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Unsettling the Homeland: Fragments of Home and Homeland among Iraqi Exiles in Amman, Jordan

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Abstract

For the past 30 years, imperial military invasions and political meddling in Iraq, and a long history of a repressive Ba’athist regime disfigured the nation, displaced Iraqis from their homeland, and unsettled their relationship to it. By examining the narratives of Iraqi exiles who have diverse migration genealogies, socioeconomic backgrounds, and political trajectories in Amman, Jordan, this thesis looks at how exile shapes how the *homeland* is imagined, remembered, and performed. Based on fieldwork and interviews conducted in Amman between May and September of 2017, the thesis explores: 1) Why certain narratives and elements of the past are employed, while other elements are forgotten or silenced when individual narrators reflect on home and homeland? 2) How do these elements, practices, and memories that are associated with the homeland feature in exilic life, and what does it tell us about the notion of *home*, the possibility of home-making in exile, and the role of homeland nostalgias? 3) In what way does the past and present of Iraq feature in imagining the homeland for the *future*? I propose that in contexts in which the homeland has been destroyed and disfigured by imperial aggressions and repressive regimes, *home* converges with the *homeland* in many contexts, and such convergence may be read as a strategic act confronting traumatic past(s) in the homeland and a precarious exilic present. The thesis shows that there is no singular or ‘authentic’ construction of the homeland, and rather these representations are rooted in the diverse subjectivities of Iraqi exiles, despite the Ba’athist past and the 2003 invasion being central and recurring elements that continue to inform and organize homeland narratives and imaginings in exile.

Keywords: exile, homeland, home-making, Iraqis, critical nostalgia, memory, Ba’athism, diaspora, Jordan, sensory memories, landscape and memory

For Our Wounded Homelands

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Preface

*“The smoke of war is blue
Human bones are white”*

*In the village where Tu Fu went
The fire had almost expired
He arrived knowing that words,
Like a tired horse without oats,
Would not last after so many events*

*He had come across
Battle-fields where the wind had bleached
Bones of horsemen entangled in
Bones of a steed. Grass would hide them soon!*

*Two hands warmed near a fire
The head hanging, the heart firewood*

*He had started to roam at twenty
And had not found a place to stay
Wherever he was, a burdensome war was on*

*His daughter had died in a famine
In China they said, he wrote like the gods*

*Tu Fu arrived at another village
Where kitchens emit smoke
And hungry people wait at a baker's*

*The bakers' sweating faces
Bear witness of the heat of their fires*

Tu Fu, You are, Sir, Lord of Exile

**“Tu Fu in Exile” by Iraqi Exiled Poet Sargon Boulus (1944-2007)
Translated from Arabic by Kees Nijland**

Chapter One

Introduction:

You cannot enter the Iraqi bakery/supermarket in Gardens Street, one of Amman's busiest commercial areas, without noticing her *bast-ta*. It is right there in the walkway leading to it. Right there in front of my eyes, but also invisible to many of those who frequent the area. I had not spoken to her yet, but the thick Iraqi accent she was bantering what seemed as a regular customer with alerted me right away. I paused, turned around, and there she was; her black *A'baya* [chador] would have given away her Iraqiness had it not been for the dialect. Displayed before her were *Saboon Ragqi* [olive oil soaps], prayer beads, *laleehs* [lanterns], and loofahs among many