianism and the Christian Church of Persia into a synonymous entity during that period (Vine, *Ibid* 42-3). The year 489 marked the end of Nestorianism in the Roman Empire, when Emperor Zeno gave

orders to close and destroy the Nestorian school of theology, compelling the followers of this doctrine to seek refuge in Persia.

The Persian Government was initially opposed to Christianity, the religion of its national rival. Yet when the Nestorians sought refuge in Persia, the authorities found it politically viable to espouse and even encourage this schismatic doctrine among the Christian subjects of the Empire. Thus, what began as a tactic of alienating Persian Christians from the Christians of the Roman Empire soon worked to converge Nestorianism and the Christian Church of Persia into a synonymous entity.

Recognizing the missionary nature of the Nestorian Church during that period is also important for understanding the historical transformations of the appellation, as some of the earliest diplomatic communications between the Church of the East and the Catholic Church in Rome, which resulted in the reinforcement of the modern appellation “Chaldean,” were carried out by Chinese Nestorian monks. While still headquartered in Persia, the Nestorian Church managed to extend roots across Asia, establishing posts in central and southern Asia, and reaching as far as China.

Mobility was also crucial for the maintenance and prosperity of the identity of the Nestorian Church of the East. During the early centuries of the Caliphate, the Nestorian Church prospered, although not all of its followers did. The center of the Church moved westward from Persia into the region that constitutes modern-day Iraq, which became one of the places where the Nestorian Church flourished the most. Within ten years of the construction of the city of Baghdad in 762AD, Patriarch of the East, Hnan-Isho II, made

it his seat instead of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Persia.²⁷ In Baghdad the Nestorian patriarchic office became associated with the court circle and accordingly gained a worldly status as a political and social as well as spiritual position. In the province of Mosul, one of the few surviving Eastern Church bishoprics and a seat of the Metropolitan were created as early as 651, with the bishopric of Nineveh also relocated in the province (Vine, Ibid: 112-120).

The social identities of the followers of the Nestorian Church of the East did not reflect the prestigious religious and political identity of their Church. While the prosperous Nestorian Church of the East spread its mission east and west of Mesopotamia, the Nestorians of the Middle East lived as *dhimmis*,²⁸ unequal yet tolerated subjects in an Islamic Caliphate. However, another power was gradually coming to the support of these Nestorian communities during this period. Though equal to the Jews in their social status as *dhimmis*, as Christians the Nestorians benefited from an additional protection external to the Islamic Umma, or *dar al-Islam*. This additional protection issued from *dar al-Harb*, or Christendom, that is, from the Latin European countries that endeavored, among other things, to ensure the security of pilgrimages to Palestine, the historical land of the Bible (Ye'or, 1996:153).

²⁷ According to the American Mission among the Nestorians, the title of the patriarch changed to "Patriarch of Babylon and Baghdad" as early as 762AD, but I have not encountered other references that support this claim. (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:127).

²⁸ The *dhimma* treaty that brought a significant change to the social status of the Nestorians dates back to 628AD. During that year the Jewish inhabitants of the oasis of Khaybar, 140 kilometers from Medina, surrendered to the forces of Muhammad after a siege. Under this agreement Muhammad allowed the Jews to cultivate their oasis on condition that half of the produce would go to the Muslims. Muhammad also reserved the unconditional right to expel this tribe whenever he saw fit. Subsequently, all Christian and Jewish tribes in Arabia submitted to the Muslims under similar *dhimma* treaties. The Islamic conquest that had driven Nestorianism out of the Peninsula after the seventh century also made it possible for Nestorian missions to be sent westward during that period. Nestorian churches began to appear in Palestine, Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus and Egypt after the Muslims conquered these lands that were previously under Roman authority. (Ye'or, 1985:44-5; Vine, 1937: 125).

Western powers, religious and political, influenced the lives of the Nestorian communities on multiple levels, and as a result directed the course of the development and maintenance of their collective identity since medieval times. While the Christians of the Islamic state managed their affairs under *dhimma* laws during the Middle Ages and beyond, Europe practiced a form of custody that was generally called “foreign protection.” This custody permeated diverse areas of Eastern Christians’ lives, including the diplomatic relations between their patriarchs and the Islamic authorities. Fragile alliances and patronages between the local Christians and the Caliphs mirrored the political relations between the Islamic state and Western Christendom. For example, Harun al-Rashid, who at some point had ordered the destruction of all Christian Churches in Islamic lands, had on another occasion granted Charlemagne rights of protection over the Christians of the East in return for alliance during the war that al-Rashid was waging against the Greeks.

The fourteenth century brought one of the earliest diaspora experiences undergone by the followers of the Church of the East. This was to have a lasting effect on the transformations and multiplications of their collective identities. The central power of the Church moved from Baghdad and dispersed eastward into Azerbaijan and northward into Mosul and its northern surroundings. As a result, the subsequent patriarchs changed their place of residence frequently. The small number of followers who did not convert to Islam sought refuge in calmer high regions. More of these Eastern Christians migrated northward from the flat plains of Baghdad and its surroundings into the mountainous regions of Kurdistan and assumed a low profile.

By the mid-fifteenth century the Nestorian Church had sparse presence in a few towns in Mesopotamia, and most of its churches in this region were converted to Catholicism (with the Chaldean rite) through successive papal missions. The center of power of the Church shifted to a specific mountainous triangle in Kurdistan, whose three corners lay in Turkey and Persia, between the Tigris, Lake Van and Urmia (Vine, *Ibid*: 171).

It is worth noting that from this period onward the denominational affiliation of the local Christians played a crucial role in determining the kind of foreign protection they would receive (Ye'or, 1985:98), a phenomenon that gradually reinforced the social and titular differentiations between the “Chaldeans” and the “Assyrians.” By the mid-nineteenth century, when the French were at the summit of power in the Middle East, they were able to demand guarantees for their *ra'aya*, the Catholic (Chaldean) protégés. In 1844, the French consul interceded on behalf of its Chaldean *ra'aya* and obtained the *millet* status for them, henceforth officially segregating them from the non-Catholic Nestorians (eventually Assyrians) who lived in the district (Stafford, 1935:22). A year later, through the aid of the protestant missions, the Nestorians were granted *millet* status, under the spiritual and temporal leadership of their Patriarch, the Mar Shimun,²⁹ who had now become a salaried official of the Ottoman Empire in addition to being the spiritual leader of his community. Under this system the patriarch of the Church of the East assumed the highest religious and temporal authority among the Christian populations of Kurdistan (Baum and Winkler, *Ibid*: 112).

²⁹ Literally Aramaic “Mar,” of the same root as the Arabic “Amir,” means “prince.” Hence, the Nestorian millet was under the authority of *Prince* Shimun. (Jammo, 2000: 63).

Additional political factors accentuated the divide between the Chaldean and Assyrian communities toward the conclusion of the nineteenth century. According to some interpretations, the Islamic state at times ensured the cooperation of the patriarchs by satisfying their personal ambitions and aspirations for economic and religious autonomy, but not those of their *millet*. In the process it pitted the various sects against one another and precluded any possibility of the emergence of an independent Christian State (Ye'or, 2002: 109). The conflicts between the Church of the East and the Islamic State, and within the Christian denominations, colored all diplomatic relations.

During this period when political relations with the Islamic state and the Western powers directly shaped the economic and religious life of the Eastern Christian communities, a series of conversions from the Nestorian doctrine to Western Christian doctrines occurred. It is safe to say that most of these conversions were not motivated by a shift in religious beliefs, but rather made in exchange for the religious protection of the Roman Catholic Church, the political protection of the Catholic French Consul in the Middle East, or that of the Church of England. The next two sections will examine some of the implications of these conversions and their role in transforming the collective appellations of the followers of the Church of the East.

From Nestorians to Chaldeans

The period during which the term “Chaldean” was introduced into the discourse of the Church of the East, and whether or not it predated the usage of the term “Nestorian” has been subject to much acrimonious debate among Western and Eastern scholars alike. Some textual references suggest that the overlapping of the terms

“Chaldean” and “Nestorian” predate negotiations with Rome. This section will take a look at these negotiations and their consequences.

By the mid-fifteenth century the Church of the East had been following a tradition of hereditary patriarchal succession. Authority passed from uncle to nephew because the patriarch did not marry. As a result of this religious nepotism, untrained minors were often assigned the patriarchal throne, to the dismay of many of the community’s elders. In 1552 this was the case, and a group of local bishops refused to accept the new young Simon Dinkha as their VIII Mar Shimun.³⁰ To sustain their authority they decided to seek union with Rome.

The so-described “reluctant abbot” Yuhannan Sulaka, of the Rabban Hurmuzd Monastery near Mosul, was chosen as their new patriarch. Perhaps labeled “reluctant” for his wavering religious stances, Sulaka welcomed the conversion opportunity to bolster his position among the Latin Catholics, whose Franciscan missionaries were already at work among the Christians of the Nineveh Plains.³¹ While the young Mar Shimun continued to rule over the mountain Christians in Kurdistan, Sulaka was sent to Rome to arrange a union with the Catholic Church, which transpired in 1553.

Sulaka was one of the first Eastern Christians to obtain a “Chaldean” title. Pope Julius III proclaimed him Patriarch Simon VIII “of the Chaldeans.” That same year Sulaka was ordained a bishop in St. Peter’s Basilica. By the end of the year he returned to Kurdistan. For the following two years he initiated a series of reforms with the hope of winning over all the Nestorians to himself. Had he succeeded, the history of the Church of the East would have concluded here, and the modern Assyrians would never have

³⁰ “Dinha,” in the Chaldean pronunciation and transcription.

³¹ At the time no significant missionary groups had yet attempted to proselytize among the Nestorians of the Hakkari mountains.

existed. But Sulaka confronted a host of oppositions that worked against the absorption of the entire Eastern Christian population into Roman Catholicism. They were launched against him by the supporters of the hereditary patriarch, the young Mar Shimun, until Sulaka's imprisonment by the Pasha of Diyarbakir and assassination in 1555.

Sulaka's following was still small and powerless and therefore sought to lapse back into their original faith. But it was too late to do so, to the disadvantage of both groups, because henceforth the Church of the East never recovered its unity.³² The event set the stage for much turmoil and schismatic plots in the ensuing two hundred years. Despite Rome's efforts to steer the conflict to its own advantage, serious stabilization did not take place until 1830, when Pope Pius VIII styled Metropolitan John Hormizdas as head of all Chaldean Catholics, with the title "Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans."

Between the papal ordinations of Sulaka in 1552 and Hormizdas in 1830, the descendants of the Church of the East weaved together one of the most unique and perplexing ecclesiastical disputes in the history of Christianity. In addition to the recurrent schismatic leitmotif, the patriarchs switched roles in terms of their allegiance to Rome. By so doing they confused the lines so frequently in effect that it became virtually impossible to clearly distinguish the followers of the Catholic patriarch from those of the non-Catholic patriarch.³³

By 1830, just before they were enticed into unity under the grand designation of "Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans," there existed three Eastern patriarchs who bore the "Chaldean" title upon their ordination: two non-Uniate or "Nestorians" at Urmia

³² In 1994 the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches came together to express their desire for unification into one single Church. The Nestorian title, however, was irrelevant at this point, and other Assyrian Orthodox branches continued to function outside of this union.

³³ See Appendix A for the various schismatic lines of succession and the locations of their patriarchates.

(northwestern Iran) and Mosul, and one Uniate—that is, already subject to Papal authority prior to his ordination—at Diyarbakir. Why did Rome allow that? Vine commendably disentangled the outline of the story (Vine, *Ibid.*: 173-5):

Sulaka's successor...received the pallium³⁴ from Pope Pius IV, and the next two...seem also to have been truly Uniate. But subsequently touch with Rome became somewhat fitful....Patriarchs sent a Catholic profession of faith to Rome, and a promise of obedience to the see of St. Peter; in return they received the pallium. Others did not trouble to do so... Mar Shimun XII sent the last such profession...after Mar Shimun XII the patriarchs of the Sulaka line are again Nestorian...the Patriarchs of the old line had also adopted a uniform name. This was done soon after the dispute between Simon Denha and Sulaka, the name chosen being Elias. This line began negotiating with Rome during the time of Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), the Patriarch Elias V sending him a profession of faith. This, however, was rejected on the grounds that it was tainted with Nestorianism. But in 1607 Elias VI sent a profession which was acceptable, and was received into union...After Elias VII the old line gradually ceased to keep its union with Rome, and fell back into schism and Nestorianism, just as Sulaka's line had done. In the eighteenth century there were, therefore, two rival Nestorian patriarchs, one at Urmia and one at Mosul...and now that both lines were again in schism, Joseph, metropolitan of Diarbekr, felt justified in renouncing his allegiance to Elias VIII and applied to the Pope for recognition...in 1826 the old line at Mosul again became Uniate, so that there was no longer any need to continue the Uniate patriarchate of the Joseph succession. From that date, therefore, the old line has to be called Uniate Chaldean, the patriarchs of the Elias succession being in communion with Rome; whereas the newer line, the Mar Shimuns of Urmia, originally Uniate, thenceforward must be taken to represent the Nestorian patriarchate.

Partially responsible for this confusion were also the reactions of the local followers of the Church of the East at the time. Generally they disfavored any kind of control from Rome and did not place value on the Pope's recognition of their patriarch (Baum and Winkler, 2003:114). Theologically and liturgically very little had changed among these splinter groups, and when it did it was mostly in matters of the Patriarch's confession rather than the practices of the people.

³⁴ The pallium is an ecclesiastical garment of the Roman Catholic Church, originally peculiar to the Pope but later it was bestowed upon Metropolitans and Primates as a symbolic delegation of jurisdiction from the Holy See.

The Roman Catholic Church augmented the confusion by coining additional appellations by way of designating the geographical location of the Eastern churches and patriarchies it subsumed under its papal authority (Joseph, Ibid:23). After a schismatic conversion in 1681, the Roman Catholic Church discontinued using the heretical term “Nestorian” in reference to the Uniate branch of the Church of the East. The Uniates became “Chaldean Catholics,” or “Catholic Chaldeans.” Subsequently, many “exotic combinations” appeared by way of redefining the convert community and its patriarchs in a fashion palatable to the Catholic Church of the West. These titles were not put to use immediately by the converted Church. They included “Chaldeans of Assyria,” and “Eastern Chaldeans of Catholic Assyria.” “The Patriarch of Babylon” title was revived from an older period during which the patriarchs of the East had used it at Seleucia-Ctesiphon before Islam, and was now given to the new primate in Mosul (Joseph, Ibid: 6-7).

Western Scholarship and the Search for Accurate Appellations

It should not be surprising that the abundance of titles befuddled the Western visitors of the nineteenth century. They had chanced upon two factions of Christians, one officially designated “Chaldean” by Rome, but which chose to call itself “Nestorian”, and the other doctrinally “Nestorian” but which referred to itself simply as “Christian”. To complicate matters even further for the American and British men who were doing their best to master the challenging Aramaic and Arabic vernaculars, plus their classical correlates, the “Nestorians” seldom referred to the Chaldeans with this name, but rather used the derogatory “Frangayé”, or Franks, to denote the Catholic group’s disparaged connections with the Latin authorities and with Rome. Moreover, when the context was

neutral, i.e., involving no discussions of theological or doctrinal professions, both groups referred to themselves, and to members of the opposite group, as “Surayá” in their Aramaic dialect, or “Siryān” in Arabic. Badger put the question of nomenclature before a contemporary Nestorian patriarch, who summed up the dispute with the following inclusive statement: “We call all Christians Meshihayé, Christiané, Soorayé, and Nsâra; but we only are Nestorayé.” (Badger, *Ibid*: 224)

But why had the Roman Catholic Church chosen the farfetched designation “Chaldean” for its new converts when these converts already had appropriated so many names? Recent studies suggest that the seventeenth-century designation “Chaldean” is due to the Roman Catholic Church’s erroneous identification of the location of modern Baghdad with that of ancient Babylon,³⁵ an observation that should lead us to conclude, Joseph argued, that the term Chaldean was given to the converts because of their geographical location at the time of conversion rather than their ethnic origins. This geographical identification existed long before the seventeenth century, when the term Chaldean, Joseph reasoned, “was used [by the Roman Catholic Church and ancient historians such as Xenophon] to refer to all the East Syrians because of the geographical location of their head church” (Joseph, *Ibid*: 8).

Badger’s alternative hypothesis is still the most compelling, however. He pointed out that (Badger, *Vol I*:180),

The Romanists could not call them ‘Catholic Syrians,’ or ‘Syrian Catholics,’ for this appellation they had already given to their proselytes from the Jacobites, who also called themselves ‘Syrians.’ They could not term them ‘Catholic Nestorians,’ as Mr. Justin Perkins, the Independent American missionary does, for this would involve a contradiction. What more natural, then, than that they

³⁵ This was a common misconception among European travelers and scholars alike, well into the twentieth century. See for example, Badger *Vol I*:153; Rabi 27.

should have applied to them the title of ‘Chaldeans,’ to which they had some claims *nationally* in virtue of their Assyrian descent?

That the modern Nestorians and Chaldeans were “nationally” and “racially” related to the ancient Assyrians was a common anachronistic assumption among nineteenth-century Westerners who chanced upon this “long oppressed nation” (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I: 46). What “nation” and “national” could have retroactively meant to Badger and other Westerners of the nineteenth century is nebulous, but the use of linguistic criteria, location, physiognomy and custom to draw ethnic associations between the ancient and modern inhabitants of Mesopotamia is evident. Of the first characteristics that prompted them to draw these associations were physiognomy and dress, and later the “vulgar Syriac” spoken among members of these communities (Wigram, 2002 [1929]:179-81).

What sets the discourse of the Catholic Church and the secular Europeans of the nineteenth-century apart from the claims of descent made by contemporary Chaldeans and Assyrians is that the latter groups began to launch claims of exclusive and selective descent from the ancients, separating themselves and raising their status above the other groups. The ecclesiasts and Orientalists of the sixteenth and nineteenth century, in contrast, did not draw ethnic distinctions between the Mesopotamian groups they studied, such as the Uniate Chaldeans and the remaining Eastern Christian population that did not convert to Catholicism. The “national” associations they assumed to exist between the contemporary locals and the ancient inhabitants of the area were general (Badger, Vol I.: 179):

If it be maintained, that the modern Nestorians are descendants of the ancient Chaldeans, and may therefore justly claim to the title, no valid objection can be urged against the assumption; but in this *national* acceptance of the term, the Nestorian proselytes to Rome, the Jacobites, Sabeans, Yezeedees, and many of

the Coords of this district, may with equal right take to themselves the appellative, there being as much proof to establish their descent from the Chaldeans of old, or rather the Assyrians, as there is in the case of the Nestorians.

The converted, i.e., “Chaldean,” Eastern patriarchs continued to employ their traditional and more familiar titles when referring to themselves, titles such as “Patriarch of the Orient,” “Servant of the Seat of Saint Thadae,” and “Servant of the Patriarchal Seat which is in the East” (Joseph, *Ibid*: 7). Ironically, while these Chaldean patriarchs sometimes declined to apply the term Chaldean during the early decades of their conversion to the Catholic faith, non-converts who continued to follow the schismatic Nestorian doctrine began petitioning for equal ownership of the title “Chaldean” given their geographical, and allegedly ethnic, proximity to ancient Babylon. Claims such as that Nestorians were the “real Patriarchs” of the whole “Chaldean Church” became not infrequent among non-convert patriarchs. Such claims were usually rejected by the Catholic branch, now realizing the *prestige* of the Chaldean title after having declined to apply it uniformly in the early phases of the conversion.

Since the mid nineteenth-century Western writers have been augmenting the confusion of the terms “Chaldean” and “Nestorian.” They invented titles such as “Nestorian Chaldeans,” “Catholic Chaldeans,” “Papal Syrians,” and “Papal Nestorians,” among others, to distinguish between the Nestorians who began reuniting with the Catholic Church from 1552 onward and those who did not.³⁶

While, generally, Rome held that the term “Chaldean” predated the term “Nestorian,” non-Catholic European travelers, archeologists and American missionaries presented a counterview. Those who visited the Nestorians in the nineteenth century resorted to their favorite historical sources to trace the origin of the appellation, with the

³⁶ See for example: Badger, 1852: Vol. I, 70-1; Layard 1849: Vol. I, 190-1. Joseph, 2000: 2, 3.

result of advancing a host of hypotheses to that effect. In the early 1830s, American missionaries, such as Eli Smith, H.G.O. Dwight, Justin Perkins and Asahel Grant, observed the recent coinage of the designation “Chaldean Church” by the Catholic Church. Grant argued that the term “Chaldean” was not applied to the Church of the East prior to the schism, while, to the contrary, Horatio Southgate who also visited the region in the early 1830s noted that Eastern Christians call themselves Chaldeans and always have, stressing that Chaldean was their “national name”(Joseph, *Ibid*: 5). William Francis Ainsworth, the English engineer, geologist and doctor who was in charge of the expedition of the Royal Geographic Society, and who was one of the first Englishmen to report about the Nestorians from a tour in the Middle East, wrote in 1840 that the Nestorians were people who considered themselves Chaldeans and “descendants of the ancient Chaldeans of Assyria, Mesopotamia and Babylonia.” They only invented the term Nestorian in a 1681 schism, Ainsworth claimed, to distinguish themselves from the converts to the Catholic faith (Ainsworth, 1842:Vol. II, 272-3).

Austin Henry Layard, the pioneer archeologist who excavated the ruins of Nineveh and was to write most extensively about the Nestorians, also believed that the term Nestorian was a recent coinage and, like Ainsworth, argued that the term “Nestorian” was applied to the non-converts by the Roman Catholic missionaries of the sixteenth century who “found it necessary and politic to treat them as schismatics, and to bestow upon them a title which conveyed the stigma of a heresy” (Layard, 1849, Vol. I:189). Clearly Layard and Ainsworth did not inspect the early documents of the Church of the East, which contain several references to the “Nestorian” title since it was applied by way of a stigma in the fourth century. Layard himself sometimes distinguished

between the “Chaldeans,” the ones who converted to Catholicism, and “Nestorian Chaldeans,” the ones who continued to observe the ancient faith (Layard, *Ibid*: 190-1). Hormuzd Rassam, a Christian native of Mosul and Layard’s assistant-excavator, elaborated the same argument by adding that the title “Chaldean” existed long before the Catholic conversion of Eastern Christians (Rassam, 1880:25).

In his conversations with a non-Catholic Eastern bishop, Perkins similarly noted how the bishop objected to being called Nestorian and demanded to be called Chaldean.

In his report Perkins explained (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:17):

I inquired if the Catholic Nestorians are not called Chaldeans. “They are”, he said, but added, “Shall a few Catholic converts from among our people arrogate to themselves the name of our whole nation? And must we surrender up our name to them?” “Nestorius”, he continued, “we respect, as one of our bishops”, but we are under no particular obligation to be called by his name.”

Averse to associations between their non-Catholic Eastern hosts and the Roman Catholics, Perkins and the other American missionaries often “forgot” the bishop’s request and called him and his people Nestorians. Consistent in his dislike of the term, the bishop is reported to have “humorously” remarked to Perkins, “We shall soon be at war if you do not cease calling us *Nestorians*” (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:21). This exchange attests to a tension between Western non-Catholics who disliked the term “Chaldean” for the associations it evoked with Rome and the followers of Nestorius who disliked the term “Nestorian” because it recalled a doctrinal heresy that separated them from the West. This tension might very well have been the impetus behind the selection of a third title that was acceptable to both groups. A few decades after the arrival of the Anglicans the name “Assyrian” was being fashioned for the non-Catholic Nestorians.

In “Nestorian rituals,” noted Badger, the term “Chaldean” appeared in contexts where the term did not bear reference to Christianity. Rather, it sometimes referred to

ancient sects, also called “Sabeans,” or worshipers of the heavenly host. Patriarch Mar Abd Yeshua, for instance, used the term in this sense when he wrote: “Daniel, of Reish Aina, wrote poems against the Marcionites, Manichees, heretics, and *Chaldeans*” (Badger, 178-9).

Dr. Grant of the American Presbyterian mission, on the other hand, conflated the unrelated terms “Nestorian” and “Nazarean,” in the hope of advancing an argument about the “Hebrew” descent of the Nestorians. He accordingly reasoned: “The word Nazarean or Nsâra [Arabic for Christians] is specific in its application to the Nestorians, and is never applied to the Armenians or other Christian sects.” Grant was promptly corrected by a rival Anglican missionary, the learned George Percy Badger, who pointed out that “Nasrâni...is the common title for ‘a Christian’ throughout the East,” and clarified how “Nestorians frequently use the term Meshihayé [also meaning Christian; literally, followers of the Messiah]...when speaking of themselves, but generally add the word “Nestorayá,” when they wish to distinguish themselves from the Chaldeans who lay claim to the former title as their peculiar right, and never apply it to the Nestorians” (Badger, *Ibid.*, Vol. I: 223).

John Joseph who presented some of these opinions in the revised 2000 edition of his book *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors*, for which he chose to replace the 1961 title with the new title *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East*, argued against the notion of the coinage of the term Chaldean in the seventeenth century (Joseph, *Ibid.*: vii).³⁷ To bolster his argument he cited Pope Paul V (1605-1621) who wrote to Patriarch

³⁷ In the preface to the new edition, Joseph informs us that “the more controversial name “Modern Assyrians” is now used because of its greater unambiguity,” because many of his readers were unaware that the “Nestorians” of the original edition referred to the group of people who are more commonly known as modern “Assyrians” today.

Eliyya, “A great part of the East was infected by this heresy [Nestorianism], especially the Chaldeans, who for this reason have been called Nestorians.”

Interestingly, interpretations of the exact titles inscribed on tombs of patriarchs buried before the schism of the Eastern Church seem to have also varied considerably. While Layard who excavated them presented the inscription as “Patriarch of the Chaldeans of the East,” Badger, another contemporaneous Anglican missionary, after examining “all the epitaphs” presented his counter-reading of “Patriarchs and Occupants of the Throne of Addai and Mari.”³⁸ More recent reproductions of these epitaphs support neither of the two readings, and present the titles as stating “Catholicos Patriarch of the East,” “Patriarch of the East,” or simply “Catholicos” (Joseph, *Ibid*: 5).

The perplexity and proliferation of titles within the context of the Church of the East and its followers can be traced to two sources: first, the nomenclature in use belongs to more than one language and historical period, i.e., Old Syriac, Neo-Aramaic, Arabic and the transliterations of the pioneer archeologists of the Assyrian cuneiform script; and second, the liturgical and archeological assignment of a particular name did not override the people’s accustomed self-reference. That is, the terms were interchangeable and remained so, and the particular contexts for the accurate use of each were more intelligible to the local users of these terms than to the Western visitors who tried to accurately catalogue these “rediscovered” communities.³⁹

³⁸ It is common in contemporary Chaldean and Assyrian discourse to trace their conversion to Christianity to a contact with these early apostles, Addai and Mari. They are also accredited for having written the Holy Qurbana, or Eucharistic liturgy of the Nestorian Church.

³⁹ Appendix B is an approximate chart of the various appellations up until the present, suggesting the locations and time periods during which the appellations came into use and the people who used them.

From Nestorians to Assyrians

According to Albert Hourani, “to-day the Assyrians of Iraq and Syria are all that is left of them [the Nestorians].” This is not entirely true because, as Hourani himself claimed, the members of the Chaldean Catholic Church, one of the six Uniate Churches, and the 75-80% of the Christians of Iraq, are in fact former Nestorians. They observe a “Syriac liturgy” and follow the “Patriarch of Babylon” who is “resident in Mosul” (Hourani, *Ibid*: 6).⁴⁰

Yet Hourani’s statement is true in one sense: the modern Assyrian Church, or Churches, represents the only doctrinal continuation of the Nestorian Church of the East. Today, virtually no living person, religious or secular, identifies as Nestorian, and Western scholarship that tries to deconstruct many nineteenth-century assumptions about the prevalence of the Nestorian identity among Eastern Christians prefers the title “Church of the East” to “Nestorian Church.” In contrast with the Nestorian identity, the Chaldean and Assyrian identities are thriving on the collective level, especially in diaspora, where many Christians who trace their descent to the historical region of Mesopotamia join their efforts to sustain the revived nomenclature and its pre-Islamic associations. The earliest instance of this appellation shift took place in the 1860s through the intervention of the Church of England.⁴¹ While the titular transformation to “Assyrians” was gradual, once these communities acknowledged themselves as Assyrian, the Nestorian label was relegated to the folds of the past. Nestorian-ness in retrospect, to the modern Assyrians at least, is no more than a dim transitional link in a long chain,

⁴⁰ Throughout the twentieth century the Patriarch’s residence had shifted between Mosul and Baghdad. Currently the stronghold of the patriarchy is in the capital.

⁴¹ See Chapter Three for details.

lying between a glorious ancient past and a revivable glory in the present, both of which are categorically *Assyrian*:

The Assyrians, although representing but one single nation as the direct heirs of the ancient Assyrian Empire, are now doctrinally divided, inter sese, into five principle ecclesiastically designated religious sects with their corresponding hierarchies and distinct church governments, namely, Church of the East, Chaldean, Maronite, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic. These formal divisions had their origin in the 5th century of the Christian Era.... The Assyrians have been referred to as Aramaean, Aramaye, Ashuri, Ashureen, Ashuraya, Ashuroyo, Aturaya, Jacobite, Kaldany, Kaldu, Kasdu, Malabar, Maronite, Maronaya, Nestorian, Nestornaye, Oromoye, Suraya, Syrian, Syriani, Suryoye, Suryoyo and Telkeffee.⁴²

Despite this statement and numerous other statements that emphasize continuity or *lastness*, modern Assyrians and their Assyrian Church began to be widely known as “Assyrians” only since the First World War, largely due to the Anglican Mission (Joseph, Ibid, xi). Before that they were known simply as the “hardy” mountaineers who occupied the region of Hakkari. They were called “Nestorian” by the European archeologists of the nineteenth-century such as Emil Botta and Henry Layard who also argued that they should be called “Chaldean” like their counterparts in Mosul and the surrounding villages of the Nineveh Plains (Larsen, 1996:75). The early archeologists and their associates interchangeably used the terms “Nestorian” and “Chaldean” to refer to Eastern Christians with the assumption that the distinction between the two was not ethnic but merely regional, referring to the residents of the plains versus the settlers of the mountains. Botta and Layard used the terms “Nestorian” for the Christian mountaineer communities and “Chaldean” for the communities of Mosul and the surrounding villages in reference to the local Christians whom they hired for the excavation work. When attempting a scholarly presentation of the “Nestorians”, Layard argued that they too should be called Chaldeans. For the two men and the lay Europeans in their environment, the term “Assyrian” existed

⁴² The introductory page of Nineveh on Line, “Who Are We?”, <http://www.nineveh.com/whoarewe.htm>.

only in the context of the ancient kings and populations that once occupied the palaces they were unearthing in and around Nineveh.

In 1881, decades after the communion with Rome and the establishment of the Catholic Chaldean rite, when the ecclesiastical debate on who had the right to call his followers Chaldean and who did not was still ongoing, the Archbishop of Canterbury sent a “Mission to Assyrian Christians” (Vine: 1937:179). For the first time in its history the Church of the East was formally associated with the Ancient Mesopotamian Empire. In 1886 a second Canterbury mission reinforced the appellation. In 1874 a Protestant-Evangelical group had organized a separation from the mother Church, and adopted the title “Reformed Nestorian Church” (Joseph, 2000:3).

Toward the end of the century, Protestant missionaries were able to alert Eastern Christians to the recent origins and stigmatic associations of the Nestorian appellation, causing the more educated segment of the community to resent the title “Nestorian Church” and call for a return to the older title “The Old Church of the East.”

By the beginning of World War I Eastern Christians, now known as Assyrians, had been divided into three groups: the mountaineers of Hakkari, modern-day Turkey; the plain dwellers of western Lake Urmia, modern-day Iran; and the lowland dwellers in southern Hakkari, modern-day Iraq. During the inter-war years, these Christian populations were beginning to appropriate, vocally, the West-fashioned identity, “Assyrian” or “Āšūrāyē” in their vernacular Aramaic.

After their post-World-War I expulsion from their former homes in modern-day Turkey, the newly-fashioned “Assyrians” became refugees in Iraq under the protection of the British authorities. There they had to contend with the somewhat pejorative Arabic

homonym of this new appellation, “Āthūri.”⁴³ The Iraqi Government uniformly reinforced and used it instead of “Āšūri” (Assyrian) in order to maintain a distinction between the incoming mountaineers and the ancient Assyrians. It was essential for the authorities to keep the two apart: the modern group was considered foreign and a source of trouble and bloodshed, while the ancient Assyrians were quickly becoming celebrated as part of Iraq’s national antiquity and one of its historical links to prototypical civilization. The Nestorians-turned-Assyrians, as one might expect, strongly resented the name “Āthūri,” and preferred instead to be identified as “Āšūri,”—an Arabic term they themselves did not use but one that corresponded literally with the English designation “Assyrian” (Joseph, 2000:19-20).

In due time the Assyrian refugees formed isolated pockets of Diaspora communities. By 1930 some had returned to the Iranian region of the Hakkari mountains, some 6000 had crossed the Upper Khabūr region and settled permanently in Syria, while others were absorbed into the Chaldean communities of the villages in northern Iraq⁴⁴ and several thousand settled in Kirkuk, Erbil, Baghdad and Mosul where more employment opportunities were available (Hourani, 1947:102). Those who established their residence in the major cities quickly disconnected from the settlement problems in the north. Henceforth Assyrians were identified as “Āthūri,” by the Iraqi government and the city-dwelling Chaldeans and Arabs.

In the 1930s, for political reasons that intensified the appeal of Arab nationalism among the Iraqi population, local Iraqi Muslim and Chaldean communities alike quickly stereotyped the non-Arabic speaking Assyrian newcomers as intransigent and culturally

⁴³ See Appendix B.

⁴⁴ Hundreds of Assyrians are said to have settled in the village of Alqosh, whose community had a long history of vacillating between Catholicism and Nestorianism (Stafford, 1935: 187).

inferior mountaineers who could speak neither *Sūreth* (the Chaldean variety of neo-Aramaic) nor Arabic properly. This stereotype survived well into the twentieth century, alongside a vision of superiority through which the Assyrian communities viewed themselves. They regarded themselves the special protégés of the British Government, while the Chaldeans were merely second-class citizens in the new Iraqi state.

The origins of the terms *Sūrāyē* (Syrian) and *Āšūrāyē* (Assyrian) have been subjected to many theories over the years. One of these theories claimed that the two terms historically referred to the same people. Because Eastern Christians had referred to themselves as *Sūrāyē*, some modern nationalist Assyrians have tried to argue that *Sūrāyē* was an abbreviated form of *Āšūrāyē*, where the initial “A” had simply dropped from the appellation at some historical juncture. An alternative to the lost-A hypothesis is the theory that the Greek language had converted *Atūr* (Assyria in Aramaic) to *Asūr*, and that in turn became *Sur* and eventually *Syria*.

All of this is fascinating for linguists and nationalists, of course, but it remains that the Iraqi Government, and by extension modern Arabic-speaking Iraqis, seldom equated the “Athūri” refugees whom the British officers brought to their country after the Great War, with the ancient “Āšūri” palaces and winged bulls which another group of British “officers” brought to their attention in the mid-eighteenth century.

ChaldoAssyrians: A Short-lived Consolidation Attempt

Before concluding this Chapter, it is worthwhile to stop briefly at a consolidated term that was coined in the beginning of the twentieth century to unite the Chaldeans and the Assyrians, but without much success.

The term “ChaldoAssyrian” was first used by Agha Putrus (1880-1932), an Assyrian nationalist and military leader (Hanish, 2008). Putrus was born in the Lower Baz village in Ottoman Turkey, moved to Iraq and then was exiled by the British authorities and spent the rest of his life in France. Against the will of his own Assyrian followers, he used the term ChaldoAssyrian to suggest the broad extent of his political authority when he presented himself to the League of Nations as the leader of all Assyrians and Chaldeans. The new coinage did not gain currency. It witnessed only one brief appearance in a mid-1970s booklet that was entitled, *ChaldoAssyrians Yes, Arabs No*, which was formulated to protest against Ba‘thist Arabization policies. After that, “ChaldoAssyrians” did not appear again until 1996, when the Kurdistan Communist Party in Iraq appropriated the term despite the disapproval of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), which opposed this usage. The ADM finally accepted the term in 2003, after the fall of the Ba‘thist Iraqi regime and a meeting with a delegation from the Chaldean Church in Michigan. A year later, “ChaldoAssyrian” was accepted by the Transitional Administration Law in Iraq and was also recognized by the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church as a “political term” (Hanish, 2008:42).

Two problems with the term “ChaldoAssyrian” erupted shortly after it was gaining currency, causing its prompt downfall. First, since Syriac speakers go by the names of “Assyrians” and “Syriacs” in Syria and Lebanon, the new term would have assigned new identities in other parts of the Middle East without the consent of their representatives; second, the Assyrians of Iraq continued to refer to themselves ethnically as Assyrians while reserving the term “ChaldoAssyrian” to serve exclusively political purposes. This caused the Chaldean Church to fear the loss of the Chaldean identity of its

people, and so it rejected the ChaldoAssyrian label, insisting more adamantly on asserting its original Chaldean identity.

In 2005, the permanent Iraqi Constitution opted for using the terms Chaldean and Assyrian separately, despite an earlier announcement that year to use the term “ChaldoAssyrian” in the upcoming Iraqi census. Today, “ChaldoAssyrian” is mainly alive in the discourse of the ADM, while most Chaldean and Assyrian political as well as religious organizations reject the label.

***III. Recapitulation:
Appellations within the Church of the East, Motives and Implications***

This Chapter opened with examples of contemporary identity disputes common among Chaldean and Assyrian circles in the Diaspora. In order to place these disputes within their historical framework, *Section I* examined the pre-Christian context from which members of the modern communities derive their selective associations with the ancient Chaldeans and Assyrians and their languages. This section posed the question of the continuity of the ancient Mesopotamian peoples and cultures to the present, arguing that the hybrid Mesopotamian ethnic groups were further assimilated into the melting pot of Aramaic language and culture after the fall of the Assyrian Empire and were eventually unified—and diversified—when Christianity entered the region during the first century AD.

Modern Chaldeans and Assyrians do not have the sufficient evidence to sustain a sound discourse of *firstness* and *lastness* and therefore cannot distinctly or selectively trace their line of descent to a single pre-Christian ethnic group of Mesopotamian settlement without also considering the possibility of being descendents of any of the

other contemporaneous ancient groups. Nonetheless this brand of discourse is widespread and moreover acceptable if not encouraged among members of the community as a sign of loyalty to a common lineage and knowledge of one's native heritage.

Section II provided the Christian historical backdrop against which a perplexing evolution of the terms "Chaldean" and "Nestorian" took place. It examined the terms' sometimes-interchangeable usage within the ecclesiastical context of the Church of the East until splinter groups began to accept the authority of Rome in 1551. Unstable conversions and reconversions to and from the Catholic creed prompted the Roman Catholic Church to bestow special titles upon convert patriarchs, emphasizing their prestigious ties with the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations and stressing their distinctiveness from the remaining non-Catholic Eastern Christians.

During the twentieth century the mutual dislike between the Chaldeans and the Assyrians in Iraq was encouraged in part by the new government as a tactic for segregating the various minorities. This antagonism lies at the root of the current acrimonious debates over the "accurate" label, viz., Chaldean vs. Assyrian. These debates as well as the local and international politics that mobilize them today call for situating the Assyrians and the Chaldeans in the context of nineteenth-century missionary and archeological enterprise in Mesopotamia, the main tropes of the following two Chapters.

Chapter Three

Contact with the West: the Missionary Enterprise in Mesopotamia

Introduction

This Chapter is not primarily a history of the Christian missions in Mesopotamia but a study of their power to foster a new sense of *Chaldeanness* or *Assyrianness* among the communities who adopted these terms as collective appellations. While focusing on the transformations in collective appellations and the communal identities associated with the Eastern Christian communities of the nineteenth century, the Chapter locates the intermediary position of these communities within the Orientalist conceptual divide between “East” and “West”.

According to Assyriologist Steven Holloway, the Orientalizing vision of the nineteenth century was “rooted in universalizing Enlightenment attitudes toward eastern peoples” (2006: 8). One key outcome of this vision was the emergence of a Western ideological binary between a civilized Christian “West/Self” and a primitive Muslim “East/Other”. The circumstances of the emergence of the ancient-new “Chaldean” and “Assyrian” identities concurrently with this Orientalizing vision, I argue, dispute the totality of this binary vision in a number of ways. By accentuating their status as Eastern Christians, speakers of a Biblical language and heirs of an ancient monumental legacy, the West assigned modern Chaldeans and Assyrians an intermediary role within this

Orientalist binary, which eventually brought their communities physically and conceptually closer to the West than those of their modern Muslim counterpart.

The transformations in collective Eastern Christian identities are to a large extent retraceable to two critical contacts with the West that took place in the mid-nineteenth century. Two sets of synergistic cultural transformations worked implicitly as *civilizing missions* that brought modern Chaldeans and Assyrians to occupy a hybrid cultural status (Eastern like the Muslim majority, but Christian like the West) at home and abroad. One transformation is marked by the arrival of the American Protestant Mission, the Mission of the Church of England, and the reinforcement of the Papal mission in Mesopotamia. These missions and their impact are the subject of this Chapter. The second transformation, as Chapter Four will explain, is marked by the establishment of French and British excavation posts in various locations in Mesopotamia.

The “Primitive” Eastern Church

To grasp how the Assyrians and, to an extent, the Chaldean counterpart in twentieth-century Iraq were perceived as collaborators with the West by the Arab majority that enveloped them, it is important to look first at the socio-political and linguistic transformations generated by the Christian missionary enterprise in nineteenth-century Mesopotamia.

When European travelers and missionaries came into contact with Eastern Christian communities in the nineteenth century, they recognized a decline in their churches and their knowledge about religious matters. They attributed this decline to “a defect in the Nestorian community itself,” characterized by “the feebleness of their

Christian faith” (Vine, Ibid:108) in which they took to be in part an outcome of “an increasingly material outlook” (Vine, Ibid: 107). These travelers and missionaries based their remarks on their first-hand observation of the illiteracy and superstitions rife among a large segment of the Eastern Christian clergy and laymen, their dilapidated places of worship and the dearth of scriptural materials within their possession.

For many centuries these Christians had managed to preserve an almost fixed version of religious doctrine, rites and liturgy, but mainly orally. What was striking for the Western observers was the dearth of literacy and scriptures in contrast with the span of the Church’s history, or what Wilhelm Baum calls the Church of the East’s loss of a “theological competence” that it had previously possessed for centuries (Baum & Winkler, Ibid: 117). The Church of the East was not exposed to the textual trends of European and American modernity, which came to simultaneously approve and disapprove of Nestorianism and the conventions of Eastern Christianity in general in the persons of its evangelists and the commentaries these evangelists sent back home to Europe and America. According to Western missions also, the “spirituality” of the Eastern Christian faith suffered under the *millet* system. It was therefore their duty to change these social conditions.

While administrative segregation through the *millet* system created isolated enclaves of mountain Christians who lived under the direct rule of their patriarch, sustained contact with Western missions and governmental delegations contributed to the making of an indigenous Christian elite in the Mesopotamian cities of the Ottoman Empire. The description of the manners and customs given by Tristram Ellis, a nineteenth-century English traveler who attends a dinner party at the home of a wealthy

Chaldean family in “Victorian” Baghdad, reflects class distinctions some urban Christian families enjoyed, where (Ellis, 1881; cited in Coke, 1935:277-8),

...dinner was entirely in European style, all the dishes being served *a la Russe*...with a row of the original black bottles containing wine and ale running all around...servants wishing to replenish one’s glass with beer (for they naturally considered that all Englishmen like to drink beer)...[women’s] eyes are painted in a way much in advance of ours in Europe...

Moreover, “there is quite a colony of Europeans in Baghdad,” Ellis observed, and “so many Englishmen have married Christian natives, that there is a growing race of young people that seem to combine the attraction of both nations, and these are always counted part of the English colony...”(Coke, Ibid: 279) Whether or not these observations were accurate, the status of the city-dwelling Eastern Christians (Chaldeans and non-Chaldeans) was always superior to those of their mountaineer counterparts, a condition that can be ascribed in part to the more direct contact with Western patronage, especially that of Rome, from the fifteenth century onward. In 1850 Badger observed that (Badger, Ibid, Vol. I: 176),

If we compare the present Chaldean community with the condition of their Nestorian forefathers...we should acknowledge the superiority of the former in civilization, general intelligence, and ecclesiastical order...The Chaldeans have profited by their communion and intercourse with Rome, from whence they have learned something of European advancement, and their youth who have been educated at the Propaganda⁴⁵ are undoubtedly more generally intelligent than those brought up in this country.

While the Chaldean Church and the Chaldeans of the plains, villages and cities underwent a process of westernization through their contact with Rome, Nestorianism and those who professed the faith of the old Church of the East remained isolated in their mountainous retreat until the arrival of the English and American missionaries who exposed their “primitiveness” to the West and marveled at the isolation in which they

⁴⁵ That is, the seminaries of the Propaganda Fide in Rome.

preserved their religious tradition. When English and American missionaries arrived in Mesopotamia during the nineteenth century, the absence of coordination or alliance between the various *millets* was striking. What they observed was an active Ottoman policy intended to perpetuate the submission of religious minorities (Ye'or, 2002: 186). Under such a system the Chaldean and Nestorian millets “touched but did not mingle” (Hourani, Ibid: 22). And as such, ironically, the *millet* structure became favored by the missionary presence, which only challenged it superficially.

The *millet* system kept the various Eastern Christian sects segregated, schismatic and thus more vulnerable to evangelism; it granted the Western Churches access to the Islamic legal system, which they could not access through the Muslim communities. Nevertheless, by 1856, the European political powers in the Ottoman Empire had established a firm consular protection that allowed them to insist on the insertion of a clause in the Hatti-Humayun reform edict, which was issued by the Ottoman Empire after the Crimean War. In that clause they made a clear statement regarding the need to abolish the discriminatory status of *dhimma* throughout the Empire, which provided for the reorganization of the *millet* system throughout the Empire (Ye'or, 1985:49).

After the *millet* system was officially abolished, some of the mechanisms of *millet* segregation carried on into the following centuries. The fact that Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire were not allowed to attend Muslim schools or learn the Arabic language until the late nineteenth century (Vine: Ibid: 95), for instance, might have played a seminal role in preserving the Aramaic language as the Eastern Christians' first language, a feature marveled at by the European missionaries who “discovered” the enclaves of mountain communities who “still spoke the language of Christ.” Although “many people

living under the dominion of the Arabians and Turks have lost the use of their mother tongue,” reported the Danish traveler Karsten Niebuhr in 1761, “in the neighborhood of Mardin and Mosul, the Christians still speak the Chaldean language; and the inhabitants of the villages who do not frequent towns, never hear any other than their mother tongue” (Ye’or, 1985:214).

To the Protestants in particular, the joy was redoubled at the discovery of isolated Christian communities whose Eastern doctrine dated back to a “pure” Christianity that predated Roman Catholicism. In 1839, after laboring among the Eastern Christians for five years, Presbyterian missionary Justin Perkins wrote (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:283):

The more I become acquainted with the Nestorian church, the more deeply I am impressed with the idea that it is spiritual death, rather than error in theological belief, which is their calamity. Many human and childish traditions, both written and oral, are indeed prevalent among them; and some of these doctrines of men they have introduced into their forms of worship. In general, however, their liturgy is composed of unexceptionable and excellent matter....They recognize...the Nicene creed...[that] accords very nearly with that venerable document as it has been handed down to us.

Not all Western missions perceived or aimed to abolish what they judged to be the “spiritual death” of the Church of the East. In the sections that follow we shall turn to the distinct agendas of each of the Christian missions to Mesopotamia, examining the various roles they played in bringing about “modernity” whether materially through improving living conditions and providing places of workshop or ideologically through conjuring up ancient-new collective identities, introducing the concepts of progress and self-rule, and implementing Aramaic language reforms in ways that will later be shown to contribute to the construction of the discourses of Chaldeanness.

I. Catholic Mission: the Official Inauguration of Chaldeanness

As early as the thirteenth century the Church of the East discerned the viability of cooperating with the Catholic Church to facilitate its interactions with the Islamic state. Yet the first official union between the two Churches did not occur until 1445 and since then the term “Chaldean,” first used by the pope, has referred to the Eastern Christians who entered a union with Rome (Baum and Winkler, *Ibid*: 112).

In addition to the *dhimma* laws that prohibited the erection of new buildings and allowed their demolition and confiscation, Muslim authorities took liberty to transfer ownership of existing buildings from one sect to another. This process wrought internal divisions among the various churches in the empire during times when the Nestorian Patriarchs were waging relentless battles with the Islamic state to preserve their religious edifices and to build new ones. They did manage to obtain permits to build new churches, but only after the arrival of the Catholic missionaries who extended Franco-Papal funds to pay the exorbitant sums necessary for obtaining these permits.

More than eight centuries lapsed between the exile of Nestorius in 435 and the first recorded contact between the Eastern Christian Nestorians and the Roman Catholic Church in 1287. The two Christian institutions were so isolated from each other to the point that the Catholic Church had not even kept an updated record of the Nestorian Church’s missionary activity in the Far East.⁴⁶ The thirteenth century also witnessed sporadic Dominican and Franciscan missionary activity among the Christians of the

⁴⁶ An example of this isolation between the Nestorians and the Roman Church is witnessed in the story of the Nestorian monk Rabban Sauma’s visit to Rome and Paris in the thirteenth century. When Sauma was selected from the branch of the Nestorian Church in China by the Patriarch Yaballah III to pay a visit to the Pope in Rome and to King Philip IV in Paris, the Roman Catholic Pope and cardinals failed to recognize that Sauma belonged to what they had designated as a “schismatic and heretic” order. They also did not seem to have noticed, nor challenge, how Sauma considered the Pope as the Patriarch of the West, much as he considered Yaballah III the Patriarch of the East (Vine, *Ibid*: 152-3).

Nineveh Plains. This resulted in the conversion to Catholicism of some Nestorian patriarchs and laity, but not in the establishment of a solid Catholic community in Mesopotamia. A collective conversion did not begin until 1552. Its impetus, as we saw in the case of Yuhannan Sulaka (Chapter Two), was an internal schism from the hereditary line of Mar Shimun rather than a missionary success.

At a later point the Catholic presence in Mesopotamia became twofold: there was a Latin Roman Catholic Church and a Chaldean Catholic Church. During the reign of the last Safavid ruler Shah Abbas (1571-1629), the first Christian bishopric directly administered from Europe was created in Baghdad. Pope Urban VIII (1568-1644) decreed the creation of a Roman Catholic bishopric, named “Babylon” and distinct from a “Chaldean” bishopric. A wealthy French woman funded the Latin project, which continued under the direct supervision of Rome but was populated with local clergymen. Those were Nestorians who had converted to the Latin rite of Catholicism before Rome established the Chaldean rite. The local bishops resided in Hamadan rather than Baghdad, and the holder of the new See always had to be a Frenchman. This bishopric, according to Richard Coke, “arose of a remarkable *rapprochement* between Shah Abbas and the Pope” (Coke, *Ibid*:201-2), creating more tolerable conditions for the Christian communities in the Islamic state.

The two branches of Catholicism, Latin and Chaldean, gradually mingled and the early seventeenth century witnessed the Catholic Church’s renewed involvement with the Uniate Churches, Chaldeans among them. Involvement with the Church of the East was to an extent motivated by the factional struggle between the Catholic converts (Chaldean) and those who continued to uphold the old Nestorian faith. On the other hand, two

circumstances local to Europe further prompted papal forces eastward to Mesopotamia: religious factionalism and Counterreformation. In a preemptive measure to forestall missionary efforts that might issue from the early Reformers, Rome's renewed involvement with the Uniate Churches during that period was in part prompted by the "heretical" surge of the Counterreformation (Cummins, 1997: xxxi).⁴⁷

Additional economic and political factors came to the aid of the Catholic missions. France, "Eldest Daughter of the Church and enthusiastic participant in Ottoman commerce," was enjoying the protective privileges of its Christian subjects, or *ra'aya*, that had been secured since the sixteenth century. The strong European political presence created a relatively safe environment for the pioneer Christian missions. It was not a chance event that the advent of Latin missionaries to Aleppo and Sidon coincided with the establishment of a French consul and factory in these cities. Before the end of the seventeenth century these missionaries, protected by the Catholic monarch's consul and the French consul in Sidon, extended their operations to Damascus, Baghdad and Mosul (Ellis, *Ibid*: 205-6). In addition to offering religious and diplomatic protection to missionaries and local protégés alike, the Franco-Papal connection fortified the protection of the economic assets of the Catholic Church and France (Haddad, 1987:206).

Thus foreign political and religious presence became inseparable in the context of Christian Mesopotamia. Because Catholic France dominated the Middle East economically and politically more than any other Western power at the time, the Catholic

⁴⁷ To the relief of the papal powers, the Counterreformation exhibited no interest in foreign mission during the sixteenth century and little interest during the seventeenth century. Ironically, however, Protestant foreign missionary enterprise was indirectly caused by Rome. It had sprung out of a desperate flight from the Roman Inquisition and the persecution of oppositional Protestant branches. As we shall see, Protestant missions developed a sweeping interest in the region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, eventually tipping the balance in their favor as the papal mission declined again (Cummins, *Ibid*).

mission was far more resilient than the other Western missions in the region. During the nineteenth century, all minorities in the Middle East were deeply affected by the European Powers' intervention in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire. One of the pretexts Europe used in order to intervene was the relations between the Porte and its Christian subjects.

The French authorities, joined by the Catholic Austrian and Italian Governments, eventually extended their protective privileges to include the indigenous Uniate Christians, mainly the Maronites in Lebanon and the Chaldeans in Iraq. A further expression of the power of the Catholic Church in the Middle East were the Jesuit (mostly French) and Dominican (mostly Italian) missions, who established Latin Churches and schools in Baghdad and Mosul during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Political conditions in the Persian and Ottoman Empires were decisive factors in driving Catholic missionary forces to establish posts in Mosul, near a concentration of Nestorian villages. After two centuries of laboring among the Christians of the Levant and Persia, the Jesuits had to overcome a serious administrative hurdle. In 1842 a *firman* was issued by the Persian authorities ordering "the disturbers of public peace" out of the empire. That same year, supported by the French consul, the mission was redirected toward Mosul (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 432, 504, 480). A stronghold was established there, fortifying the Chaldean community with the Catholic presence of Jesuits and Dominicans.

While the pioneer archeologists engaged in eager campaigns to unearth the ancient palaces that dotted the region, the missionaries competed to reach upward with

their new edifices. The plains of Nineveh were subjected to a feverish Catholic campaign of church construction. The Roman Catholic Church was aiming to reward each Uniate group with a Catholic church of its own. In 1842, a Syrian (Jacobite) Catholic Church was built, as was an Armenian Catholic Church built two years later. In 1848 a Catholic Bishopric of Babylon was expanded into an Archbishopric, acting as Apostolic Delegate to all Oriental-rite Catholics. An 1852 new Armenian Church was followed ten years later by a Syrian Archbishopric of Baghdad. The old and small 1721 Latin or Roman Catholic Church was replaced by a nicer and larger building in 1866. Latin schools and convents began to appear (Coke, Ibid:276-7).

In order to increase the number of their *protégés*, all missions, Catholic and non-Catholic, strived to apply their “auxiliary sciences” (mainly in the form of elementary education and basic health care) for “divine ends,” in order to “impress not press” their potential Eastern Christian converts (Cummins, 1997:xxvi). They tried to set up public institutions such as hospitals, hospices and schools. But not all had the same connections with the local authorities.

Support of the Catholic mission did not emanate only from the firm European presence in the Middle East. In 1822 twelve French persons, mostly women involved in the silk industry, or “a few humble and obscure Catholics,” as they called themselves, founded the Institute for the Propagation of Faith in Lyons. They aimed to raise money to hand over to the various Catholic orders and societies, among which were the “Roman Catholic missions all over the world.” A year after it was founded this lay society was blessed by the Pope. In 1842, they sent two thousand francs “for distribution among

Independent⁴⁸ Nestorians” and three thousand more for the villages in and around Mosul. The Protestant missionaries in the area, who clearly saw that the money did not contribute to the assistance of the Jesuit missionaries themselves, construed these sums as “bribes”(*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:435; Robinson, 1916:490-1).

The proselytizing tactics applied by the Catholics to win converts might offer insight into the appellation conflation that partially coincided with the conversions and re-conversions of the various hereditary lines. During the early centuries of its mission, and late into the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church earned itself a reputation of opportunism and materialism among the Protestant groups who witnessed its transactions among the Eastern Christians when they arrived in Mesopotamia in the 1800s. It is true that on many occasions drawing people into the Roman See involved tempting them with monetary compensation, a fact that led the Protestant missionaries to emphasize the titular, rather than genuinely doctrinal, nature of these conversions to Catholicism.

In 1846, the Presbyterian Justin Perkins chanced upon entire villages that had recently agreed to become Catholic on condition that the papal bishop would rebuild their churches. Perkins quoted one of the village’s elders: “But he has not done so [the bishop]...and if he fails, we will again become Syrians [Eastern Christian]” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:632). At times entire districts were reported to have converted to Catholicism, such as that of Mezury in 1841, but only the priests accepted the new doctrines, while the populations “refused”—indeed were not shown how—to “renounce the ancient faith” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:632). At other times local Christians reported to the Protestant missionaries that they found themselves obliged to accept the

⁴⁸ That is, Nestorians who have not been converted to Catholicism by the Jesuit and Dominican missions yet.

authority of the Chaldean bishop (Eliyya of Alqosh at the time) as his favorable representational powers facilitated their relations with the Turkish government (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:401).

In addition to tempting monetary remunerations, there is more than one instance in which the Catholic Church promised the solicited Eastern patriarch jurisdiction over all the Uniate Chaldeans (Badger, *Ibid*:279). When these patriarchs succumbed to the temptation of extended power, the antecedent Chaldean patriarch had to step down from his office, which would have become redundant. When most of these indirectly superannuated patriarchs refused to relinquish their titles and posts, schismatic lines of patriarchy appeared as we saw earlier. Political factors were at the root of these conversions and reversed conversions.

When these Eastern Catholic patriarchs could no longer secure the subsidy of the Pope, some pursued the alternative of ceding power to the supremacy of the Sublime Porte of Constantinople. By doing so they could appease not only the religious powers in Constantinople, but also the overarching Muslim state. For it should be noted that in the early phases of the Catholic conversions, neither the Sublime Porte of Constantinople nor the bishops of the Church of the East nor the Islamic rulers who oversaw their affairs fully recognized the Chaldean patriarchs (Badger, *Ibid*: 150). Thus the initial Catholic conversion contracts were strictly between the Eastern patriarchs who accepted the offer and the Pope himself, with the latter's prerogative to breach these contracts at any time, as he sometimes did.

Both Muslim Ottoman authorities and the Eastern patriarchs reacted violently to the interventions of Rome, which entailed challenging their power and the proliferation

of rival schismatic Churches. Likewise was the reaction of the Sublime Porte, the hereditary rival of the Pope, who did not look kindly at the transfer of spiritual leadership to Rome from the Eastern Patriarchs who were under his control as Nestorians. Not only were the titles bestowed upon the Uniate patriarchs not acknowledged by the Porte, the Eastern patriarch or the Caliph, but also in most cases the communities who nominally converted to the Latin or Chaldean rite were denounced by Muslim authorities as well as by their own Church (Ye'or, 1996:155).

To summarize the above from a spatially and temporally removed perspective in the present, the history of the Catholic mission among the Eastern Christians reveals the financial and political prestige the Roman Church enjoyed in Mesopotamia from the thirteenth century until the Second World War. This fact explains why 75-80% of modern Mesopotamian Christians, the former Nestorians, profess the Catholic creed today and call themselves Chaldean. Nonetheless, the process of Catholic conversion appears to have been at least in part enacted in a vicious circle: the disadvantaged converts from the Church of the East saw in the Catholic protégé status, which was usually enhanced through religious union with the Roman Catholic Church, a first step toward their emancipation from their debased *dhimmi* status. This emancipation contradicted *dhimma* rules, which in turn recharged Muslim hostility toward the *dhimmis*.

At the time when Rome was able to offer political and financial support to its Eastern correlates, a new Western presence began capitalizing on the debilitating effects of the *millet* system and Franco-Papal strategic hegemony over the Church of the East. Non-Catholic Western missions introduced themselves to Eastern Christian communities equipped with new proselytizing strategies. With the knowledge that they could not vie

with Rome in capital and personnel, Anglican and American Churches initially confined their missions to the communities that had not yet converted to Catholicism or had converted back to the old faith of the Church of the East after unpropitious encounters with Rome.

II. Anglican Mission: the Complementary Gift of the Assyrian Title

Discussion of the Anglican Mission in this section will focus on a notion of “discovery,” whereby the Eastern Christians of the mountains were brought to a spotlight and presented to the Christian West as a group of pure Christians with close geographical, ethnic and linguistic ties to the first Christians, including Jesus himself. Whereas the Roman Church contributed the appellation “Chaldean” to the Catholicized majority of the Church of the East, the Anglicans introduced the equally antiquated appellation, “Assyrian” to the context of the remaining non-Catholic Church of the East. Significantly, the conjuring up of a Christian Assyrian identity eventually rendered the term “Nestorian” obsolete.

In 1863, fifty-three Eastern Assyrian bishops and priests signed an appeal for help to the Queen of England followed shortly by an appeal to the Archbishop of Canterbury. For the first time in the history of the Church of the East, great hopes were placed on England. Explicit protests about the conditions of the Church were passionately articulated, portraying the Roman Catholic Church along with the pope as the “Muhammad of the West.” Shortly after these appeals the “Assyrian Christian Aid Fund” was founded in 1868, and the name “Assyrian” was fashioned for the non-Catholic

Nestorians along with a new self-consciousness that posed the Eastern Christians as the oldest autochthonous community in Mesopotamia (Baum and Winkler, Ibid: 128).

In the 1860s the French and the Papal authorities had begun discussing the prospect of settling the mountain Christians in the plains in and around Mosul. The main purpose was to bring the community within reach of the political control of France and the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome (Badger, Ibid: 279). Yet due to the increasing power of the British authorities in the region, by that time it was the Anglicans who held the power to administer the southward migration of the non-Catholic Christians (whom they were beginning to call Assyrians). The British continued to be the main foreign authority to manage the affairs of the Assyrians after their mass exodus from Turkey during World War I.

Although the Catholic mission had been working among the Christians of the Nineveh Plains since the sixteenth century, the Mission of the Church of England only took interest in the Christian communities after they were “rediscovered” by the Englishman Claudius James Rich in 1820.⁴⁹ Rich, who was an official of the East India Company stationed in Baghdad, was accredited for having aroused the interest of English and French authorities in excavating the mounds of Nineveh. Further “discoveries” of the Nestorian tribes that settled between the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers took place in 1835, when the British government was launching its steamboat “Euphrates Expedition” under the command of Colonel R. A. Cheney (Badger, Ibid: xi). These confirmed discoveries of the “ancient Christian community” in the Hakkari Mountains caused a sensation among the Anglican missionaries (Vine, Ibid: 177),

⁴⁹ His discoveries appeared in London in two volumes entitled, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh*.

Here were Christians speaking Syriac, a language closely akin to that spoken by our Lord Himself; Christians who had maintained their faith for over a thousand years as an island community in a sea of Islam; a Christian Church whose history went back far before the Reformation, which yet owned no allegiance to the Pope; a Christian Church which in some superficial ways might even be called an *Eastern Protestantism*.⁵⁰

In the mid-nineteenth century many factors joined together to form the identities of Christian Mesopotamia and their multiple transformations. In one context, competing archeological posts labored to unearth Ancient Assyria. Meanwhile the Anglicans and Presbyterians took interest in these excavations because of their relevance to the Mesopotamian context of the Old Testament. At the same time they were rivaling Rome by operating with their modern missionary methodology among the local Christians. Finally, they took to competing with each other over winning the loyalty of the Eastern Christians. As the historical links between ancient and modern Mesopotamians were being slowly forged through the excavation campaigns and the renewed interest in related sections of the Bible on the part of the missionaries, alarming information about the conditions of the Christians in the Kurdistan region were communicated in a report by Ainsworth and Rassam from Mosul in 1840. They effected the dispatch of Rev. Badger to the area under the auspices of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of London.

In 1842, while Ainsworth produced his two-volume book *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, Badger spent one year among the Nestorians and “made it clear to them that the wish of the Church of England was simply to help them in all possible ways, but not to make them give up their old faith or order” (Vine, *Ibid*: 178). To his British readership Badger emphasized “the importance of carefully avoiding whatever would tend to awaken the thought among the Nestorian

⁵⁰ Emphasis is mine.

ecclesiasts that there are rival Protestant sects and interests, upon which they may practice the private gratification of various desires.” Yet, ironically, he was utterly dismayed at the missionaries of the American Board of Foreign Missions (“whose right to labor among the Nestorians was as ludicrous as it is presumptuous, and savours much more of exclusiveness, which they are so fond of attributing to us,”) for impressing upon these Christians that the Presbyterians hold the same faith as the Anglicans, “notwithstanding the wide difference existing between us...” (Badger, *Ibid*: 6, 7). To the Anglicans to “simply help” was an understatement. Helping became their serious undertaking. The mission as a whole was premised upon preserving the old faith and order, which they believed Eastern Christians embodied but were, paradoxically, incapable of nurturing properly.

Education was the key element that the Anglicans determined to be wanting among the Eastern Christians. In the early twentieth century “superficial investigators” were sent to inspect the work of Anglican missionaries abroad. They stressed to the missionary how the object he must keep in view was to “educate,”—“to draw out and develop the latent capacities of his pupils in order that the additional knowledge maybe correlated with their previous knowledge and with their methods of thinking.” Using the Catholic mission as a paradigm for assessing how “missionary education tends to deprive converts of their hereditary virtues and to give them no others in their place,” the investigators admonished the missionaries: “the more anglicized in appearance and in methods of thought and action their pupils become the more complete has been their own failure” (Robinson, *Ibid*: 22-4).

When defining their mission, Anglicans asserted that it held an intermediate position between Roman Catholicism and Protestant teachings. Like Catholics, Anglican missionaries emphasized the value of external authority and sacramental grace, and like Protestants they sought to inculcate the notion of “man’s complete responsibility as an individual” (Robinson, *Ibid*: 500). With this last aspect of their ideology, both Anglicans and Presbyterians drew the attention of Eastern Christians to an unprecedented notion of self-rule. This, as we shall see, activated the modern Assyrian community’s proclivity toward a discourse of national autonomy, both as a refugee minority in post-World-War-I Iraq, and as Diaspora communities in Europe and the US. As an Iraqi minority, the Catholic Chaldeans by contrast did not develop a similar discourse. It was decades before they adopted a similar discourse, and predominantly from their place in the US Diaspora.

English and American missionaries, thus, were rivaling not only Rome, but also each other, and the Eastern Christians, as Badger feared, capitalized upon this rivalry to the “gratification of various desires.” Material and social benefits, coupled with political security in a hostile environment, were predominantly what stood for these “desires.”

It must be remembered that in the previous two centuries, given the nature of their interactions with Rome, the Eastern Christians accommodated themselves to a system of rewarded conversions. For the majority of their patriarchs, material and social benefits took precedence over doctrinal affiliation. The Presbyterians and Anglicans arrived during a time when the followers of the Church of the East—and to a lesser extent the Catholic followers of the Chaldean Church—were severely persecuted by the Kurds and ravaged by plagues, taxation and governmental neglect. And when none of these enthusiastic missionaries seemed to demand that they alter their daily religious practices

or cultural customs as a prerequisite for conversion, it seemed perfectly sensible to opt for the largest pie.

Presbyterian missionary Justin Perkins reported having once received a Chaldean deacon from the vicinity of Mosul who declared that he would “turn” for money. “On being farther pressed, he repeated that he would not ‘turn’ without money; but for ten tamons (roughly \$25), or some such consideration, he was ready to change his belief.” Perkins furthermore reported having no doubt that this “poor Catholic” was making his proposal in earnest, and that he would probably afterward seek to “turn” again in return for more money (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:173).

Many examples of individual attempts to garner a little profit from conversion exist, but what were effective on the broader collective level were the conversion actions taken by the heads of the Church. In pursuit of security subsequent to a number of Kurdish incursions, the Eastern Patriarch began to send requests for help to Canterbury as we saw earlier. In addition to the funds designated for “Assyrian aid” in the 1860s, the Anglican Church sent Rev. E. L. Cutts to investigate the Assyrians’ conditions in 1876.

These investigations mark an important point in this discussion because they resulted in the establishment of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s “Mission to Assyrian Christians” in 1881 (Vine, *Ibid*: 179). As was pointed out earlier, for the first time in Mesopotamia’s Nestorian history the name of the Church was associated with that of an Ancient Mesopotamian Empire, one that was just recently being revealed to the world through a British excavation campaign. In 1886 the Archbishop of Canterbury established another major mission to these “abysmally ignorant mountain Nestorians” (Stafford, *Ibid*: 24). They were again styled “Assyrian.” Three additional missionaries were sent to

Urmia from that year until the mission's interruption at the outset of World War I. Among the best known of these missionaries was Canon W. A. Wigram, who labored in the region from 1902 to 1912. In his 1929 publication, *The Assyrians and Their Neighbors*, he tried to develop several arguments for how the ancient Assyrians were related to the modern Christian inhabitants of Mesopotamia.

The next section will discuss how the other missionary group, the American Presbyterians, fostered and refashioned an additional historical link that bolstered the collective identity of the "Assyrian": a type-set version of neo-Aramaic, or "the language of Jesus."

III. American Mission: the Consolidation of "Biblical Syriac"

Perhaps the American Protestant missions failed to outshine Rome and England in establishing a stronghold in Baghdad and Mosul, or in absorbing as many Eastern Christians to their orders. The success of their mission transpired in an entirely different, though equally conspicuous, form: they standardized the modern vernaculars of Aramaic from spoken dialects to a single written language, and decorated this new invention with the special status of "Biblical Syriac" (Joseph, *Ibid*: 90). This not only contributed to the reshaping of the modern Assyrian identity of the descendants of the non-Catholic Eastern Christians among whom they labored, it equally reshaped the modern Catholic Chaldean identity and gave it its present form. Both groups today pledge to be speakers of the "language of Christ."

The association of Syriac with the New Testament predates the protestant missionary fostering efforts. As early as 1555, the title page of the earliest printed Syriac

New Testament⁵¹ claimed that it was “in the vernacular of Jesus Christ” (cited in Coakley, 2006:1). This association between Jesus and Syriac “was particularly important,” explains J. F. Coakley, “given that, even if it was not exactly the language of Jesus, it was an ancient form of Aramaic with a special relationship to his words and to early Christianity” (Ibid). In effect, it was an association that recalls the earlier discussion of *firstness* and the monumentality of history, which, as we shall see in this section, the American Protestant missions combined with the rhetoric of progress and modernity. The outcome was the emergence of a distinct conception of self, community and communal history that was first fostered among the non-Catholic Eastern Christians but quickly incorporated into the discourses of the Catholic majority of this group. After outlining the political and religious motivations behind the American missions in the next section, the discussion will turn to the nineteenth-century missionary foundations of the Chaldean/Assyrian assertions of linguistic privilege.

Mission Background and Motivations

As we saw earlier, the early Protestant Reformers took no serious interest in foreign missions until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and they eventually tipped the balance in their favor as the papal missions declined toward the conclusion of the nineteenth century (Cummins, Ibid: xxxi). The Anglicans did not establish their missionary posts among the Christians of Mesopotamia until the nineteenth century. Apparently the Anglicans also kept a low profile when relating to their Protestant brethren in America in the early phase of their mission.

⁵¹ Carried out by Widmanstetter under the sponsorship of the Habsburg king (Coakley, Ibid: 31).

American-supported missions date back to 1806, when a group of three students formalized their desire “to effect a mission to the heathen in the person of its members.” In 1810 the growing society founded the ABCFM, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, when the Roman Catholic Church was practically dormant in America.⁵² The first ABCFM mission targeted the American Indians in 1826. Less than eight years later they were bustling among the Nestorians (Robinson, *Ibid*: 273, 483). Upon Dwight and Smith’s recommendation in 1834, the “Nestorian Mission” was established, and the American Presbyterians entered the hitherto Catholic and Anglican arena. By 1833 they were established rivals of the Anglican and Catholic missions, with their headquarters in Urmia, in the mountainous northwestern region of modern-day Iran. The ABCFM substituted the title “Nestorian Mission” with “Mission to Persia” in 1869, in view of its “enlarged endeavours” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: vii; Vine, *Ibid*: 178). Two years later the mission was transferred to the Presbyterian Board, who continued its missionary activity without major interruptions until World War I. Before their expulsion from Iraq in 1959, the Protestant missionaries had numbered more than fifty between Mosul and Baghdad (Makdisi, 1959).

The mission’s posts in the Middle East were rather isolated. As late as 1833, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)⁵³ seemed to have heard of neither the discoveries of Rich, the travels of Rev. Wolff nor the printing and dissemination of the Syriac Bible.⁵⁴ That same year their *Missionary Herald* reported

⁵² Although from 1850 onward, the Roman Catholics constituted the largest religious group in the United States (Wacker, *Ibid*: 283).

⁵³ During that period the Board’s agents belonged to the Presbyterian, Independent, Dutch Reformed and other Protestant bodies.

⁵⁴ “The honor of being the first worker” was ceded to the Anglican Rev. Joseph Wolff who traveled to the region in order to bring back a copy of the Old Syriac New Testament. In England the British and Foreign

that, with the exception of the investigations made three years earlier, “almost all we know concerning that sect [of Eastern Christians] in modern times is derived from papal writings” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:2).

In order to historically situate the significant linguistic consolidation that resulted from these rather isolated Protestant missions, it is crucial to understand the nature of the Presbyterian vision of Catholicism in nineteenth-century America, the impetus behind the initial missions to Mesopotamia. A major source of U.S. Protestant anxiety stemmed from the fact that Catholicism took no note of national boundaries when spreading its mission. That membership in the “Romish Church” in America outnumbered the Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians combined in 1893 was a source of panic to these Protestants. One article from that year reported, “This is truly alarming! The enemy is getting literally behind our Home Mission forces as Sherman got behind the Confederates by his memorable march to the sea” (Wacker, 2003: 284).

The Pope’s assertion that there should be “no free education, no freedom of worship, no freedom of the press” was interpreted as “an abomination to true American citizenship.” Eventually fighting for U.S. liberty against the encroachment of “papism” translated into “fighting the spread of Catholicism anywhere on the globe,” which thus became a matter of “local patriotism” (Wills [Wacker, *Ibid*], 99).

In 1830, the same year the reunion between the Chaldeans and the Roman Catholic Church was finalized through Pope Pius VIII’s confirmation of John Hormizdas as head of the Chaldean Catholics, Eli Smith of the “Syria Mission” and H. O. Dwight of the ABCFM, the Constantinople Station, had jointly set out for an exploratory tour. They

Bible Society prepared a printed edition of it. In 1827 this Bible was distributed in great numbers around Urmia. (Vine, *Ibid*: 177).

traveled through the mountainous regions of northern Iraq, eastern Turkey and western Persia—all hitherto little known to Europe, and even less so to America. The purpose of this trip was to explore the possibilities of expanding the Protestant missionary activity to these parts. The two men were optimistic about the mission to the Eastern Christians, with whom they spent a week in Urmia. They reported back that there was (*Missionary Herald*, vol. 29:18)

Strong reason to believe that a mission would encounter fewer obstacles among them, than in any other of the old churches of the East. Their views of open communion, and their liberality toward other sects, are without a parallel in that part of the world.

As earlier discussions suggested, when Eastern Christian communities had no affiliations with Rome, they were generally perceived by members of the Anglican and Presbyterian missions as more vulnerable to evangelism because they had no other source of foreign protection. Thus, although like the Anglicans they were struck by these Christians' "puerile theology" (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 72-3), the Presbyterians constantly reported, not without hopeful enthusiasm, instances of Chaldeans' re-conversion to their old Eastern faith confession. In 1834, Perkins, an American Presbyterian who "was much delighted...at the fact that the increase of Catholics in these regions exists only in their own fabrications," confirmed his report by citing the claims of a bishop he had visited in Urmia. This bishop who "indignantly denied there having been any increase" in conversion to Catholicism insisted that the "Catholics throughout their nation are fast losing ground." He recounted to Perkins how Patriarch Mar Eliyya of the village of Alqosh near Mosul, whose line of Patriarchy had been Catholic for nearly a hundred years, had lately "revolted from Rome and returned to the old Eastern faith; and that great numbers of his people, who had also been Catholics, were following him"

(*Missionary Herald*, vol. I:16-7, 29). Another Chaldean was appointed to office, and ten years later the Chaldean bishop of Alqosh was threatening the people with his ecclesiastical maledictions “in case they refused to turn” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 463).

More than “preserving” a church that was about to become extinct as the Anglicans envisioned their task to be, the American mission had set out to resuscitate a “spiritually dead” Church of the East for the grander purpose of the “spiritual regeneration of Asia” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 2). The “deadness” was attributed to the “idolatrous” practices that were remote from Christian teachings, the “unfounded superstitions” of the Eastern Christians, and, most importantly, illiteracy in general and in scriptural knowledge in particular. The “regeneration” amounted to inculcating American cultural mannerisms and particular doctrinal interpretations of the Bible among members of the community and to bringing literacy to a segment of the local youth through a system of missionary schools they had established, where English, Arabic and a consolidated version of vernacular Aramaic were taught.

How the two tasks of reviving Asia and improving the “spiritual” condition of the Nestorian faith were related was explained by Rev. James Layman Merrick, whose mission was “destined to the Mohammedans of Persia” the same year Perkins was sent to work among the Christians. According to Merrick (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 4, 9),

The Mohammedan of Western Asia with too much reason despises the Christian religion; for, in every form in which it has been presented to his notice...it has been as a system of idolatrous worship. It must be presented to him in a different form...For this purpose, we must persevere in our missions to the degenerate oriental churches, and extend those missions more and more.

The origins of this impression date back to the missionary endeavors of the early 1820s. The ABCFM had initially sent missionaries to various parts of the Ottoman

Empire to evangelize Moslems and Jews. In time they came to realize that “the unsatisfactory lives of many of the Christians belonging to the Oriental Churches rendered their task of influencing Moslems a hopeless one...” (Robinson, Ibid: 269).

Thus the “degeneration” of the Eastern rite Churches, witnessed through the dearth of scriptural materials and general economic poverty, was taken to be the reason behind the fruitlessness of proselytizing among Muslims. If the local Christians could provide a refurbished representation of their religion, believed the American missions, Christianity would not be so shunned in the encompassing Muslim society. Such missionary sentiments did not pass unnoticed by the Eastern Christians, who with extreme apprehension entreated the Presbyterians to keep their efforts exclusively within their communities. “A multitude of Mohammedans in the city [Mosul] are daily talking about coming to school to you,” said a priest to Perkins, “but I beg you do not receive them.” Perkins in turn acknowledged how delicate the issue was, “not more because prejudice rears a separating wall between the two nations, than because we have not time and strength to do half we desire for one, much less for both of them” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 52).

The Ottoman authorities eventually obliged the missionaries to teach at Muslim schools for a short period each day, “to quiet the minds of the Mussulmans, who were disposed to look with jealousy on these new favors conferred upon their despised Christian subjects” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 54, 65). But the passion of these Presbyterian missionaries lay elsewhere: they had quietly embarked upon translating the Bible into modern Syriac.

Ancient Liturgy in Modern Language

Early Anglican and American missions to the Eastern Christians both built on eighteenth-century Roman Church studies of East-Assyrian manuscripts, especially the pioneer work of G. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Walker, 2006).⁵⁵ Between 1880-1900, as their posts became more established in Mesopotamia, Euro-American missions rediscovered and preserved dozens of East-Syrian manuscripts and exported them to Europe. Attesting to the success of Christianity in late antique Mesopotamia, these theological treaties and exegeses quickly prompted missionary interest in the linguistic revival of the theological and liturgical corpuses of the newly encountered Christian societies. At the outset of the mission, part of the ABCFM instructions to the missionaries consisted of making inquires about “whether the Bible and other books could be freely introduced and dispersed among the people,” and “the expense of transporting paper and books from the nearest or most frequented sea ports...” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 8).

Work on translating the Bible into modern Syriac began in earnest in 1837. A complete version of the scriptures existed in ancient Syriac but in the “Jacobite character,”⁵⁶ which was “detested, and but very imperfectly understood.”⁵⁷ Perkins claimed that the idea of translating the Bible into the modern language was first proposed to him by a local priest called Abraham in 1836, and that he (Perkins) “had never suggested the thought to him” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 53, 70). Meanwhile the “Romanist” aversion to the Bible was a fashionable topic in the Protestant publications at

⁵⁵ Assemani was a Lebanese Maronite scholar in training in Rome when he wrote the *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (1719-28), which is considered to be the first comprehensive introduction to Syriac literature (Coakley, 2006:2).

⁵⁶ The script used by the Jacobites, or Syrian Orthodox, was developed for the western variety of the Syriac language that had spread in Syria and other parts of western Mesopotamia.

⁵⁷ That is, detested by the Nestorians who were historically on bad terms with the Jacobites, whose doctrinal confession was created as a reaction to Nestorianism.

home. A New York pastor produced a catalogue of the many ways the Roman Catholic Church “threatened American liberty,” among which was discouraging Christians from depending on their interpretations of the Bible. Subsequently many Protestant groups encouraged Bible reading groups and private Gospel reading as a way of overcoming the hegemony of the Pope (Wacker, *Ibid*: 100), a fact that indirectly sparked the interest in Bible translation as an integral part of the missionary enterprise abroad.

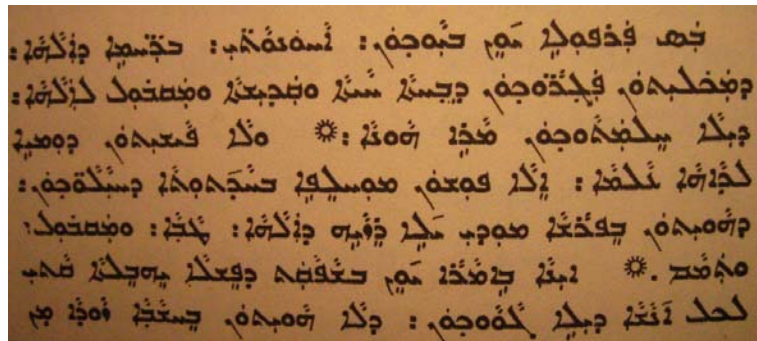


Figure 2. New Testament in modern East Syriac, New York 1864.
(Source: Coakley, 2006: 214)

After five years of pleading with the Board authorities in Massachusetts and Constantinople (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 22, 55), in 1841 the press of the American Nestorian Mission arrived at Urmia and was immediately put to operation. With fonts obtained from the British and Foreign Bible Society, and to the sheer astonishment of the local Christians, the modern dialect they spoke was “reduced to writing” (*Ibid*), that is, captured in a manageable material form and ready for dissemination within the community. Though they solicited their assistance in matters of the press, the American missionaries disapproved of the Anglicans’ publication of the 1829 version of the Four Gospels. According to the American missionaries, its language was (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 491)

Erroneously named Syro-Chaldaic; being simply the text of the ancient Syriac version printed in the Nestorians character; and having no other connection with

the modern vernacular language of that people. It was printed from manuscripts brought home by Mr. [Joseph] Wolff, the [converted] Jewish missionary...The Alphabet has a general resemblance to the [Estrangela].

In addition to being criticized as “defective,” because it supposedly contained some mistakes, it is worth noting that the Syriac type that was used by the Anglican Church and which the Americans had initially borrowed for their press had to be purchased in England at a high expense. Dissatisfied with the economic factor and critical of using the classical form of the Syriac script—the Estrangela⁵⁸—the American missionaries promptly hired a young man named Homan Hallock, who had left Boston in 1826 to become a missionary printer in Malta (Coakley, 2003), to prepare a new font for their press. The new font type soon came to be known as *Madnhāyā* (more commonly known today as “Eastern Syriac Script,” also known as “Assyrian” or “Nestorian”) and replaced the old type in the ecclesiastical publications of the Assyrian and Chaldean Churches.

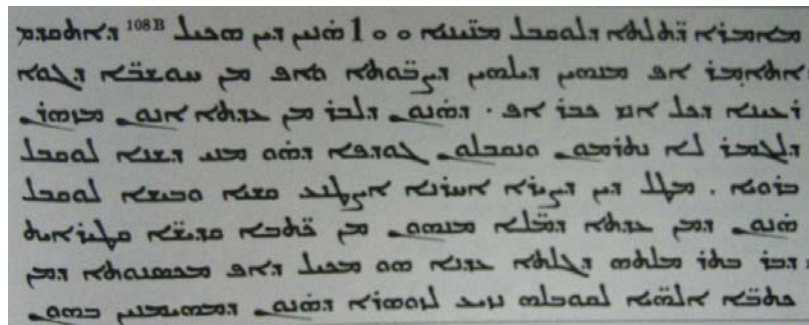


Figure 3. A Berlin specimen of the Estrangela type, 1859. (Source: Coakley, 2006:173)⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Western scholars divide the Syriac script into four branches, a) *Old Syriac*, hand produced (in mosaics, coins and handwritten documents), and dating from the 1st century to the 4th century; b) *Estrangela*, a developed form of book-hand Syriac that began appearing in copied religious manuscripts of the early 5th century; c) *Serto*, a more compact book-hand that took over from estrangela in the West Syriac region during the 8th century; and d) *East Syriac*, another distinctive book-hand that appeared within the ecclesiastical context of the Church of the East. This development paralleled the Serto of the West but appeared later during the 14th century. It is this last script that the American missionaries elaborated when they committed the spoken Eastern dialects to writing and printing in the Syriac script during the 19th century (Coakley, 2006:4-16).

⁵⁹ “The great acquisition of Syriac manuscripts by the British Museum in the years 1841-51”, writes Coakely (Ibid, 167), “had typographical consequences, since these manuscripts all at once brought the

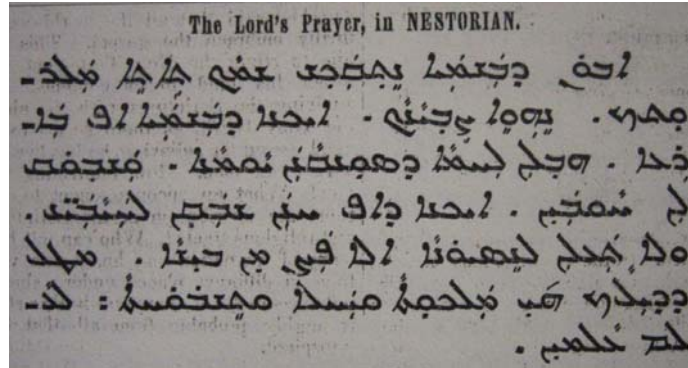


Figure 4. The Lord’s Prayer in Homan Hallock’s East Syriac type. *Missionary Herald*, May 1844. (Source: J. F. Coakley, 2006: 200)

The impact of the new press with its new type was beginning to be witnessed approximately a year after its arrival in Urmia. This was witnessed through a shift from the classical to the vernacular language in the liturgy. With delight the Presbyterians watched the “evangelical feelings” take hold of the local community, to whom “prayer in the modern language is a great novelty...It is like the day star from on high, breaking through the darkness of their dead language, and beginning to shine into their benighted minds” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 347).

The “modern language” the missionary enterprise promoted was nothing but a consolidation of several mutually unintelligible dialects of the language spoken in the various Eastern Christian villages for centuries. The new consolidated version emancipated these dialects from their notoriety as “corrupted forms” of classical Syriac and endowed them with a modern cultural value, associated closely with the modern education that the American mission administered to the members of the community.

estrangela script to prominence.” The above illustration was made by C. Schultze of Berlin, who borrowed the type from the British printing press of W. M. Watts.

The mission's interest in spoken Aramaic in the 1840s and beyond did not develop in isolation. It was one episode in a series of attempts at "understanding the Semitics." As the ABCFM took interest in the Eastern Christians of the mountains, "Eastern Assyrians" dominated the European and American literatures that tried to distinguish Aramaic-speaking Christians from "Western Assyrians," who were also known as "Syrian Orthodox" or "Jacobites" (Joseph, *Ibid*: xiii).

The contemporaneous interest in the archeological discoveries in Mesopotamia gave rise to the comparative study of Semitic languages in general. Around the time that the Presbyterian press arrived in Urmia, English colonel Henry Creswick Rawlinson, credited for having laid out the foundation for the Assyrian cuneiform decipherment, was also initiating his efforts on the tablets shipped to his residence in Baghdad. Between 1843-1847, through the excavation projects of Layard and Botta respectively, the British Museum and the Louvre amassed a collection of ancient Syriac manuscripts. Interest in deciphering the meanings of the cuneiform texts prompted grammarians to pay more attention to the living dialects in the hope of finding the missing linguistic clues there. This interest, coupled with the missionaries' interest in teaching the written vernacular to its illiterate native speakers—not only in order to instruct them in religious and worldly matters, but also to change the status of what was hitherto a *spoken* language to a *written* language suitable for documenting and preserving oral religious traditions, hymns and poetry⁶⁰—generated a series of language learning publications, ranging from textbooks, primers, philological treatises, grammars to a wide range of dictionaries (Coakley, 2006).

⁶⁰ For translation and analysis of seventeenth and eighteenth-century vernacular Syriac religious poetry see Mengozzi 2002.

Religious literature was naturally of exceptional importance, and the Eastern Christians were engrossed in a series of publications that replaced not only their ancient Syriac with the better-understood spoken variety, but also their handwritten manuscripts (until then only produced by clergymen) with neatly printed text in the Eastern Syriac vernaculars (Joseph, *Ibid*: 91-3). Previously these vernaculars constituted the language of oral communication only. The educated elders of the community could read and write ancient Syriac for liturgical purposes, but not the vernacular they spoke.

The Church of the East, along with the school-age members of its community who attended missionary classes, now had at their disposal theological treatises, Biblical expositions, hymnals, manuals of doctrine, and Presbyterian pamphlets. The modern patriarch, unlike his forefathers, was equipped to *grasp* the history of his Church and the astonishing parallels between his beliefs and those of the American Protestants. He could moreover eloquently teach and preach a West-tempered brand of salvation in what was termed “neo-Syriac” in nearly every village. Around that time also it seemed conducive for the Presbyterians who were “holding out the pledge of a new era to this people,” to begin disseminating their “Twenty-two Plain Reasons for not Being a Roman Catholic” (*Missionary Herald*, vol. I: 225, 491).

As we saw earlier, American and English missions constantly censured the Roman Catholic mission for its corrupt tactics of converting through bribes. The other side of the matter, however, was that the Anglicans and Presbyterians navigated their way among the Eastern Christians in a very similar fashion, only they used printed texts and the promise of education instead of money for bribing the impoverished communities. Protestant missionaries understood Roman Catholicism as a producer of “indolent

adherents,” and their mission as a harbinger of “a religion fraught with superstitious idolatry,” argues Anne Blue Wills, yet points out that the Americans themselves brought a “very material Protestantism...They hoped to convert Catholic sacramentalism to Protestant industriousness—still material-focused, but sacralized in a different way” (Wacker, *Ibid*: 101-2).

Aside from reports on how the early American missionaries consistently carried gifts of Syriac Bibles with them whenever they ventured into a Christian village for the first time (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:16, 22),⁶¹ the major material contribution they made to the Eastern Christians was the printing press of the American Mission. It began work in 1841 in Urmia, Persia, and was thus the first to effectively create the literature of modern Syriac. Catholic and Anglican mission presses only followed it three decades later. In contemporary Iraq, Syriac presses are mostly the offshoots of these missionary projects (Coakley, 2006:3). During the early phase of its life in the US diaspora, the Chaldean Church depended on the publications of these presses, which were then disseminated among the diasporic Chaldean community. This is why defining the Western consolidation of the Aramaic language consolidation projects is important for understanding the historical roots of the current diasporic Chaldean debates on the transmission and maintenance of the “language of heritage”, which developed during the

⁶¹ One of the first inquiries the missionaries made was about the number of books the patriarch’s library contained, and to their recurring disappointment, they usually found a few translations of the Catholic catechism and scattered fragments of old Syriac prayer books (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:426; Joseph, *Ibid*:92). The patriarchs were so accustomed to the missionaries’ attention to religious texts that later on there were reports on the readiness with which the patriarchs would demand the book-presents when a Western missionary visited them. When Rev. Badger of the Church of England made his visit to the Christian villages in 1844, he too carried generous gifts of books and other documents to leave a favorable impression. This gesture was based on the recommendation of Christian Rassam, the British Vice-Consul in Mosul, who could better estimate the expectations of the community (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:478; Badger, *Ibid*:197).

time when the same missions introduced a new rhetoric of “progress” as we shall see in the next section.

New Languages for New Progress

In addition to literacy, textuality and materialism, industriousness—an aspect that differentiated nineteenth-century Western missionaries and archaeologists from their Eastern Christian protégés who observed them work their “magic”—was introduced to the Christian communities through the rhetoric of *progress*. Catholicism, as well as Islam, were represented to Eastern Christians as two religions that have hitherto slowed down their economic prosperity. This conviction also caused the Presbyterian mission to concentrate much of its effort on education. In 1836, less than two years after the mission’s establishment in Urmia, “the first English school” opened among the mountain Christians of the region with the hope that it would be “the harbinger of light and salvation to this long oppressed nation” (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:46). A system of language learning exchange was consistently at work among the Eastern Christians and the missionaries: Americans taught them English and consulted them on the correct usage of Classical Syriac and the various modern dialects (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:45). One of the missionaries’ pastimes was a bilingual group reading of the Bible: the Americans would read the English or Latin version, while the patriarch or bishop would read the Syriac (*Missionary Herald*, Vol. I:26).

To summarize the role of the American missionaries it is important to recognize that they made the third major Western contribution to the transformation of the collective identity of Eastern Christians who were slowly transforming to “Assyrians.”

They shifted the linguistic criteria and forged associations between the dialects spoken by the community and the religion they professed. The newly-fashioned Assyrians were made to believe that they were related to the Ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, and that their Christianity was pure and closely linked to that of the early apostles. They were further told that they spoke a holy language, that of Jesus and the Bible. Finally, the concept of religious and social autonomy that was enforced by the Anglicans in an aim to discourage Eastern Christians from joining the Catholic Church was further bolstered by the Presbyterians who introduced a consistent ideology of progress.

Lastly, we will look at a Christian mission that was distinct from the previous three missions in that it was, a) indifferent toward the historical value of the Church of the East, b) did not proselytize, and c) almost managed to absorb the entire non-Catholic Eastern Christian community into its Church in a minimal amount of time. This was the brief Russian mission that concluded in 1917.

IV. Russian Mission: Protector of the Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire

While France believed itself to be the protector of the Catholics, and England and America supported the revival of the “Oriental” Churches, tsarist Russia saw itself as the guardian of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire (Baum and Winkler, *Ibid*: 134). Previous sections mention occasions on which the Eastern Christians had sent formal requests for help to the American Protestants and Anglicans in addition to having relied upon the unremitting protection of the French Consul and the Roman Catholic Church for centuries. At the time the Church of the East also aimed to elicit the help of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The last missionary case to be treated in this Chapter provides additional support for the argument that the primary motivation for the doctrinal conversions within the Church of the East was usually a quest for external protection and material gain to ensure the survival of the community as a Christian community, irrespective of denomination, title or doctrine. In other words, for the nineteenth-century Christian Mesopotamian communities and Churches, material survival outweighed any desire they might have had to sustain a particular titular designation, be that designation Nestorian, Eastern, Chaldean or Assyrian.

In 1898, alarming reports reached Western Europe that all the old Eastern Christians of Persia, a great part of the Catholic Chaldeans and at least a quarter of the Eastern Christians who had expressed allegiance to one of the Protestant orders had joined the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1899, *The Times* of London characterized the Russian Church as “the most liberal in the world because it never proselytized” (Wilson, 1889; cited in Joseph, *Ibid*: 132). How, then, did it gain all these Eastern converts when the Catholics and Protestants had spent decades of hard labor and precious resources with the hope of attaining to that end?

What partially distinguished the Russian Orthodox mission from the other European missions was the absence of interest in the historical value of the Church of the East. In contrast with the Protestants and Catholics who sought to *preserve* a certain Eastern aura while restructuring the Church from within, the objective of the Russian Orthodox mission, which was never achieved, was to entirely absorb the remaining non-Catholic Eastern Christians into Orthodoxy. Had the Russian mission not been abruptly abandoned due to the consequences of the Russo-Japanese war of 1905 and the political

turmoil in Russia, the other missions estimated that the Church of the East (which hitherto had not joined Rome and become Chaldean), would have been absorbed into Russian Orthodoxy rather than transformed into the handful of Eastern rite Assyrian Churches that exist today (Joseph, Ibid: 131-2).

Provoked by the granting of the abovementioned privileges to Western Europe, the Russian Government began to claim similar rights in relation to the non-Catholic Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire. Thus they cultivated friendly relations with the Eastern Christians, but they were not as friendly as the British, French and Italians toward the Ottoman rulers.

Contact between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East went back at least as far as 1827, when a number of Christians sought protection against Kurdish persecutions by converting to Orthodoxy while taking shelter in the eastern regions of Russia (Vine, Ibid: 180). In 1897 the specious threats that were being circulated in Christian villages by the scattered Russian clergy, such as that they would banish those who do not convert to Orthodoxy to Serbia along with the American and English missionaries, coincided with the Church of the East's cry for help that reached St. Petersburg. In return for Russian protection, an Eastern bishop declared that his community was ready to renounce its theological "errors" of the Nestorian creed by converting to Orthodoxy. Ten to fifteen thousand villagers signed the petition, in which they pledged:

...we, the Syrio-Chaldean people, followers of Nestorius, determined to unite again with the Greco-Russian, one, true, holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church...fourteen centuries ago were separated from the unity of the Church, but hereafter let this division and separation not be, between our Nestorians and the Orthodox (Wilson, 1899; cited in Joseph, Ibid: 131-2).

Accepting the offer, Russia promptly established a network of schools, parishes and missionary outposts in the Christian regions of Urmia, Persia, in 1898. By the early twentieth century the other European missions were under the alarming impression that the Church of the East was soon to be absorbed into Russian Orthodoxy. The Anglicans were forced out of Urmia by local authorities and resettled their headquarters in Van, Turkey, while the US minister in Tehran advised the ABCFM to clear out of the region.

It was not long before the non-Catholic Eastern Christians (now generally called Assyrians) antagonized the host Ottoman Empire through their intensified cooperation with its direst enemy, the Russian Government, during World War I. To the detriment of these Eastern Christians, Russian Orthodox enthusiasm ebbed away after 1905. With the unsettling events of 1917, Russia had completely abandoned the plan for the comprehensive absorption of the Church of the East. The political repercussions of this unaccomplished union with the Russian Orthodox Church were detrimental to the Assyrians of the late Ottoman Empire, but the failed union also contributed to the fostering of the ancient-modern Assyrian identity which could not have existed without the continuous borrowing from Orientalizing Western perceptions of the East. These perceptions that set the Assyrians apart from the Arab majority were furnished by the Western Christian missions as well as French and British archeology during the same period. The Assyrian community would have been severed from the environments of both Western enterprises under a union with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Recapitulation: The Missionary Enterprise in Mesopotamia, Agendas and Influences

The first three missions discussed in this Chapter shared a common problem: changing what seemed “unsatisfactory” or “heretical” about the doctrine of the Church of the East

while simultaneously preserving what was deemed “ancient,” “authentic,” or bearing historical kinship to the early apostles and Jesus himself (Vine, Ibid: 180). Each mission tried to formulate a unique solution. The Catholic solution was to recast Eastern Christianity into a “Uniate” Church, where freedom to preserve tradition and custom was permitted while canonically the new “Chaldeans” would conform to Rome. Together the Anglicans and US Presbyterians considered their missionary philosophy superior to that of Rome because their solution was to (Vine, Ibid: 181)

...preserve this ancient Church as an entity, so that it might still reckon itself as the continuation of the Church of the Persian Empire, and yet to free it from ignorance, from erroneous doctrine, from maladministration, and from those defects, major and minor, which were the legacy of its stormy history.

Unlike these three missions, the mission of the Russian Church did not seek to preserve the identity of the Eastern Church either in whole or in part. Its perspective was politically motivated, and therefore left no significant cultural trace on the Assyrian or Chaldean communities after its failure.

A general mapping of the Christian missions among the Eastern Christians suggests that the Western missionaries who succeeded in implementing change had transformed their evangelical methods over the centuries. The first shift was from reliance on power to reliance on politics, as witnessed in the transition from the Crusades to the establishment of French consulates and papal missionary posts, which closely consolidated French and Papal interests in the region. The second shift was from reliance on political influence to reliance on building a mission-dependent infrastructure through networks of hospitals, schools, colleges, press houses and arrangements for educating Eastern clergymen abroad (Robinson, Ibid: 18-22). The most recent shift, which falls outside the context of this Chapter, is characterized by a transition from sectarianism to

ecumenicalism whereby the post-Vatican Council II adopted more tolerant views toward Islam and the non-Catholic Christian denominations.⁶²

Irrespective of the evangelical methods, the missionary apparatus appeared to the Eastern Christians of the nineteenth-century somehow greater than the sum of its parts, as though it were a structure with an immaterial authority that was larger and more powerful than the European and American men who constructed it.

Western missionaries and excavators who arrived in Mesopotamia in the mid-nineteenth century mingled with the local Christians and favored them over Kurds and Arabs in many respects. In the process of fulfilling religious or archeological goals, the Western contacts with the local Christian communities of nineteenth-century Mesopotamia revived, and to an extent created, new associations between these Christians and the ancient Chaldeans and Assyrians. One of the consequences of this was the forging of a new self-consciousness within the Chaldean and Assyrian communities that lasted beyond the initial contact. This new self-consciousness colored the relations between these Christian minorities and the non-Christian communities amidst which they lived in Mesopotamia on the one hand and between these Christian minorities and the Christian West as the harbinger of “progress” and “modernity” on the other hand.

The fact that the missions recognized and endorsed their status as Christians, speakers of the “language of Jesus” and protégées of European powers enabled the Chaldean and Assyrian communities to experience a strong conceptual and cultural link

⁶² One of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, also dealt with the Eastern Catholic churches. It affirmed their equality with the Latin church and called upon Eastern Catholics to rediscover their authentic traditions. It also affirmed that Eastern Catholics have a special vocation to foster ecumenical relations with the Eastern Orthodox. CNEWA, <http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=54&IndexView=toc>

with the West. This link was also fostered through the archeological missions during the nineteenth century as we shall see in Chapter Four, and was maintained through a number of other contacts with the West during the following two centuries as we shall see in the subsequent Chapters.

Chapter Four

Victorian Chaldeans: The Modern History of Ancient Chaldean History

As the only remnant of a great nation, every one must feel an interest in their [the Chaldeans' and Assyrians'] history and condition; and our sympathies cannot but be excited in favour of a long-persecuted people, who have merited the title of 'the Protestants of Asia.'

Nineveh and its Remains,
*Austen Henry Layard, 1849*⁶³

Introduction

As we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, archeological and missionary pursuits coincided with each other in Mesopotamia, thereby offering the nineteenth-century Chaldeans of the plains and the Assyrians of the mountains a multifaceted exposure to Western cultural and religious perceptions. When the earliest excavation campaigns in Mesopotamia, supervised by Paul Emil Botta, the French consul of Mosul, literally began in 1842 to bring to the light of day new civilizations that were hitherto hardly known or not known at all, English missionaries pursued their evangelical goals in Mosul and its environs. The historical value of what the Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries presented to the West as a fossilized cluster of untouched Eastern (Nestorian) Christianity grew hand in hand with the value of the contemporaneous archeological discoveries of ancient Assyria.

This Chapter is concerned with the social and ideological changes (employment opportunities, education, self-perceptions, modes of relating to the West) generated

⁶³ Layard, *Ibid*: 191.

among the Christian communities of Mesopotamia when mid-nineteenth-century European excavations furnished the earliest material evidence for the existence of Ancient Assyria, Chaldea and Babylonia. Not all of these changes are documented or explicitly stated in writing by the Chaldeans of that period, yet many are suggested in the few extant examples from Chaldean individuals such as the memoir author Maria Theresa Asmar and the archeologist Hormuzd Rassam. Of interest here also are the ways in which these changes resonate in modern discourses that Chaldeans produce to publicly convey their strong ties with Mesopotamian antiquities. This Chapter is also concerned with how the excavations at the site of Assyria, together with the Presbyterian and Anglican missions, aroused popular, literary and institutional interest in contemporary Christian Mesopotamian communities among the European public as the purported continuation of the ancient empires that were being uncovered.

As we shall see, the public ancient-new Chaldean identity narrative was a mobile narrative, one that developed *en route* between Europe and Mesopotamia first, and later in the twentieth century, as the subsequent chapters will explain, between the United States, Iraq, and transit countries such as Jordan and Syria.

One of the early events that gave shape to identity discourses, one which exemplifies the mediation that resulted through Chaldean mobility, materialized during the first British archeological expedition to Mesopotamia (1845-1847). The expedition was led by Austen Henry Layard. At the time, young Hormuzd Rassam, a Chaldean convert to Anglicanism, quickly became Layard's most trusted man. Rassam's status as a Christian and a local privileged his position as a middleman between the local Arabs and the Englishmen. This privilege eventually extended to include the Christian men whom

Rassam was entrusted to hire for the excavations—predominantly from the Chaldean village of Telkeif and its vicinities.

Another consequence of the associations between ancient and modern Assyrians was the intensification of the contemporary appeal of the collective appellations “Chaldean” and “Assyrian” that were newly bolstered by Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries. My contention is that the archeological revival of ancient Mesopotamia, coupled with missionary attempts to dim the anathematic Nestorian identification anchored the appeal of the Chaldean continuity and “ethnic election” myths,⁶⁴ both among members of the formerly “Nestorian” communities and among interested European reading and museum publics. This was the decisive stride toward creating the conceptual ancient-modern Chaldean link.

Ancient-Modern Identity: A Victorian Backdrop

It was amidst a charged Victorian intellectual climate that derived its understanding of history from the Greek classics and Biblical studies that the pioneer European archeologists (who could not be called archeologists then because the profession was still in its tender infancy) carried out their excavations in and around Nineveh and Babylonia in the mid-nineteenth century—surrounded by competing Christian missions.

The primary focus of this Chapter is not ancient Assyria or Babylonia or their excavations themselves, but rather what nineteenth-century Europe made of the excavations. What makes the excavations key to understanding the formative decades of

⁶⁴ Defined by Anthony Smith as a particular strand of “ethnocentrism” that relies heavily on other myths such as the myth of the golden age of a social group or their sense of decline or exile (Smith, 1993).

Chaldean collective identity is the discourse they set off among secular as well as religious intellectual circles in Europe. A heated debate among these circles fortified the impression of a viable link between the Biblical accounts of Assyria, Babylonia and Chaldea and the living Eastern Christian communities encountered in the Nineveh Plains and the mountainous regions of Mesopotamia at the time of the excavations. Also related to that was the dominant impression at the time that Aramaic was the primordial language of God (Rubin, 1998; discussed in Becker, 2006).

Generally speaking, the collective identity of the Christian Mesopotamian communities was taking shape and gaining focus both in Northern Mesopotamia, where the communities in question resided, and in Europe, where the museums and the media were popularizing certain versions of the communities' profile. In 1844, less than two years after the excavations at the mounds of Nineveh had been initiated by Paul Emil Botta, the first non-religious Chaldean text appeared in London. Its Telkeifi author, Maria Theresa Asmar, dubbed herself "the Babylonian Princess." Asmar's *Memoirs of a Babylonian Princess* was published in two volumes "written by herself and translated into English" and dedicated to the Queen of England. The original text (we are not told whether it was written in Arabic, Aramaic or any other language, nor are we told who the translator is) never appeared in print. One indication of the popularity of this English-language autobiography of a modern Chaldean woman in Europe is the publication of a second book by Asmar only one year later. Also appearing in London, Asmar's *Prophecy and Lamentation; or, A Voice from the East* (1845), is a text in which the author entreats the "women of Europe" to intervene on behalf of the women of the Middle East to

improve their living conditions. This publication was not only dedicated to the Queen of England, but also (Asmar, 1845: backcover),

Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, has graciously signified her desire to encourage and advance the success of this noble enterprise of the daughter of the Patriarch of Chaldea, by accepting the dedication of her new publication, and receiving it under her especial patronage.

A patron of the queen herself, and endorsed by English media as a noblewoman from the newly-discovered ancient civilization of “Chaldea,” Asmar continued to appeal to intellectual Western audiences in subsequent decades. In 1918, an excerpt from her *Memoirs* appeared in the American series “University Library of Autobiography.” In the same volume that included autobiographies of Cardinal John Newman, Victor Hugo, Hans Christian Anderson, John Stuart Mill and other prominent nineteenth-century authors, Asmar was featured as a “courageous little Babylonian princess,” whose “unpretentious book” and “account of the scenes she witnessed is full of that oriental richness which by its very strangeness intrigues the Western mind.” (*Autobiography in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century (1820-1870)*. Vol. XIII, p 163).

Coupled with the intrigue of the Orient’s “strangeness” was the appeal of the “primitive,” but also *authentic*, Christianity of the minority of its native inhabitants to which Asmar belonged. In her autobiography Asmar traces her ancestry to a “family in the East,” who had “long professed the Christian religion in the church of Travancore; a church which, according to history, was originally planted by Saint Thomas, the apostle of our Lord in the Indies” (Asmar 1844, vol. I:1).

Two elements in Asmar’s genealogy should alert the reader. First, Saint Thomas the apostle was a contemporary of Jesus; thus, by tracing her religious affiliations to his Church, Asmar is claiming affinity with one of the earliest establishments of Christianity.

Second, when Asmar dedicated her book to “the Queen of England and the Indies” in 1844, Travancore was still a princely state in *British* India. By claiming her descent to that region, Asmar is also insinuating her status as a loyal British subject. These two elements in Asmar’s construction of her genealogy strongly suggest her European readers’ positive reception of this religious association and the suggestive linkage between Mesopotamian Christians and Europe. Moreover, Asmar’s text might very well reflect the general identity perceptions that circulated within her native Chaldean community, where Asmar might have encountered the first narratives of her descent and affinity with the West.

A little later in the *Memoirs*, Asmar portrays her father’s character, whom she dubs “Amir,” or prince, and who “he himself professed the Chaldaic rite in communion with the church of Rome.” True, he was Catholic, Asmar must admit to her already-informed British readers who may not have looked favorably at this particular information; however, Asmar continues, “his house was nevertheless at all times an asylum for the unfortunate of every denomination” (Asmar, 1844, vol. I:2).

Asmar’s texts, which are addressed to “the British public” (Asmar, 1844, vol. 2:311), strive to establish links between her “Eastern” identity and that of the “West” in a multiplicity of ways but mainly through her Christianity. Tellingly, her texts appear at a time when excavations at the Assyrian sites were slowly revealing that the biblical accounts of the region and its people were more accurate than those of the canonical Greek historians such as Herodotus and Xenophon, a fact that further enhanced the discourse on a continuity that associates the living Christian communities with the artifacts of the pre-Christian Empires that were being unearthed.

Before the archeological work in Mesopotamia, the Bible, Herodotus and Xenophon's accounts were the only sources that affirmed the existence of cities such as Babylon and Nineveh. Before the excavations at Nineveh revealed striking parallels between the biblical accounts of Assyria and the descriptions on the tablets, reliefs, and palace walls, the general attitude of the Western intellectual community bordered on viewing the biblical accounts as mythical and legendary. By contrast, Xenophon's memoirs and Herodotus' histories were celebrated in European salons whose literary and scientific interests were beginning to shift toward secular themes.

During the 1830s material evidence of the existence of Babylonia and Assyria became available to the Western public in the form of texts and museum exhibits from the excavations. The cuneiform texts found in Nineveh and Babylonia eventually revealed proper names of kings and places that paralleled the accounts of the Old Testament rather than the Greek historians, to the frustrated surprise of the European antiquarians who tried to decipher them according to their command of the Greek classics. In the end, using the erratic Greek histories to aid learned Englishmen with interpreting the Assyrian tablets discovered from 1842 onward proved unreliable and counterproductive to the process of decipherment. Just when Asmar's texts appeared in England, the scholarly shifts in interpreting Greek and Biblical sources in light of the new archeological findings—such as the cuneiform reliefs that Layard shipped to the British Museum in 1847 and later—were beginning to change the understanding of the historical roots of Christianity, and consequently Mesopotamia and its people. Concurrently, as a consequence of the museumizing trend in nineteenth-century Europe, second-order representation (through museum displays, exhibits, texts, and persons who were

perceived as cultural ambassadors, such as Asmar herself) came to be a formative component of the ancient-modern identity of late nineteenth-century Chaldeans from the point of view of the general European public of the period. Representation also became the medium through which “Chaldeanness,” both alive and in memorabilia form, was exported to the West as a public cultural commodity.

In order to understand the discursive value of these “rediscovered” Eastern Christian communities in Victorian times, and the cultural contexts of their representatives in the West, such as Maria Theresa Asmar and Hormuzd Rassam, it is crucial to understand the threefold task those in the Victorian milieu expected the pioneer excavators of Assyria and Babylonia to carry out; namely: 1) search for the very beginning of history, or *firstness* 2) establish a link between (European) modernity and the ancient civilizations represented by these ruins, and 3) dissociate the local Muslim Arabs, the majority of Mesopotamia’s contemporary inhabitants, from their land’s antiquity (Larsen, *Ibid*: xii-xiii). Following is an examination of each of these expectations:

I. Firstness

The Victorian age was preoccupied with a mission of “chronologizing” the Bible, so to speak. Bible scholarship was still following a text created in 1650 by Archbishop James Ussher. This was a precise chronology of all the events in the Bible, which at the time amounted to, and was celebrated as, a history of the entire world from the outset of Creation which was calculated to have taken place in 4004 BCE. Assyria would have been founded in 1770 BCE according to this chronology. The enormous prestige of this

publication still held sway over mid-nineteenth-century England, and it was in the context of this biblical historicism that the pioneer excavators had to present their Assyrian and Babylonian finds (Larsen, *Ibid*: 157).

Understanding this context of religious historicization of the world also gives insight into the discourse of *firstness* that was operative among Mesopotamia's Christians at the time, and continued to shape the representational discourse of the modern Chaldeans. The value of the Mesopotamian antiquities discovered in the mid-nineteenth century was closely tied to a romanticized notion of "the dawn of history," leading the excavators and art critics to consider the archeological finds as a decisive part of humans' search for their origins (Larsen, *Ibid*: 173). Thus, the older these discoveries were, the more valuable they became, and inversely. In 1847, the journal *Athenæum* published a detailed report on the eleven reliefs and two fragments of colossal bulls that were first to arrive from Layard's excavation site to the British Museum. The relation between the aesthetic value and the antiquity of these artifacts was one of the main issues elaborated in this report. The author speculated that (cited in Larsen, *Ibid*)

We may conjecture from the magnificence and vastness of both the structure described by Mr. Layard and that discovered at Khorsabad by M. Botta—as well as from the elaborate detail of the sculptures—that they are of a very remote antiquity, possibly of the earliest period of the first Assyrian empire.⁶⁵

This Victorian appetite for antiquity and origins also explains in part why the contemporaneous discovery of isolated pockets of so-labeled "primitive" Christian communities by the Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries fascinated the English public

⁶⁵ When Layered presented the result of his excavations at Nimrud to the French Académie in Paris he suggested that the Assyrian reliefs belonged to "the 11th or 12th century before Christ, 100 or 200 years before the Trojan War" (cited in Larsen, *Ibid*). This dating was significant because it added to their value in the context of the history of Art. It allowed the consideration of the Assyrian reliefs as "the very earliest models for Greek Art" (*Ibid*).

so much, a phenomenon that was touched upon in the context of the missionary enterprise.

As part of the archeological context for this, it is worth noting how a discourse of *firstness* had also been looming as excavations were carried out in southern Italy during the eighteenth century at the sites of the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. These excavations created, among the early archeologists in Mesopotamia and the institutions that subsidized their excavations, the impression that they were carrying out a comparable task in Assyria and Babylonia. Namely, these nineteenth-century excavators had set out to hunt “for the very beginning of human history,” in Mesopotamia, as Larsen perceptively noted, and their religious and intellectual framework “was the appropriation of the ancient world to form the basis for the history of the West” (Larsen, *Ibid*: xii).

There is no extant evidence, to the best of my knowledge, that the nineteenth-century Christians of Mesopotamia generated any formal displays of their identity to reproduce the ancient-modern associations of which the West made them aware. Limited access to a printing press (except for the mission-operated printing press that focused on producing religious publications), political insecurity and general illiteracy were probably factors that precluded such attempts at self-representation. Nonetheless, these ancient-modern associations endured, because we find echoes of this type of identity discourse in the contemporary Chaldean sources that emerged in diaspora. The discourse of racial and civilizational *firstness* found in Chaldean auto-ethnographies today is the offshoot of a European antecedent. For instance, the following list of “firsts” appeared in *Chaldean Americans of Southeast Michigan*, a 2006 pamphlet produced by the affluent Chaldean Shenandoah Country Club:

MESOPOTAMIAN ACHIEVEMENTS

- First to invent the wheel
- First to make glass
- First to observe and describe complex patterns in the motions of the heavens (astronomy)
- First to use writing
- By 2000 B.C. the definition of our modern day, month and year—as well as lunar and solar calendars with the year of 360 days, 12 months of 30 days each, with an extra month added in every six years or so to keep synchronized with astronomical observations.

It is likely that contemporary articulations of cultural “firsts,” such as this one, have endured since their first circulation among the nineteenth-century Christian groups in Mesopotamia. The gradual awareness of these recently-fashioned “Chaldeans” and “Assyrians” of their ancient-modern identities was reinforced by contacts with European excavators, news of exhibits of their land, or what quickly came to be known as “the cradle of civilization,” in Europe and also through contacts with the Christian missionaries who kept close relations with the communities’ clergymen and the school-age children whom they educated in their missionary schools. As oral communities with little interest in producing non-religious texts, nineteenth-century Christian Mesopotamians do not leave us multiple written sources to attest to the dominance of this self-perception. Asmar’s text, however, is one extant testimony to this.

II. A “Christian” Likeness

The European interest in understanding the ancient world as the basis for the history of the West is also why emphasis was placed over and over again on how the ancient remains of Mesopotamia were irrelevant to the local Muslim Arabs who populated the area during the nineteenth century (Layard 1849, vol 1:66). The separation was made along racial lines: the ancient empires were supposed to represent a link, a continuum,

with the modern civilized world, i.e. Europe. In order to construct the story of their civilization, the European excavators consequently also constructed one for the modern Chaldeans and Assyrians. The image of both groups was molded in contrast with the uncivilized Other, the Muslim Arabs of Mesopotamia. According to the dominant reasoning in Victorian times, the Muslim Arabs of the Peninsula could not have been co-inheritors of this legacy. Yet no proof of discontinuity from ancient times to the present was established (or looked for). Therefore, the ancient races must have left a progeny in their native land. If the progeny were not the Moslem Arabs, the dominant Victorian view point suggested, the isolated communities who spoke a Semitic language older than Arabic, and who, like the custodians of European civilization, were Christians, made the better contender.

One indication of this is the conception of a *physical* resemblance, that is, of a *natural* equality between ancient and modern Chaldeans. This was developed by both conservative and liberal archeologists and philologists who often digressed to argue for *social uniqueness* on behalf of the Christian groups they found in Mesopotamia. For example, as late as 1929, in his popular history, *The Assyrians and their Neighbors*, Anglican Reverend W. A. Wigram ventures to assert (Wigram, 1929:179),

Many a mountaineer from the Assyrian districts of Tiari or Tkhoma looks, when viewed in profile, exactly as if he had stepped down from one of the slabs in the Assyrian galleries of the British Museum, and the writer has more than once been guided to the carvings of Sennacherib's day, which are still to be found on the rocks of their country, by a native guide who, to all appearance, had just descended from those rocks himself.⁶⁶

Alongside this argument, Wigram includes two images on the opposite page of this text.

One of the images profiles a "modern Assyrian" priest from 1910, "which we put for

⁶⁶ Although in this quote Wigram refers to the modern Assyrians, he argues in the beginning of his book that the distinction between modern Chaldeans and Assyrians is a recent one, and that both belong to the same "national [i.e., racial] stock." P. 4.

comparison's sake side by side with the portrait of King Sargon of Assyria giving instructions to his Vizir, and leave them to speak for themselves." The illustrations are not only supposed to speak for the physiognomic resemblance between ancient and modern Assyrians/Chaldeans, but also Wigram proceeds to point out the similarity in their dress, contending that "even in matters of costume, the customs of old time held good."

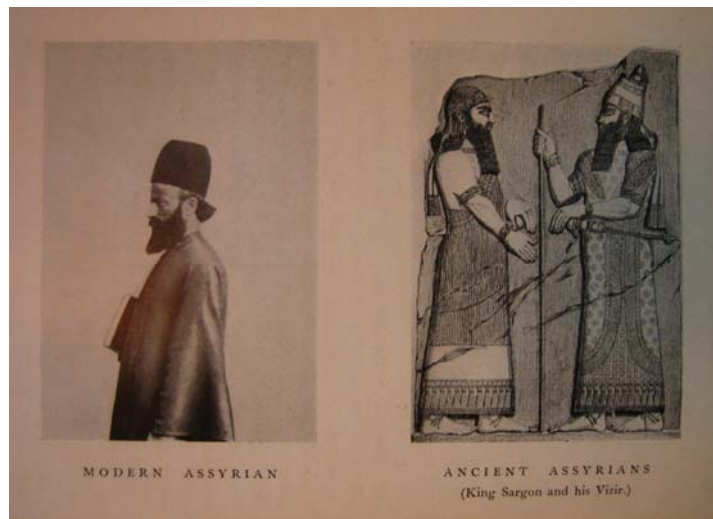


Figure 5. Modern and Ancient Assyrians as compared in W. A. Wigram (1929) *The Assyrians and Their Neighbors*. London: G. Bell & Sons.

The process of constituting racial difference was linked to the ways in which it was visualized, and the physical and societal characteristics privileged by archeologists were capable of being conserved and displayed abroad. It seems likely that these perceptions transformed the group's self-assessment and raised their historical significance. As Wigram also notes in the course of his argument, by 1929, the Assyrian and Chaldean families with whom he kept contact were already claiming "to be able to trace their own descent lineally from King Nebuchadnezzar"(Wigram, *Ibid*: 179).

III. The Biblical Liaison

For a while, Christian ideology and doctrine—which interpreted the Old Testament as the most accurate chronological and geographical history of the world—determined the reception of Assyrian religious texts by European archeologists, antiquarians and clergymen. During the nineteenth-century, one of the most widely read early histories of the Near East in Anglophone Europe was produced by George Rawlinson, a British clergyman (Rawlinson, 1862-7; cited in Frahm, 2006:78). His brother Henry Rawlinson, who played an influential role in deciphering the cuneiform writing, concluded in 1852 that “every new fact which is brought to light from the study of the Cuneiform inscriptions tends to confirm the scriptural account” (Rawlinson, 1852; cited in Frahm, *Ibid*: 78). These “scientific” discoveries in religious guise witnessed an enthusiastic reception from the European public. In his article “Assyria in 19th- and 20th-Century Western Scholarship,” Eckart Frahm notes that, “the public was fascinated [with Assyrian cuneiform stories] because it could indulge in the recognition of semblance, the reference point being the sacred book of Genesis” (Frahm, *Ibid*: 82). Yet this “semblance” between cuneiform stories and biblical ones was not always stable. In general, the prospect of recovering more textual sources from ancient Mesopotamia was extremely controversial in relation to biblical studies during the first few decades of the Assyrian excavations. While some cuneiform tablets corroborated parts of the Bible, others challenged their originality. Inadvertently the controversy began to shed light on various aspects of Chaldean history, which in turn whetted the European publics’ curiosity about the Ancient Church of the East and its modern followers. Around that period, Anglican and Presbyterian missions enhanced the colors of the debate through

their rivalry to produce and distribute the finest Aramaic translations of the Bible, both in Europe and Mesopotamia.

Before the validation of the biblical accounts, some religious communities feared that the Assyrian inscriptions would challenge the accuracy or antiquity of the Bible. As late as three decades after the onset of the Assyrian excavations, George Smith was able to stir England with his book *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (1876), in which he presented a tablet that contained a parallel account of the deluge in Genesis in addition to other tablets containing accounts of the origin of the world, the creation and fall of man and the original sin that bore striking resemblance to the accounts of the Old Testament. “The Assyrian documents,” John Joseph concluded, “proved that the ancient Hebrews like other peoples, had simply added to what they had borrowed from much older neighboring cultures” (Joseph, *Ibid*: 6-7). At first, however, public culture-makers were at odds with each other as some of them represented the interests of secular or scientific institutions such as the museums, while others sought to sustain the religious worldview of the church. If some Christian circles in Europe opposed the excavations out of religious fears, other circles celebrated the possibility of uncovering new links with the history of humanity.

Shortly after Layard began his excavations in Nimrud, his finds began to contribute positively to the biblical context. By 1884, for instance, members of the American Oriental Society organized an expedition to Babylonia for the chief purpose of locating cuneiform tablets that would support the Old Testament (Mead, 1974:49). Potentially insurmountable arguments against the authenticity of the Bible never materialized, and, in fact, to the European Christians of the nineteenth century, the

primary value of the newly discovered Assyrian artifacts became encoded in their reinforcement of the accuracy of the Old Testament (Larsen, Ibid: 164).⁶⁷ Yet the winged bulls that created a sensation in the British Museum of the late 1840s were soon associated with Assyrian tablets and monuments that to the English public began to resemble a weapon against biblical “Higher Criticism”⁶⁸ which was also actively employed against the Old Testament in that period.

Once again, the spatial and temporal contiguity of the modern Christians of Mesopotamia with these winged bulls, tablets and biblical debates, prompted an association between their purportedly “pure Eastern Christianity” and the newly excavated pre-Christian civilizations. A corollary was that the same European Christian public that admired the finds of Assyria and Babylonia in the Louvre and the British Museum also developed a cultural appetite for the “oldest living Church” and its followers, presumably the Eastern rite Nestorians, the isolated mountaineers who had not been *corrupted* by the Roman Catholic Church. Interests also spilled over to the city and village dwellers, the schismatic counterpart of the Eastern rite Nestorians, the Catholic Chaldeans of the Nineveh Plain.

Nineteenth-century popular European interest in Mesopotamian cultures conflated the ancient dwellers of this region with its modern dwellers. Good examples of this conflation are found in the publications of the pioneer Assyriologist Austin Henry Layard. Layard found himself pressured to include a detailed account of the contemporary Nestorians in a publication that was supposed to scientifically illustrate the

⁶⁷ This was also true of the religious circles of European Jews, to whom the value of the Assyrian artifacts was relative to illustrating the accuracy of the Hebrew Bible (Larsen, Ibid).

⁶⁸ “Higher Criticism” was first employed in 1787 by the German Biblical scholar Eichhorn, in the second edition of his “Einleitung” to deal with large issues such as authorship, dates, composition, and authority of entire books or large sections thereof.

archeological finds of ancient Nineveh. In 1848 he published his sensational *Nineveh and its Remains: with an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-worshippers*.⁶⁹ It should be recalled that a clear titular distinction between Nestorians, Chaldeans and Assyrians had not yet fully crystallized in the European discourses of the period. In his publication Layard made no titular distinction between the Nestorians and the Chaldeans because he argued that they represented the same ethnic group.⁷⁰ He took no interest in the religious conversions and affiliations of each group, the sources of the various appellations as we observed earlier.

Generally speaking these living communities did not constitute Layard's primary interest. He embellished his text with contemporary accounts of Mesopotamia because he was uncertain how an extensive analysis of the archeological finds in the region would be received by the British public. With no such genre as an archeology text yet, *Nineveh and its Remains* included long sections on his exotic trips and adventures among peoples who were as little known at the time as the Nestorians and the Yezidis. Like other popular books appearing in London at the time, Layard's first volume included detailed accounts of the daily life and costumes of these minority groups. His letter to Rawlinson revealed some of his qualms about this approach (Larsen, *Ibid*: 155):

I fear I am collecting together about as much rubbish as could well be put into a heap – however, my friends say that it is just what the public want & the public must, therefore, make the most of it.

Layard's friends were right: shortly after its appearance *Nineveh and its Remains* was enthusiastically received by the public, and furthermore was characterized as “the

⁶⁹ According to Meade, this was the first scholarly book on Assyriology to appear on the American market (*Ibid*, 1974:19). And according to Bohrer, it was “one of the greatest English best-sellers of the entire nineteenth century” (2006:246).

⁷⁰ See reference to Layard's argument in Chapter Two, page 67.

greatest achievement of our time,” by Lord Ellesmere, the president of the Royal Asiatic Society (Larsen, Ibid: 192).

Although applauded for his literary exposition of religious minorities, Layard and his excavation cohort were initially instructed by their benefactors “to keep clear of political and religious questions, and as much as possible of Missionaries, or native chiefs and tribes regarded with enmity or jealousy by the Turkish authorities”(Larsen, Ibid: 70). This proved to be impossible as his book revealed, but Layard had no genuine interest in Christianity or the various missions that dotted the region including that of the Church of England. For the most part, missionaries and archeologists stayed out of each other’s way. Yet both influenced the forging of an “ethnic selection” myth by which the modern Chaldeans and Assyrians became associated with the ancient civilizations for the first time in the eyes of the West.

That evidence of a socio-historical continuity between modern and ancient Chaldeans was absent from the outset was not a public concern in Europe, nor did it become a concern when the triangular identity myth, Mesopotamian Antiquity – Bible – Contemporary Chaldeans/Assyrians, was later espoused by Chaldean ethno-nationalists in diaspora. In order to understand how modern Chaldeans perceive their collective identity in their Western diaspora, it is critical to see what European cultural judgments accompanied the earliest encounters between the modern Chaldeans and their newly-inaugurated “ancient forefathers.” This is the subject of the following section.

***Britain's "Subordinate Agents":
Asmar, Rassam, and other Chaldean Connections with Europe***

“The nineteenth century,” argued Nélia Dias, “is incontestably the century of museums – of spaces designed for the exercise of the gaze” (Dias, 1998). To better situate Mesopotamia within this context of nineteenth-century European museology—as the object of the gaze—it is useful to interrogate the forms of commercial reasoning that justified Europeans’ investments in Mesopotamia. For although the elements that were incorporated into the continuity narrative (isolated Christians, artifacts discovered near their villages, biblical significance of artifacts) were randomly selected in terms of their socio-historical value by Europe’s culture-makers—the powerful persons and institutions who influenced the course of cultural perceptions both in European and in Mesopotamia—the representational value of these artifacts, narratives and reports was to a significant extent predetermined by the European publics’ *ruling discourses*—their dominant aesthetic appetite and intellectual concerns.

In addition to recognizing the resurgent religious preoccupation with the biblical land and its Christian inhabitants, French and British interests in Mesopotamian antiquities coincided with their awareness of a newfound public appreciation of museum collections. At the time the Louvre and the British Museum were engaged in a heated rivalry over acquiring and exhibiting foreign, monumental and antiquated artifacts, which in turn reflected the national and political interests of the two countries (Larsen, *Ibid*: 21). As such, the local Christians of Mesopotamia indirectly served the archeological displays in two ways, a) they represented the living corollary of the pre-Christian past of the region (thus ancient and modern Chaldeans mutually enhanced their representational

value), and b) they stood as intermediaries who could facilitate excavation work in a Muslim milieu that was growing increasingly skeptical about the motives of Western presence in the region.

If local Muslims were skeptical about Europeans, European institutions of high culture in turn perceived the locals of Mesopotamia as emotionally detached and historically dissociated from the past of the land they occupied. The cultural perceptions at work in these European institutions were sometimes camouflaged in a didactic parlance. One institutional assessment, for instance, was that locals were to receive a lesson in history and art appreciation by observing how the civilized Europeans desired to acquire their antiquities. The British Museum's contract with Layard, for example, dwelled on such condescending explanations, applying a rather convoluted logic (Larsen, *Ibid*: 111):

Nor can any thing have a more direct tendency to teach the natives some respect for the remains of the great works of art executed by the early occupiers of their country [the Assyrians] than leading them to believe, that Europeans desire to possess these remains, not because of any pecuniary value attaching to them, but because of their connexion with ancient nations and languages, and of the hope which the study of these affords of contributing to the more extended cultivation of learning and taste, and the prevalence of those principles of justice and benevolence, by which only, if by any means the general concord and prosperity of the human race is to be attained.

When it came to the locals themselves, they saw that their own understanding of the “value” of antiquity depended on culture and social class. Real and self-perceived differences between Mesopotamian Christian and Muslim communities had already existed due to the *dhimmi* status that separated ethno-religious minorities from the Islamic social mainstream, yet cooperation with the Europeans validated these class distinctions in favor of the Chaldeans for a change, as did the Chaldeans' newly found appreciation of their ostensible connection with the European-discovered ancient

civilization. The result was that the local Christians of nineteenth-century Mesopotamia, who through western acculturation were considered the conduits of ancient and new civilizations by the Europeans and by themselves, perceived their appreciation of antiquity to be superior to that of the Muslim majority. This was due in part to the endorsement they received from Western culture arbiters during the excavation period.

Christian excavator Hormuzd Rassam, for example, was not sympathetic toward the (Muslim) Arab “brick-diggers” whom he hired for his excavations during the 1870s. To justify to the British authorities the lootings and the damage done to many of the articles the (Muslim) Arabs excavated under his supervision, he attributed the problem to the “Arab style of searching for antiquities,” which was (Rassam, 1880:29-30):

...too rough to extricate fragile objects with care; and when they find them, in nine cases out of ten they break and lose a large part of them; but, worse than all, they try to make a good capital by breaking the inscribed objects and dividing them amongst the clandestine purchasers...I learned afterward that the poor Arabs received very little for the antiquities they sold to the Jewish and Armenian brokers.⁷¹

Thus, for an educated, urban Chaldean speaking to a European audience, the “poor Arabs,” (meaning Muslims), were rough, opportunistic and incapable of appreciating Mesopotamian “art” for its aesthetic value. These class-dependent assignments of cultural perception were not arbitrary. In part they evolved as a result of indigenous interactions between ethno-religious groups that lacked social integration in Mesopotamia, but they were further endorsed during the archeological campaigns in the Nineveh Plain.

⁷¹ A striking parallel exists between Rassam’s description of the antiquity looting and black market transactions and that of the reports made by Lebanese archeologist Joanne Farchakh-Bajjalay who in her 2005 tour of American universities described very similar networks and argued that they have been operating in the illicit excavation sites in Babylon, southern Iraq, since the 1990s. See Farchakh-Bajjalay, “Mesopotamia Endangered - Witnessing the Loss of History,” and “History lost in dust of war-torn Iraq,” BBC News, April 25, 2005.

Both archeological campaigns, French and English, worked closely with the locals, favoring contracts with the Christian villages, such as Telkeif, over those with Muslim tribes.⁷² Botta and Layard's workforce consisted mainly of Chaldeans from the villages surrounding Mosul and Nestorians (soon after called Assyrians) from the northern mountains. These men were perceived as "the only ones who had the strength to loosen the hard surface," whereas by contrast Muslim men, when employed, worked as carriers of the excavated earth.⁷³ Layard, who was commissioned by the British Museum, took as his primary assistant the aforementioned Hormuzd Rassam. When he left the excavations permanently in 1848, Layard recommended Rassam as the most suitable person to carry on his work (Larsen, *Ibid*: 308).

Local Christians were also entrusted on the excavation sites in the Kuyunjik mound during Layard and Rassam's absence in England. Some had been in charge of the excavations and even invented new methods of excavation. Chaldeans and Nestorians "whose strength and good sense Layard had more confidence in" continued to supervise the project during Layard's second expedition and carried out most of the digging, even though a large group of workers from the Sunni Jebour tribe were hired for protective purposes (Larsen, *Ibid*: 199-204).

Unlike the generally poor peasant Christians of the villages, urban Christians with political power and connections with higher authorities were instrumental to the English

⁷² With the exception of the Sunni Jebour tribe, which they befriended for other sociopolitical benefits the Christians could not offer.

⁷³ Western stereotypes about the various ethno-religious groups in nineteenth-century Mesopotamia were so prevalent that as late as 1935 Stafford comfortably asserted that, while the Assyrians "appeared to be better judges of a rifle than of a doctrine," the Chaldeans and Armenians were "essentially unwarlike, mourned in private" and "had proven unsuitable as soldiers" Pp. 23, 114, 65; Larsen 75. By the same token, a local authority on the subject, the Chaldean Hurmuz Rassam, whose Oxford education translated into commendably Orientalist archeological treatises, pointed out that "rural Chaldean Christians, whether Roman Catholics or Nestorians, come under the same category of physical superiority over the other nationalities" (Rassam 1880:26).

since the outset of the excavations. A good example is the Rassam family, one of the wealthiest of Mosul's families at the time, which converted to Anglicanism as a result of contact with the missionary enterprise in Mesopotamia. When Layard arrived in Mosul he was presented to the Vice-Consul, Christian Rassam, senior brother of Hormuzd Rassam, who was at the time building a house in Mosul. He therefore could clandestinely provide Layard's crew with digging equipment to begin the excavations, which continued illegally until an official *firman* to excavate was obtained in 1846 (Larsen, Ibid: 72). Credit also went to Christian Rassam for ensuring the maintenance of the excavations when the Muslim authorities were outraged by the intrusive Western presence. On many instances he intervened on behalf of Layard and his expedition by negotiating with the *Cadi* of Mosul and issuing public apologies when the Englishmen engaged in disputes with the city's Muslim authorities (Larsen, Ibid: 110).

In addition to the religious factor, class variations played an important role in forging the dissociation of local Muslims from the ancient past and in associating the Christian-Chaldeans with that same past. For instance, the examples that Layard used in his book to illustrate the remoteness of the Arab (i.e., Muslim) communities from the historical finds deal mostly with tribal figures whose cultural differences could not allow them to grasp the import of the excavations. Layard's book presents the image of his Muslim friend "Abdu al-Rahman," in a superstitious gaze at a colossal head that had just been uncovered (Layard, Ibid, Vol. I: 66):



Figure 6. The head of Nimrod witnessed for the first time by Layard's Muslim workmen. (From Layard 1849, vol. I:66)

This depiction is even more interesting when compared with the image of the cool and composed European visitors of the British Museum of that time. A print on the stationary of the Museum from 1850 depicts them thus:



Figure 7. Official stationary of the British Museum, 1850. (From Larsen, 1996:221)

By contrast with the Muslims of Mesopotamia, many of the Chaldeans, Nestorians, and converts to Anglicanism with whom Layard communicated were learned

urban functionaries, or villagers who had received some education at the hands of Western missionaries.

Nineteenth-century Chaldeans had been exposed to Western valuations of their own world in Mesopotamia: their Church, their languages, their land and even their own self-worth as Chaldeans (now elevated to a “preserved ancient race”). As such, the contact with the West influenced certain Chaldean figures, who became in turn influential in their own communities and started striving to comport themselves in ways that suggest a cultural proximity to the Europeans. European first-names, to cite one palpable example, began to appear among the Chaldeans⁷⁴ in the last part of the nineteenth century: Maurice, Marie, Janet, Madeline, George, Phillip, John and Michael are some of the popular ones. The relative modernity of those local Christians (even if they were ethnically associated with the ‘pure’ Nestorian mountaineers), it must be stressed, was perceived by the Europeans as the logical continuation of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations.

The specific locale of the Chaldean village of Telkeif witnessed Chaldeans’ close contact with the various Christian missions and the English archeological expedition in Mesopotamia. In her *Memoirs*, for instance, Asmar narrates the story of a “missionary named Gabriel Dombo,” who had been tortured (the reader is left to infer that the torturers were non-Christian Arabs) and taken in by her father, who later “supplied him with sufficient funds to enable him to found a college for the instruction of missionaries” (Asmar, 1844:2). Later she says, “To Europe we look for final deliverance from the yoke of the [Kurd and Arab] oppressors; and every Christian from Europe is therefore regarded and treated by us as a deliverer, and as such honored far beyond his Asiatic brethren”

⁷⁴ And also among other Middle Eastern Christian groups who came into contact with Western missions.

(Asmar, Ibid:157). Asmar's attitude reflects the warm reception that Layard received among his Chaldean friends in Telkeif, which he describes at length in his book (Layard, 1853:50-60).

Although general perceptions of the local Christians of Mesopotamia were formulated by learned English society around the othering Orientalist tropes of the time,⁷⁵ Layard's relations with these communities assumed a familial spirit. He made individual friendships with local men from Muslim and Christian villages alike. For instance, he befriended the Chaldean bishop of Telkeif, attempted to speak the local Aramaic dialect, and welcomed food and lodging invitations from Chaldean families (Layard, 1853:50-60). Though strategic like those of his contemporaneous missionaries, his interactions were marked by mutual respect and empathy. This was partially because he had formed personal ties with the Rassam family, their relatives and acquaintances in Mosul and the Chaldean village of Telkeif. When Layard returned to the mounds of Nineveh accompanied by Hormuzd Rassam to resume the excavations in 1849, the reception of the now famous Layard was quite familial, involving a warm welcoming by friends, relatives and the Chaldean bishop himself (Larsen, Ibid: 199). This was in Telkeif or *Telkeppe* (Aramaic: Stone Hill), a Chaldean village three hours' ride from Layard's excavation site, and a geographic trope that receives much space in the blueprints of public displays of Chaldean "heritage" in the United States today.

⁷⁵ Consider, for instance, Asmar's entreaty to "the women of England" (1845:iv):

Oh may the cry of liberty be heard from Albion's shores, to rend the chains that bind my father-land! – where all the jarring interests of contending states – lawless ambition – the avarice of individuals – a false prophet, and a false faith, have blasted the blossoms of domestic joy. Where the sword of despotism ever thirsts for the blood of the innocent – and where the name of "Christian" is a bye-word and a reproach!

Although the Rassam brothers had converted to Anglicanism and thus were no longer referred to as Nestorians or Chaldeans, their involvements in organizing the local social networks for the British expedition in Assyria shaped a certain mode of cultural exchange and expectations between the West and the Christian communities of Mosul and the surrounding Chaldean villages—mainly Telkeif.

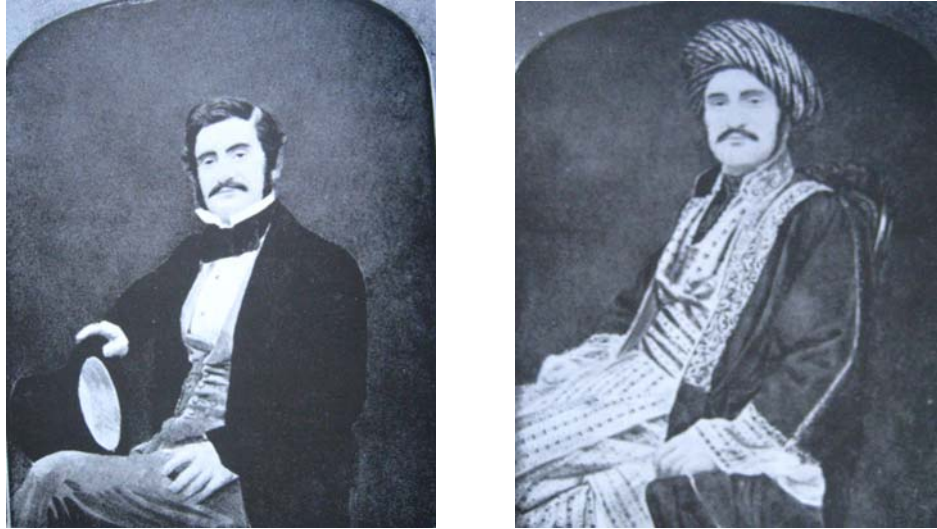


Figure 8. Two portraits of Hormuzd Rassam, age 25, showing him once as a British gentleman and once as an Ottoman subject. As Larsen notes: “one sees him in his two conflicting roles which he desperately tried to unite...” The portraits were both painted by his close friend the British artist F.C. Cooper who had accompanied the second expedition to Assyria. (Source: Larsen, 2006: 328-9)

This mode of interaction between the local Christians and the West yielded one of the earliest Western and westernized narratives of “who the Chaldeans are.” Favorable relations between the British and the local Christians soon brought about first-hand exposure to Western culture through opportunities to study abroad in England. On his way back from his first excavation project in 1847, for instance, Layard made arrangements for his assistant Hormuzd Rassam, who was eighteen at the time, to accompany him to England, to be instructed in the English language and “the inculcation of English principles & feelings.” After joining the learned society in Oxford, Rassam

quickly became a society figure with access to prominent salons and authority to regale the audience with the stories and adventures of Layard's excavations and the exotic "Orient".⁷⁶ Although he had to return, resettling in his native Chaldean environment at the expense of relinquishing the luxury of Western life was not a favorable choice for the Victorian-accultured Hormuzd Rassam. "I would rather be a chimney sweeper in England," he wrote to Layard when he was asked to leave Oxford to accompany Layard on his second Assyrian expedition (1849-1851) (Larsen, *Ibid*:132, 193, 195). Likewise, Asmar decides to settle in London after her travel through the Middle East and Western Europe. Toward the conclusion of her *Memoirs*, she explains how the "enlightened prime minister of France" had advised her to "proceed to England, where, from its boundless possessions in the East, he seemed to anticipate a large field for the exertion of my humble efforts to teach my native tongue" (Asmar, 1844: vol. II: 303). This attitude generally characterized the encounters of many Chaldean individuals with the West. Unlike their Maronite counterparts, many of whom opted to return to Lebanon or Syria after working in the West in the nineteenth century, Chaldean immigrants seldom settled back in their Mesopotamian villages after traveling to Europe or the Americas.

Nor did this tendency change during the twentieth-century after more and more Chaldeans were able to formulate impressions about the West, albeit vicariously, through their family and kin abroad. In 1956, a British traveler to Telkeif described his inquiry about Telkeifi immigrants in Detroit (Stewart & Haylock, 1956:71):

⁷⁶ Later on, Rassam's reputation and identity shifted depending on the context and location where his work was represented. He became known in Assyriology scholarly circles in America, for example, as a pioneer archeologist. In 1879, the newly founded quarterly journal the *American Antiquarian* featured an article describing Hormuzd Rassam's expedition to Nineveh and Nimrod on behalf of the British Museum. Anonymous, "A Buried Temple and Palace." *American Antiquarian* I: 1879-80, 297-298.

“Do they ever come back and settle here?” Desmond asked [a man from Telkeif], thinking of the Greek or Lebanese emigrants, who return to their homelands rich and influential.

“Why should they? They have electric light, cinemas, hotels, dancing, and everyone loves them. Why should they come back to Iraq?”

Why should they indeed? For a few minutes they may dance the Debka, see through the flattering lens of memory a Tel Kayf that never was on land or sea, recall the songs and the prejudices of this village. Then, with relief, they return to Detroit, to automobiles, cinemas, and crowded streets, where everyone is a Christian, “Just like us.”

A century after the earliest encounters with the West, as this passage suggests, Chaldeans from Telkeif were quick to point out that they were Christian when encountering Western visitors by way of evoking associations between their alleged mutual affiliations. Desmond’s parentheses around, “Just like us,” is a mocking reference to the promptness with which the Chaldeans he encountered on his trip point to their mutual faith. “They all exaggerate the extent to which the European feels Christian, in this antagonistic sense, of being not-something-else” (Stewart and Haylock 1956:62).

In the nineteenth century, only a few individuals with special social status could be a native source of written impressions about the West. But by the 1950s, many Chaldeans and other Christians from Iraq had encountered the Christian West through migration. This accounts for the dearth of textual descriptions of the migration experience during the nineteenth-century. Certainly, Hormuzd Rassam and Marie Theresa Asmar were not the only nineteenth-century Mesopotamian Christians to travel westward to be “cultivated” through European erudition or to “appeal to the women of England” and who came to feel at home in the new Western environment, but they were among a select few. In 1842, the American Presbyterian Mission was making arrangements for Mar Yohannan, a Nestorian bishop salaried by the Mission, to travel to America to preach and attend Bible reading seminars. His mind-transforming visit to America is reported to have

turned Mar Yohannan into a “reformer” and his preaching to have become “evangelical”(Herald, vol. I: 502, 524). The Church of England had also opened the door for the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shimun and his family to travel to Canterbury (Vine, Ibid: 201). And almost a century ahead of both of these missions, Rome had sponsored a battery of monks, priests and bishops to be apprenticed in the Catholic doctrine and liturgy (Mausili, 2001: 19, 39).

Yet Asmar and the Rassam brothers (Hormuzd Rassam in particular) occupy a unique position as early-westernized Mesopotamians because their exposure to Western culture occurred during an important historical moment, just when a public sphere where representations of ancient-new Assyrian and Chaldean identities were becoming integral parts of Western cultures.

Conclusion

The main points in this Chapter’s discussion can be rearticulated in terms of a triangular correlation in the order of “Mesopotamian Antiquity – Bible – Contemporary Chaldeans/Assyrians” which surfaced inevitably—albeit without substantiation with material evidence—in the European public imagination.

The Victorian context of archeological and biblical discoveries in Mesopotamia generated “ruling ideas,”⁷⁷ a discursive product of the European cultural “ruling class” by which their rule (set of standards, perceptions, and religions) was reinforced among the Christians of Mesopotamia (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Through this rephrasing we obtain a model in which *ruling* cultural meanings (e.g., that antiquity, early Christian

⁷⁷ If we substitute social “class” with the more multithreaded ruling of the discourses (e.g., creation stories, *firstness*, archeological finds, biblical criticism, discovery of enclave Christianity) that were in vogue and gained currency synergistically among producers and consumers of culture in Europe.

communities, and the Aramaic language are precious to Western modernity) were imposed upon the modern Christian communities of Mesopotamia as legitimate. “Ruling ideas,” due to their arbitrary selectiveness, also obscure the power relations (Western discovery-Oriental products-European and Mesopotamian consumers) that are the basis for their legitimacy (Ibid). To this effect, the “ancient-biblical-modern” Chaldean triangle could still be exported back to a culturally “inferior” (i.e., ruled) Mesopotamian public as a ruling Western idea even when the historical correlations between ancient civilization, the Bible and the modern Chaldeans remained obscure.

The Chapter draws from the example of the archeologist Austen Henry Layard’s contact with the Chaldeans of the villages surrounding his excavations site in the Nineveh Plain, and from the examples of Hormuzd Rassam and Maria Theresa Asmar’s encounter with aristocratic societies in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. These three interconnected examples of direct personal exchanges between contemporaneous Chaldeans and Europeans situate the incipient phase of the ideological formulations of Chaldean collective identity discourses. The subsequent chapters will demonstrate how this discourse meandered and broadened its scope among diaspora Chaldean culture-makers during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Chapter Five

Conceptualizing Chaldean Action: A Transnational Social Field Perspective

Introduction

During the nineteenth century, Chaldeans engaged in a sustained multicultural exchange with the West through contacts with religious and archeological missions. This happened at home, while the originary land of the newly-fashioned Chaldeans and Assyrians was transforming into the modern states of Iraq and Turkey respectively. During that era, American and European missions also enabled several Chaldean individuals to engage in a multi-regional lifestyle through which they served as importers and exporters of cultural perceptions between the “East” and the “West”. However, Chaldean life in diaspora was not fully established in its communal form until the second half of the twentieth century. Not until the 1960s and 1970s, after most of the Western missions had relinquished their posts in the socialist Iraqi state, do we begin to discern stable forms of Chaldean settlement in America, in the city of Detroit. With this diasporic settlement, patterns of sustained transnational contact with Chaldean family and kin members in Iraq also began to emerge.

Because social lives are complex and multithreaded, those of many modern Chaldean individuals and families residing in Iraq or the United States or any other location today cannot be aptly examined by looking solely at what happens within their national boundaries. Understanding the relationship between location and affiliation, and

the intersections of multiple locations and affiliations as they give shape to a particular dimension of collective identity, calls for a new methodological paradigm to go beyond a perspective on the roots and the affiliations established within the country of settlement. This paradigm needs to accommodate and correlate the ethnic, religious and political mobilization of Chaldeans across national boundaries; namely, their transnational activity.

What is important to stress is that the transnational within the life of the modern Chaldean diaspora, rather than an event or a state, is a multi-directional process. First, because Chaldeans' transnational activity does not originate from a single location; and, second, because, although bearing some characteristics of transnational communities whose socio-economic lives are divided between two or more countries, Chaldean immigrants can still be characterized as "uprooted." Very few Chaldean immigrants maintain a recognizable pattern of a *physically*-transnational life. Unlike the early immigrants who relied on family sponsorship and chain migrations (Sengstock, 2005:52-4), in the past two decades many Chaldeans have been leaving Iraq illegally via Jordan or Syria to petition for political asylum or seek other forms of refuge in western countries that would sponsor them as legal immigrants.⁷⁸ Generally, modern Chaldean immigrants are not temporary "sojourners" but rather permanent ones in the sense that, while they recognize a continued affinity and loyalty to the country of origin, they seek to settle permanently and participate as active citizens in a western country without entertaining the possibility of reclaiming their Iraqi citizenship for the purpose of resettling in their country of origin in the near future. The majority of Chaldean migrants become firmly

⁷⁸ UNHCR estimates the presence of 1.9 million internally displaced Iraqis and about 2 million in the neighboring states of Syria and Jordan. (2007 report on Iraq "Growing Needs Amid Continuing Displacement," www.unhcr.org).

rooted in the new country and incorporated in its economy, political institutions and patterns of daily life without contributing directly to the socio-economy of the original country.

Through the cases studied in this Chapter I would like to argue that the US-based Chaldean collective is not a self-contained “diaspora community” (as diasporas hardly ever are), nor a “transnational community,” but a “transnational diaspora community.” This community can be characterized as such if we redefine diaspora as a social and physical *multi-site* where transnational communities share “co-responsibility, recognizing their mutual indebtedness across national boundaries,” while developing “local roots and a stake in the continuity of their relationship to the country of settlement” (Werbner, 2004).

Several factors come to necessitate understanding the Chaldean collective as a “transnational diaspora community” today. For one, contemporary Chaldean immigrants in the US cannot be called “transmigrants” because most of them do not lead a daily life that “depends on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders,” nor do they frequently travel back and forth between a “sending” nation-state and a “receiving” one (Schiller et. al., 1995). However, like the identities of transmigrants who maintain stronger ties with their communities and governments in the country of origin, the public identities of Chaldean immigrants in the US are configured in relationship to two nation-states, Iraq and the US, and the many stations along their way out of Iraq where asylees, refugees and migrants wait during a period of transition. Moreover, in recent decades Chaldeans have also been engaging in processes which migration scholars identify as characteristics of “transnational migration,” such as forging multi-faceted

cultural and economic relations between the societies of origin and those of the new settlements in the US and elsewhere. They have been doing so through undertakings that will be considered in this Chapter, such as the Nineveh Plain settlement project, voting in the Iraqi presidential elections, extending medical and financial aid to Chaldeans in Iraq during the period of economic sanctions or simply the maintenance of certain forms of cross-geographical kinship ties for the achievement of personal goals.

In short, it is crucial to bypass taxonomical rigidities that do not represent the full range of Chaldean social activity. These are imposed by terms such as “transmigrant,” i.e., migrants whose lives and identities are mainly configured in relation to multiple nation-states; “sojourner,” i.e., migrants who temporarily reside in the host country, usually for economic gain, without settling there or becoming incorporated in the economy of the host country; “permanent sojourner,” i.e., migrants who settle in the host country and are incorporated into its economy and political institutions; “itinerant,” i.e., individuals whose temporary movement across multiple international borders is usually determined by work prospects; and “uprooted,” i.e., migrants who do not maintain or have lost linkages to their originary land.⁷⁹ These terms do not permit the application of useful components of transnational migration theory without creating a misleading delineation of the territorial standings of US-based Chaldean communities and the nature of their interactions with the societies of origin. This Chapter explores a “transnational social field” approach to the study of the US-based Chaldean diaspora in which traditional community spaces such as the Church and the family are reconceptualized to reveal how transnational activities are transpiring within them.

⁷⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the terms “transmigrant,” “sojourner,” “permanent sojourner,” and “the uprooted,” see Schiller et al (1995) and Werbner (Ibid: 461).

Foundational Approach to a Chaldean Transnational Social Field

The formulation of a Chaldean transnational social field proposed here seeks to consolidate elements of various strands of cultural and transnational studies. Informed by Bourdieu's concept of "social field," in which social relationships are structured by a struggle for power within fluid boundaries of social belonging (Bourdieu and Loic, 1992), this research aims to approach the activities of a set of Chaldean individuals and institutions through an organizational framework that takes into consideration social hierarchies (money, location, affiliation) as structural units of social relations. While Bourdieu proposes that participants form the social field by way of struggling for social positions within multiple intersecting networks located in a structure of politics, the Chaldean social fields proposed here in addition call attention to the implications of social fields that extend beyond nation-state boundaries back into the society of origin.

The elaborated theoretical discussion of "transnational social spaces" offered by Thomas Faist is of particular value here (Faist, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). In his view, transnational immigration is located within what he terms "pentagonal relationships," involving immigrants, their sending and receiving governments and the civic societies of both nation-states. These relationships usually result in three analytically distinct types of transnational spaces—kinship groups, circuits and communities—which he defines as "combinations of sustained social and symbolic ties, their contents, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that can be found in multiple states" (Faist, *Ibid*, 2000a: 199).

For the purpose of creating a paradigm suited for the specificities of Chaldean transnationalism, these transnational spaces are re-identified in this Chapter as being

primarily the family, the Church, and secular institutional circuits. Accordingly, a Chaldean transnational social field is proposed as the intersections between these three spaces and a set of processes that take place within them. This intersection yields an exchange or transfer of ideas, services and resources on multiple local and transnational levels, oftentimes disproportionately, with a mobility pattern of US-to-Iraq rather than conversely.⁸⁰ Financial remittance, for example, issues from Chaldeans in the US and travels to family members or church leaders in Iraq. Petitions on behalf of displaced Chaldeans; programs for teaching the Aramaic language in church or public schools; and suggestions and summons to identify as Chaldean, Assyrian, ChaldoAssyrian, or AssyroChaldeans, among other social renovations, follow the same US-to-Iraq mobility pattern.

Because the local lives of individuals are often penetrated by distant connections of received or transmitted information, this conception of social field calls into question the local, national, transnational, and global connections and the center of subjective affiliations as experienced by participants in a given social field. By conceptualizing the social field to be transnational, i.e., transcending the boundaries of the nation-state of settlement, Levitt and Schiller allow for an assessment of everyday activities and relationships that are influenced by multiple laws and social institutions which may exist across multiple physical locales, such as the kinship network, the Church and the family business.

This approach also allows for arguing that assimilation and transnational ties are not oppositional or incompatible, but rather that selective assimilation results in forming

⁸⁰ See also Levitt and Schiller's definition of social field, which parallels this delineation: the social field is "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed." (Levitt & Schiller, 2004:1009).

an “alternative site” within the host nation “where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy” (Lowes, 1996:6). Using a transnational framework for the study of US-based Chaldeans implies capturing migrants’ simultaneous engagements in processes occurring in the US, the originary country, or host countries other than the US.⁸¹ This framework requires methodological shifts (from migration, minority, and diaspora studies to the transnational dimensions of the social phenomena they study) that focus on empirical illustrations of the intersections between social networks of Chaldeans in diaspora and Chaldeans remaining in the ancestral homeland, but also on instances in which a “transnational imaginary,” in which certain transnational ties are *imagined* rather than enacted, is at work among members of the migrant-generations.

This investigation draws on personal interviews, news reports, organization websites, community volunteer work, church records and other community texts to examine the interlocking activities of three social nodes, the family, the Church and the secular institutional circuits, and the varying levels of participation in transnational activity across a section of the US-based Chaldean community.

Multi-sited research would have been the optimal approach for studying these networks. Nonetheless, recent studies in transnational theory (Faist, Schiller, Levitt, etc.) offer analytical tools the synthesis of which sets a reasonable starting point for studying Chaldean transnational life from the single setting of the state of Michigan, the group’s main concentration in the US. It is not within the scope of this Chapter to analyze a broad sample of the transnational activities undertaken by the Chaldean population of

⁸¹ Chaldeans are currently numbering approximately 23,000 in Sweden, 18,000 in France and 5,000 in Greece. (*Chaldean News*. June 2007, 4:5: 32).

Michigan as a whole. Only key homeland-newland connections (i.e., ones forming and sustaining social relations, economic status, and collective identity) will be explored through the three nodes (family, religious and non-religious institutions) that contribute most to the formation of the proposed Chaldean transnational social field.

This discussion will start with the informal social site of the family. Although some family and family-business ties will be discussed in detail, the aim is to situate this social site within the context of a wider network of transnational activities rather than scrutinize the family as a discrete unit of social life.

I. The Family

“One cannot discuss Chaldean life without referring to the family,” writes Sengstock, who defines the family in her latest publication as “a central focus to the Chaldean community” (Sengstock, *Ibid*, 2005:13).⁸² Sociological studies that aimed to profile the Chaldean community in the US during the second half of the twentieth century (Sengstock, 1974, 1982, 1983, 2005; Al-Noori, 1964; Doctoroff, 1978; Henrich and Henrich, 2007) concur on the seminal position the family occupies in the life of the Chaldean individual and Chaldean community as a whole. Chaldean family ties form the nucleus of ethnic economy (an economy that is embedded in and dependent upon coethnic networks, often in diaspora when work options are more limited for a particular immigrant group), and the longest-standing forms of transnational remittances traditionally took place within kin networks, through contributions made by joint

⁸² In her earlier publications, Sengstock has consistently discussed the profile and role of the Chaldean family as a building block of the Chaldean community in Telkeif and Michigan.

business ventures, or through the absorption of new kin immigrants into established networks via business partnerships or marriage.

Numerous community publications and video clips that aim to define “The Chaldeans” to outsiders or affirm the group’s positive distinctiveness to insiders illustrate how culture-makers from within the community also take great interest in emphasizing the importance of the family and “family values” for Chaldean individuals. For example, the CCC video entitled *Our Story: Chaldeans in Detroit*, begins with a wedding scene in the oldest Chaldean-American church, the Mother of God, followed by a brief commentary by the Michigan-based Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim on how the Chaldean marriage is not only a personal contract between two individuals, but also a decision that involves the entire extended family. Bishop Ibrahim’s definition of Chaldean marriage is followed by a statement from a secular community leader informing the viewer that “we [the Chaldeans] have continuity in our community because we have family relationships; we have community relationships; we have family values.” This video is but one of many community documents that seek to emphasize the fundamental role of the Chaldean marriage, and by extension the family, as a formative unit of the community.

“It is a sacred ceremony, the union between a man and a woman, a celebration of love, shared by family and friends,” proclaims the documentary’s opening commentary. This anonymous voice appears immediately after the image of a cross that initiates the documentary (the cross on top of the dome of Mother of God Church). Simultaneously with the voice, the observer follows the wedding scene as it takes place in the church altar (located under the dome with the cross). This audiovisual image serves as a direct

expression of the community's commitment to the Catholic faith through belief in the sacredness of the conjugal bond.

Charming as they may be, these snippets from Chaldean family life do not directly demonstrate how the social space of the family plays out its importance in the transnational field. Focusing transnational lenses on the Chaldean family as a fundamental nucleus for transnational activities entails rethinking several phenomena related to family formation and cultural reproduction (of heritage, language, identity and other components that parents or community desire to transmit to the new generation) that are familiar, but whose multiple interplays with the migration experience are not as readily recognizable. Three phenomena worth examining to illustrate transnational ties within the family are generational remittance, marriage, and ethnic economy. The following sections will consider each in turn.

Generational Remittances

Children form a central axis of family migrant life and their economic prosperity, study or work opportunities, safety, or what my interviewees generally referred to as their children's "future" are often the main reasons why some Chaldean families opt to leave Iraq or to sustain particular transnational ties. Generally speaking, however, available transnational scholarship tends to be adult-centered in its approach (e.g., focusing on those the money- and decision-makers within the community), obscuring therefore the ways in which child-raising activities or modes of assistance shape families' transition from the original home and their experience in the diaspora. As transnational research is applied at a deeper level to seek to differentiate between elderly- and young-parents'

patterns of transnational activities, we gain more insight into the inner working of Chaldean families, and by extension, into the lives of diaspora Chaldean communities. A generational differentiation in the Chaldean case, for instance, brings to light that prior to the 1980s, before conditions worsened in Iraq, many elderly Chaldean migrants who had large families of adult children living in multiple locations went back and forth between Iraq and the US. Once legal status as US citizen or permanent resident was obtained by elderly Chaldean parents, they often led a transnational life that could allow them to maintain close ties with their family members, to transfer financial remittances between siblings in different locations (usually from the US to Iraq and not the reverse), and to help children and their families remaining in Iraq to obtain legal immigration access to the US as expediently as possible.⁸³

Su'ad, 67, a Chaldean mother of four, summarizes her personal transnational life thus (interview, summer 2005):

My daughter Fatin married one [a Chaldean] from Detroit and left Baghdad in 1981. She and her husband ran their own store in Detroit. After she became citizen, she applied for me, but I didn't leave Iraq until 1991, right after the war. She was sending us money all these years, two or three hundred dollars a month, for her brothers and me. After 1991 I went to get my green card and stayed only 6 months in Fatin's house. I had to go back because her brothers couldn't leave Iraq. They were still in school and there was a ban on their travel from Saddam's government. So, it went like this for 5 years. I go every 6 months so the green card doesn't fall [expire]. Fatin and her husband took care of me, and gave me money to the brothers on the way back. Little by little the boys left Iraq through Jordan and I left to Detroit because now I have citizenship. It all happened because Fatin and her husband helped us. Now her little brother has a green card too.

But Chaldean transnational family life is not confined to circuits of elderly parents and their adult children who belong to the categories of non-migrants or first-generation

⁸³ As early as 1927, we have the example of Mr. Jonna who left Telkeif with his family to the US through the aid of his father-in-law who invited them to join him. See Sabar, Yona. (1978). "From Tel-Kepe (A Pile of Stones) in Iraqi Kurdistan to Providence, Rhode Island: the Story of a Chaldean Immigrant to the United States of America in 1927." *Journal of American Oriental Society*. 98:4:410-415.

migrants.⁸⁴ In fact, the notion of “migrant generations” itself can be more fittingly conceptualized by rethinking diaspora community in transnational terms. For instance, what gives rise to the hyphenated identity “Chaldean-American” among second-generation migrants is in part the transnational mode of life posited by the diasporic community as a collective. As Levitt and Schiller note, positing migrant generation formation as a linear process implies envisioning a social field where migrants and non-migrants lead isolated modes of socialization (Levitt and Schiller, *Ibid*: 1017). This paradigm is clearly inoperable in the case of the US Chaldean community, where intricate social networks are often inclusive of members of various generational experiences because of the high value Chaldeans place upon family and kin ties.⁸⁵

To emphasize the workings of a conceptual transnational field within the familial sphere, it is important to consider the case of Chaldean parents who left Iraq with their young children or had them shortly after arriving to the US when socioeconomic conditions at the country of origin were not entirely unfavorable. Such families usually brought up their children in households where impressions about Iraq or one of the Chaldean villages such as Telkeif, its people, values, and goods were present on a daily basis. These impressions provide for what Levitt dubs “social remittances” (Levitt and Schiller, 1999: 1017), that is, “ideas, practices, identities, and social capital that migrants

⁸⁴ Although the terms first- and second-generations have not been uniformly defined in the literature of cultural studies, migration scholars in the US commonly use the term “first-generation” to refer to persons born and socialized in a country other than the US. “Second-generation,” on the other hand, has been usually used to refer to US-born or socialized children of foreign-born parents, although, as Ruben Rumbaut points out, “under this rubric immigration scholars also often, if imprecisely, lump together foreign-born persons who immigrated as children as well as U.S.-born persons with one U.S.-born parent and one foreign-born parent, treating them together as a *de facto* second generation” (Rumbaut, 2004: 1165). In this dissertation, the two designations are applied in a manner that conforms to these definitions.

⁸⁵ In her fieldwork among the Chaldean community of Southfield, MI, Natalie Henrich found that 67% of the Chaldeans she interviewed have no non-Chaldean friends. These informants reported interacting with non-Chaldeans at work or school only. (Henrich and Henrich, 2007: 87)

remit home,” or, in this case, what migrants receive from or posit in terms that are associated with home. Even today, when children raised in the US never return to their parents’ home country, their generational experience is usually not territorially bounded; they are surrounded by all sorts of music, foods, manners, events and words with roots in the originary country—objects and impressions that attain the status of memorabilia as they often receive particular attention from the Chaldean individuals exposed to them. And they attain this status because they empower these individuals to an identity that is more than local (“Chaldean-American” or “Chaldean from Detroit”), or, in other words, an identity that is transnational (Chaldean with veritable roots and counterparts in Iraq). The fictional stories of American-raised Chaldean writers such as Weam Namou and Deborah Najor are characteristic of this transnational imaginary, where many of the characters depicted are first-generation immigrants or Chaldeans residing in Iraq or transitioning from there to the US.⁸⁶

More often than not the lives of non-migrant Chaldeans (born or raised) in the US are situated in social networks that are transnational by virtue of the constant sharing of actual, reconstructed or imagined experiences that take place across national borders.

A typical “Chaldean” wedding in the US is one frequently-occurring example of hyphenated identification with the place of settlement and the land of origin. The March 2008 issue of the *Chaldean News* magazine provides an excellent illustration. In this issue the magazine published the first “Annual Wedding Guide”, promising the readers pages of “the latest [wedding] trends and tips—with a nod to time-honored traditions” (*Chaldean News*, 2008:4:2:25-46). While the tips consisted of insights into the latest trends in fashion, hall decoration and etiquette at weddings that take place in American

⁸⁶ See the discussion of Chaldean fiction in Chapter Six.

cities, the “nod” included an article on the phenomenon of the “halhole” (the shrill ululation produced by Middle Eastern women on joyful or mournful occasions), suggestions on how to behave during the church ceremony, and “Love Iraqi Style,” a collection of personal stories of Chaldean weddings that have taken place in Iraq from the 1950s to the present.

Navigating through social life between two or more languages is another instance of hyphenation shaping the identities of US-based Chaldeans that is due in part to the transnational feature of the community’s life. As Faist observes, “transnational webs include relatively immobile persons and collectives” (Faist, *Ibid*, 2000a: 191). One of the salient processes that integrate immobile, i.e., non-migrant, US-based Chaldeans into the transnational sphere is the extent to which they have been exposed to the migrant generation’s first-language, in this case Arabic or Chaldean. If the Chaldean family is involved in a family business, for instance, second-generation youths who help their parents run the family business after school or on weekends often interact with kin or family acquaintances at the workplace. Many of these individuals are recent arrivals from Iraq, hired temporarily or permanently by relatives by way of helping them establish themselves in the new country. Since many of them only gradually develop their communicative skills in English, members of the different generations are forced to interact more frequently in the family’s native language. The result is a pattern of language remittance—or the language(s) that migrants remit to the non-migrants as well as the language(s) they receive from them—by which Chaldeans born or raised in the US

acquire or improve their command of their ancestral language, while the Chaldean newcomers build up their English.⁸⁷

In addition to exposure through family business, involvement in Church life is another factor that strengthens second-generation Chaldeans' investment in transnational networking. Different migrant generations of Chaldeans interact there and become exposed to the three languages (Aramaic, Arabic and English) of the Church's Sunday service (Since family ties are often strong, it is not uncommon that 2nd generation, English-speaking children would accompany their 1st generation Arabic- or Chaldean-speaking parents and grandparents to the Sunday service in the language of the older family members). Moreover, Chaldean churches in the US aim to instill the urge to learn the Aramaic language and preserve the Chaldean heritage among their young parishioners through after-school programs, Sunday activities, competitions and tournaments.

It remains, however, that not all Chaldean-Americans are introduced in the same manner or extent into the informal, family-based transnational social field. Not all Chaldean families attend a Chaldean church or participate in running a family business. And the extent to which second-generation Chaldeans become involved in forging transnational connections later as adults depends strongly on such formative introductions. Nonetheless, a transnational imaginary pervades the contemporary US-based Chaldean community, and the gap between transnational discourse and transnational action is not unusual. As we shall see in the subsequent sections of this Chapter, it is the task of formal Chaldean networks, such as Chaldean institutional

⁸⁷ I mostly gathered the information in this section during interviews with Chaldean store owners and employees in Oakland and Wayne counties, 2006-8.

circuits, transnational marriages, the Church, etc., to place that discourse into an organizational framework with a potential to yield transnational actions.

Transnational Marriages

Intricate family networks operate most effectively when their members share a perception of compatibility. For the early Chaldean migrants this meant marriage should ideally take place between members of families who could cooperate within the confines of a tight network, socialize and operate joint business ventures, namely, between Chaldean kin.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the strong family ties that the early Chaldean migrants continued to value upon departing from their originary villages in search for economic prosperity quickly gave rise to the notion of an “ideal marriage” which they attempted to reproduce in the American diaspora. Traditionally, and until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Chaldeans from the villages of northern Iraq lived under the protection of their Patriarch or head of the Millet in patrilineal communities composed of large extended families that strongly favored endogamy (Sengstock, 2005: 13-5). Early (1920s-50s) immigrations to the US, usually undertaken by single young men, did not alter families’ expectations for their sons to marry within the kin network. It was usually assumed that a marriage with a Chaldean immigrant from the US would automatically result in the emigration of the Iraq-based individual. Thus the earliest patterns of Chaldean migration—family-based chain migration⁸⁸—formed when young

⁸⁸ Initially, migration literature applied the term “chain migration” to describe how the first wave of migration, often of young workers, triggered other migrations from the same family or community. (Price, 1963), as cited in (Castles, 2004). In recent usage, the term is also applied to discuss the role of migrant networks in facilitating the transition of other migrants to the new country and the existing diaspora community. As a form of “social capital,” the impact of chain migrations has also been researched in the context of refugees and asylum seekers, whose mobility choices are usually strongly influenced by existing connections with coethnics. (Koser, 1997).

men returned to their home villages for the purpose of marriage, anytime within 2-20 years of living abroad.

Male migrants usually married a cousin or accepted a bride chosen by immediate or extended family members residing in the village of origin. While some wives lingered behind for a while and raised children in the village through remittances sent by the migrant husband, a more common scenario was to arrange for the young bride, typically 12-18 years of age, to join her husband in the diasporic community as soon as the legal family-based migration process permitted. These patterns were witnessed as early as the 1920s and have continued to this day.⁸⁹

“Passport marriages”—where one spouse is admitted to the US based on the citizenship status of the other spouse—still takes place among Chaldeans in the present. Studies conducted in the last five years show that second- and third-generation Middle Eastern immigrants in Europe and the US continue to return to the land of origin to find marriage partners (Hooghiemstra, 2001; Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Several factors, however, have modified the traditional patterns of Chaldean transnational marriage over the decades. One of these factors is the growth in the size of the US-based Chaldean community. This factor has resulted in decreasing the importance of gender and generational differences in determining spousal mobility. For instance, compared to the early decades of migration when Chaldean migrants were predominantly first-generation male bachelors, more and more female and second-generation migrants are now also returning from the US to meet a suggested or selected spouse; hence, Chaldean men and women from different migrant generations are engaging in spousal mobility in multiple

⁸⁹ See, e.g., the story of David Kassa who immigrated to the US in 1929 while his family waited in Telkeif. CCC documentary film, *Our Story: Chaldeans in Detroit*. I also encountered a similar personal family account during an interview with Sabah Emmanuel, 4/25/2006.

directions from and to the US. Also, the expansion in size of the US-based Chaldean diaspora now allows young Chaldeans to meet and select their spouse from a local social network of kin and coethnics without leaving their country of residence.

The size of a community and the duration of its settlement in one place are also factors that contribute to the changing incidence of Chaldean transnational marriage. The Chaldean migrant community has expanded significantly and so has the time span of their settlement in the US, a fact that directs transnational patterns in multiple directions. That there are multiple migrant generations in the US today—recent immigrants who are not yet comfortably incorporated into the legal or socio-economic system in the US, US-born and educated Chaldeans who only speak English and who do not take part in the cultural life of the Chaldean community, etc.—is clearly contributing to the rising incidence of intermarriage, which in turn has its effects on the incidence of kin marriage in its transnational form. Sengstock writes that the *2000-2001 Chaldean Directory* lists twenty-eight persons under non-Chaldean names (Sengstock 2005:20). In its twentieth edition, or the *2006-2007 Chaldean Directory*, that number has at least tripled. Another indication of the rising incidence of intermarriage can be found on the congratulatory “Halhole!” column of the Michigan-based monthly community magazine, *The Chaldean News*, where out of the 106 marriages and engagements announced between February 2004 and July 2007, 24 were between couples one of whom did not have an Arabic or a Chaldean last-name.

Other factors that have shifted transnational marriage patterns are the travel restrictions imposed on migrants from within the sending country, Iraq. For instance, during most of the 1980s when Iraq was waging a war with Iran, many Chaldean

migrants feared that they would be drafted into the army should they return to their land of origin. Prompted by the general unsafety of civilian life during the war, many Chaldean families remaining in Iraq also discouraged their migrant relatives from visiting during that eight-year period. The conclusion of the Iraq-Iran War in 1988 spurred many individual and group visits from the US to Iraq, but those visits resulted in limited Chaldean marriage contracts because they lasted only briefly. Since the early 1990s, the advent of the first Gulf War made it less feasible to return to Iraq for the marriage selection process but also more feasible to meet with the potential spouse in one of the temporary refugee stations, mainly Amman and Damascus.

The main current shift in the patterns of transnational marriage is that fewer marriage-seekers go back to Iraq to meet or select a spouse. Instead, contact with other Chaldean diaspora communities is serving to alleviate some of the difficulties generated by the curtailed communications with Iraq. Marriage across diaspora communities guarantees the maintenance of already existing kinship ties and also the establishment of new ones that could become beneficial to other family members at a future point. Awni, a Chaldean father from Southfield, Michigan, described how he took his son to visit his brother in Greece. During this visit, they attended various Chaldean functions. His brother's family introduced them to a young Chaldean refugee who had arrived recently from Baghdad with her family. After spending two weeks in Greece, the Chaldean-American son was engaged to the Chaldean woman in Greece. Six months later, the woman arrived in Detroit on a marriage visa. Five years later, after she obtained American citizenship through marriage, she was able to apply for permanent residency status for her parents. Upon obtaining their green cards, the parents were able to submit

applications for the immigration of their other adult children to join them from their various locations in Iraq, Jordan and Australia (Interview, Detroit 5/5/2006).

As is the case with the Assyrian community in London among whom Madawi Al-Rasheed conducted her anthropological fieldwork in the late 1990s, Chaldeans in different diasporic communities welcome marriages with US Chaldeans as beneficial to their children and to other members in the family. “Having a new kinship link is always regarded as an asset,” Madawi accurately perceives, “which could facilitate further migration if that is desired, and provide new contacts and information relating to the host country by the new individuals entering the circle of one’s kinsmen” (Al-Rasheed, 1998:202).

The steady persistence of Chaldean transnational coethnic marriages despite their shifting patterns also changes the ways in which Chaldeans who have not left Iraq construct their ideals for a successful marriage and suitable marriage partners. From the 1990s to the present, for example, young Chaldean women in Iraq or in temporary refuge in Jordan or Syria only desired to marry Chaldean men who had migrated because they are considered the ideal breadwinners and the solution for transporting the entire family to a safer country.⁹⁰ As more young Chaldean women leave the country with their families to wait for a permanent resettlement solution in a temporary residence in Jordan or Syria, marriage arrangements with Chaldeans remaining in Iraq become less likely and ones with Chaldeans who are citizens of another country become more desirable. In earlier decades, by contrast, when social life in Iraqi cities was relatively stable, young

⁹⁰ This case is by no means unique to the Chaldeans of Iraq or the other religious minorities in the Middle East. In her field research in a Dominican village, Levitt found that many young women also considered men who had migrated to be the ideal life partners and some wished to marry exclusively from that category. (Levitt 2001a: 1016).

women or their families could afford to be more selective in their choice of a marital partner and to assess the migrant status of a potential spouse with more ambivalence.

One of the factors upon which Chaldean families have traditionally placed considerable importance when assessing the social status of a migrant suitor is his or her profession abroad, and, as a significant correlate, the income obtained through this profession. The next section will take a look at the interplay between the institution of in-marriage and ethnic business as two intertwined dimensions of the Chaldean family in its function as a transnational social field.

Ethnic Economy

Marriage and enterprise have often shaped each other within the Chaldean diasporic community, as is shown in the surveys conducted by Sengstock in Detroit during the 1960s and 1970s. Chaldeans who engaged in allied family businesses, according to Sengstock, were more likely to marry endogamously and to live near other Chaldeans than those who pursued other occupations. Engagement in family business ventures also showed Chaldean immigrants' higher tendency to participate in other community networks such as the Chaldean Church and the Chaldean-Iraqi Association, and to speak Arabic or Chaldean with their kin and coethnic peers (Sengstock. 1974: 30-1).⁹¹ Family-owned businesses play a seminal role in Chaldean marriage choices also because they set the economic standards for a large segment of the immigrant community. Recently economists and sociologists have concurred that a high self-employment rate of a racial or ethnic group bore strong associations with a high average income for that group, and

⁹¹According to Sengstock's surveys, 88% of Chaldeans engaged in family enterprise married endogamously and lived in areas with high concentration of Chaldean households, compared to Chaldean non-grocers of whom only 70% married endogamously and 77% lived near other Chaldean households.

that their descendents enjoy individual and family incomes higher than the national averages (Zhou, 2004:1052).

Considering their longest-standing and most pervasive mode of economic sustenance—the family business⁹²—US Chaldeans neatly fit the profile of “ethnic entrepreneurs” that has fascinated many social scientists as a social phenomenon where immigrants simultaneously own, manage and operate their businesses within a network of common cultural heritage or origin that constrains the interplay between individual behavior, social relations and economic transactions (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990; Yinger, 1985; Zhou, Ibid, 2004).

Although no exact count of Chaldean stores exists, informal estimates provided by Chaldean and other trade associations today suggest that Chaldeans own 6,050 businesses in Michigan alone. They also suggest that 2,500, or 80-90 percent of grocery and liquor stores in Metropolitan Detroit, are owned and run independently by Chaldeans and their descendants.⁹³ Moreover, the latest “Household Demographic Survey” commissioned by the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce and carried out by the United Way and Walsh College, revealed that 61 percent of Chaldean families in Southeast Michigan own at least one business (*Chaldean News* . June 2008:5:5: 29-30).

The history of store ownership by Chaldeans in Detroit dates back to 1917, yet as a distinct ethnic group they only began to dominate the inner city’s market in the late 1960s, when both Syrian-Lebanese store owners and the larger chain grocery stores

⁹² By 1974, nearly 40% of Chaldeans who had adult relatives in Detroit reported being engaged in business with them. (Sengstock, Ibid, 1974: 26). By 2007, Henrich and Henrich’s study shows a figure of 94% for Chaldeans working with at least one relative in grocery and wholesale industries (Henrich & Henrich, Ibid: 86).

⁹³ Chaldean-American Chamber of Commerce,
http://chaldeanchamber.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6

began to leave the area after the 1967 riots. While the willingness of Syrian and Lebanese shop owners to sell their stores to other Middle Eastern groups provided a market opening for Chaldeans to enter store ownership with a ready means of support, the other factor that helped boost these small family businesses was the major influx of new Chaldean immigrants during the 1960s and 1970s.

This socioeconomic climate provided the early Chaldean immigrants with the opportunity to pool kin resources which resulted in a rapid business boom as family based-chain migrations ensured a sufficient supply of coethnic workers to run the stores without the need to revert to business partnerships with non-Chaldeans (Sengstock, 1982). Conversations with Chaldean business owners and observation of the “success stories” promoted in community literature reveal that the primary factor used to explain Chaldeans’ dominance in the liquor and grocery businesses is the kin network. In addition to the large labor pool that the extended family provides to cut costs and generate a higher profit margin, there is the obvious advantage of solidarity and enforceable trust, and the financial help often extended to newly arriving kin who need start-up funds. The story of Ra’ad, a Chaldean store owner in Ferndale, Michigan, links these points (Interview, July 2006):

I had many relatives already in Michigan when I came in '89. You know, we Chaldeans have big families, and we stay close together when we can. My old brother Imad opened this store five years before I came, and when I came I started working with him right away. He opened and I closed, seven days a week. I have a Masters in engineering from Baghdad, but the party store business is better because it's for the entire family. You know they will back you. It's not easy work, we work many hours, sixty-eighty each week, but you can trust your brothers more than anyone else. This is why we're successful. Now Imad has another store in West Bloomfield, and my young brother Jawdat came from Jordan in '97 and he's working with us too. We helped him out and got him into the business. He had nothing when he arrived. We gave him loans, no notes no interest, nothing. He just paid it back when he was ready. Now we're all equal partners. When one goes on vacation we cover for him, and he covers for us when we go. It doesn't mean we get paid less if we can't work because of a

special event. You have more freedom when you work with your relatives, and you also trust them on your shift.

Although Ra'ad's assessment of his family business situation underscores the positive impact of transnational family ties on economic prosperity, his statement also suggests an exploitative use of kin networks where power differences mobilize class differentiation in which wealthier family members could extract labor from members defined as kin. Yet exploitation and aid balance each other out within these economic family networks. Family business often has an integrated cultural component whereby economic activities are governed by commonly accepted norms of reciprocity that transcend contractual monetary bonds (Zhou, 2004: 1044).

That the Chaldean family is often large and its members support each other are features that have not been lost on outsiders, especially other store owners in the area and customers who frequent Chaldean stores. As Gary David points out, the close-knit nature of the Chaldean family has "created tension and animosity between store owners and their customers, who notice that very few non-Chaldeans are working in the stores" (David, Ibid: 157). However, as Barbara Aswad stresses, this type of kin cooperation used by Iraqis in general in Detroit is not rooted in racial discrimination but rather in the patrilineal nature of the Iraqi family. Nonetheless, it is often misunderstood by the surrounding, often exploited and economically marginalized, black population (Aswad, 1993).

Oddly enough, business success which Chaldeans repeatedly attribute to the assistance of the family often comes at the expense of the family. Due to long work hours, family members who are often used as a labor force cannot afford to spend much time together outside the store. As a result, parents and children spend little family time

together, and the family as a whole has to build its social life around the store hours (Sengstock, 1982: 36). According to Sengstock, many of the Chaldeans she interviewed cited extensive work hours as the source of delinquent behavior among their youth (Sengstock, 1983). Yet traditionally, both parents and children viewed this separation as a necessary sacrifice, either for the immediate financial security of the family or for the future of the store owners' children. Many storeowners, however, also view their business as the gateway to providing their children with the opportunity to obtain education that would allow them to take up a different profession away from the family store (David, Ibid:175, interview with a Chaldean store owner in Detroit).

For the next twenty years things will remain the same. But after that, who knows. 'Cause my kids probably would not choose to be in this business [family store], and I don't want them to be in this business. I want them to be in the professional life. You know, doctor, attorney, engineer, whatever it takes.

If the family store has been the young Chaldean generation's means to *quit* the original family store business as many activities indicate, such as sending the kids to college instead of asking them to run the store, what, then, ensures the survival of this form of Chaldean entrepreneurship today?

While the rapid social mobility of Chaldeans has often been attributed to the family business, sociologists and anthropologists who studied the community in the second half of the twentieth century often speculated as to whether or not entrepreneurs' children, born and raised in Detroit and its suburbs, would follow in the footsteps of their parents in running the family store. Almost twenty-five years ago Sengstock observed that Chaldeans did not place a high importance on education since they were able to attain socioeconomic success through entrepreneurial activities which did not require much formal training (Sengstock, 1983: 24).

By the late 1990s Gary David suggested a change in this pattern that paralleled the changes undergone by earlier Arab immigrants in the area. He claimed that more Chaldean youth were entering college and the ethnic community was shifting its economic emphasis from store ownership to professional occupations, especially “doctor, lawyer, or engineer” (David, Ibid: 173-5).

David further predicted that “as Chaldeans move away from store ownership, they are simultaneously moving away from a career that is linked to their ethnic identity...the departure from grocery and convenience stores may have the unintended result of weakening the Chaldean community as an ethnic group” (Ibid: 175)

However, contrary to these claims, my findings suggest that the ethno-economic ties among members of the Chaldean community in Metropolitan Detroit continue to be strong despite moving away from store ownership. As we shall see shortly, the evidence is that these ties are becoming more structured through ethnicity-based umbrella organizations that look after their legal protection (e.g., against lawsuits, taxation problems, etc.) and provide for their networking and publicity. I would argue that the survival of the Chaldean community as an entrepreneurial group bounded by coethnic social structures and locational clustering is due to the community’s adaptation to the changes in the market forces. The community does so by constantly finding new ways of incorporating itself into the economic mainstream without shedding the discourse of its ethnic distinctiveness, that is, as a set of consolidating ethnic ventures. Instead of the Detroit party store as the discrete representative of Chaldean business, now umbrella organizations such as the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, the Chaldean Justice League, and the Chaldean Federation of America provide the consolidating

discourse and legal façade that suggest to community members and outsiders alike the presence of an invisible power that connects and unifies all small Chaldean businesses in the Detroit area.

Two crucial factors that have sustained Chaldean economy in Michigan while simultaneously altering its shape in recent years are, a) the emergence of strong and elaborate networks of ethnic organization, and b) the continuous influx of new Chaldean immigrants. Together these two factors reinforce the ethnic group's control over the employment network, whereby members who share the same ethnicity can be channeled into coethnic and non-coethnic ventures and to the public sector of the encompassing labor market. In addition to contributing to Chaldean economy in diaspora, the continuous entry of new Chaldeans to the US is at the same time maintaining a transnational site of ethnic economic remittance. New Chaldean immigrant economic success tends to be in part motivated by the desire to send money to family and kin in Iraq and transit countries to support them until they arrive and settle in the US.⁹⁴

Coethnic networking, one that takes the shared ethnicity as the basis for partnership in economic matters (irrespective of location, in the case of the Chaldean community), is best exemplified by the Chaldean-American Chamber of Commerce (which will be discussed within the context of other major Chaldean organizations in a subsequent section in this Chapter). What prompted the emergence of such an umbrella organization in 2006 was the quest of small business owners to join resources or forge extensions of their businesses into the core of mainstream economy for the purpose of

⁹⁴ In eight interviews with Chaldean male immigrants who arrived to Michigan between 2007 and 2008, ages 18-42, six reported sending money to relatives in Iraq, Syria or Jordan on a regular basis. The remaining two expressed the desire to do so once their financial situation improved (Interviews, May-Aug 2008).

achieving socioeconomic mobility, which, as David rightly observed, could no longer be achieved solely through operating convenience stores in Detroit.

Store owners see the decline in the growth potential of small family businesses, the changing habits of American consumers and the dwindling customer base due to the shrinking population of Detroit. However, instead of abandoning these small businesses the way their Syrian and Lebanese predecessors did, Chaldean store owners are expanding them in multiple directions. For instance, as early as 1974 Sengstock had noted that Chaldean businessmen began branching out into the wholesale food industry (Sengstock, 1974: 25-26). Many businesses have also branched out to Detroit's western suburbs, where now they dominate the wealthier, more densely populated towns of Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, and Bloomfield Hills, among others, in Oakland County.

It is generally agreed among sociologists that certain immigrant groups are more entrepreneurial and more likely than others to adopt family business ownership as a chief strategy in their quest for economic security and mobility (Zhou, *Ibid*: 1041). While Chaldeans continue to be family business owners in rundown areas such as the inner-city neighborhoods of Detroit, in recent years the family store has acquired a diverse profile and many of the new shop owners appear to have successfully sustained a positive ethnic distinctiveness in other entrepreneurial contexts.⁹⁵ In addition to grocery and liquor stores, many Chaldeans now own and operate gas stations, cellular phone stores, video stores and other types of small businesses. The current website of the Chaldean Chamber

⁹⁵ The stores the Chaldeans initially owned in Detroit were commonly referred to as “Mom and Pop” stores—owned, managed and run by a single man, assisted by his wife, children or siblings, carrying limited stock of items, extending limited credit to their customers and operating for long hours, usually seven days a week. (Sengstock, 1974:25)

of Commerce provides the following figures for businesses owned by Chaldeans in Michigan.⁹⁶

<u>Business Sector</u>	<u># of Stores</u>
Food Stores	2,500
Gas Stations	400
Hotels	150
Small Businesses (Cellular Stores, Dollar Stores, etc.)	2,000
Professional Services	1,000
Total Estimated Businesses Owned	6,050

It is true, also as David pointed out, that more recent generations of Chaldean-Americans are attaining socioeconomic mobility through professional degrees and higher education. Nonetheless, an important trend that has ensured the survival of the family business among Chaldeans in Michigan while the younger generations are shying away from operating the family store is the continuous influx of new immigrants willing to engage in virtually any financially secure enterprise to earn their keep in the US. In interviews with Chaldean attorneys and businessmen in Michigan it was indicated that Chaldean families regularly help their immediate and extended family members to come to the US. Upon arrival they also help them learn the specific skills required to run the family business in the new country. When legally viable, some Chaldean families have even opened a store for the specific purpose of assisting relatives to arrive as labor migrants.⁹⁷

As sociologist Min Zhou suggests in his analysis of ethnic entrepreneurship in the US, particular contexts of exit (from originary land) and reception (to the host country) of

⁹⁶ http://chaldeanchamber.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6

⁹⁷ See also similar claims stated in an interview with Chaldean attorney Salman Sesi (Sengstock, 2005:18).

immigrants can result in distinctive social environments and socioeconomic conditions for the members of the immigrating group and their receiving diaspora community (Zhou, Ibid). Among Chaldeans, business success has often been linked to exploiting specific patterns of social networking to circumvent labor market and legal barriers. For instance, many Chaldeans shop owners favor hiring relatives because they can pay them a sum of money that is different from the amount declared by the business and the employee, and thus circumvent paying higher taxes. Moreover, Chaldean immigrants who enter the country illegally or continue to reside in the US after the expiration of their legal residency status often find work with relatives or close coethnic acquaintances who are willing to employ them through informal work agreements that do not involve legal contracts or taxation.

Munir, a Chaldean physician at Detroit Mercy Hospital, reports a similar development of events surrounding his migration as a medical school graduate from Iraq (Interview, Northville, March 2005):

My wife and I were both 28 when we arrived in Southfield in '97. We both graduated as doctors from the medical school of Saddam University. We took the USMLE qualifying exams in Jordan after 3 years, and waited in Amman until my wife's green card application—her parents were in the US for a long time and they applied for her—went into effect so we can immigrate to the US legally. When we arrived we realized it takes a while to be accepted to a residency program in Michigan—this is where her parents lived and we stayed with them in the beginning. Residency programs are very competitive for immigrants, even if they score high on the USMLE. Anyway, I had to earn a living meanwhile to support the two of us. My father-in-law had a distant relative, also a physician, who owns gas stations. Through these connections I was hired to run one of his 3 gas stations in Southfield. I managed the station and the store alone at night, working a daily shift from 11pm to 7am for 5 months until I started going on interviews for residency programs. I was paid under the table, of course, because neither of us wanted to pay extra taxes. We trusted each other because of family ties, so it worked out perfectly.

In the past decade or so, Chaldean immigrants' success in operating the family business upon arrival to the US is in many cases also connected with the work experience

many of them bring from Iraq. In modern Iraq, where Islam forbids the handling and consumption of alcoholic beverages, their religious status served as key component in establishing a large segment of city-dwelling Chaldeans as a community of liquor store owners. While as Christians they were not constrained by religious conventions from obtaining licenses to operate liquor stores in Iraqi cities, Chaldeans benefited from selling alcohol to a large body of Muslim clientele who were not legally prohibited from consuming alcohol during the twentieth century. Upon uniting with their families in Michigan, Chaldean liquor vendors were readily incorporated into the family grocery-store business, a large component of which traditionally consisted of alcoholic beverages.

The events following the 2003 change of regime in Iraq and the resurgence of Islamic extremism, however, have placed these Chaldean-operated liquor stores on the central stage of ethno-religious cleansing. Dozens of liquor stores and distilleries, predominantly owned by Christians, were burned and their owners threatened or murdered. More than a business venture, liquor-related entrepreneurial activity among Chaldeans in the past five years became frequently cited by Chaldeans and their proponents as a life-threatening activity in Iraq, one that justifies seeking political or religious asylum in other countries, including the US.⁹⁸ Their religion and their religious minority status in Iraq, as we shall examine in the next section, play another leading role in shaping diaspora Chaldeans as transnational actors.

⁹⁸ See for example: Matthew Rosenberg. (Jan, 2004). "Iraqi Liquor Store Murders Raise Concern." <http://www.rense.com/general48/ris.htm>; Christians of Iraq. (Feb 2007). "Christians Fleeing Iraq." www.christiancentury.org; Nineveh Online. 2005. "Bishop Gabriel Kassab Visits London." <http://www.nineveh.com/Bishop%20Gabriel%20Kassab.html>

II. The Chaldean Catholic Church

Scholars have only recently begun to explore the relationship between religion and transnational migration (Levitt and Schiller, *Ibid*: 1026). The salience of religious institutions, as a set of doctrines, practices and cohort of personnel, lies particularly in that they are not coincident with the borders of the nation-states that contain their followers. Yet it is precisely because of this absence of physical fixity (which allows for delineating a *sending* nation and a *receiving* one) that migration theory has largely ignored the social impact and power of migrants' religion.

Sociologists of immigrant communities often expect immigrants to develop religious institutions in the host country as part of the process of incorporation—which the Chaldeans did as early as 1947 in Detroit, Michigan (“The History,” 1998)—however, these institutions are also expected to lose their force over time with the assimilation of subsequent migrant generations.⁹⁹ This prediction does not coincide with the development of Chaldean religious institutions in America, mainly, I shall argue, because these religious institutions have operated from the outset within a transnational field suitable for replenishing their force (e.g., within a network that is organized through the decisions that transnationally circulate between diaspora bishops, ancestral land archbishop, and the Rome-based pope).

The Chaldean Catholic Church can be explored as a prominent arena for expressing membership in multiple polities. Although it is not coincident with the borders of the nation-states where its followers reside, the Church may coexist with them or

⁹⁹ See for instance Dinnerstein & Reimers (1999), who argue that “the decline of foreign language in churches [in the US] was indicative of the growing Americanization and loss of ethnicity in American religion in the twentieth century.” The late nineteenth-century German Catholic church slogan “Language Saves Faith” (*Ibid*, p. 184) is also indicative of the threat of assimilation perceived by certain ethno-religious immigrants upon settling in the US.

create new spaces for belonging within these nation-states. As such, the religious Chaldean social field transcends the territorial and political boundaries of Iraq and the United States, among other nation-states, and forges in the process an alternative site for the expression of loyalties and a substantive global network of social and economic support.

Traditionally, through its liaisons with the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the various groups of missionaries that frequented the Christian communities in northern Mesopotamia,¹⁰⁰ the Chaldean Church has acted as a formal site for collecting, organizing, preserving and transmitting information and aid among its members in multiple locations. In recent decades it has also been an active political mouthpiece on behalf of the endangered Chaldean community in Iraq and a trusted source of data for international aid organizations interested in helping Iraqi religious minorities. Today it continues to extend a multi-faceted influence from its American stronghold, coordinating efforts with other non-religious community organizations and with its religious branches in other parts of the world.

To examine the current transnational relations maintained by the Chaldean Catholic Church, it is worth beginning with an overview of the politics of church-state relations in Iraq during the second half of the twentieth century. A subsequent section of this Chapter will attempt to correlate these relations with the developments that were simultaneously undertaken by the Church in the American diaspora.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter Three.

A Twentieth Century Overview of the Iraq-based Church

As we have seen in chapters Two and Three, the Chaldean Patriarchate—dubbed “Patriarchate of Babylon” after its Catholic conversion—moved the seat of its Patriarch in multiple directions over the centuries, until it established a measure of stability in Mosul in 1830. The next relocation to the Patriarchate’s current location in Baghdad did not take place until 1950, coinciding with large waves of migration of Chaldeans from the northern villages to the capital city. In 1958, the Church elected its new Alqosh-born Patriarch, Paul Cheikho, and transferred him to Baghdad from his post as a bishop in Aleppo (O’Mahony, 2004).

It is important to consider the political milieu of Paul Cheikho’s tenure as a Patriarch in Iraq in order to contextualize the transnational profile of the Chaldean Church during his tenure (1958-1989). While in office for over thirty years, Cheikho navigated the Chaldean Church and its followers through a rapidly transforming Iraq, where many were taking up a new ideology of Arabism that was to conflict with their ethnic filiations. At the time also, an oil-driven economy was emerging, three different regimes usurped power (Monarchic, Communist, Ba’thist), three national revolutions took place (1958, 1963, 1968) and an eight-year war with Iran (1980-1988) transformed the socioeconomic infrastructure of the country.

One critical event transformed the lives of the Chaldeans present in Iraq during that century. This event also highlights the transnational political environment in which Cheikho fulfilled his leadership role: the 1974 nationalization of the school system. This initiative had a direct impact on the provisions for Catholic education, which came predominantly from foreign missionary establishments in the country (see “Iraq,” 1989).

The private schools—mostly established and operated by Christian missions—were closed down and their foreign priest educators were deported.¹⁰¹ Moreover, for a period, the Iraqi government attempted to impose the study of Qur’an on all schools, including those where Christian students were the majority. These developments were fairly rapid, taking place less than two years after a 1972 decree had granted the Syriac-speaking Churches—Chaldean, Assyrian and Syrian—the right to teach Syriac in schools with classrooms of a Christian attendance of twenty-five percent or more (O’Mahony, *Ibid*: 443).



Figure 9. First-Grade Syriac reading book issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Education in 20,000 copies, 1974.

The 1972 religious education decree was rarely implemented and official measures to place restrictions on religious activities in Iraq after 1974 were implemented

¹⁰¹ For a detailed account of the various Christian missions and their schools in Iraq during the twentieth century, see Suha Rassam (2005); see also MacDonnell (2004) for detailed descriptions of the arrival of the American Jesuits to Iraq upon the request of the Chaldean patriarch, their systematic expulsion between 1932-1969 and the nationalization of their two Vatican-sponsored schools in Iraq (Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University).

through educational reforms as well as other political tactics. The Ba‘th regime ostensibly professed secularism and the constitution endorsed religious freedom, but legal procedures shaping political life, mixed marriages, inheritance and property ownership remained highly influenced by *Shari‘a* law. For example, while Muslims could inherit property from Christians, the reverse was prohibited; children of Muslim-Christian marriages had to become Muslim; and Christian men marrying Muslim women had to convert to Islam. The same went for the social, literary and pastoral activities of the Chaldean Church, all of which were closely watched and required prior authorization. In 1981, for example, the Iraqi government wanted to nationalize all Christian places of worship through the Ministry of *Waqfs* (religious properties and endowments) and to control all the churches’ functions, transforming church dignitaries, including the bishops, into state employees. Although this plan did not formally materialize, the religious leaders at the top had to secure political authorization before the assignment of any new posts (Younan, 1991). Also in that same decade, the National Assembly included four Christian representatives when parliament membership was 250 individuals. Eight would have been the number proportionate with their population (O’Mahony, 2004:129).

To situate Iraq’s Chaldeans within the context of that political era, it is important to stress that in Ba‘thist Iraq the livelihood of the Chaldean communities and their Church depended on the right interplay between religion and politics, with *Chaldeanness* as an ethnicity falling outside of the confines of legally recognized affiliations. The 1970 constitution recognized “the legitimate rights of all minorities in the context of Iraqi unity,” a statement that enacted the legal recognition of the existence of five Christian

communities (Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syrian Orthodox, Armenians and Latins) as *religious* minorities, while the various *ethnicities* these groups professed elsewhere (in diaspora or during other historical periods) were subsumed under the new unifying identity of “Iraqi citizen” (O’Mahony, Ibid: 442). These restrictions on collective identifications significantly affected the ways in which Chaldeans related to their homeland, and revived their conceptual affinity with the Christian West.

In this political atmosphere of tightening religious freedoms, transnational religious ties with the West manifested themselves as a source of power. While maintaining a formal loyalty to the local government, Cheikho carried his actions on behalf of the Chaldean community to an international audience, the only audience, in his estimation, that could lend an ear to the collective concerns of Christian minorities. In 1984, for example, he led an ecumenical and interfaith delegation to the Vatican as witness to the suffering of the Christian communities in Iraq from the consequences of the war with Iran.

Cheikho diplomatically navigated his way between the dictates of the central government of Iraq and the circuitous protection of the Vatican networks. But the Patriarch did not work single-handedly to check and stabilize the conditions of Chaldean minorities in Iraq through his connections with the powerful transnational religious networks of the Vatican. During the second half of the twentieth century, which was dominated by the traumatic internal displacement of Iraq’s Christians and their southward migration into the major cities of Baghdad, Kirkuk and Basra,¹⁰² Roupheal I Bidawid, subsequent Patriarch of Babylon (1989-2003), also activated certain transnational ties on

¹⁰² According to O’Mahony, between 1961-1995, the number of Chaldeans and Assyrians in northern Iraq dwindled from one million to a hundred and fifty thousand due to the war of attrition between the Kurds and the Iraqi army (Ibid, p.438).

behalf of the Chaldean community in Iraq. These included, as we shall see, representing the Chaldean community in transnational contexts, advancing ecumenical bonds, launching a literary heritage-saving campaign in diaspora, and establishing Chaldean dioceses in the US.

Bidawid's earliest exposure to transnational circles dates back to the 1940s, to his time in the junior Chaldean seminary in Mosul, which was administered by the Dominican mission. He continued his education in Rome, which, coupled with his subsequent exposure to the West, allowed him to obtain a position as the chaplain in service of the Christians working in the Iraq Petroleum Company. This Company extended from Tripoli in Lebanon to Kirkuk in Iraq, ethnically diverse regions with sizable Christian expatriate communities (Mérigoux , 2000).

In 1958, at a time when the Iraqi government engaged in a messy conflict with the Kurds, Bidawid was serving as the bishop of one of the largest Chaldean dioceses that spread through a large section of Kurdistan, a region that would become the center of the conflict between the fighting Arab and Kurdish factions. While Bidawid had to employ a great deal of political tact in order to maintain good relations with the fighting Kurdish factions and the government of Iraq, he was aware that transnational political relations were as essential as transnational religious ties for extending protection to the politically-marginalized Chaldean minority in the turbulent, post-World-War II Iraq.

From 1958 and until his transfer to Lebanon in 1965, Bidawid's challenging task was to maintain good relations with both factions, without compromising the position of the Chaldean Patriarchate in Baghdad or the livelihood of the Chaldean villages caught in the maelstrom. Moreover, witnessing the destruction of the Chaldean communities,

Bidawid foresaw the beginning a heritage-saving campaign that was to extend its roots internationally wherever Chaldean families congregated. Starting in the early 1960s, Bidawid began supervising the cataloging and transferring of the rich holdings of books and manuscripts from his bishopric to the patriarchal library in Mosul. He also published several articles on the Chaldean Church's relations with the Christian West, a topic about which he was exceptionally passionate ("Iraq": 1989).

It should be noted, however, that since his tenure in Lebanon (1965-1989), and later, after assuming the role of the Patriarch until his death in 2003, Bidawid did not confine his career to literary and theological pursuits. While residing in Beirut, Bidawid represented the Chaldean community in multiple transnational contexts. In addition to presiding over the religious life of the Chaldean community that numbered approximately 20,000 individuals in Lebanon, the Chaldean church he headed there provided a social nucleus for Iraqi exiles, tourists and businessmen of various religious affiliations. He represented the Catholic Church in the Fourth Assembly of the Council of Churches of the Middle East in Cyprus (2003) and advocated Church's membership in the Council as well as participating and heading several religious committees that advocated ecumenical bonds. Moreover, deploying his Lebanese connections, Bidawid acted on behalf of the Iraqi Chaldeans when the Iraqi Ba'athist regime was attempting to strike friendly relations with the Maronite community in Lebanon.

Finally, during and after the first Gulf War, as a patriarch, Bidawid began formulating multiple responses to the growing number of displaced Chaldeans, internally in Iraq and externally in various parts of the world. He created *Akhawiyyat al-Mahabba*, (or "Confrérie de la Charité," or "Caritas Iraq"), which became a full member of Caritas

Internationalis, a confederation of 162 Catholic relief organizations, in 1995 and gained the support of all four Catholic Churches (Rassam, Ibid, 2005:172). During the years of the sanctions, the *Akhawiyah* was the only private local aid agency that could distribute humanitarian aid to all regions of Iraq.

In addition to acting as a transnational player on behalf of the Chaldeans in person, Bidawid also encouraged more important senior Catholic figures to employ their transnational powers to publicize the effects of the embargo worldwide. Bidawid facilitated the visit of Cardinal Silverstrini, Prefect of the Congregation of the Oriental Churches, to Iraq in 1993 as well as that of the Catholic patriarchs of the Oriental and Latin Churches the following year. Although Bidawid's attempt to clear the path for Pope John Paul II's "biblical pilgrimage" to Iraq in 2000 was aborted by US diplomatic interventions and other embargo-related factors, the efforts of the Chaldean patriarchate eventually prompted papal contacts with the UN, US, European and Ba'ath authorities in an effort to bring about the end of the sanctions on Iraq ("Papal Pilgrimage," 1999). Indeed, as O'Mahony writes, "apart from Tariq Aziz, Bidawid was one of the few Christian personalities who had any real [political] profile during this [1990s] period."

Between 1982 and his death in Lebanon in 2003, Bidawid was also involved in establishing Chaldean dioceses in Detroit, Chicago and California to accommodate the arrival of the new Chaldean immigrants to the US. During that period he moreover appointed a patriarchal vicar to attend to more than 60,000 Chaldean refugees living under harsh circumstances in Jordan (O'Mahony, Ibid: 438-44).

In summary, the transnational careers of Cheikho and Bidawid made strong strides toward ecumenism that worked politically in favor of the survival and westward

mobility of the Chaldean communities. Together they acted to define Papal policy toward Iraq, and to take on the roles of intermediaries between Rome and Baghdad. They established mutual bonds between the Chaldean Church and the more influential Church of the East, subsequently dubbed “sister Churches,” which also had their favorable resonance abroad, where the Chaldean immigrant communities settled near other Eastern Christian diasporas, such as the Assyrian communities in Illinois and California.

The ambivalent relations the Chaldean patriarchates of Cheikho and Bidawid kept with the Ba‘th regime since its coming to power in 1963 also served, though erratically, to enhance the position of the Chaldean communities in and outside of Iraq for a while. The contacts between the Ba‘th government and the Chaldean Church and communities in the US will be discussed in the next section, in the context of other transnational relations that were charted in diaspora since the establishment of the first Chaldean-American Church in Michigan in 1947.

***The Chaldean Church in the US:
Transnational Activity from Lay to Religious Social Field:***

While the westward Chaldean migration that was facilitated by the transnational connections of the Chaldean Church continued to have mixed effects on the demographics of the Christian communities remaining in Iraq, it has, nonetheless, acted as a vital expression of the identity of Eastern Christianity in the US, and in a relatively short time.

The first Chaldean parish to exist in the US was St. Ephrem church, which was organized in Chicago in 1913 (Coakley, 2006:239). However, the most conspicuous formation of an autonomous Chaldean religious body in the US diaspora, the Mother of

God Parish in Detroit, Michigan, took place only after a somewhat unified Chaldean collective had already been organizing itself in the social, non-religious sphere. The anonymous author(s) of “The History,” an article written in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Mother of God Parish, do not exaggerate when they state that “the history of Mother of God Parish is the history of Chaldeans in the United States.”

In the early 1920s, when the Chaldean community in Detroit numbered less than thirty families who had settled near the older and larger Lebanese Maronite community, Chaldeans combined their religious practices with those of the Maronite Church. As the community grew larger and more autonomous in the 1930s, socially active members founded the Chaldean-Iraqi Association—later the Chaldean-Iraqi Association of Michigan (CIAM)—to represent their particular common interests. In less than a decade the size of the community grew to approximately seventy-five families, whose social needs and activities were marshaled through CIAM. The principal goal of CIAM’s founders was to “unite the community, to retain a Chaldean priest and to later acquire a church of their own” (Ibid, 50th Anniversary). To this end, the Chaldean Church was initiated into the diasporic life of its community of followers via an association delegate who was the first to coordinate between the Chaldean Patriarchate in Iraq and the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit in an effort to import a Chaldean priest from Iraq to serve the growing Chaldean community in the US.

After obtaining their first priest, Detroit Chaldeans enthusiastically sought to acquire their independent Chaldean church through the financial assistance of the Archdiocese of Detroit. The Chaldean religious institution continued to expand and to be transformed in the US diaspora, with the transfer of the first Detroit pastor, Toma

Bidawid (not to be confused with Roupheal Bidawid, Patriarch in Iraq), to a new Chaldean Parish in Chicago and the arrival of a second priest from Iraq, Toma Reis, to serve the Detroit community in his place, and so on. In subsequent decades, the growth of the Chaldean-American Church paralleled the growth of the Chaldean-American community. By 1951 the community grew to about 125 families, who could offer more help with the functions and financing of the Church through volunteer work and donations. A communal effort between Chaldean immigrant families helped the Chaldean Church achieve more independence by paying its debt to the Archdiocese in Detroit. While the Chaldean community and its churches grew correspondingly, the mobility pattern of Chaldean families triggered a parallel mobility of their places of worship. As families began to move from the city of Detroit to its residential suburbs in the 1960s, so did the Mother of God Parish, which was relocated in the city of Southfield in 1964.

While its establishment and maintenance depended heavily on the diaspora community's contributions, at the leadership level the institution of the Chaldean Church in the US exhibited more autonomy from its lay followers and more dependence on the decisions of the Patriarchate in Iraq. The diaspora Church was predominantly operated by functionaries who previously had lived and received their religious training in Iraq, the Middle East or Rome. By 1952, the Chaldean Church in Detroit was able to organize and administer its own variety of religious activities while drawing on financial assistance from the first Parish Council, which was composed of influential lay members from the Michigan-based community. Visits from Patriarch Cheikho during the 1960s and 1970s also implemented, through his assessments, changes and additions in the allocation of

religious posts in various areas in southeast Michigan where Chaldean families were rapidly multiplying.

Church functionaries also enjoyed a high level of mobility between Iraq and Detroit, and in this charted one of the earliest religious and political transnational networks within the Chaldean-American social field.¹⁰³ After serving as a pastor of Mother of God Parish, for instance, Toma Reis was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Zakho, Iraq, while Gorial Koda was transferred from Iraq to his post as the third pastor of the Mother of God Church. After serving a three-year term, Koda was transferred back to Iraq, and a fourth pastor exchanged countries with him to serve in the same Detroit Parish. This cyclical mobility pattern brought the attention of the Iraqi political authorities of the time to the Chaldean community in diaspora. As early as 1953, for example, when the Detroit Chaldean community had almost doubled in size to number 300 families, King Faisal II of Iraq was to pay them a friendly visit.

Ostensibly friendly transnational relations between the Iraqi authorities and the Chaldean diaspora continued to exist until the first Gulf War through the conduit of the Church.¹⁰⁴ According to several reports by Chaldean, Assyrian and American media, the Ba‘th regime made numerous attempts to improve its image, placate Chaldean-

¹⁰³ A separate, Church-associated Chaldean transnational network was forming after World War II in San Diego, California, when a group of Chaldean young men who had received their education at the hand of the American Jesuits in Iraq were invited to San Diego to teach Arabic at the Army Language School to American officers who were to be stationed in the Middle East. Their diasporic community continued to grow in relative isolation from the family-chain-migration-based Chaldean communities in and around Michigan.

¹⁰⁴ Saddam Hussein’s bond with Chaldean Detroit reportedly started during his first year as the president of Iraq, in 1979, when he donated \$250,000 to Reverent Jacob Yasso’s Chaldean Sacred Heart Church in Detroit. The money is said to have helped build the Chaldean Center of America, located on Seven Mile Road next to the Sacred Heart Church, in the district that is dubbed today “Chaldean Town.” “Saddam Reportedly Given Key to Detroit.” 2003. <http://www.clickondetroit.com/news/2064887/detail.html>

Americans or “Arabizante” (Arabize) them either by threat or bribery through Church liaisons (San Francisco Chronicle, 1982:1:18:5). US State Department officials, for instance, asserted that, while establishing an elaborate network of spies that infiltrated the US-based Iraqi-Christian diaspora, in 1979 the Iraqi government also gave away approximately \$10 million to US-based Chaldean and Assyrian Churches, which was interpreted as a “bribe” but was given away as a “donation.” In Detroit alone, it was estimated that the Iraqi government doled out \$1.7 million to Chaldean Churches and organizations in 1980 (Detroit Free Press 1981:3:1:1A).

These generous “donations” earned Saddam Hussein a “key to Detroit” from Mayor Coleman Young, which, according to a broadcast report on the local “Channel 4” at the time, officially granted Iraq’s president the status of an honorary citizen of the city (Moses, March 31, 2003).

That happened when the Ba’th regime was still an ally of America. Shortly afterward, FBI agents along with a number of Assyrians and Chaldeans from Detroit’s diasporic communities alleged that the Iraqi regime was paying certain Chaldean and Assyrian immigrants on a regular basis to provide reports on the activities of coethnics in the US (Detroit Free Press 1981:2:1:15A). The FBI, although failing to apprehend the culprits who committed the “acts of terrorism” reported by their own agents, stressed that there was a record of beatings, arson, and even homicide in the Chaldean immigrant communities which they ascribed to agents hired by the Iraqi government (Ishaya, n.d.).

Nonetheless, transnational politics did not infiltrate the everyday activities of the Chaldean Church in its diasporic stronghold. To the majority of the lay Chaldean migrant population, new Church personnel simply introduced new ways of involving the diaspora

community in religious life. For example, during the 1960s, the fourth comer from Iraq, Pastor George Garmo (later elevated to the rank of monsignor by the patriarch), established youth activities at Mother of God Parish, obtained a section of the Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Detroit for the burial of members of the Chaldean community, and opened a Mission House for the Chaldean Sisters. Also at Garmo's behest, the Chaldean American Ladies of Charity (CALC) was established in 1961 for the purpose of providing social services and financial assistance to new immigrants. In a couple of decades the twenty-three active women members of CALC initiated additional networks of community services for coethnics through their fundraising efforts for the construction of a senior citizen center under the auspices of the Chaldean Church (Terry, 1999).

Since its inception and to the present, the transnationally-oriented Chaldean Church of Michigan continues to be grounded within a lucrative network of local lay organizations. In the 1970s, for example, CIAM was searching for a site to build a Chaldean social club. This materialized in 1975 through the purchase of three acres from the site of the Mother of God Parish in a mutually beneficial agreement between the Parish and CIAM, resulting in the creation of "The Chaldean Heritage Association."

In addition to striving to become a "community-wide venue for activities" through working locally with lay organizations and transnationally with the Patriarchate in Baghdad, the Michigan-based Church slowly forged nation-wide connections with other Chaldean churches. In 1982, for example, a milestone was achieved through the appointment of Pastor Ibrahim Ibrahim of the St. Paul Chaldean Assyrian Church of Los Angeles, as the first "Bishop of the St. Thomas Chaldean Catholic Diocese of the United States of America." Through the event, the Mother of God Parish became his See

(Diocese), and was proclaimed “Our Lady of Chaldeans Cathedral.” During that time, too, English was introduced to mass services at the Michigan-based Cathedral (originally Arabic and Aramaic only). It was only in 1990, however, that English masses were added permanently to the schedule of Sunday and holiday church services, allowing second-generation Chaldeans more access to the religious life of the community. This feature enhanced the maintenance of social interaction between Arabic- or Aramaic-speaking new immigrants and English-speaking second-generation Chaldeans through the opportunity to maintain a common faith while sharing the physical space of the same ethnic Church.

That second-generation, English-speaking Chaldeans are claiming membership in the life of their ethnic Church has endowed the religious institution in its American diaspora with a special symbolic authority over the affairs of the community in spite, or because, of owing its material existence and financial robustness to their initiative and unremitting aid.

Symbolic authority refers here to the power of the verbal or textual endorsements offered by the Church in the context of formal or informal secular undertakings, such as a “Chaldean Household Survey” which was sent to every identifiable potential “Chaldean” household in Southeast Michigan in spring 2007. The research for this Survey was conducted by Walsh College of Business and United Way for Southeastern Michigan, commissioned by the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, and funded by as diverse a set of corporations as DTE Energy, Charter One Bank and Country Fresh Dairy. That a two-line letter of support by Father Manuel Boji, Rector of Our Lady of Chaldeans Cathedral, should preface the bundle of papers making up the application materials of a

socio-economic study might seem irrelevant in other contexts. But Boji's succinct statement,

I support this project hoping that this survey will benefit the whole Chaldean community. I would like to thank the Chaldean Chamber of Commerce for its effort in this matter,

suggests that the Church holds a prominent role in legitimizing and legalizing community projects. From the perspective of the members of the Chaldean community in diaspora whose input the survey seeks to elicit, no other lay institution, no matter how prestigious or popular, is able to vie with the symbolic authority and the assurance of the Church.

The *Chaldean News*, an English-language monthly community publication designed predominantly to draw a second-generation Chaldean readership, reserves a permanent column for "Religion," in addition to regularly featuring full-length articles, special issues, and cover illustrations about the Pope, the Chaldean Bishops and other religious dignitaries in Iraq and elsewhere. This is another good indication of the active role the Church continues to play in the life of the diaspora community and in turning its attention to transnational matters.

As a transnational player with strong symbolic power over the Chaldean-American community and protective influence on behalf of the Chaldeans in Iraq, the Chaldean Church functions as a conduit between its communities of followers in the two countries, creating a conceptual social field of belonging where the two geographically separated communities can engage in transnational activities on familiar terms. For not only do US-based Chaldeans readily fund their religious institutions in the diaspora, but they also trust the branches of this institution as the legitimate disseminators of financial aid to the Chaldean communities in the homeland and elsewhere. For instance, the newly-founded program "Adopt-A-Refugee-Family" is one in which monetary contributions

made by US-based Chaldeans are collected by the Chaldean Federation in Michigan and wired to religious personnel (Fr. Joseph Burby in Amman and Bishop Antoine Audo in Aleppo) to be disseminated among Chaldean refugees in Syria and Jordan. Another example is that of the current patriarch, Emmanuel Delly, who was recently working with funds raised and donated by CALC to make significant contributions for the Chaldean Seminary in Iraq (*Chaldean News* , July 2005:18)

Contrary to public appearances, it is important to note that financial remittances transmitted through transnational institutional media within Chaldean sociopolitical networks are often offered with expectations. In fact, they turn the process of giving and receiving into a cycle of mutual transnational profit. CALC members made their donation of \$10,000 with the knowledge that six young men had recently joined the Seminary in Iraq and were on their way to becoming Chaldean priests. Within the last decade or so, CALC and other community members have been critically concerned with the problem of a shortage in the number of priests in the quickly expanding Chaldean-American parishes.¹⁰⁵ By financially contributing to the fostering and ordination of new priests in the country of origin, the US-based community secures the continuation of its “authentic” Church in the diaspora.

CALC’s monetary contribution to the Iraqi Seminary is one of the examples that point out the junctions where secular Chaldean transnational activities redound to the maintenance of a Chaldean religious transnational social field and vice versa. Within the transnational context which this Chapter examines this example offers an opportunity to

¹⁰⁵ According to a *Chaldean News* article entitled “Father, do you have a minute? Priest Shortage Hits Community Hard,” (July 2004:1:6:25), the priest-Parishioner ratio in Chaldean Michigan is 1/12,000. Citing Fr. Manuel Boji, the article attributes this unreasonably low figure to the Chaldean community’s “preoccupation with material prosperity” which drives second-generation Chaldeans away from priesthood.

conceptualize the migrant Chaldean community as a site where multiple transnational social fields, such as the Church and lay institutions, exist within and intersect across the borders of nation-states. It is also worth emphasizing, by way of recapitulating Chaldean transnational activity from the lay social field to the religious in the US, that the early institutionalization of the Chaldean religion in diaspora depended on community-oriented efforts of Chaldeans as an *ethnic minority*, a role reversal from the historical precedence at the homeland, where the institution of the Church had continually acted on behalf of its lay followers to ensure their survival and protection as a *religious minority* that had no right to express its identity in terms of its ethnicity. This was demonstrated in the previous section through the context of Chaldean transnational life under Patriarchs Cheikho and Bidawid.

The next section will map out other non-religious junctures where Chaldean migrant generations express membership in two polities (Iraq and the US) and marshal Chaldean transnational activities to sustain a paradoxical combination of ethnic and diasporic cultural identities, the struggle between which strains but also helps form the Chaldean diaspora as such.

III. Institutional Circuits

While individual migrants contribute to creating networks across state boundaries to achieve personal goals through channels of kinship ties (e.g., transnational marriages, financial remittance through ethnic economy, etc.), diasporic Chaldean institutions pursue a similarly transnational path to realize a variety of purposes through fostering group interest in broader collective issues. These could be inclusive of but not limited to the maintenance of ethno-religious identity—as we saw in the case of the Church—the

preservation of the Chaldean language, ethnic solidarity, or even assistance in legal matters such as establishing a Christian settlement in Iraq or helping Chaldean refugees immigrate to America.

US-based Chaldean institutional circuits are becoming successively more intricate and wide-ranging in the ways they mobilize ideas and practices for specific community projects. Their success is attested to through the extremely high level of participation, where 64 percent of Michigan-based Chaldeans are involved in some sort of community organization. This figure is more than twice as high as the average participation level among Americans (Henrich and Henrich, *Ibid*: 87).

Organized, institutionally mobilized and sustained connections between the US-based Chaldeans and the homeland require the involvement of political, economic and cultural elites who share a commitment to maintain institutionalized transnational projects. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the constituency of an emergent elite segment of US-based Chaldeans who are at the leadership level of these transnational networks.

After identifying the role of this elite segment of the community, the discussion in this section will center upon three recent examples that most effectively characterize the formal component of Chaldean transnational activity: 1) Voting in the Iraqi elections, 2) the Nineveh settlement project, and 3) Operation R-4, the campaign currently waged on behalf of Chaldean refugees. All three projects potentially involve extending the boundaries of citizenship (both American and Iraqi) and reorganizing Chaldeans in the US to act on behalf of Chaldeans in Iraq or to financially contribute to the betterment of the circumstances under which the latter group is living.

Networks of Communal Elite

Questions of internal power are critical for understanding the transnational Chaldean diaspora. If the US-based Chaldeans are an example of a community of co-responsibility where this responsibility flows from the advantaged to the disadvantaged, from the rich and powerful to the poor and weak, as Pnina Werbner proposes (Werbner, 2000), then cultural products and collective representations should likewise be flowing from the stronger diasporic center(s) to the weaker multi-national peripheries. In the case of the Chaldean community in Michigan, it can be observed that these centers of power are formed by diasporic elites composed of clergymen, businessmen and a variety of wealthy philanthropists who, as Khachig Tölölyan puts it in his analogous study of the Armenian diaspora, “passionately share the conflicts that divide them” (Tölölyan, 2000).

The current Chaldean elites in Michigan are predominantly individuals who have relatives or acquaintances of Telkeifi descent (Sengstock, 1974: 24).¹⁰⁶ The majority of their institutions are located in or near the city of West Bloomfield, Michigan—one of the top five wealthiest suburbs in the United States. These elites and their institutions have always assumed responsibilities that are simultaneously philanthropic, cultural and political. Over time, by virtue of the diasporic community’s longstanding transnational activities through family, business and Church involvements, the issues that animate elite politics, economy, and aesthetics are shifting beyond the local to the transnational as well. In order to understand how a Chaldean ethno-geographic self-localization is emerging simultaneously with a transnational dimension of Chaldean political activity, it must first be understood how these institutions and individuals have been orchestrating

¹⁰⁶ In 1962 Sengstock established through a community census she conducted that only eight of the 305 families who participated in the census were from Iraqi villages other than Telkaif. Modern Chaldean elite, in turn, are mostly from these oldest Chaldean immigrant families or their descendents.

their various powers and channeling them into a single stream of action and publicity over the span of few decades.

There are 34,000-113,000 Chaldeans in Michigan alone;¹⁰⁷ about a quarter of that estimate in other American states;¹⁰⁸ roughly 50,000 refugees in Syria, Jordan, and other parts of the Middle East; and a rapidly dwindling 400,000 in Iraq. A public, collective, unifying, anonymous narrative of who all of these Chaldeans *are*, what their sociopolitical needs and demands consist of, and how they relate to the former and current political climate in Iraq and the US is being fostered, renovated, maintained, and broadcast in American mainstream media and local community media by a Chaldean elite and the institutions they represent in Oakland County, Michigan. Some of these secular institutions that share multiple sociopolitical valences are:¹⁰⁹

- Chaldean Americans Reaching and Encouraging, CARE (West Bloomfield, MI)
- Chaldean American Ladies of Charity, CALC (Southfield, MI)
- Shenandoah Country Club (West Bloomfield, MI)
- Chaldean Iraqi American Association of Michigan CIAAM (Detroit, MI)
- Chaldean Community Cultural Center, CCC (Shenandoah Country Club, West Bloomfield, MI)
- Chaldean Federation of America, CFA (Farmington Hills, MI)
- Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, CACC (Farmington Hills, MI)
- “Chaldean Detroit Times” newspaper (Farmington Hills, MI)

¹⁰⁷ “Household Demographic Survey”; *Chaldean News*, 5:5:2008:30.

¹⁰⁸No exact figures exist. The most recent Chaldean count in Michigan revealed that 113,000 live in this state alone. However, according to the 2000 US Census, the category “Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac” was checked by 34,484 individuals in Michigan, 22,671 in California (The state's largest Assyrian American communities are in San Diego and Los Angeles), and 15,685 in Illinois (with a concentration in Chicago and Niles). No other reliable figures are available to count the Chaldeans apart from the Assyrian and Syriac population in California and Illinois.

¹⁰⁹ In order to focus the discussion specifically on the sociopolitical activity of Chaldean-Americans, I decided to leave out the influential Chaldean religious establishment, which also falls within this geographical district.

- “*Chaldean News*” magazine (Farmington Hills, MI)
- Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America, CASCA (no specific location listed as of yet)

There are numerous other Chaldean institutions in Southeast Michigan that coordinate efforts with the above listed ones to address local needs, yet what I would like to elucidate here is how these organizations operate on constant symbiotic, if not familial, terms to mobilize transnational agendas and multi-local values, discourses and practices.

Founded, funded, and managed by the diasporic elites, these institutions (five of which materialized only within the last decade) have been shoring up the functions of cultural re/production of one another for the sake of promoting the common goal of introducing to the American mainstream, and subsequently internationally, one *legitimate* Chaldean culture that extends beyond state boundaries. Moreover, together these institutions labor to construct a diasporic civil society that nurtures and sustains a Chaldean public sphere of cultural production operated by a growing group of Chaldean teachers, activists, journalists, investors, professionals and performers who are associated with or dependent upon these institutions. Here is briefly how the symbiotic circuits work.

A Symbiotic Circuit

Chaldean Americans Reaching and Encouraging (C.A.R.E.) was founded in 1997 by a group of Chaldean youths, both students and professionals, as a community-based organization with a commitment to “humanitarian needs,” and to “strengthening and preserving our culture.” Initially CARE was sponsored by the “mother” institute, the aforementioned Chaldean American Ladies of Charity (CALC), founded in 1961. As a non-profit, Church-annexed organization, CALC works mainly through raising and

distributing donations among Chaldean families in the area, with the chief objectives of “enhancing the lives of the people in our community...and maintaining our culture within the diverse community in which we live.”¹¹⁰ In addition to working with Chaldean individuals in Oakland County’s public schools and senior citizen homes, both CARE and CALC regularly sponsor community events that are held either in St. Thomas Chaldean Catholic Church (West Bloomfield, MI), Mother of God Church (Southfield, MI), Southfield Manor Club (Southfield, MI), or the neighboring Shenandoah Country Club. CALC, which was founded through a clerical initiative, now financially backs the Chaldean Patriarch Emanuel III Delly, who in turn uses some of the funds to sponsor the Chaldean Church and seminaries in Iraq.¹¹¹ And most recently, CALC members have been involved in creating the CCC in the neighboring Shenandoah Country Club.

Next on the list is Shenandoah Country Club. It opened in 2005, but the idea of “building a community center that would unite all Chaldeans” was in the making since the influx of Chaldeans to the Metro Detroit area in the 1960s (Jabiro, Jan 2005). Sami Kassab, a grocer for more than 30 years and a pioneer member of the Chaldean Iraqi American Association of Michigan (CIAAM), is one of the first Chaldeans to conceptualize a project for social consolidation. Kassab and a group of twenty-five Chaldean men first formed the Chaldean Youth Club with the idea of creating a gathering place, “especially for future generations.” A few years later, in the 1970s, when the Chaldean Diocese sponsored the building of the Chaldean “Mother of God Church,” it sold the remaining lot to this group of Chaldeans (later CIAAM) who sought to create a community center. In 1979, the plan materialized into the Southfield Manor, where most

¹¹⁰ CALC website: <http://www.calconline.org/>

¹¹¹ See p. 200 in the previous section of this Chapter. Clair Konja. (July 2005). “CALC Corner.” *The Chaldean News* . Vol. 2:6:18.

of the social events (such as wedding receptions, first communions, funerals, etc.) of the Chaldeans of the west side of Detroit's suburbs took place for the ensuing two decades. Through the Southfield Manor membership fees and other fundraising drives, CIAAM raised funds to purchase the Shenandoah property in 1989. Fifteen years later, the \$25-million, 93,000 square-foot building of the Shenandoah Club opened, featuring "one of Michigan's largest ballrooms," with the capacity to accommodate 1,300 people.

It is worth stressing the socio-economically exclusive profile of Shenandoah. First, membership is open exclusively to Chaldeans and their family members. Second, annual family membership fees range between \$2,500 and \$2,600, with a \$5,000 initiation fee and a minimum monthly spending of \$300.¹¹² Clearly less affluent Chaldeans from other parts of Michigan are unlikely to be able to afford this sum. It is also crucial to consider the massive five-million-dollar budget of the CCC Museum, which complements the high membership fees of the Country Club and proposes a selective audience for the Museum's exhibits when they become open to the public.

The socio-cultural priorities of the members of the Chaldean community who are invested in the Shenandoah project can be considered by simple comparison of the space allotted to current social events at Shenandoah Club, and the space that is to host the CCC with its Museum. While Shenandoah's Grand Ballroom totals 11,336 square-feet, the CCC receives a mere 2,500 square-feet to display and narrate six thousand years of Chaldean History. The dominating social entertainment aspect of the Club is primarily an outcome of the profit-making orientation of the Club's sponsors.

¹¹² Compared to the slowly increasing \$50 initiation fee and \$35 annual membership of the Chaldean Youth Club during the 1970s.

Along with CIAAM, overseeing and financing the activities of the above institutions is the responsibility of a non-profit umbrella association called the Chaldean Federation of America (CFA), and the business-professional partnership organization, the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, established in 2003.

Established in 1982 through the coming together of nine major Chaldean organizations in Metropolitan Detroit, the CFA claims to have “served as a catalyst for the assimilation of thousands of Chaldeans into the American culture,” and to “represent” more than 150,000 Chaldeans in MI today.¹¹³ It has regularly hosted the annual Chaldean Student Scholarship Commencement Program whose aim is to single out the scholarly achievements of Chaldean high-school and college students. Recently the Federation has also been offering its office space on weekends for the meetings of members of the Chaldean-American Student Association (CASA) to encourage fostering and organizing programs and projects by young Chaldean-Americans state-wide.

On the transnational scale, the last two years the CFA has dedicated considerable resources to the humanitarian relief of Chaldean displaced persons inside and outside of Iraq. As we shall see briefly, the Federation’s efforts are currently culminating in a campaign to secure US and UNHCR support for the resettlement of Chaldean refugees through the project “Operation R-4.” The CFA has in addition partnered with various organizations in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as with an international Jesuit organization that was formerly involved with Chaldeans in Iraq, to launch the “Adopt-A-

¹¹³ “Chaldean Federation of America (CFA) Organizational History.”
<http://chaldeanfederation.org/history/index.html>

Refugee-Family” initiative whereby diaspora Chaldeans could securely extend financial assistance to Chaldeans transitioning from Iraq through officially recognized channels.¹¹⁴

Ample financial resources combine with legal expertise and political connections to enhance the success of the Federation’s current transnational undertakings. Michael J. George, the current chairman of the CFA, for example, is the owner and operator of several business ventures including Melody Farms; Champion Wholesale Foods; Spectrum Enterprises, L.L.C.; Healthtreat, Inc.; Michigan Data Storage; Midwest Wholesale Foods; Port Atwater Parking, and several others. Current CFA executive director, George Kassab, on the other hand, is also the former president of the Chaldean National Congress (CNC), and has co-headed numerous Chaldean-American humanitarian delegations to Iraqi Christian refugees. Former chairman of the Federation, Steven Garmo, employed his expertise in US immigration law to work with Senator Carl Levin in drafting the “Iraqi Christian Adjustment Act” that is aimed to make Chaldean immigration to the US easier.

These individuals along with many other active members of the CFA also participate in running the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, an organization that since its inception has proven itself as an influential market power capable of consolidating the wealth of individually owned Chaldean businesses and creating a more vocal entrepreneurial, as well as political, voice for the Chaldean collective. In addition to marshaling the Chaldeans of Oakland County on the local cultural level, the Chamber also offers help to Chaldean investors who wish to establish or join businesses in Michigan and Iraq.

¹¹⁴ “Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program.” <http://chaldeanfederation.org/programs/adopt.html>

At least at the level of publicity, the Chamber is currently invested in three community projects: the Chaldean Museum in Shenandoah Country Club, a Survey of Michigan's Chaldeans that seeks to establish "Chaldeans' contributions to their community," and a ChaldoAssyrian settlement project in the Nineveh Plain for the remaining ChaldoAssyrian population in Iraq. The Chamber is sponsoring the latter project mainly through partnership with another umbrella organization, the Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America (CASCA).

CASCA was initiated in 2007 "to educate U.S. policymakers on the plight of Iraq's Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac Christian minorities and to advocate for policies that will support stability, security, aid, and reconstruction relief within Iraq and assistance and resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees of this fragile population outside Iraq" (CASCA, 2007) The Council, like other umbrella organizations in the US-based Chaldean diaspora, was formed through the coming together of other influential organizations: The Assyrian American National Federation, The Assyrian National Council of Illinois, The Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, and The Chaldean Federation of America. Martin Manna who serves as the Executive director of the Chaldean Chamber of Commerce and George Kassab who occupies a similar position at the CFA are also the co-founders and co-directors of CASCA.

The Local Emergence of Transnational Projects

On the local level, the self-descriptions of the above exclusively-Chaldean institutions and their publications demonstrate how they all boast an interest in preserving and promoting "heritage," or "culture" without clearly qualifying the domains of these

slippery terms. Their assumption, it seems, is that participants and recipients of this “heritage” or “culture” agree upon a stable, communal version of Chaldeanness. This tacit agreement about the contents of terms like “heritage” and “culture” in turn suggest the presence of a discursive process that links these institutions in an internal, private sphere, a linkage that is a stage which predates and mediates the exposure of collective Chaldeanness to the public sphere of the American mainstream.

The tacit collective agreement at the same time suggests strong transnational ties between the diasporic community and a larger community from which they derive their distinct moral and aesthetic values. These ties extend beyond the geographic boundaries of the US, giving way to one expression of “diaspora aesthetics”—or material inscriptions of culture that are formed through the group’s aesthetic activity in diaspora, its art, literature, and myths—to emerge to the transnational level. Diasporic attempts at *real* political mobilization at times materialize in “transnational moral gestures” (Werbner, 2000) as we shall see next in the following three cases where Chaldean institutional circuits in the US aim to act politically, sometimes in opposing directions, on behalf of geographically-remote Chaldean individuals and groups.

Casting the Iraqi Vote

In January 2005, under the “Out-of-Country Voting Program” that made voting possible for Iraqi expatriates in 14 countries outside of Iraq, US-based Chaldeans were allowed to register and vote in the National Assembly elections that were to shape the government of post-Saddam Iraq.¹¹⁵ Not only were Chaldeans born in Iraq eligible to cast the ballot, but

¹¹⁵ These polling sites in the US and the other thirteen European and Middle Eastern countries were selected by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with the Independent

also those born abroad before 1987 to an Iraqi father were as well (Selweski, Jan 4, 2005). I would like to present the range of Chaldeans' reactions to this event by way of exploring the elections from the contrastive perspective of "transnational action" vis-à-vis the "transnational imaginary" that we touched upon earlier in this Chapter.

It could be argued that the Interim Iraqi government and the Bush administration sanctioned the right to vote from abroad as a way to implement the kind of symbolic policies that would reinforce Iraqi emigrants' sense of enduring membership in both the US and Iraq and hence to draw in their various forms of economic remittances to rebuild Iraq or retain their political loyalty in both countries. The participation of expatriates in political activities, however, whether symbolic or real (i.e., whether intended mainly for expressing particular preferences, or for implementing change in the socio-political structures of the originary land) did not passively depend on the decisions of the Iraqi and the US governments. Generally speaking, institutions of diasporic civil society, including those of the US-based Chaldeans, tend to provide material support to a public sphere that engages in a range of political practices. This phenomenon has driven scholars of diasporas to suggest the existence of "stateless power," a form of power that could be productive or prohibitive within a social formation ruled by individual voluntarism or communal compulsion alike (Tölölyan, *Ibid*). In the case of the US-based Chaldeans, the Church, community organizations and culture-makers—that is, the active architects of the community's transnational social fields—expected at least half of the 113,000 US-based Chaldeans to vote in the Iraqi elections. The US-based Chaldean institutions urged

Electoral Commission of Iraq. Together these organizations worked with local groups from Detroit to organize the elections, using the \$92 million budget allocated by the Iraqi government for the worldwide voting process.

individuals to take part in the elections so that Christians could maintain a foothold in Iraq when the ethno-religiously-representative candidate is selected to the parliament.

The community leaders conveyed to the US-based Chaldeans that the importance of their votes was twofold: one, they “understand and support democracy [because they live in a democratic country] for their homeland,” and two, because their votes for a Christian representative were necessary “to reconfirm the Chaldean presence as a religious and national minority within Iraq” (Delaney, 2005. Cited text is by Joseph Kassab).

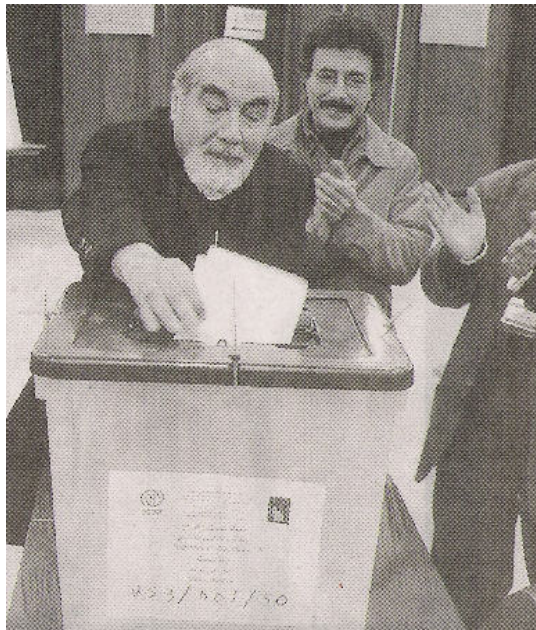


Figure 10. “Chaldean Catholic bishop, Mar Ibrahim Ibrahim casts his vote at the Detroit area polling site in the first democratic Iraqi election. Mar Ibrahim heads the Chaldean diocese for eastern U.S.” (Source: *Zinda Magazine* 11:2:2005, February).

Registration and polling stations were established in five metropolitan areas across the US: Michigan, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago and Tennessee. In Michigan, voting sites were set up in Sterling Heights, Southfield and Dearborn. The Churches and the Chaldean Federation, who publicly complained about the distance of

these polling stations from concentrations of Chaldean residences, organized bus trips to take groups of Chaldean voters (Ibid, January 21, 2005).

The all-Christian democratic slate, Al-Rafidayn, received 29 percent of all the Iraqi expatriate votes in the January elections. Disillusioned by the results and the voting process which they perceived to be intentionally made cumbersome to prevent them from voting, fewer Chaldeans voted in the subsequent parliamentary elections the following December, bringing the figure down to 26 percent for Al-Rafidayn slate (Barakat, 2005). Although not significant enough to have an impact on the overall results of the elections in Iraq, the victory of Al-Rafidayn, which took the top spot among US-based expatriates and narrowly defeated a Shiite Muslim religious bloc with Shiite supporters in Dearborn, Michigan, demonstrates how influential diaspora Chaldean networks can be in persuading the members of the community to mobilize and act politically in a particular way.

There was a range in Middle Eastern diaspora leaders' reactions to expatriate votes. Martin Manna, President of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce reasoned that, antagonized by the media that portrays Iraq as a country comprised of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, diaspora Chaldeans and Assyrians would take the voting opportunity to show how they represent five percent of the Iraqi population, rather than the one percent suggested in the media (Ibid, Jan 4, 2005). While Manna was a proud Chaldean voter himself, James Zogby (of Lebanese-Christian descent), president of the Arab American Institute and a pollster during the Iraqi elections, on the other hand, was troubled by the U.S. balloting as a whole. Allowing U.S. citizens to vote in another country's elections, claimed Zogby, sends the message that Iraqi-Americans are not full

participants in U.S. democracy. "We send a very conflicted message about the value of U.S. citizenship," he said. "It undervalues our American citizenship" (Ibid, Dec 19) But the conflict of which Mr. Zogby spoke, the conflict of local nationalism and transnationality, is being emphasized in a growing body of scholarship on diaspora communities. As Tölölyan stressed, "those who emerge as transnational leaders...always remember to speak of their local community as simultaneously *rooted* in the host society and *routing*, a node of the transnational diasporic network" (Tölölyan, Ibid).¹¹⁶

The *rooted-routing* dual orientation of displaced minorities is well exemplified by the Chaldeans of Michigan who, on the one hand, fight for citizenship and equal rights in the place of settlement, and, on the other, continue to live with a sense of loyalty to other places, groups and imagined histories (Werbner, 2000).

This dual orientation of US-based Chaldean transnational activity is complicated further by a conflicting institutional investment in helping Chaldeans leave *and* settle in Iraq at the same time. As we shall see in the following two examples, institutional authorities are calling for a Chaldean settlement in the ancestral land, while simultaneously aiding them to *leave* the ancestral land as expediently as possible.

The Nineveh Plain Settlement

In December 2007, the US Congress passed a bill, including \$10 Million, in assistance to the internally-displaced religious minorities in the Nineveh Plain, with a particular emphasis on the "endangered" Christians of the region. The bill included the following language:

¹¹⁶ Originally, in James Clifford (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

The Appropriations Committees support the use of prior year funds, as proposed by the House, to assist religious minorities in the Nineveh Plain region of Iraq, and direct that prior to the obligation of funds, the Department of State consult with ethno-religious minorities and locally-elected representatives to identify Iraq-based non-governmental organizations to implement these programs.

The Appropriations Committees are concerned about the threat to the existence of Iraq's most vulnerable minorities, particularly the Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac Christians, who are confronting ethno-religious cleansing in Iraq. The Appropriations Committees expect the Department of State and USAID to designate a point person within the Department to focus, coordinate, and improve U.S. Government efforts to provide for these minorities' humanitarian, security, and development needs" (CASCA, Ibid, 2007).

This was the first American bill to contain monetary and policy specifications for administering U.S. Government aid to the Christians of Iraq. The language was considered by the newly-formed Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America (CASCA) to be "a tremendous victory" for their advocacy efforts.

In fact, organized coethnic advocacy efforts on behalf of the Chaldeans and Assyrians of the Nineveh Plain started much earlier. The first formulations of a "Christian haven" project took place at an Assyrian Democratic Movement conference in Baghdad in 2003. The conference adopted the "Nineveh Plains Administrative Region" program for Assyrian (later recognized as "ChaldoAssyrian" under the Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law of 2003)¹¹⁷ administrative autonomy. In less than a year, the objectives of the program were brought to focus by transnational networks of Middle Eastern American Christians.

In 2004, the Middle Eastern American Convention for Freedom and Democracy in the Middle East (MEAC) convened in Washington DC under the sponsorship of

¹¹⁷ "New Iraqi Census Officially Recognizes ChaldoAssyrians." (2004, July 9). AINA. <http://www.aina.org/releases/2004079004216.htm>

Maronites, Copts, Assyrians and Chaldeans and their representative diaspora organizations such as the American Lebanese Coalition, US Copts and the Assyrian American National Federation (AANF). During the Convention, immigration attorney Robert Dekelaita, a Chicago-based, self-described “ChaldoAssyrian,” delivered a keynote speech on behalf of ChaldoAssyrians in Iraq, stressing, to the consensus of the present Christian groups, the need to concentrate the Convention’s efforts on helping the endangered ChaldoAssyrian community.¹¹⁸ After posing the recent destruction of Babylon and Nineveh and the mass exodus of the ChaldoAssyrians as a serious problem for the country and for its Christian population, Dekelaita then proceeded to claim that the solution “lies in the Nineveh Plain,” a political “unit” or “province” in Iraq’s Kurdish region that would be “economically supported, secured and administratively designated for ChaldoAssyrians.” “Iraq, without Babylon and Nineveh, is illegitimate as a nation, and Iraq without ChaldoAssyrians is incomplete,” wrote Dekelaita a little later, as a guest columnist in the “*Chaldean News*” (Dekelaita, 2006).

Other non-Christian organizations were also invited to the Convention. By refusing to acknowledge the plight of Christians in Iraq, the Kurdish Patriotic Union (KPU), the Syrian Reform Party (SRP) and a Shiite delegation from Iraq caused rancor among the ChaldoAssyrian representatives. That antagonism surrounding this issue grew along religious (Christian vs. Muslim) lines also created a geographical rift where diaspora Middle Eastern nationalists (predominantly Christian) set themselves against political parties indigenous to the Middle East (predominantly Muslim).

¹¹⁸ “AINA: Middle Eastern Christian Conference: Safeguard the Assyrians of the Nineveh Plains.” (2004, October 7). www.christiansofiraq.com/Ainaconference.html

Initially, the settlement project was to ensue under the auspices of Kurdish leadership. Fear of antagonizing Kurdish parties, which currently control the Nineveh Plain, created a sizable dilemma among diaspora ChaldoAssyrians. The outcome was the religious minority's inability to reach consensus on this issue: should Iraqi-Christians cooperate with Kurdish leadership to form their autonomous area within Iraq's federal state, or should they depend on external resources to create a federal state for minorities alone?¹¹⁹

With the intervention of diaspora Chaldean and Assyrian organizations, the interplay between political powers, religious affiliations and funding sources seem to have sent the project in different directions. For example, Iraqi Kurdistan's Minister of Finance and Economy, Sarkis Aghajan, who is a Christian and a member of the governing Kurdistan Democratic Party, called for a Christian region attached to Iraqi Kurdistan. His agenda gained support from many local and international Iraqi Christian political parties since Aghajan had financially sponsored several thousands of Christian refugees from the south and promised to construct more than a hundred new villages and Churches in their ancestral Nineveh region.

While Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Nejervan Barzani backed Aghajan's proposal, other Iraqi Christian leaders, such as former Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration, Pascale Warda, voiced their opposition to the project internationally, with the argument that Christian and other minorities merit a separate federal state. Warda found a different source of backing for her opposition. In 2006, she visited AssyroChristian organizations in the US to drum up support for an autonomous federal state for Christian

¹¹⁹ "Iraq: Christians Debate Self-Autonomy to Halt Exodus." (2006, Dec 22). *Compass Direct News*. <http://www.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4711&backpage=archives&critere=nineveh%20plain&countryname=&rowcur=0>

and other minorities. Among the diasporic networks whose favor she gained were the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), the Chaldean Chamber of Commerce, and the Chaldean Federation of America (CFA).

While most of the Assyrian political groups in diaspora support one of the two proposals that characterize the Nineveh Plain project, not all Chaldean groups, in the US or in Iraq, are enthusiastic about the proposed settlement. One argument against the Nineveh Plain proposal popular among US-based Chaldeans with relatives remaining in Iraq is that the settlement poses a safety problem. By grouping all Christians together, a Chaldean archbishop counter-argued, they “will become targets, sandwiched in between Kurds and Arabs.” Hence, either plan would only make things worse by creating a “Christian ghetto” (Ibid, Dec 22, 2006).

While reports by UN officials claimed that the majority of Iraqi refugees want to return to Iraq eventually, between 2003-2006 it was rapidly becoming apparent that the Chaldean refugees are not among those wishing to return. By spring 2007, the CFA announced that 17,000 applications were received on behalf of Iraqi refugees who wished to live in America. Most of these applicants were ChaldoAssyrian refugees who had received death threats from fanatic Islamist groups, operated liquor stores or done translation or intelligence work for the US troops in Iraq—experiences which made their desire to return to the ancestral land highly improbable.

Although the CFA had publicly supported Pascale Warda’s Nineveh Plain campaign, with Church-bombing, priest-kidnapping and the various acts of religious persecution of Chaldeans in Iraq, the diaspora umbrella organization with its secular and religious affiliates began publicizing that displaced Iraqi-Christians cannot return to Iraq

due to the unfavorable political climate. That was before the \$10 million Congress bill passed in December 2007.

The case of the Nineveh Plain Settlement project is one instance of the desire of Chaldean transnational circuits to be seriously involved in directing the political affairs of the Chaldean community in the originary land. The case demonstrates how coethnic transnational actors could potentially complicate political matters for Chaldeans in Iraq when pursuing goals that are prompted by symbolic ideologies, such as the “myth of return”.¹²⁰ These political complications redouble when Chaldean transnational actors begin to simultaneously pursue practical solutions that contradict their ideological pursuits. As we shall see next, desperate to halt the mass exit of the Christian communities from Iraq, the CFA also joined in what might seem to be a project that is oppositional to the Nineveh Plain settlement. Operation R-4, contrary to the Nineveh Plain plan, is a transnational project that aspires to aid Chaldeans by safely removing them from their ancestral land.

Operation R-4

Launched by the CFA in May 2006, the primary goal of Operation R-4 (Research, Rescue, Relief and Resettle Iraqi refugees) was to “identify, locate and assist displaced

¹²⁰ “The myth of return” is an expression that appears frequently in studies of immigrants and refugees, often in reference to the symbolic transnational activities such individuals maintain with the originary land. Dahya (1973), was one of the first to define the expression explicitly, in relation to his work on Pakistani immigrants in Britain:

...the immigrant continues to re-affirm his adherence to the myth of return because for him to do otherwise would be tantamount to renouncing his membership of the village community and the village-kin group in Britain—for these groups together form a single whole, and for a migrant to opt out of one means opting out of the other as well. The myth of return is an expression of one’s intention to continue to remain a member of both of them.

Iraqi-Christian refugees throughout the world in order to reunite them with relatives already residing in the United States.”¹²¹ Phase I of the campaign, which concluded in August 2006, identified the number of Iraqi refugees in 31 countries and the factors leading to their flight from Iraq. The figures were revised quickly from the initial projection of a few thousand potential newcomers to the US to several tens of thousands.

The pronounced transition from the local to the transnational level of activity occurred when the CFA aimed to build its Operation into a worldwide movement by communicating its findings to the humanitarian international community. It began by sending reports and delegations to the Resettlement Services of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Meanwhile, Chaldean-Americans represented by the CFA also appealed to governmental agencies belonging to the US Senate to expedite Iraqi-Christian refugees’ emigration to the country of their relatives’ residence.

In addition to increasing publicity regarding the plight of Iraqi-Christians, the CFA aimed to implement changes in the US immigration policies. Since the numbers of Chaldean people fleeing Iraq continued to rise dramatically during Phase I of the campaign, the CFA could not depend on P1 status (non-migrant work or entertainment visa) while petitioning on behalf of their displaced relatives because the P1 status, the CFA asserted, was “too little, too slow, too painful and problematic for our refugees.”¹²² Instead, the CFA sought to document how the refugees it identified were “persecuted religiously, ethnically and/or politically in order to fit the basic requirement for priorities

¹²¹ “CFA Begins Campaign to Secure U.S. Governmental and UN Support for Identification and Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees.” (2007, January 26). Chaldean Federation of America news release. www.chaldeanfederation.org

¹²² “CFA Progress Report.” (2007, April 30). www.chaldeanfederation.org

P2 [persecuted group admission], and P3 [family reunification admission], i.e. to meet the refugee definition.”

To implement action based upon these findings, Phase II of the campaign focused on the legal procedures of admitting Iraqi refugees to the US in mass numbers. In this Phase, the CFA began appealing to US legislation to secure P2 and P3 Status or both for kin Iraqi-Christian refugees. The outcome (which could also be attributed to the efforts of the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations) was the admission of 2,631 Iraqi refugees to the US in 2007.¹²³ This figure rose up to 12,118 Iraqi refugees who were admitted to the US in 2008, and 17,000 to be admitted in 2009 (“US Passes Iraqi Refugee Admissions Goal.” September, 2008).

Meanwhile, the Organization and the local Chaldean press in Michigan are stressing that “85% of Iraqis who are currently residing in the US are of the Christian faith”¹²⁴ and that the same percentage of all Iraqi refugee applicants have a family member already living in the US (Goldblatt, 2007).

The last pair of figures was deliberately sought out in order to highlight two matters critical for the American government and for public opinion: one, that by already having an established network of family support the newcomers are less likely to become burdensome to the country’s economy; and, two, by virtue of being non-Muslims, these Iraqi refugees are less likely to pose the terrorist threat much feared by political entities that have been reluctant to dedicate state funds for the resettlement of Iraqi refugees.¹²⁵

¹²³ The US Department of State had initially announced its intention to admit 7,000 Iraqi refugees in 2007. “Iraqi Refugees Knocking: U.S. to Let in 7,000.” (2007, May 30). *MSNBC World News*.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18944557/>

¹²⁴ “Statement of the CFA on the Iraqi Christian’s Plight to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary.” 2006. www.Chaldeanfedertion.org

¹²⁵ See for instance statements made by Minuteman Project, an illegal immigration watchdog group with affiliations nationwide, and by Ohio Democratic Gov. (Ted Strickland. *Fox News*, Feb 22, 2007).

Accordingly, the CFA is now in the habit of concluding its reports with comments such as this one (CFA, see *Ibid*, January 2007):

CFA strongly believes that Iraqi Christians, as past history demonstrates, can assimilate well without burdening the country of final resettlement, and will make a valuable contribution to society.

“As past history demonstrates,” refers simultaneously to the history of Chaldean settlement in the US during the twentieth century, and to the ancient history of Chaldean civilization, which, as we saw in previous chapters, the modern Chaldeans are quick to summon when stressing their legitimacy, authenticity and positive collective impact on western societies. Referring to the US as “the country of final resettlement” puts the efforts of Operation R-4 in direct opposition with the Nineveh Plain Project. For while the latter project calls for international aid in creating a home in Iraq for Iraq’s Christians, the former project is candidly admitting that Iraqi Christian refugees who arrive to the US have no intention of returning to Iraq. What is worthy of note here is that this dichotomy of goals has been minimized to the point of general invisibility. Neither local Chaldean media nor mainstream US media stress this discrepancy in their reports, although both projects receive ample coverage individually.

Only in particular situations does it become efficacious for Chaldeans to admit to this discrepancy publicly, namely, the desire to create a home for Iraqi Christians in Iraq *and* to have them admitted as refugees in the US. One example is that of “AssyroChaldean” Chicago-based attorney, Robert DeKelaita, an active advocate of the Nineveh Plains Settlement project who also petitions on behalf of hundreds of Iraqi Christian refugees who seek asylum in the US after entering or sojourning illegally. “My heart is wedded to the idea that they should be safe and secure in their own homeland.

What I'm doing is temporary" DeKelaita justified his stance during an interview with the Los Angeles Times inside his law office in Skokie, Illinois (Ibid, 2008, April 28). Unlike DeKelaita, the CFA, the majority of Chaldeans in the US, and their displaced relatives who aspire to reunite with them do not think of the admission of the Chaldean refugees to the US as a "temporary" one. The thousands of dollars that US-based Chaldeans invest in helping their displaced kin arrive to the US present one indication of their aspiration for permanence for the resettlement prospect.

That the CFA had to depend on private (mainly US-based Chaldean) funding for its transnational Operation R-4 campaign is a fact, because the US government and the non-governmental humanitarian agencies it sought out declined to supply the funding it had requested. The manner in which these funds were community-raised and allocated is a further example of how local Chaldean circuits in the west side of Michigan operate to serve transnational goals. A new political component was adjoined to the transnational social fields of the family and the Church through the use of these selfsame institutions and spaces of social gathering to implement political goals. During 2006, for instance, the CFA held several fund-raisers at Shenandoah Country Club. Selling the tickets for \$250/person insured that the gathering would include only familiar members of the elite clique. Less affluent contributors to the cause of Iraqi refugees could pledge their donations online. Meanwhile, The *Chaldean News* made the efforts of the CFA public, and called upon the Chaldean residents of the US to make their contributions to "authorized resettlement agencies." These were many, and included the aforementioned Chaldean networks of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, the Chaldean American Ladies of Charity and Mother of God Church, among others. On Saturday

afternoons the main office of the CFA welcomed individual volunteers from the Chaldean community along with Chaldean groups such as the Chaldean American Students Association (CASA) to carry out the tasks of classifying, analyzing and storing the confidential data submitted on behalf of the refugees by their Chaldean relatives in the US. Moreover, a service to help relatives fill out the applications accurately was made available for a fee at various locations of social gathering such as some Chaldean churches in Michigan and Shenandoah Country Club.

The Federation has been successful in rallying Michigan's Chaldeans for a transnational cause that they can relate to on a personal level: virtually everyone has a relative or a friend who desires help to migrate to the US. Because the CFA is proving to the community that its campaign is effective in helping Chaldean refugees, it can also effectively indoctrinate the particular version of "Chaldean identity" that enhances the institution's public image. During my interview with Joseph Kassab, the current Executive Director of the CFA who spearheaded Operation 4-R in 2006-8, he requested that I cite the following words in my dissertation, "We [the CFA] put all of these efforts [Operation 4-R] so that we can help our people assimilate to American life...without forgetting their original culture" (phone interview, Joseph Kassab, December 2007). Whenever there is a public opportunity, the CFA designates Chaldeans categorically as a people with a clearly defined religion, family values, work values, and, most emphatically, an abiding capacity to become "American" without ceasing to be "Chaldean."

The very fact that Chaldean diasporic circuits and their leaders have reached the size and level of organization that allow them to contemplate large-scale transnational

projects and to construct applicable identity narratives for them is an indication that the Chaldean diaspora in Michigan is establishing itself as a *permanent phenomenon*, and as such, it is now able to generate diverse transnational social fields to meet specific social or political goals as they arise.

Closing Remarks

The above discussion of the various levels of transnational activity hoped to open the space for a new perspective on Chaldean migrant society that has not been fully explored by the cultural and sociological studies available today. Instead of examining Chaldean life from the delimited context of the community's diasporic resettlement, the discussion took into account the dynamic flow of Chaldean identities, economies and cultural values across territorial boundaries, as well as the simultaneous exchange that gives the Chaldean community the public profile it experiences or tries to portray in the US today.

The Chapter sought to underscore some peculiarities of cross-boundary activities in which US-based Chaldeans are currently engaged by examining three types of social spaces: the family, the Chaldean Catholic Church, and institutional circuits. These spaces were examined in their capacity as overlapping transnational social fields where diaspora Chaldeans participate directly or indirectly in multi-stranded transnational activities. The bulk of the examples used in this Chapter come from the specific site of southeast Michigan. This site was selected because the oldest and largest Chaldean community outside of the Middle East resides there, giving rise to the critical transnational projects that were analyzed. More importantly, Southeast Michigan was selected because it is

home of a Chaldean elite whose powerful political and cultural influence has given shape and articulation to a modern collective Chaldean identity that resonates worldwide.

During the early years of migration to America, several Chaldean immigrants discouraged their children from pursuing political activism in general out of fear that it would generate harm, danger or economic detriment to them or to the community. Gradually, increasing numbers of US-raised Chaldeans began to seek to establish coethnic membership in organizations that are broader-based than the Church, village- or ethnic-based clubs (Janice Terry, *Ibid*: 243-4). These organizations often aimed to advance a particular political agenda on behalf of the Chaldean collective in the US. More recently, many of these groups have started to broaden the circle of their political influence from the national to the transnational in order to aid the Chaldean communities in Iraq.

Persons living within the borders of a state as legal or substantive citizens, such as the US-based Chaldeans, may not make transnational claims or feel the urge to create transnational social fields until a peculiar event or crisis occurs. Operation-4, the Nineveh Plains Settlement and the Iraqi vote campaign are three such instances provoked by the serious humanitarian crisis affecting the Chaldeans in Iraq. In addition, what these projects have in common that made them worthy of discussion in this Chapter is the fact that they are diaspora-enforced (i.e., local) projects aimed at making a transnational impact.

Underlining particular examples of semi-private and public Chaldean networks demonstrated how some Chaldeans participate more than others in the transnational networks discussed above. As the cases revealed, it is not easy to chart passive levels of

participation in transnational life; everyone as a member of the community is embedded in a transnational social field, and is possibly participating in it unconsciously or indirectly whether by contributing money to a CFA project, running a store in Detroit, marrying an acquaintance from Telkeif, or engaging in any one of countless activities with a possible transnational effect. However, the examples chosen here revealed that a few persons and organizations act as nodes that actively direct the trajectory of transnational activities. As we saw through the symbiotic workings of the Chaldean circuits, a small cohort of affluent Chaldeans presides over most of the formal transnational projects across multiple institutions. This small cohort also works to insure an effective publicity of these projects within the larger public domain in order to elicit the desired level of participation from other, less involved members of the immigrant community and to obtain the recognition of the broader non-Chaldean society in which the Chaldean networks are embedded.

As nodes these persons (community elite) and organizations (secular and religious elite) have adopted hierarchical social forms in order to be recognizable and acceptable by mainstream society. An example of such hierarchal forms can be witnessed in the respect accorded to the Church by secular organizations that seek out its symbolic endorsement on political or other non-religious decisions (Chaldean Church as socially superior to non-religious Chaldean institutions). Another example is the similarly symbolic respect accorded to the Chaldean family (as a decision-making unit that controls the sum of its members' collective power) by the individuals belonging to it and by the community at large (Chaldean family as socially superior to Chaldean individuals and institutions).

In addition to influence, recognition and acceptance, Chaldean culture-makers, who are at the same time the representatives of transnational social fields, are generally interested in advertising their goals and achievements as a means to attract more participants and donors.

Identifying transnational activity among US-based Chaldeans addressed the inner unity, durability and power of the diasporic collective, but it also generated a number of questions that remain unanswered today. For example, when viewed as a set of multiple interlocking networks, at times the social fields seem to overlap or join efforts to yield a notable range of transnational activities, such as church-organized fund-raising campaigns to house Chaldean refugees who received help from secular institutions and family members in order to arrive in Michigan, and who may eventually sponsor the immigrations of other family members. However, it remained unclear, for instance, as to whether the multiple broad-scale transnational projects are complementing or subverting each others' goals (e.g., the simultaneous call for an enclave for Iraqi Christians in Nineveh *and* a comprehensive migration plan to help the remaining families reunite with their relatives in the US and elsewhere).

Another important question that must fall beyond the scope of the current inquiry is the future of Chaldean transnational life. In light of the mass exit of Iraqi-Christians from their ancestral land, aided by the transnational efforts of diaspora Chaldeans, and the rapid expansion of the size of the US-based Chaldean diaspora, it is unclear which transnational ties are likely to endure in the coming decades. We may have to rethink the contours of Chaldean communities if we cannot take their territorial sites or boundaries for granted, especially when other concentrations of Chaldean life outside of the US (i.e.,

Syria and Jordan) are not likely to build up to the form of “transnational Chaldean diaspora” like the one we examined in this Chapter due to these concentrations’ size, organization and political status within the host countries.

Another conceptual site where Chaldean identities sometimes retain their transnational dimension is in US-produced Chaldean fiction. The next Chapter will examine how the nascent examples of this cultural product are initiating the diasporic community into the American “ethnic” mainstream by accentuating what is specifically “Chaldean,” or “non-American,” in Chaldean-American life.

Chapter Six

Representations in Fiction/Fiction in Representations: Enacting Chaldeanness

Introduction

The factors that contributed to the formation of the current Chaldean collective identity have been the main subject of interrogation in the previous chapters. They discussed historical and current public debates surrounding the titular import of the term “Chaldean” (Chapter Two); they questioned the influence of nineteenth-century Western archeological and religious missions on reviving and reinforcing particular identity discourses among Chaldean communities in Mesopotamia (Chapters Three and Four); and they examined the transnational context of the communal agency of “Chaldeanness” by treating the socio-conceptual locales of the family, Church and institutional circuits as transnational social fields where collective identification is enacted (Chapter Five).

The text of the dissertation has so far centered on Chaldeanness as a communal expression and experience, be it in Iraq, the US, another migrant settlement, or a transit country. Are there countervailing expressions of what it means to be Chaldean? Are there alternative conceptual spaces where individual Chaldeans express their identities and articulate communal identities differently?

These are the questions that animate the discussion of this Chapter, which, unlike the previous chapters, seeks to cast light on those aspects of Chaldeanness that remain outside of the formal, public, and collective domains. Specifically, it seeks to recognize

the representations of identity in Chaldean works of fiction that are written to express their authors' individual positions with regard to the collective. I shall treat these identity narratives as discourses that are inconsonant with the dominant public narrative of Chaldeanness.

My contention is that the possibilities Chaldean fiction offers do not necessarily constitute *counter* narratives of identity, but rather – through their engagement with ethnicity and race, in conjunction with gender and class – they generate a dialogical relationship between the public and the private, the formal and the informal, and the individual and the collective. This dialogical relationship, as I shall argue, is one that contests and omits, but also unevenly accommodates and bolsters, aspects of the dominant version of “who the Chaldeans are”

I shall raise these points through the discussion of a selection of English-language texts that includes one play, two short stories and three novels. These are: Marshall Garmo's play, *An Immigrant's Dream* (2002); Deborah Najor's short stories “*Bebe Khomee*” (1988) and “*Selma's Weddings*” (1992); and Weam Namou's three novels, *The Feminine Art* (2004), *The Mismatched Braid* (2006), and *The Flavor of Cultures* (2008).

The only criterion that I tried to reinforce while determining which fiction to present in this Chapter was the engagement of the texts with notions of Chaldean (dis)identification and communal belonging.¹²⁶ Tellingly, through this selection process I discovered that the only works of fiction that deal with these issues to some extent, and to my knowledge, are written in English by individuals who use hyphenated identities

¹²⁶ Although Dahlia Petrus' two short stories “The Red Maverick” (2000) and “Is That All There Is?” (2001) could fall into the category of ethnic fiction as well, I excluded them from this Chapter's discussion because the identity label “Chaldean” does not appear explicitly in their text and because they do not share the four ethnic literary tropes that I propose as the common denominators among the six works of fiction discussed in this chapter.

(Chaldean-American and/or Iraqi-American) to define the domains of their personal belonging. These works constitute most of what has been produced in English by Chaldean writers. Thus, two essential features hold the selected works together: first, thematically they are concerned with demarcating the social context of the text as the Chaldean community and their protagonists as situated at a point or points relevant to this community; and, second, they are written in English by Chaldean individuals dwelling in the US.

This selection naturally excludes other authors who might concede Chaldean descent but whose literary works, in Arabic or English, do not touch upon the question of ethnic identity or the Chaldean community. The works of such authors as Sinan Antoon and Dunya Mikhail (US), Heather Raffu (US), Inam Kachachi (France), and Yousif al-Saigh (Iraq), among others, are generally better known than the ones I introduce in this Chapter. These authors, who are Chaldean by “descent” but not always by “consent,”¹²⁷ have achieved national or international renown as *Iraqi* or *American* or *Iraqi-American* authors.¹²⁸ This fact raises a host of questions about the nature and extent of “ethnic literature” as a category different from “national,” “world,” or “universal” literature.

How is Iraqi or Iraqi-American fiction different from Chaldean-American fiction? Does the modernization of Iraqi or Iraqi-American fiction simply mean its emancipation from discourses of ethnicity? If what sets the Chaldean English-language fiction this Chapter examines apart from the other works of Iraqi literature is indeed its form and content as ethnic literature, as a diasporic development, its status as “American literature”

¹²⁷ See Warner Sollors definition of the terms in *Beyond Ethnicity*, (Sollors, 1986: 4-6), which will be revisited later in this Chapter.

¹²⁸ The same observation applies to popular literary figures who are Assyrian by descent, but whose identify themselves as Iraqis. Of these I list Samuel Shimon (UK) and the late Sergon Bolus (US).

should also be considered. For this reason, retracing the emergence of ethnic literature and examining its position in the socio-historical context of twentieth-century US will serve as a prelude to examining the environment that contributed to the rise of Chaldean ethnic fiction. The following brief section will view the factors that gave rise to a revival and then a deconstruction of the notions of ethnicity and ethnic literature in the US.

When and where is Ethnic Literature?

Sociologists and scholars of American culture generally concur that the US civil rights movement of the 1960s impelled a new sense and acceptance of the notion of “ethnicity” (Payant and Rose, 1999; TuSmith, 1993; Nash, 2003). The notion became more fashionable in the subsequent decade, giving rise to new interpretations not only of cultural belonging, diversity and uniqueness among US-based groups, but also of certain works of literature produced by African-Americans, Native-Americans, Asian-Americans, Chicano/as and other descendants of non-European immigrant groups. By the 1970s, the general perception was that distinct “ethnic writers” began to “speak for themselves,” divulging distinct brands of “American values” through an emergent “ethnic literature” (TuSmith, 1993:1).

However, the paradigm of ethnicity and the “sociobiological” interpretations of the power of the affiliations of descent offered by scholars such as Andrew Greeley’s *Ethnicity in the United States* (1974) and Michael Novak’s *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972) soon began to exhibit their problematic faces. It was not clear, for instance, which racial groups residing in the US were to be deemed ethnic and which where to be non-ethnic. If every American possessed an ethnicity, then all literature

produced by Americans qualifies as ethnic literature. Or, to reverse the statement, ethnic literature *is* American literature (Payant and Rose, 1999: xiii). Moreover, it was ambiguous which characteristics set ethnic groups apart from one another (Sollors, 1986: 20-39).

Prompted by such observations, Werner Sollors presented what came as a radical new interpretation of ethnicity in the 1980s in his studies *Beyond Ethnicity* (1986), and *The Invention of Ethnicity* (1989). He suggested that ethnicity, the state of “belonging and being perceived by others as belonging to an ethnic group,” is an invented state (Sollors, 1989: xiii) a condition of “consent” rather than “descent,” (Sollors, 1986:4-6) confronted and maintained by various groups *after* they relocate in the United States. By juxtaposing the two concepts with each other, Sollors examined how American culture prompted the conflict between “self-made and ancestral definitions of American identity”—the interplay between a language of blood and nature relationships, individuals’ entitlements, responsibilities and positions as heirs to particular heritages (descent) and a language that “stresses our ability as mature free agents and ‘architects of our fates’ to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems” (consent) (Sollors, 1986: 5, 6). Sollors also argued that individuals who perceive themselves as members of so-called ethnic groups are engaged in a constant process of reinventing and reinterpreting themselves individually and in each generation. It is this reinterpretation of self and community, he adds, that is the project of the literature of these groups.

It is this understanding of ethnic literature as a process of invention and reinterpretation that inspires the ensuing analysis of Chaldean-American fiction in this Chapter. Sollors defines ethnic literature broadly and inclusively as “works written by,

about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups...” (Sollors, 1986: 243).

Despite its inclusive terms, this definition does not yield more than a handful of texts when applied to the literary production of the US-based Chaldean collective. As a self-designated “ethnic group,” Chaldeans have produced very few texts about a Chaldean-specific context. Reported by community leaders to have begun migrating to the US since the 1910s, and to number 113,000 in southeast Michigan alone, US-based Chaldeans have produced only three “Chaldean” novels up to date. Two of these novels are published in paper print, with the first appearing in 2004.

One simple yet not easily answered question emerges: why such dearth and delay in Chaldean-American literature? When I posed this question to Weam Namou, author of the first and only novels to deal squarely with Chaldean-American ethnicity, her answer was (Namou, Interview, July 2008),

I think there are a lot of Chaldeans who, like most other people, *want* to write. But writing a book is not an easy task, and although “finding enough time” is an issue everyone faces, the numerous duties between family and work that most people have in our culture make it difficult to write on the side (which is how most authors begin), much less commit to a career that might not be as financially rewarding as other jobs.

The Chaldean community is fairly new in the United States. Like other ethnicities that first arrived to America, they paid attention to making money and enjoying the materialism that the country had to offer. When they were living in Iraq, reaching America was their dream and it came true. Their children’s dreams are different, are career oriented.

True, the US-based Chaldean community had emerged relatively recently, compared to some of the other ethnic groups that have produced ethnic literature during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Social class is another factor. As Payant and Rose point out in their edited volume, *The Immigrant Experience in North American Literature*, social groups who migrated to the US with a composition of mostly peasants who came from

oral cultures with little literary tradition, such as the Italian, Greek and Polish immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, did not produce much ethnic literature in the US (Payant and Rose, *Ibid*: xix).

It should be remembered that the established Chaldean community in the US, until recently, was also composed mostly of individuals from Telkeif and other northern Iraqi villages, who came mainly from peasant and working-class backgrounds with little exposure to the literary traditions of Iraqi Arab culture.¹²⁹ Those Chaldeans who were exposed to Arabic literature by virtue of dwelling and studying in Iraqi cities, as I shall argue in the next section, have their cultural affiliations elsewhere, and therefore are not the ones who typically engage in producing Chaldean ethnic literature. Some of the factors regarding the dearth and newness of Chaldean literature fall outside of the frameworks of American ethnic literary formation. They more so reflect the influences of the socio-economic life of US-based Chaldeans, and therefore they also call into view Sollors' categorization of descent and consent, suggesting particular modes of negotiating between the two categories that result in distinct articulations of ethnic presence.

The next two sections, therefore, will take a look at a Chaldean-specific context to better situate the belated emergence and dearth of Chaldean-American literary fiction. It will aim to frame the contents of Chaldean literature within the local discourses and representational pressures produced by the diasporic Chaldean community where the

¹²⁹ In his book, *Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe : A Story in a Truthful Language Religious Poems in Vernacular Syriac (North Iraq, 17th Century)*, (2000), Alessandro Mengozzi contends that religious poetry has historically occupied the central position in the literary life of Chaldean communities in northern Iraq, which in turn was “essentially organized around the oral tradition,” and that “both the religious beliefs and the worldly interests of the community are safely handled and preserved in the living universe of proverbs, stories, rhymes, and songs” (Mengozzi, 2000:5, 6).

Chaldean fiction writers in question maintain the strongest of their personal and public affiliations.

Obstacle 1: The Production of Chaldean Fiction

In addition to the tropes and contents of the literary works in question, aspects that surround the circumstances of their production, promotion and readability are relevant to their status as a medium for multicultural contact. How are these texts published? How do the authors represent themselves in the texts that *surround* their narratives? (i.e., the cover of the novel, the autobiographical blurb on the back, etc.). For which audience(s) are the narratives written? Who actually reads them? These speculations emerge because the publications that will be discussed shortly are not yet firmly situated in a particular literary canon, and because there are no signs that indicate they have secured entry to the mainstream of the ethnic literary continuum in America. Chaldean fiction is just beginning to take on the forms of American ethnic literary expression.

In an essay entitled “The Diaspora of the Novel,” Artemis Leontis notes that “whenever one finds narrative taking the shape of the modern novel, one also finds the creation of a vernacular print culture...” (Leontis, 1992: 133). In light of this observation, we should consider, how, with the exception of Deborah Najor’s short stories which appeared in academic literary periodicals, the publication of the bulk of US-based Chaldean literature is self-executed: Marshal Garmo’s play *An Immigrant’s Dream*, as well as his other literary works, a play called *Akitu*, a novel called *The Boy and the Beast*, and a collection of short stories called “Masquerade,” have all been self-published and

printed at a local Chaldean print shop, Naman Printing, Inc. They do not carry an ISBN number and are not catalogued at the Library of Congress.

Of considerably higher print quality and having ISBN numbers, Namou's first two novels have also been self-published. She, however, owns the publishing house that produced them (named Hermiz Publishing after her late father, and sponsored financially by her immediate family) (*Liqā'*, 2004). Curiously, this publishing house appeared when Namou's first novel was distributed by the author to several universities and public libraries in the Midwest. However, Namou's third novel was published online at Bookhabit.com, while the website of Hermiz Publishing seems to have changed ownership.¹³⁰

It is not clear who reads the works of Garmo and Namou since they are mostly self-promoted at Chaldean cultural events that are sparsely attended (if compared to other Chaldean events, such as fashion shows, Cigar Club nights, Bible & Brew, etc.). When Namou published her last novel online, she received four reviews in total, all of which were from non-Chaldean readers. One review expressed the following unmet expectation, "I clicked on [the link to the novel] immediately as it had a religious sounding flavour. And do you explore the history? Not exactly what I expected"¹³¹ Religion and history are not topics that Chaldean fiction has yet explored. Perhaps one reason is that this has been traditionally the domain of the publications of the Chaldean Church, in relation to which the nascent Chaldean fiction seeks to establish a distinct boundary in order to gain

¹³⁰ Most of the Chaldean publications I found in this country are self published. For instance, Amer Fatuhi, whose Arabic-language history book *Chaldeans since the Early Beginning of Time* was discussed in earlier chapters, also self-publishes his texts locally via Naman Printing, Inc. Paul Batou, another Chaldean writer whose works are not discussed here, published his only collection of speculations, poetry and art illustrations, *My Thoughts about Iraq*, through Xlibris, a company that offers personalized kits for self-publishing.

¹³¹ http://www.bookhabit.com/book_details.php?bcd=QTc5MkIzS05SRTZTTVM2RUNVRVv=&limit=yy

recognition for what it is: fiction, an alternative way of looking at oneself and one's community. Nonetheless, to the non-Chaldean readers of English-language fiction, who are likely to be unfamiliar with distinction between the religious and non-religious domains of Chaldeanness, the Chaldean text of contemporary ethnicity is not of great appeal. Having traditionally known the Chaldeans through the monumental contexts of ancient civilizations and the Bible, these readers expect to learn something about Chaldean history or religion in its modern expression.

Moreover, for a different set of reasons, Chaldean ethnic literature also would not appeal to a wide Chaldean readership. First, Chaldeans would assume that they *know* the details of their own culture, a factor that minimizes the intrigue of the stories offered. “Why would I read a Chaldean story when I could learn something from the [Western] classics? It’s boring stuff!” one of my American-born Chaldean interviewees told me. Second, for those who are positively invested in their Chaldean identity, the depictions offered are too unflattering, too revealing of well-known Chaldean cultural problems, and at times, too sacrilegious for those who are invested in their Chaldean brand of Christian faith. Finally, the third and most important factor that would keep the Chaldean readership at a distance from these texts is education, both too little and too much of it. The next section explores this cultural phenomenon.

Obstacle 2: The Denial of Chaldean Fiction

“Chaldeans don’t read!” Alaa, 47, told me. A Chaldean by descent, Alaa refused to be labeled Chaldean and identified himself instead as a *muhājir ‘irāqī*—Iraqi immigrant—despite having settled in Michigan as an American citizen since the age of

twenty-five. Alaa is a civil engineer who enjoys reading “Arabic and Western novels” and following the developments within the Arabic literary scene on the Internet in his free time. He also characterized himself as “different from the average Chaldean here” precisely because he reads for pleasure while “the average Chaldean does not read” “Maku muthaqqafin”—there are no intellectuals (in the US-based Chaldean community)—Alaa complained (Interview, Sterling Heights, MI, April 2005).

The Arabic term *muthaqqaf* (pl. *muthaqqafin*) is derived from *thaqāfa*, a word that combines culture, cultivation and education. It is significant to note how, for native speakers of Arabic, the notions of intellectuality, education and culture are combined as a single concept through this derivation. Culture is intellectuality; without adequate education there is no culture. And because the US-based community is predominantly composed of entrepreneurial Chaldeans who do not value intellectuality above material gain or pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge, a conceptual binarism dominates among US-based Chaldeans that runs along linguistic lines: there are those who are educated and read for intellectual pleasure and those who are uneducated and do not read for intellectual pleasure. The former, a minority group, are mostly native speakers of Arabic who received some education in Iraqi cities. They perceive themselves as possessors of “culture,” an illusive component but one which nonetheless they perceive as significantly wanting among the latter group, the majority of US-based Chaldeans, who do not enjoy reading literature, who were born or grew up in the US, and who cannot read and write Arabic. These are perceived by the “cultured” few as having “no culture”.

After meeting Alaa I encountered many other US-based but Iraqi-raised Chaldeans who expressed similar sentiments about the lack of *thaqāfa*, or culture, among Chaldean-Americans. Gorial, 61, a retired high-school teacher of Chaldean (but not Telkeifi) descent who had received a BA in Arabic literature from the University of Baghdad in the 1960s, tried to help me arrive at the roots of this phenomenon. Gorial explained in Arabic (Interview, Troy, MI, June 2008):

Of course they [Chaldeans in America] don't have culture. They are 90-95% from Telkeif here. You know what Telkeifis were in Iraq? They came to Baghdad as starving peasants. Not reading, not writing, they worked in cleaning sewers and hotels. Yes, that's all they did! And sold liquor in al-Battawin [neighborhood in Baghdad] and sent their boys to be waiters in night clubs. They were working from morning to night. Their father and mother are money. They came here [the US] having no talk other than 'the store spoke,' and 'the store said,' all the way from Detroit to San Diego. Where should they get their culture?

Gorial's deprecatory language might have been colored in part by the fact that his family originated from Tellisquf, also a Chaldean village in the Nineveh Plain, but one that is considerably smaller in population and size and more modest in resources than the nearby Telkeif. Moreover, Telkeifi families and their descendants by far outnumber those who migrated to the US from Tellisquf. Nonetheless, Gorial's enumeration of the professions held by Chaldeans of Telkeifi descent in the originary land and in the US reiterates a common perception among my interviewees and non-Chaldeans alike, and has been linked to the presence of a pragmatic orientation. As early as 1956, in their travel book, *New Babylon: A Portrait of Iraq*, Desmond Stewart and John Haylock described Telkeifis thus (Stewart and Haylock, *Ibid*: 58):

It would be easy to spend a week in Baghdad and never meet an Arab. All the hotels are owned and serviced by Tel Kayfis, Christians from a village in the north. The same people wait in the clubs, whether British or Iraqi, own taxis, brothels, cinemas and other public services. They speak Arabic, it is true, but badly. Their own language is called Chaldean, though it has only remote affinities with the language of the people who first practiced astrology from the

tops of ziggurats. They all aspire to speaking American, however badly; their promised land is Detroit...Not a boy scrubbing parts of a floor, not a barman grubbily mixing drinks, but has a dozen American relations, each of them, according to report, owning a Cadillac or at least a Buick.

Stewart and Haylock claim that the real reason for taking up these professions is not the obvious reason. In other words, Telkeifis do not work in hotels and bars because the Qura'n forbids alcohol to Muslims, but because "the Arabs disdain this kind of work" whereas to the "[Iraqi] Christian, Americans and Europeans [who owned most of the hotels and bars at the time] are the most coveted employers" (Stewart & Haylock, Ibid: 59).¹³²

As for their current occupations in the US, the 2007 Chaldean Household Survey in Southeast Michigan boasts 33,000 Chaldean-owned businesses, with the most recurrent types of businesses being the convenience store (351 businesses) and the supermarket (138 businesses) (Household Survey, 2007:18).¹³³ As an essential component in the official story of who the Chaldeans are, the "entrepreneurial spirit," or the "business-orientation" of the Chaldean community has received ample coverage in a variety of academic and non-academic texts.¹³⁴

¹³² Since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, many reports in the American media have pointed out Christian-Iraqis' dominance in the liquor and bar businesses in Iraq; however, the dichotomy drawn by Stewart and Haylock which points out Iraq's Christians' economic affinities with the British and American presence there is virtually forgotten in these recent reports in the context of Chaldeans' dominance over the liquor business. "After the War: Vigilantes; Iraq's Liquor Trade Becomes a Casualty of Postwar Chaos." (2003, May 24). *New York Times*; "Extremists Crack Down on Liquor Stores in Iraq." (2004, October 4). *Los Angeles Times*; "The Other Iraq War." (2005, March 29). *The Washington Times*.

¹³³ See also Chapter Five, p. 180.

¹³⁴ See, for instance, Allen Doctoroff's dissertation, *The Chaldeans: A New Ethnic Group in Detroit's Suburban High Schools* (1978); all of Mary Sengstock's publications (1975), (1981), (1982), (1999) and (2005); Gary David's "Behind the Bulletproof Glass" (2000); the CCC video "Our Story: Chaldeans in Detroit" (2004); the website of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, www.chaldeanchamber.com, as well as the works of fiction to be discussed in this Chapter.

Chaldeans' preoccupation and success with business ventures in the US, their tendency to partner with kin and coethnics and to bequeath business properties to their children have produced a distinct relationship with the concept of education in recent years. Young Chaldean generations have become more aware of the instrumentality of education in substituting the family store with the American corporate job as the source of high income. The text of the Household Survey comments (Household Survey, Ibid: 15),

While the stereotype of the Chaldean population by non-Chaldeans is often one of convenience store and gas station owners/operators, the trend for Generations X and Y is that of high degrees of education and specialization in law, medicine, finance, accounting, and the media.

The association between Chaldeans and the store business does not appear only among non-Chaldeans. *Ahl-il-storaat*—the people of the stores—is a common designation used by Chaldeans, albeit sarcastically at times, to refer to the Chaldean community's dominance in the store business. Also, all the fictional texts we shall consider in this Chapter take place among a US-based Chaldean segment of society whose primary business is the family store.

More recently, as the Household Survey indicates, examples of Chaldean-American professionals abound in the wealthy suburbs of Oakland County, Michigan. Children and grandchildren of store owner immigrants, Chaldean professionals now are more conspicuous as they cluster in particular hospitals (Oakwood, Detroit Mercy and Providence), banks (Bank of Michigan) and other corporate venues.

Professionalism and economic wealth also generated leisure time for some members of certain Chaldean families. Some of these individuals devoted this leisure time to the understanding of their identity and culture. Thus, among these same

professionals, their siblings, children or their store-owner parents are now culture-makers who engage in projects of identity maintenance, heritage revival and assertions of ethnic uniqueness. Among these culture-makers and professionals also, or somewhat publicly concealed behind them, are the sparse few Chaldeans who pursue higher education in the fields of the humanities.

The three fiction writers whose works will be discussed next are culturally embedded within the kinship networks of the new generation of professional Chaldeans. They have written their works either while occupying other professional posts (Garmo, attorney and former district court magistrate; Najor, English professor and doctoral student in cultural studies) or by virtue of having other members in their households who can make their literary undertakings financially viable.

When presenting their fictional texts to the reading public, two of the Chaldean authors share a desire to tell us about their education through the occasion of their published texts. “Marshal Garmo is a Chaldean attorney and author,” the back cover of *An Immigrant’s Dream* tells us. “[He] is also a licensed real estate broker and title insurance agent,” the back cover continues, as if suggesting that the professional success of the author should attest to the quality of the text. Similarly, the back cover of Namou’s second novel stresses that “she studied screenwriting in film school [where?], poetry in Prague [in what capacity?], and the personality of other cultures through traveling.”

Yet despite this education-centered self presentation, some Chaldean authors seem to accept the tangential reception of their literature among family and kin. Namou reflects (Interview, July 2008),

As for my family, some of them used to be concerned about where my passion was leading me, particularly since they did not know of people in our community

who did similar work [fiction writing]. My mother, for instance, worried that I'm toiling for something that may not pay off in the future...Today everyone, particularly my husband, supports me.

[An American] friend from my writer's group...said she couldn't believe that while she was praising my work to my husband, brother and sister-in-law, at their place of business, she discovered none of them had read my work. For me, I don't need my family to read my work. I need their assistance...and their support, both of which they do flourish [*sic*] me with.

But "Chaldeans don't read!" Over the past four years I was constantly reminded of Alaa's indignant comment as I visited several Chaldean homes and workplaces of varied socio-economic standings. In the humble houses and apartments of liquor store owners and operators in Oak Park, Detroit and Southfield I mostly found no books, with the exception of the Bible, the phonebook, the Chaldean business directory and a few publications from the local church or community publications acquired at the local Chaldean food shop. In the lavish high-ceilinged homes of Chaldean doctors, lawyers and pharmacists in Bloomfield Hills and West Bloomfield I found books, but they were mostly technical, filled with the jargon of my hosts' professions, books that were inherited from college days or updated for the purpose of an upcoming board exam. True, my random sample might have not been representative, yet the fact that I do not recall having witnessed a bookcase in any Chaldean household I have been to in the US is worth pondering. In the course of five years, I have encountered a handful of Chaldeans who claimed enjoying reading fiction, but none of these individuals, nor any other, has admitted to reading any of the Chaldean fiction I am about to discuss.

Recalling Alaa's cultural dichotomy, I speculate: what happens to community perceptions when emergent Chaldean authors, so-perceived possessors of "no culture," start to not only think but *write* in terms of "culture"?

I aim to demonstrate through the six works of fiction outlined below that the touchstone of their value lies in their importation of an entire non-literary ethnic tradition into the current tropes of literary discourse of American ethnicity. Because the modernization of forms (and tropes) precedes that of content (Leontis, *Ibid*: 133), what these modules of nascent Chaldean fiction perform is the translatability of difference (Chaldeanness) to the tropes of sameness (American mainstream). The characters and events of the works in question are situated within the cultural context of the Chaldean community in and around Detroit, and sometimes extend to reveal the contexts of their transnational ethnic relations. After outlining the works in the next section, the subsequent section will analyze the cultural tropes these narratives construct and the articulations of ethnicity they generate in the process.

Six Works of Chaldean Fiction
I. "Bebe Khomee" (1988)

In the seven pages that make up "*Bebe Khomee*," Deborah Najor explores the relationship between a US-born and raised girl and her immigrant Chaldean family. The story is told from the perspective of Selma, a store owner's daughter, who, as a child and later as a young woman, is simultaneously immersed in two contexts, that of her upbringing in a Chaldean household and that of her xenophobic American environment in school and the neighborhood. As a child, Selma experiences her otherness through "Mrs. Shoober" who "raised her finger and said no Arabic" while Selma recited her times table. "Everybody laughed; I hate school," she reflects (Najor, 1988: 14). At home, her mother prepares okra with rice, a common Iraqi dish, but Selma prefers pizza. Later when Selma is in her twenties, her mother urges her to marry her first cousin, but Selma protests in

surprise, despite acknowledging that her own parents are first cousins. “Is he screwed? We’re first cousins like you and Baba” (Ibid, 18).

The other key protagonists in the story are Selma’s mother, whom she addresses in Chaldean as *Yimma*, and Selma’s grandmother, whom she calls *Bebe*, a widow from Telkeif who long ago had joined her husband in America after a period of separation. After her husband’s death none of the grandmother’s US-based children and their families wanted her to reside with them permanently, so the grandmother used to alternate between their homes, staying occasionally with Selma’s family in their Detroit home until her death of ovarian cancer (Ibid, 19). During her unwanted visits, the grandmother tells Selma and her sister Lenna stories about Baghdad, where their mother and her family used to live before the migration to Detroit. To demonstrate Selma’s conceptual distance from the land of her parents’ origins, the writer reveals that the name of the city is interpolated in Selma’s memory as “Bags of Dad.”

As a child, Selma is at once intrigued and embarrassed by the character of her grandmother. Intimacy and othering occur at the same time. She enjoys certain aspects about her visits, such as “when she slept with us,” and yet “she smelled like how my socks smell when I forget to take them off before going into the pool at Auntie Mariam’s and then I step on the gravel.” When Amy and Sandy, her non-Chaldean neighbor friends (indicated through their American names and “both have pretty blonde hair and twin color barrettes”) ask Selma “who’s that weird old lady with your mom,” she blurts out, “our new maid” (Ibid, 15).

Later in the story, when Selma is a young woman, her status as a single college student who rejects the concept of marriage and bearing children is juxtaposed with that

of her grandmother who was engaged at age ten and bore her first child at fifteen (Ibid, 18-19). This contrastive portrayal between the life of a Chaldean-American grandchild and that of her Chaldean-Telkeifi grandmother is mediated and moderated by the character of the mother, who stands in a medial relation to the two women, representing a transitional state of life, between the “old country” and America. *Yimma* speaks Chaldean and Arabic, but also broken English; she lives in Detroit, but labors to infuse her imported values (such as early marriage, respect for elders and appreciation of certain Chaldean foods) in her children. The story does not conclude with a decisive event, but rather with the subtle unfolding of the grandmother’s life before Selma, through some casual descriptions made by her mother before she falls asleep (Ibid, 20).

II. “Selma’s Weddings” (1992)

The dichotomy between tradition and freedom, the old ways and the new, appears again in Najor’s story “*Selma’s Weddings*”. Here it resides in the contrasts between the behaviors and worldviews of two Chaldean-American sisters, also named Selma and Lenna like the sisters in “*Bebe Khomee*”. The events of the story also take place in Detroit, but Lenna, instead of Selma, is the first-person narrator of this story.

The action of the story develops through the sister’s narration of Selma’s unseemly behavior during and before social events, especially weddings. Selma refuses, for instance, “to be one of the bridesmaids in Aunt Sina’s wedding because our second cousin, Nawal, had arranged it so that Selma would walk with Nawal’s brother-in-law, Pharim Kalu” Pharim, a twenty-eight year old resident doctor, was interested in getting

married and his mother wanted to introduce him to twenty-year-old Selma. After Selma rejects the prospect, Pharin considers her younger sister Lenna for marriage (Ibid, 608-9).

The rest of the story narrates the dynamics between the two sisters and the suitor, beginning with Selma's protests against the idea of her sister's engagement to Pharin, "why do you want to put her in a coffin so soon, Mother?" and proceeding to her later acquiescence to accompany Lenna "as a chaperone" on her formal dates with Pharin. These dates were arranged and negotiated by Lenna and Pharin's families, as explained by Lenna (Ibid, 609-10):

Pharin's mother called to negotiate dating arrangements. Yimma wanted a promised engagement. His mother said Pharin wanted at least a month to decide, so Yimma told them that she needed to discuss this with my father. They decided that I could go out with Pharin, but then he would need to decide if he wanted me by the third date. Everyone agreed to those terms.

Soon after her three dates Lenna becomes engaged to Pharin, whose conservative views on life do not seem to infuriate her as much as they do her sister Selma.

A discussion between Lenna and Selma at one public occasion when Selma gets drunk reveals the two sisters' divergent worldviews; Selma laments: "I don't want to be like you'll be—having babies and being miserable. You haven't even finished high school, Len. Why are you letting Yim do this to you? You'll never go to college if this happens," to which Lenna replies (Ibid, 612):

Sometimes you're not that logical,...it doesn't have to be either-or...I can have my kids and go to college later...what difference does it make? It doesn't bother me like it bothers you. This is the only life we have. Why can't you just accept it?

The two sisters' views embody the tension between individual and communal agency, in which Chaldean social mores are at variance with American inflections of freedom, a binary pairing that runs through most of the narratives considered in this Chapter.

The story closes with a scene in which Selma belly dances to honor her sister's wedding, a common tradition in Chaldean-American weddings that is described earlier in the story in the context of a previous wedding. From Selma's refusal to partake in this activity in previous weddings, the reader knows that she does not enjoy this public appearance. Nonetheless, she hesitantly agrees to belly dance when Lenna demands it from her as a bride. However, Lenna is disappointed by the outcome, and distastefully narrates the manner in which her sister performed the dance (Ibid, 616):

Selma had washed the make-up off her face, the make-up which had taken my Aunt Mariyam a half an hour to apply....brushed out the teased style that the hairdresser had given her. Her hair looked wet, flat behind her ears, drawing attention to her high cheekbones and sullen lips. She danced, the velvet dress clinging to her slender waist and hips, with her eyes closed and her head slightly tilted back, as though no one watched. She had abandoned her high heels and glided on her toes...

This performance prompted the other dancing bridesmaids to abandon the dance floor, the music band members to glance at one another and the mother to stand "paralyzed". Lenna concludes the final paragraph of the story by telling the reader that she "pitied" her sister. She states her last words without explaining why, "I did not belly dance at my wedding, and I knew I would never dance at Selma's wedding either" (Ibid, 616). The ambiguous ending does not demonstrate whether or not the author identifies more with one of the two sisters or the other. The reader is left to ponder the unconsolidated rift between Chaldean values (obedience, marriage at an early age, gendered social protocol) and their suggested American antitheses (individuality, social freedom, blurred gender roles).

III. An Immigrant's Dream (2002)

Also set in Detroit, Garmo's play, *An Immigrants' Dream*, depicts the life of a Chaldean immigrant, Najib, and his family: his wife Amira, older son Farid, daughter Sarah, and younger son Jack. The central figure in the play, Najib, a controlling, "old fashioned" father (Garmo, 2002:4), has a dream, which, Najib tells us, is "the American dream. The dream of every immigrant" (Ibid, 15). Najib's dream is to buy a large supermarket that would be operated by his sons. He expects to multiply his wealth through this venture, and then purchase a large piece of land where he would build homes for each of his children in order for every one in the family to live near him. One by one, however, each of his children disappoints him with the individual lives they forge for themselves, until he is disillusioned and begins seeking to "change himself," following his older son's advice (Ibid, 122, 136-7):

Dad...We don't live anymore in the same age in which you lived with your father and grandfather. That period is gone with all of its good and bad...You should accept the change and adjust yourself to it.

His first disappointment comes when his older son, Farid, decides to work for a computer company in San Francisco, and to marry a divorced woman against his will (Ibid, 57-68). After failing to convince Farid to work with him in the supermarket and to marry his brother's daughter, Farid's first cousin, Najib shifts his efforts to Jack, whom he wishes to wed to the Chaldean daughter of the former supermarket owner in order to join the fortunes of the two families and become wealthier (Ibid, 110-113). But Jack also disappoints his father by revealing his desire to marry his ostensibly "Mexican" girlfriend, who turns out to be Puerto Rican, as Farid later explains to his father, and whom the father rejects as a daughter-in-law due to his racial prejudices against ethnic groups that are unfamiliar to him. "Porto Dico, Porto Kiko. All of them are the same

thing. All of them eat Taco and Tortilla...I assure you [to Farid] this rascal only wants him [his son Jack] for a Green Card” (Ibid, 124-5).

Finally, Sarah deals her father the hardest cultural blow by getting pregnant out of wedlock. Enraged by the news, Najib and his wife wish death to their daughter while their son Jack, lays out a plan to kill her (Ibid, 140-3). Amira: “Pretend that she’s dead...just tell them she’s not my daughter...;” Najib: “If she were to die some how;” Jack: “Do you want me to kill her?” (Ibid, 142). The murder does not transpire because, in a flashback just when he aims his gun at her, Jack remembers their sweet childhood together and reconsiders (Ibid, 144-6).

The crude contrast between the father’s worldview and that of his children is intended to illustrate the clash between the old immigrant generation of Chaldeans and their American(ized) children. The play mostly sides with the stereotypical values of the new generation (freedom, individuality, tolerance), suggesting that the father is the one who should consider changing his, equally stereotypical, rigid values (communal life, greed, intolerance, patriarchal control, endogamous marriage).

Structurally, Garmo’s work is the least developed of the narratives being considered here. Its events unfold in a rather abrupt and sometimes unrealistic manner and the characters lack expressive power and convincing actions. Weam Namou’s fiction, by contrast, offers the first examples of developed Chaldean American novels.

IV. The Feminine Art (2004)

The events of Namou’s first novel, *The Feminine Art*, meticulously unfold in 254 pages. The work is primarily a comparison between two marriage contracts between

Iraqi-based Chaldean women and US-based Chaldean men; one between Suham and her husband George that is realized, and one between Michael and Rita that remains unfulfilled.

The third-person narrator follows the details of the quotidian life of the semi-autobiographical protagonist, Suham. As a Chaldean housewife of a grocery store owner and the mother of a store owner's wife, her thoughts, manners, aspirations and projects depict the specific workings of the culture of Chaldean store business owners and their families in the US (Namou, 2004:48). The text reveals that Suham is constantly preoccupied with food, which appears in connection with her other unrelated thoughts in a variety of ways (Ibid, 14-5):

Suham drove to Farmer Jack to buy a roast, but at the checkout counter, she doubted herself...what if the sight of a grilled bird on his [Michael's] dish could open his appetite as widely as the guards could open a castle's door before the queen entered through it?

A can of kernel corn in her left hand and a box of baking soda in her right, both products having been on sale, Suham suddenly paused in the middle of the #3 checkout counter and did an unusual thing. Between the shoppers and shopping cart, the candy and magazine racks, she prayed for Michael's well being.

The text also repeatedly utilizes metaphors and similes of food that come to articulate other concepts, such as the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, which is likened to the pot and its lid in this example (Ibid, 254):

Her mother once told her [Suham] that every pot had its lid, an old Iraqi saying that meant each person had a soul mate. And that when the pot and its lid were sealed together, and the flavor of the spices and the heat of the fire worked privately inside, the taste of the food was much enhanced before it was served to guests. "You be like this with your husband," she'd told Suham, making a fist with her hand.

The Feminine Art is initially set in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan, but the story eventually moves to Jordan, where Suham and her American-raised nephew, Michael, travel to visit a potential bride whom Suham arranges for Michael to meet. During the

trip Suham gradually begins to see herself mirrored in the character of Rita, who reminds her of her own former life in Baghdad and her marriage to a US-based Chaldean (Ibid, 252, 154).

Interpersonal communications between the US-based Chaldeans and the Iraq-based ones who had just left Iraq when the daughter was selected for marriage creates the novel's transnational context. The text depicts a detailed picture of how Chaldean-Americans communicate with and exert financial and social influence on Chaldean-Iraqis (Ibid, 241). Meanwhile, Namou furnishes a subtle critique of the politics of politeness and the institution of marriage in the Chaldean-American community (Ibid, 218). By providing two contrasting models of Chaldean males through Suham's caring and hardworking husband, George, and her irresponsible, selfish, profligate and immature nephew, Michael (Ibid, 244), Namou crafts an indirect critique of male dominance in Chaldean culture which she then explores further in her second and third novels as we shall see later.

Rita, the Iraqi-born and raised Chaldean woman whom Michael meets in Jordan does not get along with her potential Detroit suitor. "Your nephew is deeply confused," Rita tells Suham, "he is like a child who enjoys games more than money or power....He lacks maturity...He says that maybe he'd like me better if I colored my hair and gained a few pounds" (Ibid, 157). Their marriage plans falter after a few confrontations between Michael and Rita that reveal how both have had a sheltered upbringing that makes them immature and unripe for marriage. The novel concludes with Suham and her nephew's return to America without having achieved their primary goal. Suham's reflections, however, reveal that the trip was a learning experience for her. It taught her the value of

her own marriage, and the contrast between her husband George and her nephew Michael (Ibid, 154, 244).

With a nuanced portrayal of the different protagonists' behavior, speech and arguments about marriage, Namou paints an intricate landscape of the life, interdependency and networking of a segment of the US-based Chaldean community. She brings to the fore her characters' convictions, power relations and the specific cultural values they share or reject in their close-knit diasporic community along with the transnational dimension of their kin and coethnic networking.

Plotting the events of the narrative in two geographical locales also provides Namou with the suitable context to describe the living conditions of Chaldean refugees who had recently left Iraq (Ibid, 228-9):

“I love it there [in Baghdad],” Rita Said.

“Love what about it, *habibti*, that it has no water, no milk, no eggs, no meat, no sugar,” Saleema said, bitterly... “Did your eyes not see merchants in the streets selling a tablespoon of tomato paste in a plastic bag?” Saleema asked with hostility. “did your eyes not see people drinking water with worms and dirt swimming in it?”

By staging casual dialogues between protagonists who are not in America Namou also explores aspects of Chaldean life in Iraq and in transit countries such as Jordan after the first Gulf War. By so doing she creates a political and historical context for her novel without reverting to the authoritative voice of an anonymous narrator.

While in *The Feminine Art* Namou creates a portrait of Chaldean social life that unfolds with its political history, anecdotes, romances and familial disputes in Jordan, in her following novel, *The Mismatched Braid*, Namou takes her reader to Greece, where she examines the life of another, very similar, segment of Chaldean itinerants and their US-based kin.

V. The Mismatched Braid (2006)

Namou continues to explore the themes of familial relations and coethnic marital contracts in her second and third novels. In *The Mismatched Braid*, marriage deliberations take place in Greece, where Dunia, a practical, “worldly,” and studious, but also flamboyant and exploitative young Chaldean-American, visits her cousin Amel in Akernoon, an Athenian neighborhood where Chaldean refugees gradually flocked together since the 1990s (Namou, 2006: 45). Amel falls in love with Dunia during her semester-long study visit, while Dunia’s emotions are not entirely revealed to the reader on occasions when Amel confesses his passion to her (Ibid, 64).

Amel’s status as an illegal refugee is precarious. His future entry to the US is uncertain. He lacks education and he is financially dependent on his aunts and uncles in America, including Dunia’s parents (Ibid, 31, 36, 67, 230). These factors make him stand out as the weaker of the two. “He wasn’t fancy like her. Her hairbrush alone, with its thick silhouette shape and pink flowers intimidated him...And he was afraid of her layers and layers of knowledge. It was like peeling [Sic.] an onion without ever reaching the center” (Ibid, 66).

Dunia’s intentions are never fully spelled out. Ambiguity envelops her actions and thoughts throughout the novel. Toward the end, in a dialogue that takes place on one of her clandestine visits to Amel in his apartment in Canada, they teasingly discuss their unrequited love in the third person. Amel begins (Ibid, 214):

“Did she tell you why she doesn’t love him?”

“Because he’s an immigrant. He can’t afford her”

“You can’t place a price on love”

“She’s not that type of girl. She charges”

“Really? That’s news to me”

“It’s a trend in America for Chaldean girls to charge. Maybe she’ll make an exception for first cousins”

The sarcasm in Dunia's tone appears in many of the dialogues between the two cousins in the novel. The reader is left to interpret it without a direct commentary from the author, who does not intervene to offer a judgment on the behavior or point of view of either of the two protagonists.

Towards the end of the novel, months after Dunia returns from Greece to her home in Michigan, Amel manages to smuggle himself illegally to Canada through the financial help of his relatives. Namou creates this occasion in order to compile a realistic description of the process of smuggling which, in real life, has helped many Chaldeans reach the US (Ibid, 168-78). Soon after arriving in Canada, Amel is united with his relatives in Detroit, also through a smuggling scheme that involves the assistance of his extended family (Ibid, 204). He and Dunia, however, do not conclude their short-lived affair in Greece with marriage. In addition to occasionally resorting to the excuse of her desire to obtain a law degree before marriage (Ibid, 236), Dunia breaks up with her cousin due to the interference of other mutual relatives and the several verbal misunderstandings that take place because of them (Ibid, 156-8). The last section of the novel concludes with a cold encounter between the two cousins where Dunia alludes to her educational accomplishments and her future Ukrainian fiancé (Ibid, 238). Soon after this encounter Amel resigns to marry Elizabeth, a less attractive but more accommodating and compliant Chaldean woman who is recommended and introduced enthusiastically by his aunt. The novel concludes with Amel comparing the object of his first love to that of his potential marriage (Ibid, 241):

[Dunia] was a flower. Yet the beauty and splendor of the flower required care, and lasted only a week or two. Elizabeth was a vase. She could be decorated and if treated properly, survive for decades...He was afraid, and wanted to be held. The vase could contain him. There, he would release his history, embellish his present and craft his future.

Disillusion with the first lover or potential life partner, followed by a practical reconsideration of what matters for a person's well-being are the events that provide closure for all three of Namou's novels. The semi-requited love but unconsummated marriage project is a theme that animates her third novel, *The Flavor of Cultures*, whose general plot outline is similar to the first two novels.

VI. The Flavor of Cultures (2008)

In this story two young Chaldeans, Mervat and Johnny, children of store owners in Detroit, fall in love and begin dating secretly but ultimately separate and Mervat later marries another Chaldean man. The power dynamics are reversed in this novel. Unlike Dunia who could afford to tease her younger, less experienced, less wealthy and less educated cousin in *The Mismatched Braid*, Mervat is intimidated by the wealth of Johnny's family, who resides in the more affluent west side suburbs of Detroit. "His wealth absolutely startled me" (Namou, 2008:64, 70). She is also taken by her "handsome" boyfriend's "blue eyes, light skin, and tall, large-boned frame" (Ibid, 17). "A man like him was impossible to reject, even by a sultana. He could be mistaken for a European model rather than a Chaldean immigrant" (Ibid, 49).

At nineteen, Mervat's main objective behind dating Johnny is to be married to him, yet her speculations reveal her ambivalence about marriage and an inhibited desire to find freedom through other means (Ibid, 84):

I ought to be smart and remain single, I concluded. Then I changed my mind. Spinsterhood would suit me only if I had a career, and that required years of schooling and dedication, not to mention an interest in a specific (and of course respectable) profession. I was trapped in limbo and I wondered how long I was going to be there so I could pack enough clothes.

And elsewhere (Ibid, 96):

By morning I couldn't stand the thought of being without him. I would only be at the mercy of unfavorable suitors, reputation-threatening meetings and a college degree with no probable career.

Namou extensively explores the emotional turbulence of the phenomenon of unsanctioned dating in the US-based Chaldean community to depict the unfolding of Mervat's sexuality and the psychological dilemmas she undergoes due to violating her family's and community's expectations (Ibid, 67, 79). Unlike Najor's assertive Selma, whose rebellion against tradition is unfaltering, and stands in stark opposition to her sister Lenna's silent submission to societal expectations, Namou's Mervat embodies the thoughts and emotions of both sisters creating an inner tension that problematizes the interdependency between Chaldean individuals and their community.

Mervat fears endangering her "name," or her "flatly ironed reputation," in the course of illicit dating, a notion that recurs throughout the text with much detail and emphasis, leading Mervat to create a "bad girl/good girl" typology in her mind. For instance, she describes her Lebanese college friend Sonya as "one of the bad girls who, apart from smoking, was a Christian publicly dating a Muslim" (Ibid, 37). Yet the thought does not settle well with Mervat (Ibid, 40):

The notion that Sonia and Maysoon enjoyed their youth more than I did stung me painfully. That day I drove home a most unhappy and envious girl. I suddenly realized that even if I had a boyfriend, I wouldn't be able to enjoy him the way a bad girl does. Then I looked at the bright side. Sonia and Maysoon might always have boyfriends but they would never have husbands to take them to the Virgin Islands or Mexico.

Without admitting it to anyone except the reader, in spite of her cultural inhibitions Mervat wants to be able to explore her sexuality the way her friends Maysoon and Sonia, characterized as "bad girls," do. "Now that I had a boyfriend, now that I was waking to

the possibilities of love rather than listening in jealousy, I wanted the stories of her [Maysoon's] exploits to slither down from her wine-colored lips onto my thirsty imagination" (Ibid, 53).

The dating scene unfolds with endless machinations to entice Johnny into marriage. Johnny, on the other hand, seems to be preoccupied with luring Mervat to premarital sex, and with his own life. After months of trepidations and pangs of conscience, and failed hopes for marriage, Mervat and Johnny end their relationship due to Johnny's escapist, unresponsive behavior. After the separation Mervat sinks into depression and eating disorders. She finally attempts suicide and then goes through a spiritual transformation during a brief trip to Mexico with her Chaldean "bad friend" Maysoon. The novel concludes with a cold chance meeting between Johnny and Mervat, by then a married woman and a mother, a decade after their first encounter.

While Namou's first two novels explore the transnational relations between Chaldeans in America and other transit countries through the tropes of romance, marriage, and familial power relations, *The Flavor of Cultures* is not concerned with depicting the Chaldean community outside of Michigan. In her last novel Namou shifts the attention to the new motifs of sexuality and dating protocols among Chaldean-Americans and explores key social problems that prevail in the US-based community today, such as gambling, drug dealing and smuggling.

More than any other writer to date, Namou is concerned with presenting a meticulously realistic depiction of the social dynamics within the Chaldean community. In each of her novels she takes up one or two main themes and tries to explore them

thoroughly. As we shall see through the tropes discussed in the next section, Namou's fiction offers the most nuanced treatments of Chaldean ethnicity.

Four Tropes of Chaldean Fiction

The hallmark through which the six outlined narratives can be recognized as works of ethnic literature, I shall argue, is their preoccupation with setting ethnic tropes that are familiar to an American readership (i.e., defining Chaldeans through topical elements such as language, descent, food, religion, family values and customs), to accommodate a content (i.e., the specific inner dynamics of the Chaldean family, and by extension, the Chaldean community) that is assumed to be unfamiliar to the readership.

As the introduction of this Chapter emphasized, fictional and official modes of identity narration both engage in negotiating the community's "descent" and "consent" values. However, these two modes of narration do not yield the same set of tropes. Recognizing how collective identity gets formulated differently in fiction and the official narrative, illuminates the discontinuity that exists between these two representational modes of Chaldeanness, along with the friction site where the two narratives dispute and rewrite each other. It is therefore useful to first discuss the shared tropes in fiction that reveal the authors' respective interest in signaling ethnic specificity, and, second, to turn to discuss the points of difference between the fictional and the formal identity narratives.

Trope 1: Showing Chaldeanness by Naming Chaldeanness

The six works share a common interest in stating their Chaldeanness unambiguously. They do that mainly in three ways. 1) by showcasing Chaldeanness in the textual material that physically falls outside of the text of the fictional work itself,

such as the cover, the blurb or the preface, 2) by incorporating references to monumental Chaldean history, the Chaldean language and Chaldean place of descent inorganically into the plot of the fictional work, and 3) by situating the narrative in an almost exclusively Chaldean (but also conflated with “Arab” and “Middle Eastern”) social milieu where characters from other ethnic groups make a minimally characterized appearance.

These works of fiction reveal a tendency to *tell*, rather than show, the reader from the outset that their narrative concerns an exclusive ethnic group that goes by the name “Chaldean”. This information often appears in or around the fictional text. Namou’s first novel showcases its Chaldeanness through the description on the back cover (Namou, 2004: backcover).

For the first time in literary history, a Chaldean American novelist emerges to portray the descendants of ancient Mesopotamia, now called Iraq, where literature, school, law, a map of the world, and the idea of dividing time and space in multiples of 60 was first found.

On the same page, the personal blurb of the author tells us, “Weam Namou, of Chaldean descent – Neo-Babylonians who today, still speak the language of Jesus – was born in Baghdad and came to America at age ten.” Inside the fictional text, on the first page of the narrative, St. Joseph Chaldean Church in Troy, Michigan, is mentioned in passing by the third-person narrator to describe the physical setting of the novel, but also to indirectly prompt the reader to associate Chaldean Christianity with the protagonists’ religious affiliation (Ibid, 7).

In Namou’s novels, contemporary Chaldeanness, which is the subject of the narrative text, is framed by an external description that situates it as connected with ancient Chaldeanness. The historical-religious characterizations of the work of fiction

that is referred to above recurs in Namou's second novel through the citation of other factual information. The description of the back cover this time introduces Enheduanna as "the first writer in recorded history" (Namou, 2006: backcover),

...a woman from ancient Iraq. She lived, composed, and taught roughly 2,000 years before Aristotle and 1,700 years prior to Sappho...The people who have in the past contributed greatly to our civilization are today portrayed by Weam Namou as she shares yet another modern day story that's based on true events.

On the back cover, also, Namou's biography this time describes how the author "was born as a minority Christian in Baghdad, Iraq." On the first page of the novel, the text alludes to the Chaldean language when the protagonist Amel argues with his mother on the phone "in Chaldean, the language of Christian Iraqis who originated from Mesopotamia."

Neither of Namou's first two novels integrates the historical and religious profiling into the plot of its narrative, which, after merely listing these Chaldean identity markers, move on to portray a contemporary social reality that bears out Namou's more recent description of her work in a 2008 interview (Namou, Interview, July 2008):

I feel that my novels are universally appealing. Years ago, my former agent, Frances Kuffel, compared my work to that of Jane Austin and after *The Feminine Art* was published, an Iraqi critic said the exact same thing in an article. Jane Austin's work focuses on familial stories that most anyone could relate to even though they were written in another era.

Indeed, in Namou's first two novels, the portrayal of ethnicity is superimposed on what could stand as "universal" or generic familial stories, mostly through an external physical frame that includes the back cover and the introductory first page of the novel.

Namou's third novel creates a more integral context for portraying ethnicity through an introductory anecdote about the narrator's uncle who was from Telkeif, which in turn appears on the first page of the narrative as "a Christian village in Northern Iraq

inhabited mostly by Chaldeans (Christian Iraqis)” (Namou, 2008:3). Language specificity is also signaled in the introductory chapter, “once again my sister, using mostly English, had woven Chaldean (Neo-Aramaic) and Arabic myths into my heart” (Ibid, 5).

Like Namou, Najor accentuates the Chaldean identity of her familial protagonists by directly referencing the village of “Telquaif,” (Telkeif) which, in “Selma’s Weddings,” appears in the course of describing a traditional wedding by the aunt to her two American-raised nieces (Najor, 1992: 613). In “Bebe Khomee,” the village appears briefly, simply as “Telquaif, Iraq” with no further descriptive features, to indicate the place the narrator’s grandmother chooses for her burial (Najor, 1988:19). In both stories Najor also makes several references to her protagonists’ use of the Aramaic language, an indirect allusion to the ethnic group’s Christian religion and also a reference to the generational differences between family members. Aramaic is the language spoken by the grandmother in “Bebe Khomee,” and by the old aunt in “Selma’s Weddings,” while the American-raised generation of Lenna and Selma speak English among themselves and some Arabic of which they have a “limited supply” (Najor, 1988: 17; 1992:613).

Finally, in the published script of Garmo’s play, his biographical sketch describes him as “a Chaldean attorney and author,” while the play itself employs the term “Chaldean” in reference to individuals as kin/non-strangers/non-Americans (“Nadia: nobody sent me. I am Chaldean. Najib: (Astonished) I thought you are American. Please have a seat. Do you need something?” (Garmo, 2002:59)), and in reference to the “Chaldean community” as a contemporary site of public judgment, approval, disapproval and gossip (Ibid, 111, 130, 175).

On the one hand, then, Chaldean-American fiction forcefully establishes its distinct “descent” values—its language of heritage, the monumental legacy of its authors, and the paradigmatic symbol (village of Telkeif) of its characters’ descent. On the other hand, this fiction fashions its own rhetoric of “consent” (or non-consent, rather) by distancing itself from the American (non-Chaldean) contexts that contribute to its development as an ethnic *American* literature.

To accentuate the Chaldean-specific components within the protagonists’ characters, Chaldean fiction includes sketches of Americans rather than fully developed American protagonists. These sketches appear only as the antithesis of Chaldeans, with no features that set them apart other than their physical and cultural difference. In Namou’s *Flavor of Cultures*, Mervat thinks of Matthew, the stock boy who works at her family’s store, as “an American, and no threat to my reputation.” Mervat who is otherwise preoccupied with her reputation in the Chaldean community reveals that she “wanted his fingers to climb my ribs and touch my breasts” (Namou, 2008:42). As a secondary character who is brought into the story only to signal a contrast between Mervat’s complex interest in a Chaldean man versus her tangential interest in an American man, Matthew does not make another appearance in the text after this incident.

“American girls” appear in Mervat’s envious thoughts as those “who only had hair on their heads and between their thighs,” in contrast with her hirsute body (Namou, 2008:41). In *The Feminine Art*, the only American characters are Michael’s anonymous girlfriends and Suham’s neighbor who piques Suham’s curiosity because the latter has no idea about the culture, food, customs and habits of this American woman (Namou, 2004:7). In Najor’s “Bebe Khomee,” Lenna and Selma’s American friends “have pretty

blonde hair and twin color barrettes” (Najor, 1988:15). In the eyes of their grandmother, Americans lurk outside of the house as “crazy drug dealing...kidnappers” (Najor, 1988: 16) and that “America is full of filthy, violent people who do not know God” (Ibid, 17).

People of different ethnic or national backgrounds sometimes also feature in a flat, *othered* appearance. Mervat who takes a trip to Mexico with her friend Maysoon toward the end of the novel describes her first impression of Jose, the Mexican man whom she befriends there, with a dismissive “he seemed ordinary and temporary” (Namou, 2008: 153), before she is spiritually transformed by his descriptions of religion and nature. Analogously, Jack’s Puerto Rican girlfriend, Rosetta, is rejected by his “old-fashioned” father. Mistaking all Hispanic-looking people for Mexicans, the father reveals the reasons behind his objection to his older son Farid. “You want me to bless my son’s marriage to a Mexican girl, one who came from nowhere or how many miles she walked barefoot until she arrived in the U.S....What will I say to the people, My son got married to a Mexican girl. Besides, maybe she wants him for a Green Card” (Garmo, 2002: 124).

While “Americans” and other ethnic groups appear in crude sketches to set the parameters of Chaldeanness by depicting what it is *not*, references to Arab, Eastern and Middle Eastern cultural components are constantly conflated with the cultural depictions in these works. Several instances reveal these identities as interchangeable. Sometimes Chaldean identity is shown to be subsumed under a larger Eastern or Middle Eastern rubric. Garmo, for instance, resorts to the term “Eastern,” as in “the Eastern man will never be able to overcome his obsession with female sexuality” (Garmo, 2002:169) and defines his play in the Prelude as “the story of every Eastern immigrant in the United States” (Ibid, 7). He also refers to the place of origin of his immigrant family as “the old

country” (Garmo, 2002: 122) rather than Iraq or Telkeif, establishing by so doing a broader Middle Eastern setting for the cultural context of the play, despite the fact that the protagonists of his play are referred to as Chaldeans.

Najor’s Chaldean characters know some Arabic, are interested in arguing “about the state of Palestine,” and are confused for “A-rabs” by discriminatory outsiders who urge them to “go back to [their] flying carpets or camels” (Najor, 1988: 15; 1992: 607). Najor’s reference to outsiders’ conflation of Chaldeans with Arabs suggests to the reader that, even if the two categories Chaldean and Arab may be different in some of their cultural nuances, they are very similar to the outsider American observer.

In Namou’s novels, the author herself reproduces the conflation between contemporary Arab and Chaldean identities in America, suggesting by so doing that Chaldeans are culturally Arab. When not speaking in English, her characters revert to speaking in Arabic despite early mention in the novels that the “Chaldean language” is the language spoken by the group whose story is to be told. In *The Mismatched Braid*, when Amel and his cousin Sabah speak, the text reveals the linguistic distinction between Iraqi-based Chaldeans who grow up in a village and ones who grow up in a metropolitan area (Namou, 2006: 9):

“All is well with your family?” Sabah asked [Amel] in Arabic. Both born and raised in Baghdad, they were more at ease speaking Arabic than Chaldean. Their parents, having come from the Chaldean village of Telkaif in Northern Iraq, were the opposite.

By introducing the Arabic language as an identity component which her Chaldean characters possess, Namou also implies that the confines of Chaldeanness are changeable and, with respect to their linguistic dimension, situational—but only in relation to Arab and Middle Eastern cultures. In *The Flavor of Cultures*, Namou further qualifies

linguistic multiplicity along generational lines when Mervat's mother speaks to her in Arabic. "She never spoke English with us – what little she knew of it – and generally used Chaldean with my father and elders" (Namou, 2008: 10).

Moreover, in her latest novel Namou interchangeably uses the English terms "God" and the Arabic term "Allah" (but not the less familiar Aramaic term *Ālāha*), emphasizing how they are one and the same deity in Islam and Christianity (Ibid, 13, 15, 86). By bringing the two religions closer through language, Namou also implies their cultural proximity in Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern societies.

While describing particular costumes, *The Flavor of Cultures* also seems to conflate "Arabic culture" ("Females in the Arabic culture are not considered women until they either grow old or surrender themselves to a man" (Ibid, 16-7)), with "Middle Eastern culture" ("I, like any other Middle Eastern girl, had to first design solid blueprints, which needed effort and courage to keep my rendezvous a secret" (Namou, 2008: 35)) as determinant cultural components in the life of the US-based Chaldean community. Namou makes no explicit distinctions between the three categories "Arab", "Middle Eastern", and "Chaldean" in spite of the fact that the events of the novel transpire almost exclusively within the cultural confines of a "Chaldean community." Two or more of these ethnicity labels might appear in the same cultural explanation (Ibid, 8):

Chaldeans don't mail their [wedding] invitations, thinking it impersonal, so my mother had to hand deliver a card to a woman named Aunt Evelyn – because the family is the core of respect, everyone in the Middle Eastern culture is addressed as "aunt" or "uncle," "brother" or "sister," "son" or "daughter," depending on their age.

Namou's Chaldean protagonists also incorporate several Classical-Arabic formulaic expressions in their speech, which she then translates to English, such as "kan

ma kan fi qadim azzaman – there was, there was not, in the oldness of time”¹³⁵ (Ibid, 22), “mashallah (may Allah’s name be upon him)” (Ibid, 4), and “al-hamid ila Allah (praise be to God)” (Ibid, 8). Although some of these terms bear Islamic connotations in modern Iraqi culture, Namou is not reluctant to incorporate them into the speech of her Christian Chaldean characters. By so doing, she does not only pursue her goal of “realistic” portrayal through mirroring the actual use of these terms by non-Muslim speakers of Arabic in Iraq and the Middle East. Namou also implicitly challenges the official narrative of Chaldeanness that constantly aims to purify the image of Chaldean culture of all Arab and Islamic associations.

In all of the six works of fiction under consideration, where most of the Chaldean protagonists have Arabic names, the only explicit commentary on the three ethnicity labels, “Arab”, “Middle Eastern”, and “Chaldean”, appears in Namou’s *Flavor of Cultures*. In a rare scene (rare in its being not exclusively composed of Chaldean characters) young “Middle Eastern” student friends gather in the cafeteria of their college. Through their “heated discussion”, Namou captures the gist of the formal Chaldean identity narrative, and the informal socio-political discourses surrounding it. The dispute is started by “a Chaldean who’d corrected a Palestinian for innocently labeling him Arabic”

“Chaldeans existed six thousand years ago – long before Iraq appeared on the map,” the Chaldean explained, rigidly. “We have our own language, our own traditions, our own –”

“That, my friend, does not matter,” the Palestinian interrupted. “The question is, where were you born?”

“In Mesopotamia”

Everyone laughed and the Chaldean accused them all of being ignorant. “You know nothing about history!”

¹³⁵ Namou provides the literal translation, whereas a more standard way of rendering the phrase in English would be “once upon a time.”

While some disputed his claim and others apologized for the jests, Sonia [Christian Lebanese] leaned closer to her boyfriend [Muslim Syrian] and asked whether or not he knew why Chaldeans became offended when called Arabs.
“Because they think it implies they’re Muslim”

In this argument, Namou’s first person narrator Mervat succinctly reveals her own position with regard to the identity dispute: “not all Arabs are Muslim.” This thought, which Mervat doesn’t share with her friends, is the only explicit commentary on the interchangeability of “Arab,” “Middle Eastern,” and “Chaldean” identities throughout the book.

Chaldeanness is the pivotal trope in the works of fiction considered in this Chapter. I argue that this concern with portraying identity “as it is”, this concern with these cultural “‘outings,’ which are also invitations to enter” (Shryock, 2004: 302), is the first sign that Chaldean authors are attempting to enter the mainstream of American ethnic fiction. As anthropologist Andrew Shryock notes in his assessment of ethnic memoirs and ethnic fiction in general, it “tends to fixate on the cultural distance that separates an (almost always) immigrant household from the ‘American culture’ that prevails just outside,”....while “‘we,’ the faceless reading public, are now as much ‘their’ imagined community as ‘we,’ non-Arab [non-Chaldean] and nonkin, were once complete strangers to whom ‘such things’ (the hard stuff of cultural difference) should never be divulged” (Ibid). By attempting to articulate it “accurately” and “realistically” to an American readership, the works of fiction initiate the dialogue between notions of Chaldean descent and consent (between a preset heritage and a negotiated modern hyphenation). This dialogue yields comparable negotiations of ethnicity across the six works of fiction, which share conception of Chaldeanness as a monumental past, as

somewhat Arab and Middle Eastern, and as non-American yet meant for an American readership.

Trope 2: Family Affairs

A characteristic feature of American ethnic fiction is its preoccupation with the family scene and the “natural cohesion” of the family unit (Sollors, 1986: 6). Through this focal point, many depictions of ethnic specificity tend to accentuate the sites of familial ritualistic practices, such as the wedding. These ritualistic sites have the effect of stabilizing the family as a steady, tangible source of ethnic identity symbolism. As this section shows, the family and the wedding scene are consistently invoked to fulfill the ethnic identification function in Chaldean fiction.

In order to create an intimate polyphonic “reality” in their texts, Namou, Najor and Garmo resort to depictions of characters who interact on a private, personal level: parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses and lovers. By the same token, in order to describe actions that are deemed to be of primary importance in the life of the community, the three writers turn to reveal the inner workings of the nuclear family unit and its intimate social extensions. In order to do so, they all resort to introducing the wedding event, and draw from discussions and conceptions of courtship and marriage.

In Garmo’s play, the principal protagonists are the members of Najib’s immediate family. All the other secondary characters are potentially related to them by marriage. Familial disapproval of siblings’ and children’s behavior in situations that reveal values and perceptions of Chaldean marriages and weddings is a trope that animates Garmo’s play.

Although the themes of marriage and familial relations are crudely developed, they are central to the development of the play only three events that punctuate the linear unfolding of the play's actions are the changes in each of Najib's children's marital or familial status. They demarcate the first two of the three acts indicating where events begin and end in the story.

While Garmo's marriages and weddings transpire within the life of three siblings in one Chaldean nuclear family, the plot of Najor's "Bebe Khomee" transpires through the thoughts and words of three generations of Chaldean women, also in one family, with one woman symbolizing each generation. No weddings appear in the story, yet the second half, when Selma is a young woman, pivots around the theme of marriage through tracing the main protagonist's disputes with her mother about her status as a single, childless woman and through descriptions of the contrast between her life and that of her grandmother who was married and bore children at an early age. In her emblematically faulty English, Selma's mother summarizes the traditional expectations against which Selma is rebelling (Najor, 1988:20):

"You know she [Selma's grandmother] would have happiness to see you marry before she died. Who will come and see you already at twenty-four and not even engage. It is shame on our good name. What good is your college for having children that should be your life and your happiness?" She says this wearily, perfunctorily.

In "Selma's Weddings," the same familial and marital conflict is explored through the trope of the Chaldean wedding. The story begins and ends with descriptions of Selma's uncomely behavior at Chaldean weddings. Deployed symbolically in order to situate the discussion of Selma's rebellion against Chaldean protocols and social mores, the wedding trope mainly appears in order to reveal the intimate workings of the US-based Chaldean community's social life and that of their ancestors in Telkeif. In order to

broaden the descriptive context of the event, Najor constructs a sample of five different weddings in the space of ten pages. Despite the suggestive title, none of these weddings is Selma's, who rejects the concept of marriage.

The first wedding, which opens the story, introduces Selma's rebellion against endorsed behavioral roles such as not going to the open bar alone as a young woman and not arguing about sensitive political issues with men (Najor, 1992: 607). The second wedding highlights Selma's refusal to partake of the religious ceremony (she "refused to take communion at Aunty Sina's ceremony, even after the priest insisted"), and to be introduced to a potential suitor (Ibid, 608). In the third wedding, Selma gets drunk clandestinely, making a scene in the restroom that almost caused "devastation to our name," from her sister Lenna's point of view (Ibid, 611-2). Amidst the preparations for Lenna's wedding (the last to be described, more extensively than the others), their aunt Mariyam describes the details of a traditional Chaldean wedding in "Telquaif and Baghdad" (Ibid, 613). Lenna and Mariyam's wedding descriptions offer another occasion for the text to juxtapose tradition (Chaldean weddings in Iraq) with modernity (Chaldean weddings in the US).

The fifth and last wedding, Lenna's, is also created to describe a typical ceremony in a Chaldean church in Southfield, MI, and a lavish reception in a Chaldean wedding hall. It details the steps followed in arranging a US-based Chaldean wedding and the manner in which people behave during the event. The stereotypical wedding scene is moreover there to show the multiple ways in which Selma misbehaves from the perspective of her community, causing the final rupture between her rebellious character and that of her acquiescent sister Lenna.

Broader in scope than Najor's stories and Garmo's play, Namou's three novels ambitiously aim to offer a comprehensive depiction of the Chaldean family scene. The social space and dynamics of the extended family is the skeletal framework of each of Namou's novels; and the wedding, either as an event or a prospect, is its thematic building block. Like Najor and Garmo, Namou also highlights the involvement of multiple family members in the marriage decisions of one person. However, instead of accentuating the authoritative dimension of fathers like Garmo's Najib, or the rebellious character of American-raised daughters like Najor's Selma, Namou works intently to expose the subtle dynamics of persuasion that family members and the community exert upon individuals. Through lengthy descriptions, comparisons and deliberations, her characters reveal the internal conflicts experienced by Chaldean individuals as they weigh the personal choices that lie between modernity and tradition.

In *The Feminine Art*, the conflict is played out between Michael and his prospective bride Rita, two young Chaldeans from two different environments and incompatible worldviews, who are pressured into the marriage project by their families and by circumstances (Rita's status in Iraq during the post-Gulf War period of economic sanctions). The conflict also appears in Suham's unvoiced thoughts about her own marriage, her doubts and her constant comparisons between her husband George and her nephew Michael.

In *The Mismatched Braid*, Amel and Dunia's kindred families are the cause of the two cousin-lovers' first encounter in Greece (Dunia is only allowed to travel to a country where she has adult relatives) and the main reason behind their eventual breakup (through gossip, miscommunications and money matters).

The role ascribed to Mervat's family in *The Flavor of Cultures* is also pivotal. Their cultural perceptions and expectations are at the core of the dichotomy between "good girls" and "bad girls" that dictates Mervat's thoughts and actions. "I was only collecting good character traits, that's all. If not to please my family, then at least the Arabic community," Mervat confesses to her sister Layla (Namou, 2008:126).

In addition to Johnny and Mervat, central to the development of the novel's plot are the actions and words of Mervat's three sisters: Layla, Ikhbal and Nameera. Older, married and more experienced in familial matters, the three sisters come to Mervat's aid in planning and strategizing her dating escapades with Johnny. It is to her "first mentor" and sister Layla that Mervat confides her feelings and all the developments of her affair with Johnny, her first love, while seeking her "nonconforming advice" (Ibid, 31). The three sisters are also Mervat's accomplices who ensure that their strict parents remain in the dark with regard to her romantic outings. Later, when Johnny proves to be unsuitable for marriage, they console her about her failed affair.

The family also puts itself collectively in charge of deciding on Mervat's marital future when a Chaldean suitor, other than her secret boyfriend, visits with his family to ask for her hand (Ibid, 124):

After the guests had drunk their Turkish coffee and gone, my family analyzed the suitor in detail: he was short, but fairly well built, had button-shaped eyes, but exquisite lashes, a flat-nose but a masculine presence...And so it was decided the suitor wasn't suitable.

The unsuitability of the suitor "was decided," indicating the workings of an authoritative collective or unanimous decision, clearly not one that is made by Mervat alone. To illustrate the subtle hegemony of the family, Namou cites another humorous example in which the family as a whole, in an elaborate bureaucratic process, decides on behalf of

Mervat. At the age of twenty-one, when she wishes to embark on her first trip outside of the US, Mervat resorts to her sister Layla to present her case favorably before her mother, next her mother informs the father, and finally each family member gets to vote before Mervat receives her approval (Ibid, 149-51):

The vote was “Nae” from Isaam, “Yea” from Nameera, and “Half nae, half yea” from Ikhbal. With the ballots’ results so sloppy I was thankful that my father was the licensed magistrate here.

The family does not feature only in the context of decision-making in Namou’s work, but also as the main player in key social events such as the Chaldean wedding. More elaborate than the description offered in Najor’s “Selma’s Weddings,” the story of Mervat’s family is initiated in the novel through a detailed portrayal of her brother Isaam’s wedding. In thirteen pages Namou describes the intricacies of the event, from the dresses of the bridesmaids, to the local shop of the Chaldean hairdresser who fixes the women’s hairdos, the marriage ceremony at the Chaldean church, the dinner served during the reception, the music and chants sung for the bride and groom, and the rules for the “depka” danced in their honor (Ibid, 21-34).

The first exchange Mervat has with her first and only boyfriend, Johnny, also takes place at this wedding. Likewise, the novel concludes with a chance meeting between Johnny and Mervat in another Chaldean wedding. The writer’s choice of locating these chance meetings at weddings exudes a symmetry that creates a frame of opening and closure for the love story, where the public social sphere envelopes and dominates the private.

“Informal identity spaces,” writes Shryock, “are filled with things outsiders would not understand and do not need to see. For exactly this reason, however, intimate spaces are filled with things that, if outsiders are to be made ‘at home,’ they must inevitably be

shown” (Ibid, 299). The family and its prominent cultural ritual site, the wedding, are the informal, private or semi-private identity spaces that the Chaldean official identity narrative cannot and does not need to explore due to its need to preserve an official demeanor and to maintain its discourses in the public sphere. By contrast, the family and the wedding are the very stuff of Chaldean ethnic fiction. As intimate spaces, the family and the wedding are one discursive space where Chaldean fiction can make the outsider reader feel “at home” with Chaldean ethnicity. Another way in which Chaldean fiction intimately portrays ethnic identity, as we shall see next, is through representing collective cultural and behavioral imperfections, flaws and vice.

Trope 3: Flawed Chaldeanness

Since the works in question are concerned with bringing out the “reality” of their Chaldean experience, a tendency to stage aspects that Chaldeans generally consider flawed in the community’s life lies at the center of most of these works’ cultural agendas. At times these works function as social-critiques of the vices of their communities (alcoholism, gambling, drugs, gender inequality), and at others as social vindications of individuals who are victims of the unfair judgments of the overarching community (obsession with female reputation, restrictions on sexual freedom, preoccupation with keeping up appearances).

The father figure in *An Immigrant’s Dream* embodies the key vices within the stereotype of the “Eastern immigrant”. His actions are provoked by material greed; he is racist, rigid in thought, unable to be modern or accepting of change or of others, and unable to appreciate what is already in his possession.

Najib's younger son, Jack, who is characterized by the author as an "irresponsible young man," adopts the behaviors that were perceived by first-generation immigrants as the characteristic vices of their American-raised children. Jack is promiscuous: "I'm like a bee. As soon as it lands on a flower and captures its aroma, it wants to move along to another" (Garmo, 2002:33). He is also a "devil worshiper," who frequents a bar that belongs to a "satanic group" (Ibid, 85) and finally, though a lesser vice, Jack chooses to marry outside of the Chaldean family. In other words, Jack embodies the values that are most foreign to his father's generation, creating a cultural clash even between the two characters' vices.

Another problem that Garmo brings into his play (without fully integrating it with the other events) is gambling, a widespread problem in the actual life of the Michigan-based Chaldean community.¹³⁶ Najib's neighbor, Najma, is a gambler who squanders her son's money on her uncontrollable habit at the local casino.

Namou's *Flavor of Cultures* defines Chaldean vices in cases that are more clearly delineated and integral to the overall narrative. Gambling appears again as one of these vices. It is introduced as the problem from which Ikhbal's husband suffers (Namou, 2008:59). While Ikhbal's marital conflicts revolve around the problem of her husband's gambling, those of her sister Layla revolve around her husband's infidelity (Ibid, 82-3). Drug dealing and other illegal business transactions between Detroit and Ohio appear to explain Johnny's excessive wealth. His illicit involvements are also the primary cause behind the failure of Johnny's love affair with Mervat.

¹³⁶ See, for instance, the *Chaldean News*' report "Bad Bets" on this problem in the July issue of 2008. Vol. 5:6:29-30.

By introducing the character of Johnny, a young Chaldean narcotics dealer, coupled with that of his half-brother who is also involved in all sorts of illegal pursuits, Namou makes an allusion to the “Chaldean Mafia” that had monopolized the drug dealership in Detroit during the 1980s (Knox, 2008). Though this allusion may be subtle to a reader who is unfamiliar with the crime scene in Detroit, it revisits a set of events that is well-remembered by the long-term Chaldean dwellers of the east side of Detroit. The physical description of Johnny, a fair-skinned, blue-eyed young man, seems to recall that of the “Charismatic” Khairi Kalasho, or “Harry,” known as the “Drug Lord” by Chaldean gang rings. Khairi was murdered in 1989 after exterminating two strong Chaldean Mafia members in a desire to be the only source of cocaine in Detroit.¹³⁷ Other members of his gang are now either dead (murdered by other gangsters) or are serving a life prison sentence, although some local sources claim that a large-scale Chaldean Mafia is still thriving in Detroit.¹³⁸

Finally, Namou’s most thorough criticism is directed against the community’s vice of allowing appearances to become momentous determinants of individuals’ behavior. Her final work shows how this vice permeates the dynamics of Chaldean social life on many levels. Through her nuanced depiction of Mervat’s brother’s wedding scene, for example, the novel pauses briefly at some images to show how people are preoccupied with physical appearance. A relative of the bride cautions “don’t give her a real kiss and mess her makeup...Give her a fake one.’ ‘Yes, a fake one,’ another chimed” (Namou, 2008:27). The bride is also over-made. “Each strand of hair was over-teased, four huge flowers flocked the top of her veil, and from head to toe, too many layers of

¹³⁷ “Khairi Kalasho: Drug Lord 1986-1989” http://www.geocities.com/jiggs2000_us/kalasho.html

¹³⁸ “The Detroit Mafia.” (2008, January 31). *D-Tales*. <http://dtalesdtown.blogspot.com/2008/01/detroit-mafia.html>

ruffles surrounded her dress” (Ibid, 26). And when describing the wedding festivities, the narrator focuses on the details of the event as a rehearsed performance, rather than on any of the spontaneous aspects that accompany the celebration (Ibid, 29).

Appearances also preside over the affairs of the community, Namou illustrates, through the weight ascribed to women’s “reputation” and the “family name” they are unequally expected to preserve. Mervat, for example, feels “tremendous pressure” about her rendezvous with Johnny when she does not know the definite conclusion of her affair. She desires to reach a conclusion that would be acceptable to her community (Ibid, 48):

If Johnny didn’t eventually propose, it’d look as though I was tricked or used or wasn’t good enough. I’d be forever burdened with a secret that weighed twenty times more than my first kiss. It was a good thing that intricate steps had been taken to make this occasion happen.

By portraying her female protagonist’s excessive concern about her future after a single encounter with premarital love (no premarital sex was involved), Namou offers a social critique of the Chaldean community that restricts the freedom of its women in ways that are not paralleled in the behaviors of men in the same social space. Namou’s main point is that community unjustly constricts individuals’ happiness for no justifiable reason. Toward the conclusion of the novel, a while after her courtship with Johnny concludes without a marriage proposal, Mervat confesses to her sister the root of her unhappiness, “It’s true...I cannot feel. How can I when the world wears a mask, disguising happiness as sorrow and sorrow as happiness?” (Ibid, 127). The “world,” Mervat’s world, does not extend beyond the Michigan-based Chaldean community. “I didn’t feel I lived in this country. My thousands-years-old [sic.] customs were so overpowering they guided my thoughts, words and actions” (Ibid, 116).

The masked appearances, or “Eastern culture,” is what separates the narrator from a free world, or “Western liberty,” (Ibid, 59) that lies just outside her restrictive traditions and culture. The characteristic Chaldean vice for Mervat, therefore, is not one of the social problems enumerated; it is not gambling, promiscuity or drug dealing, but rather the (de)limiting cultural expectations that segregate their community from the American mainstream. “[I] wished I could just strip myself of the rules that held me apart from the rest of America...my dreams did not match my nationality” (Ibid, 43). We are, however, as we shall see next, not informed as to what exactly constitutes this “rest of America,” or the American nationality of the narrator.

Trope 4: Attenuations and Omissions

The tropes of ethnicity that I aimed to identify as a common denominator among the six Chaldean works of fiction are ones that reveal a disjunction between the model of “consent” to the American cultural mainstream presented through literature and the one presented in the official master narrative of “who the Chaldeans are”. Both models have distinct tropes (overemphasized cultural components), and both have attenuations and omissions (cultural components that are distorted or not represented), but they differ with respect to their contents.

Contemporary US-based Chaldean fiction is composed in the wake of a pre-established master Chaldean identity narrative, one that proposes itself through community leaders and influential culture-makers as non-fiction. Again, the components of this narrative, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, are:

1. Modern Chaldeans draw from an ancient Chaldean history that dates back several thousands of years (firstness/native-Iraqiness)

2. They speak Aramaic, “the language of Christ” (significance to the West/non-Arabness)
3. They are devout Catholics (goodness/non-Islam)
4. They are hardworking entrepreneurs (success/Americanness)
5. They are community and family oriented (ethnic uniqueness *and* Americanness)

As a result of the preponderance of the tropes of this master narrative in formal cultural representations of US-based Chaldeans,¹³⁹ the Chaldean fictional works are in part preoccupied with conducting and contending the fictional representations in reality through their “realistic” representations in fiction. In other words, Chaldean fiction does *not* reproduce the master narrative of Chaldeanness, but, instead, variably affirms and challenges it. A characteristic departure from the official narrative to the fiction of Chaldeanness is one that can be mapped out in terms of a shift from the “culturally particular” that is exclusive and inoffensive to Chaldeans and to the conservative American mainstream to the “culturally particular” that is inclusive and inoffensive—and even compelling—to other ethnic groups, especially to Americans who identify with ethnoracial difference (See Shryock, *Ibid*: 301-2).

For instance, the master narrative and the works of fiction discussed above share an emphasis on the role of the family in the life of the Chaldean individual, yet while the master version presents the family as an unproblematic site of unification and consolidation, the six works of fiction all reveal the inner conflicts that permeate familial life and result in alienating its members in a variety of ways. Likewise, the family store business, which features in the master narrative as a symbol of success and prototypical entrepreneurship, is deployed in the fictional works as a cover for illicit practices and a

¹³⁹ See Chapter Seven, pp. 293.

site of crime (*The Flavor of Cultures*), the cause behind the absence of the father figure from family life (“Bebe Khomee”), or the symbol of Chaldean immigrants’ avarice and backwardness (*An Immigrant’s Dream*).

Religion, the specifically “Chaldean” brand of Catholicism, features glamorously in the master narrative at once as a unifying and distinctive denominator across Chaldean culture irrespective of location and class. Yet, in five of the six fictional works, it is hardly discussed beyond its appearance in a passing reference to a “Chaldean church” or the “language spoken by Christians from Iraq.” In the one exception that broaches the topic, *The Flavor of Cultures*, religion is deployed as a site of skepticism, ridicule, anger at cultural mores and reinterpretation of widespread conceptions. Ironically, for instance, the Chaldean narrator does not find her spiritual path until her encounter with the words of wisdom of a Mexican man (Ibid, 155-6). Otherwise, Mervat confides in her reader (Ibid, 122),

I found myself loathing God for having life’s many secrets and not sharing any of them with me. It would greatly assist His so-called-children – which I assumed included me and Johnny – in creating better lives. His stinginess and game playing annoyed me and I couldn’t wait until I died so I could lash out at Him in person.

If religious references are rare in the six works, then the ancient Chaldeans and their civilization are entirely omitted from the narratives. Beyond the titular designation “Chaldean” that appears in association with the authors’ biographies or the fictitious characters or the church in which their weddings take place, the reader is told nothing about ancient Chaldean history in the course of the novel. Nor is the reader informed about the manner in which the modern Chaldeans being portrayed in these works are linked to the ancients (who are mentioned on the back cover).

This modern-ancient ethnicity continuity, as discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, is also alleged without due justification in the master narrative. Yet what distinguishes the latter from the six works of fiction is its insistence on enlisting the ancients as formative determinants in the collective identity of modern Chaldeans.

Politics, in the sense of the processes of decision-making that are attributed to nations' governments, is a component that is conspicuously absent from both fictional and official identity discourses. With the exception of Selma's rebellious propensity to "argue about the state of Palestine" (we are not told in what capacity), the three fiction writers tell us nothing about their protagonists' political viewpoints or that of their ethnic community. The official narrative tries to convey to the spectator that Chaldeans are "law-abiding people," yet it does not freely offer information on how the majority of community representatives supported the decision of George Bush's government to invade the "land of their ancestors," nor do they share with outsiders the widely expressed sentiments that Ja'far, a self-labeled "progressive" Chaldean, shared with me (Interview, July 2008):

Extremely religious [US-based Chaldean] people are generally leaning right, due to the brainwashing that occurs in Church and which is also heard from neo-con right wing political hacks.

America, with its political system, political alternatives, diverse ethnicities, mainstream culture and other components remains generally obscure in Chaldean fiction and the master narrative alike, even when their discourses aim to portray a patriotic American character or a hyphenated Chaldean-American identity. As we saw earlier in the description of how the Chaldeanness of the fictitious characters is delineated in the six works, defining the boundaries of Chaldeanness relies on designating what lies outside of

this category. In the works of all three authors the “American” appears as a symbol of alterity, indicator of the outsider Other, unworthy of a depiction beyond the indication of his/her non-Chaldeanness. A striking feature in all of these works, where the plot transpires in the US for the most part, is that no non-Chaldean American characters are depicted realistically beyond the mere physical or categorical description that indicates their alterity.

Conclusion: the Location of Chaldean Fiction

Instead of grounding the reading of the fictional texts on static notions of descent and Chaldean identity fixedness, and to avoid overemphasizing and exaggerating the ethnic particularity of their authors and protagonists, I propose the literary texts presented in this Chapter as “codes for a socialization” into the realm of ethnicity and into America (Sollors, 1986: 11). Sollors suggests that the “historical unfolding of ethnic writing” in America has been seen as a process of “growth.” He cites examples of how ethnic literature grew “from nonfictional to fictional forms,” and then from “folk and popular forms to high forms,” from “lower to higher degrees of complexity,” and from “‘parochial’ marginality to ‘universal’ significance in the literary mainstream” (Ibid, 241). If we are to situate the current developments in Chaldean literature using this paradigm of growth, we must locate the six foregoing works in a transitional stage between literary marginality and the threshold of American ethnic literature. As we saw earlier, Chaldean literature, as an expression of ethnicity, is very recent and offers a very limited sample. It is also not widely known among any category of readers. In order to attract the attention of readers of ethnic literature, those readers have to be acquainted

with the ethnic group, or at least have the desire to be acquainted with it. In the case of the Chaldean ethnicity, the process of carving out a Chaldean-specific niche (separate from Iraqi-American, Arab-American, and Middle Eastern-American literatures), depends on a symbiotic relationship between Chaldean literature and the Chaldean community, whereby each is made a little more known by the other.

In his introduction to *Off Stage/On Display*, using examples drawn from post-9/11 Arab Detroit, anthropologist Andrew Shroyck argues that (Shroyck, 2004:14),

Whenever “culture” is not the kind of thing one can showcase, in a generically positive way, in mass-mediated forms, then odds are good that, like Greeks smashing plates, it is the sort of thing Others should not be allowed to see.

This observation applies to Chaldean Detroit as well. Examples of identity components that Shroyck enumerates as likely to be omitted from public representation, such as “distinctive models of time and space, ways of holding the body, methods of sexual approach, ideas about authority, reckonings of kinship, styles of talking, notions of clean and unclean” (Ibid, 14) are all things that one does *not* find in public descriptions of the Chaldean community. However, most of these are the building blocks of the ethnic models presented in Chaldean fiction. Thus, one way to understand Chaldean fiction as ethnic literature is by recognizing it as one of the first sites where ethnic identity discursively begins to recognize, subvert, and negotiate its multicultural possibilities. Directly relevant to this is a crucial observation that Shroyck makes: “It is precisely the cultural materials that cannot be easily displayed in public formats [e.g., the enumerated above] that take on exaggerated significance in situations of pervasive multicultural contact” (Ibid, 14).

Chaldean literature that is preoccupied with representations of ethnicity is one effective site of a posited “pervasive multicultural contact.” For while Chaldean writers

engage in a dialogue with the master narrative of identity, they are simultaneously striving to enter an established American literary canon in a way that utilizes a traditional literary model of a typical ethnic life where certain components of identity tend to prevail more than others.

Since Chaldean fiction has just begun to establish itself *as* Chaldean, it has given primary attention to those elements which are closest to the writer's life; namely, to the private, personal and intimate realm of the family. It is not accidental that most omissions in the master narrative, which is public and official, are made from representations of the same realm. Sollors notes (1986: 6):

Most striking in a great variety of American texts are the persistent attempts to construct a sense of *natural*¹⁴⁰ family cohesion in the new world, especially with the help of naturalizing codes and concepts such as "love" and "generation." The conflicts between descent and consent in American literature thus can tell us much about the creation of an American culture out of diverse pre-American pasts.

"Natural," translates to "ideal" in formal Chaldean identity discourse. Recall the presentation of the family in the CCC video documentary: Chaldeans are devout Catholic entrepreneurs whose primary concern is to marry in church, maintain tight family networks and run the family business successfully. The morale is stated clearly: "we [the Chaldeans] have continuity in our community because we have family relationships; we have community relationships; we have family values."¹⁴¹

On the other hand, "natural" translates to "realistic" in Chaldean literature. In an interview with Weam Namou where I asked her about the community's reaction to certain skeptical remarks about religion and family values that appear in her latest novel, *The Flavor of Cultures*, she replied (Interview, July 2008):

¹⁴⁰ Emphasis is mine.

¹⁴¹ See Chapter Five for a discussion of family values and the CCC documentary video, p. 288.

My response to the remarks made about the passages concerning God (or any other subject) is that this is the *reality* of the culture I write about. This is what some [Chaldean] people say and do. That's why I write *true* life stories. I think they are much more fascinating than the worlds of make believe that do not necessarily benefit our universe.¹⁴²

To “benefit our universe,” the individual author feels responsible to present a piece of cultural “truth”. Makers of the official narrative, conversely, conceive of this benefit in term of presenting a *favorable* cultural picture, one that makes Chaldeans palatable to outsider spectators, something in the order of Bishop Sarhad Jammo’s statement, “Chaldeans are the foundation of everything important and religious and civil...Everything of importance was discovered by the forefathers of Chaldeans” (Jammo 2001, cited in Henrich and Henrich, 2007:77).

In sum, negotiations between descent and consent do not fall into the same tropes in the official and fictional contexts of identity representation, revealing a discontinuity between the two representational modes. To probe these discontinuities further, the concluding Chapter of this dissertation examines other representational elements that get omitted from the official narrative, ones that are not necessarily articulated through fiction, but which become marginalized in different ways.

¹⁴² Emphases are mine.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Center and Peripheries of Chaldeanness in The Age of (Re)Invented Ethnicity

...We are part of the Chaldean community. We are also part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community. We want you to know we exist and we are not going anywhere. You might not SEE us, but our alleged invisibility does not make us less real...We are speaking out because as first and second generation Chaldeans, we are still striving to find a cultural identity that encompasses equality and justice. We are Queer Chaldeans and we will not allow anyone to strip us of our identity.

Friends in Unity- Queer Chaldean Women Speak
(Anonymous Letter to the *Chaldean News*, 2008)

Introduction

Because “the roar of countervailing stories is ever present, on the edge of recognition” (Ochs and Capps, 1996), I am choosing to conclude the discussion of Chaldean identities with this quote from a collective anonymous letter that was sent to the Chaldean News by “Queer Chaldeans.” The representational demands this letter makes, viewed by the overarching composition of the Chaldean community as “cultural extremes,” characterize a fragment of the cultural periphery that the conservative-leaning Chaldean culture-makers have been laboring to suppress in recent years as they institute and stabilize the official narrative of “who the Chaldeans are” in America.

The Chaldean News never published this letter, just as it also ignored a number of letters making representational demands the recognition of which would have de-centered the official collective narrative of identity. Marita Eastomin’s reflections on the role of

official collective narratives in shaping social memory offers insights into the representational dynamics within the Chaldean community. She writes (2007:257):

While powerful institutions exert influence over what is remembered and what is forgotten and define moral positions in relation to critical events, official narratives are always vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of so called 'historical deposits,' experience that contradicts official versions...Memories and alternative stories which are not given explicit voice may live on in other ways, sometimes over a long time.

With this in mind, I conclude the discussion of identities by consolidating the official narratives of Chaldeanness specifically by looking at some contemporary auto-ethnographic sites in which they are re-articulated. I then contrast this consolidated official version with the countervailing identity stories that surround it. By so doing, I attempt to provide a working definition for the identity "Chaldean" as a *process* (Stuart 1989) that is both synchronic and diachronic in scope.

Observing Stuart Hall's warning about the binaries and polarized extremes that tend to characterize representations of minorities in Western discourses (Hall, 1997), I try also to provide a closure that does not reduce Chaldeans to fixed "types" through the construction of binary oppositions that channel complexity into two extremes (official narrative and counter-narrative). This is why I also avoid singling out the official narrative of Chaldeanness exclusively within a context of non-Chaldean discourses of identity by which it is surrounded in the US (in the national or state media, Catholic news, academic discourses on the Chaldean Church, etc.). In addition, I try to pin down some of the power dynamics between a successively more structured group of US-based Chaldean culture-makers and the oppositional Chaldean discourses that exhibit a potential to offset or upset the attempts at official identity representation.

To reiterate, then, central to concluding the discussion of the politics of Chaldean ethnicity are the omitted identity components that form the Chaldean representational margins, the cultural subalterns and, what I shall call, the *unofficial* narratives of identity. Moreover, to better situate the official narrative in its diachronic context, this conclusion also revisits some of the incipient beginnings of this identity discourse in nineteenth-century Mesopotamia, in twentieth-century Iraq, in the contexts of the National Iraqi Museum and the early native representations of the village of Telkeif.

Reappraisal

The changing relations between religion (Catholic Chaldeanness, non-Catholic Assyrianness, and the Islam of the overarching majority in the Middle East or the adjacent minority in the US), nation (Ottoman Empire, Iraq, United States) and ethnicity (Arab, Nestorian, Chaldean, Assyrian, and the numerous hyphenated variations discussed earlier) along with the sustained contact with the West, have driven segments of the Chaldean and Assyrian communities that have been settling in the United States over the course of a century to search after their ancient historical roots and to seek to foster a uniform, stabilized public image that relies heavily on Catholicism and monumental Mesopotamian symbolism.

The fact that selective representations of folklore and antiquity are being used by US-based Chaldeans to express a revived ancient-modern identity indicates the power of the politics of representation in mediating and interpreting ethnic identities in the United States. As Chapter Five demonstrated, it also indicates the emergence of a Chaldean-American elite interested in heritage attractions (Prentice, 2005) and capable of carrying

out auto-ethnographic projects¹⁴³ successfully and on a transnational scale through which the new articulations of Chaldeanness can be exported to Chaldean communities in transit and in other diasporic locales as well as back to Chaldeans in the originary country.

What follows may reveal the multiple cultural binds that resolve in inventing Chaldeanness. I will follow a line from my point of departure in Chapter Six to conclude by suggesting that a group's ethnic initiation into the American cultural mainstream is the product of multiple tensions between the stereotypically particular, i.e., the official narrative of Chaldeanness, and the ungeneralizably multiple, i.e., the fluid individual positions vis-à-vis this narrative.

Consolidation: The Ingredients of the Official Narrative

Anyone in the US interested in understanding “who the modern Chaldeans are” by directing the inquiry to Chaldeans themselves is likely to be offered a description containing some or all of the following collective identity tropes (as mentioned in Chapter Six):

- I. Modern Chaldeans are the offspring of the founders of the first civilizations, the Chaldeans and Assyrians, whose existence predates Christianity by a few thousand years
- II. They originate from the village of Telkeif, in modern day Iraq
- III. They speak Aramaic, “the language of Jesus”
- IV. They are devout Catholics
- V. They are hardworking, successful entrepreneurs
- VI. They are community- and family-oriented

¹⁴³ First coined by John Dorst (1987) as “auto-ethnography,”— a formalized and self-conscious text that a culture produces about itself but which inevitably goes beyond its creators’ conscious objectives.

The Life of the Official Narrative

The six components above are often offered as stable, uniform identity benchmarks. They appear in tabloid versions on official websites and internet forum discussions, in community publications, in documentary videos, and in the verbal accounts of culture-makers to instruct anyone – whether a non-Chaldean “outsider” or an uninformed Chaldean “insider” – who might express a desire to learn more about the Chaldeans.

On the homepage of the Chaldean Cultural Center (CCC), Mary Saroki Romaya describes the gallery project¹⁴⁴ in succinct terms that reveal the project’s desire to encompass all of the foregoing identity components (Romaya, n. d.):

Imagine stepping into an area where you could do all of the following: see what the town center of ancient Babylon was like; touch the stele on which Hammurabi’s Code of Laws were etched; walk into a sacred space and hear the “Our Father” spoken in Aramaic as Christ would have taught it to His apostles; be transported to Telkaif, or other surrounding villages, in the early 20th century to witness a bride preparing for her wedding; journey to America and view the New York skyline as early pioneers would have seen it from Ellis Island; feel the pride as you stand inside a grocery store in the 1920’s as a Chaldean entrepreneur establishes his place in the Detroit business community; learn what Chaldeans are doing today as they expand their professional horizons. How is all of this possible? Welcome to the Chaldean Cultural Center (CCC).

¹⁴⁴ which was supposed to be completed in 2004 but has been rescheduled to open for five consecutive summers, the latest of which is summer 2009.

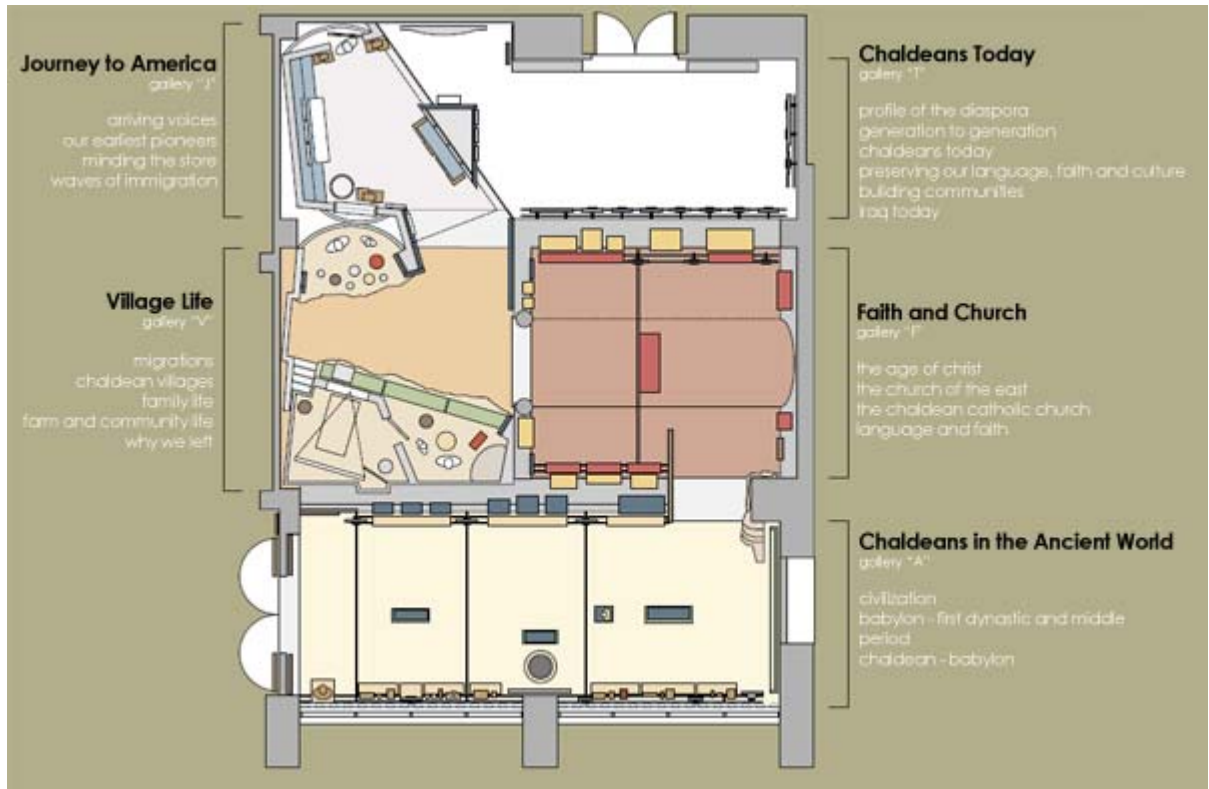


Figure 11. The latest floor plan of the CCC gallery, showing its five divisions, as it appears on the project’s official website, <http://www.chaldeanculturalcenter.org/exhibits.html>

In a similar fashion, the Chaldean Household Survey offers the most recent tabloid Chaldean narrative, but this time allegedly after a “scientific” analysis of data gathered in a study by Walsh College and United Way of Southeast Michigan (Survey 2007):

Chaldeans differ from the majority of Iraqis in three major respects: first, they are Christian rather than Muslim; second, their ancestral language is Aramaic rather than Arabic; and third, most prefer to identify themselves as Chaldeans rather than as Arabs or Iraqis. Chaldeans also trace their lineage to the Chaldean empire of Ancient Mesopotamia, whose major city was Nineveh.

Despite their interests in conveying palatable renditions of Chaldean “truth,” public narratives like these two reflect, instead, a dynamic interplay between experience, expression and aspiration. There were no questions on the multiple-choice Survey that could have elicited the assertion that “Chaldeans trace their lineage to the Chaldean empire of Ancient Mesopotamia,” nor, for that matter, is it accurate that most prefer the

Chaldean identification over the Arab or Iraqi one. Two earlier surveys, the 2000 US Census and the DAAS (2003) conducted by the University of Michigan, revealed that a considerably smaller segment of society identified as “Chaldean” or “Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac.” That figure was 32,000 in the US Census (compared to the Household Survey’s 113,000 Chaldeans in southeast Michigan alone). The DAAS, on the other hand, showed that only 15 per cent of the Arab and Chaldean American population chose to identify itself specifically as “Chaldean”, whereas the remainder of the Catholics identified in the study, 42 per cent in total, were comfortable with the identity label “Arab American” (DAAS, 2004: 6, 16).

Based on these quantitative discrepancies, among others, I analyze the text of the Chaldean Household Survey as an official *narrative* of identity, one that is capable of exerting socio-political influence but which is not necessarily accurate. As such, the “results” of the Survey are of immense importance to the understanding of ethnic identity construction in the US, irrespective of the extent to which the Survey is objectively representative. The results, even when refashioned to meet certain representational agendas, are important for a number of reasons. For one, who delineates a group’s ethnography has become a matter of significance in the case of contemporary Chaldeans’ articulation of their past, both for the Chaldeans and for the broader construal of ethnicity (Pieters, 2005). The authority they once ascribed to the representations created by European outsiders to stage their collective past in art galleries (Louvre, British Museum) and national history museums (Iraq) has shifted to auto-ethnographic projects, which are now becoming the central site of Chaldean “rituals of citizenship” (Ibid). When ethnic groups exist in an age that demands their voice in order to recognize their presence, art

and national museums can no longer sustain a definition of “Who the Chaldeans Are.” This is why Chaldean fiction is also beginning to negotiate a space for itself among the competing identity discourses. Accordingly (and it is worth noting that this is taking place after the Arab-incriminating catastrophes of September 11, 2001), the representational power of the classical ethnographic museum, national museum or national survey are giving way to at least three auto-ethnographic projects which many US-based Chaldeans find more fitting for representing them today: the Chaldean Household Survey, the CCC gallery, and the Babylon Museum.

Among the various characteristics that set these auto-ethnographic endeavors apart from other types of representations is the notion that the “community narrative” evolves from *within* the community, in response to its own situational needs, and without the superimposition of the hegemonic voice of classical ethnography. The official auto-narrative serves to anchor collective remembering—an otherwise continuously changing, ambivalent and dispersed process—in tangible, transparent sites and fixed articulations. Yet although the official narrative is shaped by members of the community, it also has the power to reshape that community. The three official narrative projects cited here mark a distinct moment of realignment in the diasporic group’s international politics and economic power relations. They involve hiring major US design and fabrication companies, the sponsorship of the media sector, the cooperation of multinational corporations and the use of “the aura of culture to attract capital” (Wallis, 1994).

Key analytical distinctions between the different ways in which experience and expression are interplayed ought to be taken into account as we examine each of the collective Chaldean identity components enumerated above. The relationship of

experience and expression to reality, according to Bruner (1986) is a complex one, consisting of three levels: *life as lived*, *life as experienced* and *life as told* (Bruner, 1986). Following Bruner, the stream of occurrences in a person's or community's life (life as lived) is always interpreted and ascribed meaning by the person or community while drawing from other sources such as previous experience and cultural repertoires (life as experienced). The framing and articulation of these experiences to others then subjects the experience to another level of understanding (life as told).

The first half of this dissertation focused mainly on Chaldean life *as lived*; i.e., on certain sets of events that occurred during recent Chaldean history and gave rise to their current affiliation with the appellation "Chaldean" and its prehistoric correlates. Chapter Two outlined the historical divisions and languages of the ancient Chaldeans, tracing the roots of the tropes of firstness, continuity and lastness. Chapter Three focused on the role of the encounter with Christian missions in coining and reinforcing the Chaldean and Assyrian appellations among different denominations of people who formerly belonged to the same Eastern Church and were characterized as a single Semitic race. Chapter Four expanded the discussion of the previous chapter by situating the same events within their Victorian context whereby Chaldean and Assyrian antiquities became an integral part of Western cultures and the ancient-new identity was further reinforced. Moving to the modern context, Chapter Five continues to explore the *life*, and to some extent the *expression* of Chaldeans through an examination of the transnational dynamics that connect the diaspora community with Chaldeans in other parts of the world. In Chapter Six we begin to discern the dominance of the expression of Chaldean identity, or Chaldean life *as told* by Chaldeans themselves, in the context of ethnic fiction. Next we

will see how competing non-fictional textual and other displays, along with personal testimonies, contribute to forming multi-threaded narratives of “who the Chaldeans are.”

The official identity components enumerated above will be discussed in the following sections: I. Ancestry, or “Firstness”, II. Telkeif, III. Aramaic, IV. V. and VI. The “Good American” Package.

I. Ancestry, or “Firstness”

The quest for meaning, for finding answers to frequently asked questions, for affixing a communal identity and establishing stature, appear in the official version guided by grand narratives of historical ideology. As Chapters Two, Three and Four tried to demonstrate, since the popularization of the ancient Assyrians and their civilization by Western missionaries and archeologists, both modern Assyrians and Chaldeans began to appropriate the history of the ancients with the claim that they are their true descendants. Ancient motifs suggesting the association between ancient and modern Chaldeans/Assyrians proliferated widely. By 1918, for instance, we find a small emblem of the Assyrian King Sennacherib (705-681 BC) on the bottom left corner of the page containing the (wrong) personal image of Maria Theresa Asmar in the aforementioned American bibliographical series that republished an excerpt of her *Memoirs of a Babylonian Princess*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ See page 125.



Figure 12. Left: the image of Maria Theresa Asmar that appears in the 1844 version of her *Memoirs of a Babylonian Princess*, showing her Ottoman-style headdress and her Arabic and English autographs on the bottom. Right: the author as imagined in a 1918 American publication, showing the image of Assyrian King Sennacherib (705-681 BC) on the bottom.

In contemporary Chaldean media, this ancient-modern visual juxtaposition is a prominent corollary of the official identity discourse in the US diaspora. It is employed to emphasize the *firstness* (whose earliest formulations were traced to the Roman Catholic Church's titular designation of "Chaldeans" in Chapter Two, and to the context of the search for origins in Victorian England in Chapter Four), and to suggest that the modern Chaldeans were themselves the native inhabitants of Iraq, long before an Arab-Muslim majority established the current nation-state and adopted a history that belongs only to the remaining small and persecuted Chaldean/Assyrian minorities.



Figure 13. Jewelry of Queen Puabi from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (c. 2600-2500 BCE). Helen Asmar from Telkeif modeled for the head of the Sumerian Queen

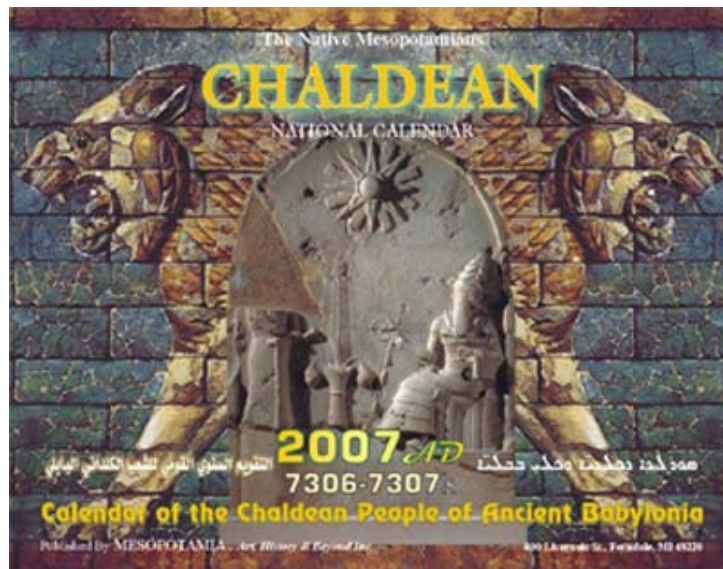


Figure 14. The Chaldean National Calendar, a publication initiated in 2002 by The Chaldean Educational/Cultural Center of America

The introduction of the Chaldean Household Survey (2007), as we saw earlier, claims that the Michigan-based Chaldeans (for whom it aims to provide a quantitative profile)

“trace their lineage to the Chaldean empire of ancient Mesopotamia, whose major city was Nineveh” (Survey, 2007:6) A telling correlate to this definition is the implicit publicity agenda of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, the producer of this Survey and the claim that earlier national and academic surveys did not represent the Chaldeans accurately. “The survey is particularly important because Chaldeans are chronically undercounted by the U.S. Census Bureau,” according to Michael George, chairman of the CFA (Chaldean News 5:5:2008, p.30).¹⁴⁶

Also in part promoted and financially sponsored by the Chaldean Chamber of Commerce is the Shenandoah Country Club section that was going to feature the exhibit gallery of the Chaldean Cultural Center (CCC). Martin Manna, Executive Director of the Chamber said the following in his 2004 speech about the gallery (Cited at “Catholic Writings,” 2004):

This [Mesopotamia] was the cradle of civilization, where the wheel was invented, where astronomy and mathematics began. The first schools, the first library, the first law. This [the gallery] gives us a chance to tell our story.

The CCC had planned to devote the entry division of the gallery to these firsts; namely, to a section entitled “The Ancient World,” where the Tower of Babylon, the Code Hammurabi and other Mesopotamian symbols would be displayed as ancestral relics.

¹⁴⁶ Also this opinion recurred in an mail interview with Martin Manna, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, June 2008. Manna’s reference was to the DAAS survey, conducted by the University of Michigan (2004), and the 2000 US Census.



Figure 15. Martin Manna for the *Detroit News*. The background is a replica of the Lion Hunt, an Assyrian stele relief from Nineveh, reproduced in Amer Fatuhi's Mesopotamian Gallery (Source: Bunkley, 2005)

The authority the Louvre and the British Museum once held over standardizing the story of Mesopotamian identities in the nineteenth century has in part transferred to the auto-ethnographic projects of contemporary Chaldeans. “We want it to be as authentic and state-of-the-art as possible,” Antone and Sarafa described their vision of the gallery (Interview, Antone and Sarafa, 2006). In 2004, during the early stages of the CCC gallery project, board members were hoping to procure Mesopotamian artifacts from various museums and antiquity dealers. Later on, however, they were admonished by various sectors about how buying such artifacts would in fact contribute to the harmful process of antiquity looting that has been taking place in Iraq since 2003. Consequently, they revised their plans by considering replicas that are “right from the original,” in place of authentic artifacts. Consultations with the Louvre and the DIA for recasting replicas of the Code of Hammurabi and other prominent Mesopotamian artifacts were underway by summer 2006.

The Babylon Museum of Native Iraqis is another auto-ethnographic exhibit project which a different group of Michigan-based Chaldeans, led by Amer Fatuhi, was

contemplating, also during the same post-9/11 period. Like the CCC gallery project, it never materialized. It was envisioned to consist of six major exhibit halls, the first three of which also focused on antiquity and on a stylized narrative of continuity (Fatuhi, 2006):¹⁴⁷

1. Ancient Mesopotamia: archeological and educational exhibit of ancient history.
2. Chaldean Chronology: Chaldean history through artifacts and textual information.
3. Jewish [sic] of Babylon Chronology, 1900 BC-Present: archeology and textual information.



Figure 16. Amer Fatuhi giving a public lecture about his Babylon Museum project. 2006. The bottom left corner includes Fatuhi's vision of the façade of the Museum. http://kaldaya.net/Meetings/AmerFatuhi/interview_Amer_Fatuhi.html

¹⁴⁷ Also, information was repeated on personal interviews with Amer Fatuhi, 2004-2006.



Figure 17. While neither the Babylon Museum nor the CCC gallery materialized, the architecture of the Chaldean Educational/Cultural Center in Detroit, MI (built 1974) also shows how modern Chaldeans are inspired by Babylonian design.

Another shared feature between the representational projects of the Household Survey, the CCC gallery and the Babylon Museum is their didactic intention. The two exhibit sites both configure a library and a space for lessons in history and Aramaic in their project plans (neither is yet to open). The Survey intends to inform the world who the Chaldeans are via “scientific research” (Chaldean News 2008: 5:5:30).

That the ancient history of modern Chaldeans is something that culture-makers have to persistently *teach* to young generations and outsiders through displays, lessons, lectures, etc. should alert us to the forgettable quality of this identity component. In other words, the non-stylized public and private presence of Chaldeans in America (at work, in school, at home, etc.) does not spontaneously evoke a correlation with Mesopotamian antiquity. Alternative identifications of numerous individuals who think of themselves as Chaldean tend to problematize this ancient-modern liaison on a regular basis. For instance, when I asked my Chaldean informants about their thoughts regarding the ancient Chaldeans, the majority expressed their confusion about their historical roots, claiming that they heard different accounts from Assyrian and Chaldean sources and that

they were uncertain whether or not they were the same as or different from Assyrians.

Nesreen, 21, answered (Interview, March 2006):

My [Assyrian] friend in Chicago told me that we're Assyrians, but we don't know it because we don't study our history as well as they do. I guess she's right. I mean, it's so complicated. When I asked the [Chaldean] priest he told me not to believe that 'cause she's wrong. The Chaldeans were there before the Assyrians. I don't know. It's so complex. I want to study our history at some point, but I have to study Aramaic first.

Another informant, Faris, 27, who grew up in Iraq, stated the same uncertainty in different terms (Interview, May 2006):

I swear they gave me a headache with this question! In school [in Iraq] they kept drilling it into our heads that Nabukhadnazar was Saddam's great grandfather, and then we come here and they tell us [Chaldean culture-makers] that we're different and we're the first and we're the best and we're the inventors of everything on earth. Of course I like the second version better [he laughs], don't you? Now, when people ask me who are you, I can philosophize and tell them how exotic I am. Americans love it when they know I speak Sureth. "Oh, you can read the Bible in the original?!" They ask me right away. "Can you say something in Aramaic please!"

A different example of ambivalence toward antiquity is that articulated by Deborah Najor, who in her presentation at a conference entitled "Mapping Arab Diasporas" (2006), opened her talk with the following provocation (Najor-Alkamano, 2006):

Born in Detroit, I am an Aramaic-speaking Iraqi-Catholic Chaldean who is a descendent of the ancient Babylonians. Why do I want to lay claim to Nebuchad-nazar, who conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and deported the Jews? Because, if I do not describe myself this way, and I contest the historical accuracy of this identity construction, then I am not a "true" Chaldean; furthermore, I am anti-Chaldean, according to those who want to police our culture and dictate the parameters of its terrain. I cannot be a Chaldean emissary because I do not 'do' Chaldean history –I only get myself in trouble.

Najor also pointed to Chaldeans' Islamophobic tendencies and to the cultural inaccuracy of their diasporic self-designation as non-Arabs. And, indeed, Najor got herself in the "trouble" she had anticipated from the Chaldean gatekeepers of culture. In the Chaldean News issue that appeared the same month during which the conference was held, Najor's views appeared in an article entitled "Ruffling Feathers: Teacher Challenges the Mainstream View." On the same page, side by side with this article, a column entitled

“The Other Viewpoint” retorted the rebuking reactions of some of the most popular culture-makers in the community (Chaldean News, 2006:3:5: 38). Amer Fatuhi, for one, asserted that Najor’s comment characterized “a very naïve viewpoint. Our nationality is not a point of view.” Furthermore, Rosemary Antone called this view “absolutely not true...We as Chaldeans came before the Jewish and Islamic religions. We were the beginning...We’ve gone to different authorities; we’ve really gone into detail and deep research and feel very confident that our accuracy is right on the money.”

This conflict of identities is not unprecedented in the US-based Chaldean community, yet its emergence into the public sphere is recent. Those who are engaging in challenging the official version of Chaldeanness publicly consider their actions “brave,” and often designate themselves as “progressive,” “dissident” or “reactionary” individuals. The majority of cultural “dissidents,” however, still prefer to voice their opinions under the cover of anonymity. After describing my dissertation project to the author of the anonymous letter I cite in the opening of the chapter, for example, she wondered if I planned to present my dissertation using a pseudonym.

In addition to the myths of ancient ancestry, the other identity components that appear in the official version are also contested by certain individuals and within the private discourses that do not appear in Chaldean public representations. Next, we look at the status of the northern Iraqi village, Telkeif, in the debates over Chaldean identity.

II. Telkeif

Historically speaking, little is told about Telkeif in the Western archeological and missionary accounts of the nineteenth century. Exceptions are the brief descriptions of its strategic location in relation to the British excavations, and the fact that the Rassam

brothers facilitated the hiring of Telkeif's men, in addition to workforce from nearby (mostly Christian) villages, to carry out British excavations. We can assume that the excavation contracts improved financial conditions in the village, and strengthened the imagined link between Telkeifis and the ancient civilizations with which they were brought into close contact. Yet it was only a few decades later, after World War I, that Telkeifis began to perceive themselves as cultural superiors to the Chaldeans of the villages surrounding them and of Mosul.¹⁴⁸ This was preeminently the result of two gradual but ongoing processes that began in the 1920s: the opening of the "Iraq Museum" mentioned earlier, which resulted in Telkeifi's early associations with ancient civilizations,¹⁴⁹ and the family-based chain migrations to the United States.

Alongside the encounters enabled by the British-assisted archeological displays of "national treasures", one of Telkeifis' earliest textual encounters with themselves as a privileged class of Chaldeans came by way of a native Chaldean's encounter with the West and with a Chaldean-American émigré community. One of the earliest local (Arabic language) histories of Telkeif, *Nineveh's Remains or the History of Telkeif*, characterized the place as (Jammo, 1993:21)

¹⁴⁸ Ironically, while Telkeifi Chaldeans in the US view themselves as cultural superiors because they are more "authentic" and "pure" than Chaldeans from the Iraqi cities, in Iraq Chaldeans from Mosul, or *Maslawis*, view themselves as cultural superiors to village dwellers, and consequently to Chaldean culture in Michigan (Interviews with various people).

¹⁴⁹ Even if the Iraqi national discourse of the time did not explicitly sanction such associations between its living minorities (which it tried to define as religious rather than ethnic minorities) and the nation-state's "antiquity treasures." The nascent Iraqi monarchy also made use of the archeological expertise of other Chaldeans who were involved in the earlier British excavations, and hired these men to set the earliest representational standards of the now "Iraqi" Mesopotamian antiquities. By the 1960s the archeological finds were fully appropriated as "regalia for the secular state," to use Anderson's language, under the supervision of the Ministry of Information. A 1975 publication, *Treasures of the Iraq Museum*, was prefaced by the Minister of Information who appropriated the finds as part of Iraq's "Arab" heritage:

The Revolution in Iraq...wishes the heritage of the past to serve as a situation to preserve the Revolution's originality, to crystallize our national character, and to characterize the part of the Arab lands in the history among the parts of other nations.
(p.7)

The only surviving heirs of Great Nineveh, and the dwellers of this town are the descendents of those who built Nineveh. They gathered there or spread around. Whether they are in Telkeif or around it, they remain indisputably the descendants of the ancient Ninevites.

Yusuf Jammo, a local of Telkeif, wrote this text in 1937 after a visit to Detroit and after the publication of his book *Six Months in America* in which he introduced the Chaldean communities in Telkeif and in Detroit to each other (Ibid, 9). Today, of the twenty or more Chaldean villages spread in and around the Nineveh Plain, Telkeif receives a special consideration in the public discourse of Chaldean-Americans. At least three Arabic language histories of Telkeif, including the abovementioned one, have been republished in Michigan within the last decade. A pamphlet published by the Chaldean Catholic Diocese of America claims that “the vast majority of the Chaldeans in the U.S. originated from the village of Telkeppe...” (Chaldean Americans: Past and Present).



Figure 18. A celebration in the village of Telkeif, early 1980s.
<http://www.mesopotamia4374.com/adad7/2.htm>

Telkeif is always at the forefront of public representations of the geographic origin of Chaldean-Americans. In an interview with the curator and Chairwoman of the CCC gallery, Rosemary Antone claimed that Telkeifies constitute eighty percent of the

Chaldeans in Michigan (Interview with Josephine Sarafa and Rosemary Antone, Ibid, July 2006).¹⁵⁰ Two years later, the Chaldean Household Survey announced publicly that ninety-five percent of Michigan's Chaldeans are Telkeifis and their descendants, but this information was withdrawn, also publicly, a month later (Chaldean News, 2008: June, July). Moreover, the section of the CCC gallery now proposed as "Chaldean Village Life" was originally entitled "Streets of Telkeif." It was later renamed when US-based Chaldeans affiliated with different Chaldean villages in Northern Iraq protested the disproportionate representation.¹⁵¹

It is not only natives of Telkeif and their descendents who carry with them this localized geographical history. Sociologist Mary C. Sengstock, academic authority on Michigan's Chaldean community par excellence, makes the following summary description of the link between the modern Telkeifis and the ancient Chaldeans in her latest publication *Chaldeans in Michigan* (Sengstock, 2005, 2, 3):

...[T]he Detroit Chaldean Community originates from a town called Telkaif...located in the Tigris River region near Mosul and the ruins of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh...Based upon this geographic origin, Chaldeans also lay claim to the "Assyrian" and "Babylonian" titles from the pre-Christian era.

Yet one could hardly criticize Sengstock's texts for abiding by a version of ancient Chaldean history that is local to southeast Michigan. Throughout her publications Sengstock's representations of Chaldean history rely on local Chaldean testimonies,

¹⁵⁰Before I could record this interview I was first asked by Sarafa and Antone if I was Chaldean, and upon answering in the affirmative, I was also questioned about my village of origin, which is not Telkeif. Throughout the interview the two ladies made the effort to qualify that the museum will represent "your people and village too," and "your customs and cuisine too," qualifications that set the tone for a discourse about Telkeifis, with the welcomed "Other Chaldeans." A differentiation was evident, but one which they sought to reconcile.

¹⁵¹ Because Amer Fatuhi who conceived of the Babylon Museum project is not of Telkeifi origins, his section of the Museum is formulated in more generic terms as the "Chaldean and Jewish [sic] of Iraqi Villages: folklore of Chaldean and Jewish Iraqi villages, or *mithwatha*."

obtained predominantly from the same institutions and individuals who are formulating the particular Chaldean ethnic profile through pamphlets, displays and other media. These same testimonies seem to have informed more recent academic discourses, such as those of a 2007 publication that calls itself an “urban ethnography” of the Chaldean community in Southfield, Michigan, where the Telkeifi descent of the community and the ancient-new connections are given prominence again (Heinrich and Heinrich, *Ibid*).

Home and the loss of home may mean different things to different Chaldeans who left Iraq in the course of more than one hundred years. Nonetheless, the official version tends to fashion a romantic image of the village of Telkeif as the prototypical “home” that presupposes a homogenous heritage for the preponderant majority of US-based Chaldeans. How home and belonging are constructed by immigrants and their offspring through narratives independent of time and space is a topic that is approached by anthropologist L. Malkki (1995). Home, in her understanding, is tied to a territorialized place that the individuals associate with “the natural order of things.” As such, we could construe Telkeif as a symbolic referent to notions of belonging and stability which the US-based Chaldean culture-makers, who are mostly of Telkeifi descent as discussed in Chapter Five, seek to reenact in the host country.

During my fieldwork among Chaldeans in Southeast Michigan, not only did I encounter scores of non-Telkeifi Chaldeans who were incensed by the under-representation of their villages in the official community discourse, “‘abalak kullitna Tilkeif” (as if we were all Telkeifis), but also numerous Chaldeans of Telkeifi descent who expressed ambivalent associations with the village. In the writings of Mikhail, a diaspora poet of Telkeifi descent who has established her reputation in the US as both an

Arab and Iraqi writer,¹⁵² the Telkeifi rubric, and the Chaldean one in general, does appear, but only tangentially, as if the narrator can only relate to the village in a detached manner from a point removed from its time and space. Unlike many US-based Chaldeans, nonetheless, Mikhail had a chance to witness the land of her ancestors in person (Mikhail, 1999:12)

I filled the tank with the gasoline of fear and memories and went to Talkef Village. I saw the Chaldeans looking after their sheep even in the time of war. In a room with no ceiling I sat watching the cocks fighting for no apparent reason...The village was smaller than a graveyard and bigger than the planet Venus which fell into the tanour [kiln] of my aunt so her bread had a flavor of roses.

In Mikhail's depiction, Telkeif appears as an isolated and anachronistic place, without a map or a history. Its Chaldean shepherds are minding their age-old business and the cocks are doing what they have always done, all out of touch with a modern war, and out of touch with significance. Aside from the "room with no ceiling", and the "tanour" where the aunt bakes the bread, the physical features of the village are nondescript. Nothing in the passage reveals monumental associations with this almost-desolate (graveyard, roofless houses) place. Standing in opposition or nonchalance vis-à-vis the overarching official narrative, Chaldean persons or voices who are indifferent to the grandeur of their heritage run the risk of marginalization from the community. Suheil, 38, who was born in a Detroit suburb to Telkeifi parents, made an insightful hypothesis about

¹⁵² Dunya Mikhail had participated in Iraqi poetry festivals and published in Iraqi journals during the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, after her immigration to the US, Mikhail's poems began to appear in anthologies of Iraqi, Arab and Arab-American Poetry, such as *Le Poeme Arabe Moderne*, *Iraqi Poetry Today*, *The Post-Gibran Anthology of New Arab-American Writing*, *New Arab Poetry*, and *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*. She gradually began to gain a reputation as a "dissident and subversive poet," an appellation that would not have been viable when she was writing under the censorship of the Ba'hist regime in Iraq. Currently she also directs the Iraqi American Center in Michigan.

the significance of Chaldeans' affiliation with their ancestral village (Interview, Detroit, Nov 2005):

If they're born there or visited when they were young, then they don't want to go back. They say America is so much better; Telkaif was so filthy and poor. But if a Chaldean is born here, all they want is to know the land of their parents and grandparents, to trace their roots...Here you feel so cut off, you know your ancestors didn't come from here, so you want to go to the old country and search for them, to know your own history, specially since it sounds exciting-Mesopotamia and all. But if you already know the reality of it, then what's the point? You'd probably just be happier if you can run away from Saddam.

As Suheil suggests, the idealization of Telkeif happens along migrant generational lines. It is a subject of intrigue for the culture-makers, most if not all of whom are American-born or raised. Those who spent a period of their life in physical proximity to the village or city of their origin are the ones who produce the least romanticized accounts of their roots. Similar propensities are witnessed in the case of the ancestral language. As we shall see in the next section, it is US-based Chaldeans who are least exposed to Aramaic's communicative instrumentality who most promote its symbolic value.

III. Aramaic

Language is one of the first components that come to mind when individuals try to enumerate what is exclusively Chaldean today. Chapter Two tried to trace the origins of the neo-dialects of Aramaic or Syriac (also known as *Sūreth* in the native tongue) that are spoken today by Chaldeans and Assyrians, while Chapter Three considered the role of the Christian missions of the nineteenth century in reviving Biblical Aramaic and consolidating the living Aramaic dialects through providing a writing system, a printing press and new font types. The discussion aimed to demonstrate that the variety refurbished today is a hybrid version, more a product of the encounter with Western

missions than with the variety spoken by Jesus. Yet the publicity value of the language of the modern Chaldeans relies heavily upon the religious associations with which they seek to imbue it.

The revival of Aramaic in the US diaspora is a relatively modern phenomenon that parallels the emergence of other inflections of Chaldeanness. An “Aramic Voice” began “broadcasting Chaldean issues in Aramaic all over the world” from a Detroit suburb in 1979 (Chaldean News, 2004: vol 1:4). Numerous publications online and in print started featuring entries in Aramaic. After 25 years of publication in Arabic, the first Iraqi newspaper in the diasporic community, ‘Al-Mashriq,’ or ‘The Orient,’ began displaying the Aramaic title atop the Arabic one (Al-Mashriq, 1975: no. 24). Businesses and community institutions such as the Chaldean Federation of America and the Chaldean Chamber of Commerce began to feature Aramaic in their logos.



Figure 19. Logo of the Chaldean Federation of America with the Aramaic title on the inside circle.



Figure 20. Logo of the Chaldean Chamber, to point out one of its symbolic affiliations, features the title in Aramaic, and the Ishtar Gate with designs of the lions of Babylon.

Country clubs, churches and youth organizations such as CARE began devising curricula for teaching the language to US-born or raised generations of Chaldeans. Chaldean churches and families in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities were reproved from Detroit for neglecting to speak the language of their heritage, for failing to “preserve” it as they should have, and for not ensuring that their children grew to speak it.

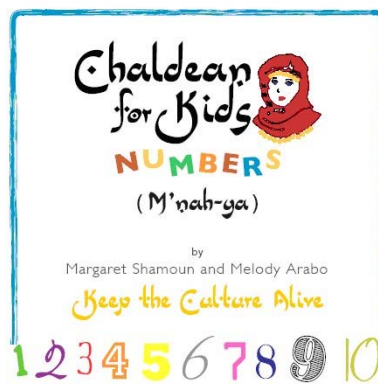


Figure 21. One of the volumes of the recent series *Chaldean for Kids* (2008), prepared by two Michigan-based Chaldean sisters.

The process by which asserting language uniqueness becomes possible predicates the emergence of a totalizing language ideology. When appropriated by the official

narrative, this ideology attains the power to institute the iconic value of Aramaic even when only a fraction of the Chaldean community can speak it (mostly without the ability to read and write it), and only a select minority, predominantly clergymen, can read and write the Biblical variety. The function of a language ideology is twofold: it facilitates the group's assertion of a link between ethnicity and language, and it constructs a context of alterity conducive to describing linguistic difference that sets the group apart from the surrounding linguistic and socio-cultural context in Iraq. In other words, it asserts Arabic-Aramaic bilingualism on behalf of the Chaldeans of Iraq. It also asserts English-Aramaic bilingualism on behalf of the Chaldeans of the US, while suppressing the fact that many Chaldean immigrants are at home with Arabic more than any other language.

Some counterviews stress this fact publicly, but their views are quickly rebuffed by supporters of the official version. For example, when Najor pointed out how many Chaldeans speak Arabic in her aforesaid presentation, her comment "infuriated [Chaldean] Mark Samano, bilingual coordinator for Hazel Park Schools, to the point where he believed she should be fired from her job." Samano's counter argument was that "when people speak Arabic it doesn't mean they are Arab. If I speak French, it doesn't mean I am French." (Chaldean News June 2006:38)

As the central component in the language ideology of Chaldean culture-makers, Aramaic attains an iconic value even when it fails to retrieve its practical communicative value (i.e., US-based Chaldeans do not read and write Aramaic, but English and/or Arabic). This is why Aramaic is mentioned once or twice in the introductory statements of English-language Chaldean novels and short stories and adorns institutions' emblems, among other cultural products, such as infants and children's apparel and toys.



Figure 22. Bib with Chaldean Alphabet

Part of the campaign to bolster the status of Aramaic within the US-based Chaldean community has resulted in the proliferation of attempts to teach it to new generations of Chaldeans. As mentioned earlier, both the CCC gallery project and the Babylon Museum envisioned their didactic role to encompass teaching the language. Moreover, in its scientific guise the Household Survey came out with a figure of 66.2 per cent for the speakers of the “Chaldean language” among the Chaldeans of southeast Michigan, with the assertion that “Chaldeans hold onto their traditions and many today still speak the Chaldean language” (Survey 2007:17). This figure is problematic for at least two reasons: 1) the Household Survey was administered in English only, thus possibly precluding the participation of recent Arabic-speaking Chaldean immigrants whose proficiency in English is still limited, and 2) it omits mention of figures of those who speak Arabic instead of Aramaic or Arabic *and* Aramaic. Three years prior to this Survey, the DAAS, which was administered in English and Arabic by bilingual interviewers, revealed that 36% of Chaldeans who reported speaking Aramaic also reported speaking Arabic, and that 15% of Chaldeans speak Arabic but no Aramaic (DAAS: 2004).

Aramaic as symbolic of linguistic uniqueness also assumes a central role in advancing political agendas of national autonomy. It is not only crucial for US-based Chaldeans for demanding autonomous representation in the upcoming US Census, but also for transnational projects that involve asserting ethno-religious independence in the new Iraqi state. This is why shortly after the demise of the Ba‘thist regime, the US-based National Chaldean Congress began to demand that Chaldean children in Iraq should be taught their “native language” (Chaldean Nation, 2002:1:1). In order “to be represented by Chaldeans and no one else” in the Iraqi Governing Council, diaspora Chaldean nationalists envisioned their task to include representing Chaldeans to the world as “one people with one language” (Shathaya, 2003). According to anthropologists Irvine and Gal’s (2000) characterization of linguistic differentiations, it is only by “tidying up” the linguistic picture in this fashion that the iconic value of language (here, Aramaic) begins to emerge, after “facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away” (Irvine & Gal, 2000: 38).

Because language ideology proceeds from a totalizing vision (Ibid), the official narrative of Chaldeanness omits mention of elements that do not fit within its functional framework. Facts such that modern day Aramaic is not the language ancient Babylonians and Assyrians spoke or wrote, and not even the one used in contemporary Chaldean liturgy, and that it is a version heavily influenced by Arabic, and that at least half of the US-based Chaldeans feel at ease with Arabic¹⁵³ are suppressed out of strategic necessity.

Of the most telling countervailing voices (although silent ones) to this narrative of linguistic identity are the facts that, a) the preponderant majority of US-based second-

¹⁵³ For example, during the period of my fieldwork I have seen at least five Michigan-based Chaldean periodicals that are published in Arabic. (e.g., Al-Qithara, Babil, Al-Sunbula, Sada Al-Watan, and Al-Mitraqa)

generation Chaldean immigrants do *not* read or write Aramaic and many do not speak it as fluently as their parents or grandparents who learned it in Iraq, and b) although many Chaldeans attend undergraduate and graduate programs in the US today, they are virtually invisible in programs and classes where academic instruction of Aramaic is available.

IV, V, and VI. The “Good American” Package: Catholicism, Entrepreneurship, and Family Values

In her study of the marketing of Latinos and their products in the US, Arlene Dávila makes the following observation (Dávila 2001: 217):

U.S. minorities are all subject to stereotyping as low-income, unskilled, uneducated, crime-ridden, unemployed, and, in some cases, as perpetual foreigners, and, whether more or less family-oriented or brand-loyal than other market segments in the United States, they are always required to prove their worth and compensate for their tainted image.

Added to these ingredients that taint US minorities’ image, conflation with the already-stigmatized Arabs and Muslims is experienced in the case of the Chaldeans; after all, they have similar physical appearance as other Arabs, act like them and speak Arabic. For this reason, symbolic fashioning, or “cultural formatting”, of descent and language, among other “uniquely Chaldean” qualities, aspire to stage Chaldean alterity in relation to other dangerously comparable groups of Arabs, Muslims and/or Middle Easterners in the US. This is what Chaldeans who do not subscribe to the official narrative witness as their community’s “racist” propensities; for racism, evoking Stuart Hall’s definition, “is a structure of discourse and representation that tries to expel the Other symbolically—blot it out, put it over there in the Third World, at the margin” (Hall 1991a:16). Concurrently with Chaldean culture-makers’ attempt to cast their community out of Arab/Muslim contexts, the rhetoric of religion, professional success, and family values assumes high

status in the official narrative in order to profile Chaldean ethnicity as compatible with the projected prerequisites of the “white” American mainstream; i.e., they aspire to stage *sameness*. This interplay between alterity and sameness, or “descent” and “consent,” to revisit Werner Sollors’ formulation (1986), is the central drama that results in forming Chaldeanness as an American ethnicity.

Catholicism in the Chaldean case assumes a medial position between sameness and difference, and consent and descent. On the one hand, it conveys that Chaldeans are Christian, just like the religious majority in America. On the other hand, it nuances their Christianity when qualification is added that Chaldeans belong to the “oldest” Christian Church, to a *unique* brand of Christianity that is almost as old as Jesus himself (recall, the Chaldean patriarchs trace their lineage to St. Thomas (c. 33 -77 AD), a contemporary of Jesus). By adding reference to the “Chaldean Church of Babylonia,” the ancient-new discourse of firstness is doubly reinforced.

This strategic portrayal is the task of the official narrative of Chaldeanness. The plan of the CCC gallery designates a special room for “the Catholic Faith.” The Household Survey introduces Chaldean “difference” from “the majority of Iraqis” by pointing out first and foremost that “they are Christian rather than Muslim” (Survey 2007:6). Not only are they Christian, explains the Survey, but also “religion is of enormous importance to members of the Chaldean community. Chaldeans are particularly proud of their heritage as one of the oldest of the Christian groups” (Survey 2007: 7). How a survey conducted through the mail could offer such a qualitative analysis of the “Chaldean community” is not explained. The quantitative portion of the study, on the other hand, argues that 59.4 per cent of all Chaldeans in southeast Michigan

attend church service regularly, with 76 per cent of these churchgoers attending mass in a Chaldean church (Survey 2007:23).

Omissions from the official narrative of Chaldeanness are more conspicuous when it comes to religion. To proceed with the example of the Survey, it is worth noting how it reports that a mere .1 per cent of all Chaldeans do not attend church at all. This is not even the percentage of those who do not subscribe to the Chaldean Catholic faith, whose numbers the Survey neglects to investigate.

Two facts about the Survey are worth pondering here in order to grasp the import of the religious identity omissions, among other omissions. First, the figures of the study are based on a mail survey that was sent out to a “Master List” of 8,739 Chaldean households, of which only 1,498 responded (Survey: 26). Based on this response rate of 17 per cent, the Survey claims “to be able to estimate the current Chaldean community as numbering 113,000 individuals” (Survey: 5). In addition to these mathematically mysterious figures (which are not justified anywhere in the Survey), the study depended on “estimates” provided by the Chaldean churches and by schools of high concentrations of Chaldeans. In other words, if there are Chaldean households with no school-age or churchgoing members, it is safe to deduce that they were *not* represented in the Survey. Second, the question of faith (e.g., do you consider yourself Christian, Catholic, etc.) does not appear. Instead, the Survey asks “Do you attend church?” (Question no. 17) and “where?” (Question no. 18). It directly omits by so doing any reference to Chaldeans who do not fit the criteria of its Christian narrative framework.

As the normative (Catholicizing) ethics of the official narrative of Chaldeanness suppress other (a/anti)religious discourses, heterodox religious expressions crowd on the

narrative's margins. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Weam Namou's last novel abounds in articulations of heterodox perspectives on Christianity, told from the viewpoint of a young female Chaldean protagonist. Outside the realm of fiction, religious conversions to other Christian denominations or marriages between Chaldeans and non-Catholics are becoming more frequent occurrences, yet they continue to exist within the realm of unrepresentative "scandals." Ragheed, 33, who married his Jewish girlfriend against his parents' will, described his experience (Interview, June 2006):

At first, I thought it would be really hard for us. The priest said he didn't want to have anything to do with it, they [his parents] said they weren't even gonna come to the wedding, mom was really upset. They were so embarrassed because they didn't know what to tell the community. They thought this never happened among Chaldean families, but when they realized that Chaldeans do this all the time these days, they softened a little. When Andy [his son] was born, things got much better. Not normal, but better.

The reaction of Ragheed's parents demonstrates the authority of the official narrative of Chaldeanness in forming Chaldeans' perceptions about what happens within their community, even when the actual events are unrepresentative. The "Queer Chaldean" whose letter opened the chapter, qualified her religious status as "spiritual." While admitting faith in God, she declines any affiliation with institutionalized religion. Yet, much as she feels obligated to conceal her sexual orientation from the community in order to preserve her "family name," she also seeks to conceal her religious views for the same reasons. To cite one last example, Ja'far (who chose this Arabic pseudonym for himself), to whom I had only directed an open-ended question regarding his identity vis-à-vis the Chaldean community, initiated his definition of self with a reference to his unrepresentative religious beliefs. "To begin, I am agnostic," he told me, "this is a huge problem in my family" (Interview, July 2008).

The intricate interdependencies between the family, religion and ethnic economy were explained within their transnational social field context in Chapter Five. In this conclusion I shed light specifically on how the official narrative represents this relationship in the US. Religion is one key component in the official narrative of identity. It is also part of the delineated package of “family values” that designates Chaldeans as “family oriented” and by extension as “good Americans.” Another important constituent of this narrative orientation toward the family and towards American virtue is presented through the depiction of Chaldeans in America as successful “entrepreneurs.” As hardworking men and women, the official discourse conveys that Chaldeans contribute to the betterment of their society and consequently their country.

A pamphlet written by Josephine Sarafa and published by the Chaldean Catholic Diocese of America, entitled “The Chaldean Americans: Past and Present” describes Chaldeans’ positive contributions to the city of Detroit, emphasizing their role in maintaining the grocery business there after entrepreneurs of other ethnicities had abandoned the city in the wake of the 1967 riots:

It has been the Chaldeans, in large part, who have provided neighborhood food shopping facilities, jobs and services to many inner city residents. Chaldean businessmen are participating in positive interaction programs with their customers and neighbors, contributing to soup kitchens, youth programs and area churches. Their contributions have been recognized and applauded by local, state and national officials and have been written up in the Congressional Record.

Defined thus, the Chaldean entrepreneurs were intended to figure in the CCC gallery, in a section entitled “the Land of Opportunity.” Of the many omissions in this homogenous representation of “Chaldean businessmen,” are the gambling problems associated with Chaldean business owners, particularly store owners whose stores sell lottery tickets (Chaldean News5:6: 2008, pp. 29-30). Another is the assortment of complaints raised by

the African American communities in whose Detroit neighborhoods Chaldeans operate many of their stores (David 2000), and the antagonism that erupts intermittently between the City Mayors and Chaldean store owners (Chaldean News 2:6:2005, p30). Moreover, the armed robberies and murders suffered frequently on the job site are also omitted (Chaldean News 2:5: 2005, pp. 24-26; David 2000), as well as the proliferation of a “Chaldean Mafia” in Detroit that had monopolized illicit drug trafficking and resulted in the death of several young individuals (Knox 2008). With all these serious consequences brushed aside, the official narrative selectively brackets the “entrepreneurial spirit” of Chaldean business owners as their emblematic attribute.

Related to this characterization of entrepreneurial success, one figure that the Survey boasts is that of the median Chaldean household income, which is estimated to be \$96,100, “well above the area median” (Survey, 5). “One reason for this,” the Survey explains, “is the fact that Chaldean households tend to be family households.” Other details the Survey reveals in order to demonstrate the well-above-average material prosperity of the Chaldean community in combination with its familial cohesiveness include Chaldeans’ “housing tenure and structure type,” their “housing value,” “fuel use,” and “business ownership.” In contrast, no questions regarding any of the aforesaid prevalent problems appear in the Survey, although it was purportedly designed to “cover just about everything” (Freer, 2005).

The “Balanced Chaldean” and More Omissions

Chaldeans are good Americans, says the official narrative, polyphonically and in an array of gestures. As immigrants, they were propelled to this land by the “American Dream,” which they quickly and repeatedly realized through their hard work and Christian ethics.

In a section entitled “Journey to America,” the CCC gallery envisions primarily communicating these “Major Concepts,” in this order:¹⁵⁴

- Most early Chaldean pioneers came for liberty, equality, and prosperity
- Early immigrants were economic entrepreneurs
- Chaldean's [sic] balanced acculturation with preserving their heritage

While “preserving heritage” amounts to conjuring symbolic referents through refurbishing certain elements from Mesopotamian antiquity, Aramaic and Telkeif, “acculturation” came to mean staging a similar stylized version of what it means to be American. Prevalent representations of this stylization are the word “American,” the American flag, American names and nicknames, proficiency in American English, and outward compliance with national policies and the US government in power.

When it comes to the expression of politics, however, the official narrative becomes reticent. The official narrative’s stance with regard to national and international politics is seldom stated explicitly. Often there is no component in the official narrative that shows how Chaldeans want to be viewed as republican, conservative, heteronormative or right-wing. However, indignant reports by Chaldeans who do *not* uphold these political stances are indicative of their prevalence among makers of the official narrative and those who endorse their values. For instance, Atto, 26, who defined himself as politically “progressive” (Interview, summer 2008), had sent a “An Open Letter to the Chaldean News” imploring them to “look at the ‘other side’ of each story” by including leftist political views, critical assessments of the consequences of the US-invasion of Iraq, among other political omissions (Atto, 2004):

So far, I’ve seen articles about the Chaldean Church Hierarchy (“A New Leader”), articles about how Saddam was a bad leader (“Abuse of Power”), and articles expressing patriotism (“Proud to be an American”). I have to say,

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.chaldeanculturalcenter.org/exhibits/comingtoamerica.html>

however, that your periodical isn't doing a good job of presenting both sides of every story...From Iraqi citizens to Chaldean Americans? One of the most important aspects of being an American is having a respect for the constitution and the country, yet at the same time questioning aspects of the government and country that seem to be going off this constitutionally-defined path. What I see from our Chaldean community and your publication in particular is a blindly patriotic mentality that is quite contrived and dangerous.

The letter was published in April 2004, but the Chaldean News did not modify its topical choices or representational politics as of yet. The cover of the first issue (Feb 2004), for instance, had represented the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church with a background that included the hanging gardens of Babylon side by side with the American flag. Subsequent issues featured large-font ads of FBI jobs (Chaldean News 1:3: 2004; 2:6: 2005), articles about Chaldean policemen in Michigan (Chaldean News 5:1: 2008), Chaldean store owners' boycotting of Miller after the beer company had used the image of Jesus in a suggestively homoerotic way (Chaldean News 4:5: 2007), and numerous depictions and articles about the Pope, the Chaldean Patriarch, and Chaldean churches and their priests.



Figure 23. Example of an FBI ad that appears frequently in the Chaldean News

These topical choices represent the *Chaldean News*' leaning toward expressing and supporting the US-based community's more conservative views about life, work ethics and religious values. Emphasis on governmental jobs and American patriotic symbolism is made in such a way as if to suggest that all the Chaldean readers of the magazine share a similar patriotic identity. Moreover, recurrent reports on the affairs of the Chaldean Church and its dealings with Rome presents Chaldean religious life in monolithic terms that stage Catholicism as the one and only possible religious affiliation to which all Chaldeans ascribe.

As the discussion of Chapter Six mentioned, explicit references to sexuality and politics are often omitted from official representations of Chaldeanness. Sexuality, unlike politics, very recently began to appear in fiction. On the other hand, by way of asserting their difference (as queer, liberal or progressive Chaldeans), a few Chaldean individuals

recently also began articulating the “heteronormative” and “(neo)conservative” thwarting expectations they encounter in their community. One example is the group of “Queer Chaldeans” who demanded to be recognized and accepted as such, also by the Chaldean News. In an interview with the letter’s author, 23, she explained (Email interview, August 2008).¹⁵⁵

I’m still navigating and re-defining what it is to be Chaldean. Most of the thought or literature out there defining “Chaldean” doesn’t represent everyone. In fact, it perpetuates the monolithic Chaldean: god fearing, assimilating into American culture, very conservative in political views, only interested in business and making money, and only interested in our own people’s affairs. I suppose I am trying to rewrite what it is to be Chaldean to encapsulate a more socially conscious and diverse identity.

That alternative voices to the official narrative exist is only to be expected, but the fact that a growing body of representatives of this Chaldean cultural “dissidence” is demanding to be recognized and incorporated in the official narrative signals the persistence of this narrative’s sway over those who challenge it from *within* the community. The question that arises forcefully is *why* do they demand to be recognized as representative Chaldeans when they disapprove of the dominant version of “who the Chaldeans are”? In other words, what prompts these individuals to redefine Chaldeanness instead of exchanging it for an alternative appellation?

Part of the answer, I suggest, is that the official narrative *does* represent individuals who assert alternative Chaldeanness, but only partially, some of the time, and in a distorted fashion. For instance Ja‘far, who rejects the Christian faith and the conservative politics of Chaldean culture-makers, still considers himself Chaldean because, he explains, “I guess for one thing, it doesn’t hurt that I really look the part.

¹⁵⁵ She chose to be dubbed “Chaldean Queer” in this dissertation because she feels that by doing so she is “breaking the definitions, and queering what it is to be Chaldean, American, a woman, a lesbian, and so on” (Email Interview, August 2008)

But in seriousness, it has been around me my entire life, this culture, this language [Aramaic], this food, traditional stories and dance, a certain attitude and way of looking at the world” (Email interview, July 2008). Ja‘far who grew up in the US, also disapproves of his family members’ tendency to act like “patriotic Americans.” Although he lists language as part of what makes him Chaldean, he regrets the fact that his family did not speak the language at home and consequently did not teach it to him. By way of tailoring a suitable version of Chaldeanness for himself, Ja‘far is learning Aramaic as an adult, and creating online Aramaic lessons for others because, he says, “I feel as though our language is just as important as any other language, and should be preserved and passed on. I’d also like to learn Iraqi Arabic one day” (Ibid).

Like Ja‘far, the “Queer Chaldean” also identifies what makes her Chaldean in terms that fall upon family and familial traditions. (Ibid, 2008):

What makes me Chaldean is that my parents are descendants of Iraq, and their religion is Chaldean Catholic, and because they raised me, these traditions and language influence my life in many ways. I was not raised speaking Arabic or Aramaic...Although I was born in Diaspora, and I have never been to Iraq, my Americanness does not supercede my Chaldeanness all the time, and vice versa. I am very interested in culture and tradition, but I feel oppressed by patriarchal, sexist, and racist attitudes perpetuated by my family and peers.

A significant issue that the “Queer Chaldean” points out is the fluid interplay between her American and Chaldean identities. This expression of fluidity—that Chaldeans are only *sometimes* Chaldean, and *at other times* American and in a variety of ways¹⁵⁶—is absent from the official narrative that presents Chaldeans and their Americanness in static terms. Another appellation that is missing from the official narrative and that often resurfaces in

¹⁵⁶ which recalls Stuart Hall’s effort to reconceptualize identity as a “process of identification” (Hall 1991a:15)

unofficial or individual representations of Chaldeanness is “Arab.” The “Queer Chaldean” adds, as she refines her definition of self (Ibid, 2008):

Personally, I am interpolated by Arab cultural signifiers (belly dancing, food, language, etc), and I call myself Arab American. If someone asks me what my ethnicity is, I say Middle Eastern/Arab, and then get specific by including Iraqi Christian, or Chaldean. The problem is that no one knows what Chaldean is. So I am constantly forced to regurgitate the monolith definition and reinforcing this equation: Iraqi+Christian-Arab (that is a minus sign). I also call myself Arab American for solidarity. If we want real peace talk in the world, I believe it is imperative that we, people of Middle Eastern decent, join, not conflating our identities, but understanding them, to fight for justice and equality.

“Solidarity,” which prompts a large number of Chaldean individuals, like the “Queer Chaldean,” to identify situationally as Arab, is precisely what the official narrative wants to invalidate in order to emphasize Chaldean Americans’ categorical difference from Arabs. This happens even when representatives of Chaldean culture seek cultural engagement with the Arab American community. For instance, for a long time Chaldeans have been active participants in the annual Arab World Festival in Detroit (established 1972), yet in the year 2000, after longstanding requests from the Chaldean American Federation, Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, Chaldean radio channel and other influential culture-makers in Michigan, the name of the festival was changed to “the Arab and Chaldean Festival” (Phone interview with Jacoub Mansour, Chaldean director of the Festival, July 2008). Although changing the name of the Festival does not reflect a change in its program, activities or audience, bringing in the term “Chaldean” to the title accentuates a sense of difference, autonomy and distance from the “Arab” component of the Festival. Concurrently, the intended impression of compatibility and cooperation between Chaldeans and Arabs is what the Festival embodies in practice.

Another example of this compatibility is double networking. A number of the Chaldeans who established Chaldean-American organizations were, or continue to be,

active members of Iraqi- or Arab-American ones, such as Wendy Acho who is the Secretary of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce board and also the treasurer of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce. Amer Fatuhi who regularly hosted Chaldean events such as the Babylonian New Year celebration in his Mesopotamia Learning Studio and Art Gallery, is also a co-founder of the Iraqi Artists' association and the active organizer of "Iraqi cultural events" that exhibit the same art works which otherwise appear in his Mesopotamian Gallery or during Chaldean art exhibits. The list goes on.

Identity, says Hall "always has ambivalence within it. The story of identity is a cover story" (Ibid, 15). In the case of the modern Chaldeans we have competing versions of the cover story. The result, I suggest by way of closing this discussion, is a dialogical process that is apt to alter the contours of the official narrative when those Chaldeans who stand at its representative periphery begin to amass a mutually recognizable majority. "I thought I was the only queer Chaldean when I started college," said the Queer Chaldean, "but now I know there are so many of us. It's exciting to know that we can unite and express our alternative views to the community." For the time being, however, "it's too early to show who we are...I don't want to hurt my dad. His name is well-known in the community" (Interview, July 2008).

As I write the conclusion of this dissertation, the official narrative stands officially unchallenged. It is witnessing the prime of its representational authority, which, in the course of defining Chaldeanness, fashions identity as a project rather than a process. The official Chaldean narrative is currently exhibiting a remarkable capacity to inhibit alternative Chaldean voices from revealing their names and belonging with ease

within their families and communities. To the same extent, it has been witnessing a remarkable success in “educating” outsiders about “who the Chaldeans are”.

Closing Remarks

The conclusion of this dissertation consolidated the Chaldean identity constituents of ancestry, originary land, language, family-values, and Americanness to explore the ways in which certain US-based Chaldeans of Telkeifi origins configure the official narrative of identity in the US and the ways in which peripheral Chaldean voices negotiate their personal belonging. The preceding chapters examined from various vantage points how the interdependent development of the exhibit projects, a community survey, international relations and cultural investments reflects the materialization and shifts in collective identity that became more easily justified with the longevity of Chaldean antiquity’s appeal in Western societies. This was especially the case when the suitable interplay between modernity (and progress) and antiquity (and heritage) were established at the discursive level. By way of seeking endorsement as an ethnic group in the US, Chaldeans not only *can*, but are *encouraged* by the receptive cultural mainstream to pose as ancient Mesopotamians and patriotic Americans at the same time. They face no authoritative objections when identifying as the “native people of Iraq” while supporting George W. Bush’s administration’s “war on terror” in their originary land; or when naming their children Sam, Sue, Al, Amy, Jack, Johnny, or Jill, while striving to teach them the Aramaic language at the same time. They are “good” American citizens: churchgoing, hardworking, heterosexual and rooted in history.

The ancient-modern interplay can also be valuated as a site of cultural enactment, or a site of “cultural formatting,” to borrow from anthropologist Andrew Shryock’s

paradigm of post-9/11 Arab-American culture in Southeast Michigan, whereby the socially intimate, private, non-transparent site is seen as an “‘off stage’ area in which the explicitly public is made, even staged, before it is shown” (Ibid, 2004:3). It is the terrain where collective knowledge is institutionalized and exhibited, where sets of “regularities” do not always correspond with individual lives yet not infrequently dictate and regulate them.

While the construction of ethnic history continues to excite controversy among Chaldean culture-makers in the US, it is important to understand the politics that give shape to people’s investments in the past. A discussion of the “uses and abuses of heritage,” by Graham et al (2005: 35) concludes with the claim “that most heritage, most of the time, and for most people is harmoniously experienced, non-dissonant and an essential enrichment of their lives” (Graham, Ashworth and E., 2005). The authors also claim that heritage is the instrument with which to contest the past, but what makes heritage a unifier of Chaldean identity today is the set of circumstances that occasion it: the need to redefine the community’s citizenship in a multicultural, post-9/11 United States, and the quest for material prosperity. Recasting *just* the right heritage opens up a new zone of cultural flux and opportunity. It is far from strange, therefore, that in these times of transition new representational strategies should come to the aid of Chaldean American culture-makers in waging the utopian identity project that is the *mélange* of progress and nineteenth-century antiquarianism.

Appendix A

Nestorian, Chaldean, and Assyrian Patriarchs of the Church of the East¹⁵⁷

1. Catholicoses of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Patriarchs of the East

Order	Patriarchic Name and Title ¹⁵⁸	Years in Office	Location of Patriarchate
1a	Mar Thoma Shilha (St. Thomas)	c. 33-c. 77	—
1b	Mar Tulmay (St. Bartholomew the Apostle)	c. 33	—
2	Mar Addai (St. Thaddeus the Apostle)	c. 33-c. 66	—
3	Mar Agai	c. 66-c. 87	—
4	Mar Mari	c. 87-c. 120	—
5	Mar Abris	c. 121-c. 137	—
6	Mar Abraham I	c. 159-c. 171	—
7	Mar Yacob I	c. 172-c. 190	—
8	Mar Ahha	c. 190-c. 220	—
9	Mar Shahioupa	c. 220-c. 240	—
10	Mar Papa bar Gaggai	c. 317-c. 329	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
11	Mar Shimun I Bar Sabba'e	c. 329- c. 341	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
12	Mar Shalidoste	c. 341-c. 342	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
13	Mar Bar Bashmin	c. 343-c. 346	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
14	Mar Toumarsa	c. 363-c. 371	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
15	Mar Qaioma	c. 371-c. 399	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
16	Mar Isaac I	c. 399-c. 410	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
17	Mar Ahhai	c. 410-414	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
18	Mar Yab-Alaha I	415-420	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
19	Mar Maana	420	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
20	Mar Frabokht	421	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
21	Mar Dadisho I	421-456	Seleucia-Ctesiphon

2. Post Ephesus Council schism (431AD) Patriarchate (Nestorian)

Order	Patriarchic Name and Title	Years in Office	Location of Patriarchate
22	Mar Babwahi	457-484	Edessa
23	Mar Aqaq-Acace	485-496	Edessa
24	Mar Babai I	497-502	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
25	Mar Shila	503-c. 523	Seleucia-Ctesiphon

¹⁵⁷ This chronology depended on several sources, none of which are complete. To ensure accuracy, I consolidated and modified the “Assyrian Patriarchs” and the “Chaldean Patriarchs” charts from Coakley (1999), Baum & Winkler (2003), Abuna (1996), and *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Patriarchs_of_Babylon#Catholicoses_of_Seleucia-Ctesiphon_and_Patriarchs_of_the_East, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Chaldean_Catholic_Patriarchs_of_Babylon.

¹⁵⁸ Great variations exist in the transcriptions of these names from the original Aramaic, Neo-Aramaic and Arabic. Some of these variations are also due to the differences between the Assyrian and the Chaldean pronunciations of the Syriac script. When possible, I tried to conform with the current Chaldean pronunciation conventions for the Chaldean Patriarchs, and the Assyrian conventions for the Assyrian Patriarchs.

26	Mar Narsai and Elisha	c. 524-c. 537	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
27	Mar Paul I	c. 537-c. 539	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
28	Mar Aba I the Great	c. 540-552	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
29	Mar Joseph I	552-567	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
30	Mar Ezechiel	570-581	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
31	Mar Isho-Yab I	582-596	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
32	Mar Sabr-Isho I	596-604	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
33a	Mar Gregorius I	605-608	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
33b	Mar Babai the Great (coadjutor)	609-628	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
33c	Mar Aba (coadjutor)	609-628	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
34	Mar Isho-Yab II	628-646	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
35	Mar Emme	646-650	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
36	Mar Isho-Yab III	650-658	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
37	Mar Guiwarguis I	661-680	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
38	Mar Yohanna I Bar Marta	680-683	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
39	Mar Hnan-Isho I	685-700	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
40	Mar Sliwa Zkha	714-728	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
41	Mar Pethion	731-740	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
42	Mar Aba	741-751	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
43	Mar Sorine	752	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
44	Mar Yacob II	754-775	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
45	Mar Hnan-Isho II	775-780	Seleucia-Ctesiphon
46	Mar Timothee I	780-c. 823	Baghdad
47	Mar Isho Bar Noun	c. 823-828	Baghdad
48	Mar Guiwarguis II	828-831	Baghdad
49	Mar Sabr-Isho II	831-835	Baghdad
50	Mar Abraham II	837-850	Baghdad
51	Mar Theodossious I	853-858	Baghdad
52	Mar Sarguis I	860-872	Baghdad
53	Mar Israel	877	Baghdad
54	Mar Anoshel	877-884	Baghdad
55	Mar Yohannan II Bar Narsai	884-892	Baghdad
56	Mar Yohannan III	893-899	Baghdad
57	Mar Yohannan IV Bar Abgare	900-905	Baghdad
58	Mar Abraham III	905-937	Baghdad
59	Mar Emmanuel I	937-960	Baghdad
60	Mar Israel Karkhaya	961-962	Baghdad
61	Mar Abd-Isho I	963-986	Baghdad
62	Mar Bar Tobia	987-1000	Baghdad
63	Mar Yohannan V	1000-1012	Baghdad
64	Mar Yohannan VI Bar Nazuk	1012-1020	Baghdad
65	Mar Isho-Yab IV Bar Ezechiel	1020-1025	Baghdad
66	Mar Eliyya I	1028-1049	Baghdad
67	Mar Yohannan VII Bar Targala	1049-1057	Baghdad
68	Mar Sabr-Isho III	1057-1071	Baghdad
69	Mar Abd-Isho II Bar Ars Autraya	1071-1091	Baghdad
70	Mar Makkikha I Bar Shlemon	1092-1110	Baghdad
71	Mar Eliyya II Bar Maqli	1110-1132	Baghdad
72	Mar Bar Sauma I	1133-1136	Baghdad
73	Mar Abd-Isho III Bar Maqli	1139-1148	Baghdad
74	Mar Isho-Yab V	1148-1176	Baghdad
75	Mar Eliyya III	1176-1190	Baghdad
76	Mar Yab-Alaha II Bar Qaiyuma	1190-1222	Baghdad

77	Mar Sabr-Isho IV Bar Qaioma	1222-1226	Baghdad
78	Mar Sabr-Isho V Bar Almassihi	1226-1256	Baghdad
79	Mar Makkikha II	1257-1265	Baghdad
80	Mar Dinkha I ¹⁵⁹	1265-1281	Baghdad
81	Mar Yaballah III Bar Turkaye	1283-1317	Maragha
82	Mar Timothee II	1318-1332	Arbela
83	Mar Dinkha II	1332-1364	Karamles
84	Mar Shimun II	1365-1392	Mosul
85	Mar Shimun III	1403-1407	Mosul
86	Mar Eliyya IV	1437	Mosul
87	Mar Shimun IV	1437-1497	Jezireh
88	Mar Shimun V	1497-1501	Jezireh
89	Mar Shimun VI	1504-1538	Rabban Hormizd
90	Mar Shimun VII	1538-1551	Rabban Hormizd

3a. Patriarchs of the East (Nestorian)¹⁶⁰

Order	Title	Years	Location
91a	Mar Shimun VIII	1551-1558	Rabban Hormizd (Alqosh)
92a	Mar Shimun IX	1558	Alqosh
93a	Mar Eliyya VI	1558-1576	Alqosh
94a	Mar Eliyya VII	1576-1591	Alqosh
95a	Mar Eliyya VIII	1591-1617	Alqosh
96a	Mar Eliyya IX	1617-1660	Alqosh
97a	Mar Eliyya X Yohanna Marogin	1660-1700	Alqosh

3b. Catholic Chaldean Patriarchs of Babylonia

Order	Title	Years	Location
91b	Mar Yohanna Sulaka (Mar Shimun VIII Sulaka)	1552-1555	Diyarbakir
92b	Mar Abdisho IV Maroun	1555-1567	Diyarbakir
93b	Mar Yab-Alaha V	1578-1580	Diyarbakir
94b	Mar Shimun IX Dinkha	1580-1600	Urmia
95b	Mar Shimun X Eliyya	1600-1638	Urmia
96b	Mar Shimun XI Eshuyow	1638-1656	Urmia
97b	Mar Shimun XII Yoalaha	1656-1662	Urmia

4a/b. Mar Shimun XIII Dinkha broke communion with Rome in 1681 and returned to the Nestorian Church

Order	Patriarchic Name and Title	Years in Office	Location of Patriarchate
98 a/b	Mar Shimun XIII Dinkha	1662-1681-1700	Kotchannes-Mosul

4b. Patriarchies of Eliyya XI-Eliyya XIII (Nestorian/Chaldean): period of negotiation and attempts to merge with the Roman Catholic Church after Mar Shimun XIII broke from Rome

Order	Patriarchic Name and Title	Years in Office	Location of Patriarchate
98b	Mar Eliyya XI Marogin	1700-1722	Alqosh
99b	Mar Eliyya XII Dinkha	1722-1778	Alqosh
100b	Mar Eliyya XIII Isho-Yab	1778-1804	Alqosh

¹⁵⁹ Commonly *Dinha* in the Chaldean dialect of Neo-Aramaic, and *Dinkha* in the Assyrian dialect of the same language. The current Assyrian Patriarch is usually referred to as Dinkha IV in English-language media.

¹⁶⁰ In the binary charts “a” stands for non-Catholic Nestorian or Assyrian patriarchs, while “b” stands for Catholic Chaldeans. Any other letters following the numbers indicate additional schismatic lines of succession.

5a. Church of the East (Nestorian-Assyrian)

Order	Title	Years	Location
99a	Mar Shimun XIV Shlemon	1700-1740	Mosul
100a	Mar Shimun XV Maqdassi Mikhail	1740-1780	Mosul
101a	Mar Shimun XVI Yohannan	1780-1820	Mosul
102a	Mar Shimun XVII Abraham	1820-1860	Mosul
103a	Mar Shimun XVIII Rouel	1860-1903	Mosul
104a	Mar Shimun XIX Benyamin	1903-1918	Mosul
105a	Mar Shimun XX Paulos	1918-1920	Mosul
105c	Mar Yosip Khnan-Ishu (coadjutor)	1918-1920	Mosul
105d	Mar Abimaleck Timotheus (coadjutor)	1920	Mosul
106a	Mar Shimun XXI Eshai	1920-1975	Mosul-Chicago, San Francisco (assassinated)
107a	Mar Dinkha IV Khanania	1976-Present	Chicago

5b. Catholic Chaldean Church of Babylonia

Order	Title	Years	Location
99b	Mar Joseph I	1681-1696	Diyarbakir
100b	Mar Joseph II Sliba Bet Ma'ruf	1696-1712	Diyarbakir
101b	Mar Joseph III Maraugin	1714-1757	Diyarbakir
102b	Mar Joseph IV Hindi	1759-1781	Diyarbakir
103b	Mar Joseph V Hindi (union with Rome ends)	1781-1828	Diyarbakir

6b. The Alqosh-based Assyrian Patriarchate (97b-100b) converted to Catholicism and accepted the authority of the Chaldean Patriarchs in Mosul

Order	Patriarchic Name and Title	Years in Office	Location of Patriarchate
104b	Mar Yohanan VIII Hormizdas	1830-1838	Mosul
105b	Mar Nicolawas Zaya'	1840-1847	Mosul
106b	Mar Joseph VI Audo	1848-1878	Mosul
107b	Mar Eliyya XIV Abo-Alyonan	1878-1894	Mosul
108b	Mar Abd-Isho V Khayyat	1895-1899	Mosul
109b	Mar Joseph Emmanuel II Thoma	1900-1947	Mosul
110b	Mar Joseph VII Ghanima	1947-1958	Baghdad
111b	Mar Paul II Cheikho	1958-1989	Baghdad
112b	Mar Raphael I Bidawid	1989-2003	Baghdad

112c	Shlemon Wardoni (apostolic administration)	2003	Baghdad
113b	Mar Emmanuel III Karim-Delly	2003-Present	Baghdad

6c. A schismatic line of Assyrian Patriarchs, the “Ancient Church of the East,” appeared in Baghdad.

Order	Patriarchic Name and Title	Years in Office	Location of Patriarchate
106c	Mar Thoma Darmo	1968	Baghdad
107c	Mar Addi II	1970-Present	Baghdad

Appendix B Appellations and Languages

Appellation	Period in Use	Main Settlement	Language Spoken	Miscellaneous Context
Mesopotamian	Various	Mesopotamia	Various	This is the generic ethnonym I sometimes use in reference to all of the groups below, especially in the historical context of Chapter One, to indicate dissociation from the religious or political denotations the other terms carry.
Assyrian (ancient)	Imperial periods: c. 2000BC-612 BC	Northern Mesopotamia (Assyria)	Akkadian, Aramaic, other.	Arabic: <i>Ašūri</i> (in reference to the ancient Assyrians only); Aramaic: <i>Āšūrāyē. Ašūri.</i>
Chaldean (ancient)	Imperial period: 612BC-539BC	Southern Mesopotamia	Akkadian, Aramaic, other.	Arabic: <i>Kildāni</i> ; Aramaic: <i>Kaldāyē</i> . Dominant ethnic group in Mesopotamia during the 8 th and 7 th centuries BC.
Babylonian (ancient)	Imperial periods: c. 1900BC-c. 539BC	Southern Mesopotamia (Babylonia)	Akkadian, Aramaic, other.	Arabic: <i>Bābilī</i> . Historically two ethnic groups, Sumerians and Akkadians, had dominated the region of the Babylonian Empires. Term is not used in reference to a modern group in the context of modern Iraq or the Diaspora.
Aramean (ancient)	c.14 th -8 th Century BC	Northern Mesopotamia	Aramaic (ancient)	Aramaic: <i>Ārāmāyē</i> . Term relevant due to the use of the Neo-Aramaic language within the modern Assyrian/Chaldean communities. Not commonly used as an ethnonym. Historically it carried connotations of paganism within the discourse of the various branches of the Church of the East.
Nestorian	c. 431-c. 1681	Urmia (Persia), Hakkari (Turkey and Iraq), Nineveh Plains (Iraq)	Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Kurdish, Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac	Neo-Aramaic: <i>Nestorāyē</i> . After the 1681 conversion to Catholicism, the Vatican discontinued the use of this term in reference to those whom it labeled “Uniate” and “Chaldean”
Uniate (Chaldeans)	1681-Present	Urmia (Persia), Hakkari (Turkey and Iraq), Nineveh Plains (Iraq)	Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Kurdish, Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac	Modern Chaldeans are one of six Uniate groups. This is the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical designation of Eastern Catholic Churches. Not commonly used outside of religious context. Currently the term carries pejorative connotation and is therefore avoided in the discourse of the Catholic Church.

Chaldean (modern)	c.1681-Present	Iraq, US (MI, CA)	Arabic, English, Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac (Sureth)	Neo-Aramaic: <i>Kaldāyē</i> .
Assyrian (modern)	c.1881-Present	Iraq, US (IL, CA)	Arabic, English, Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac	Arabic (in reference to the modern group): <i>Athūri</i> , Neo-Aramaic: <i>Ātūrāyē</i> .
Assyro-Chaldean; Chaldo-Assyrian (modern)	c. 1918-Present US Census: 1998-Present	Diaspora (Europe-US)	Various + Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac (Sureth)	Neo-Aramaic: <i>Kaldū-Āšūrāyē</i> . Ethnonym was coined by Nestorian leader Agha Petrus in exile after WWI to unite members of both Churches who were both weakened by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Members of Chaldean and Assyrian Organizations who met in Michigan in 1998 officially suggested the title “Chaldean-Assyrian” for purposes of representing both groups collectively in the US Census.
Syriac-Siryān (modern)	US Census: 2000-Present	Syria, Lebanon, Iraq	Arabic, Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac	Neo-Aramaic: <i>Sūryoyē/Sūryāyē</i> . Primarily used to refer to the language spoken by Mesopotamian Christians. It was chosen by the “Syrian Orthodox Church” as an ethnic designation to represent Levantine Christians independently from the “Syrians” in the 2000 US Census.
Christian Kurds, Christian Arabs	c.1970-Present	Iraq	Arabic, Kurdish, Neo-Aramaic/Neo-Syriac.	Politically-motivated designations promoted by the Ba‘th Party when it sought to subsume the various ethnic groups in Iraq under the Kurdish and Arab ethnicities in the national census.

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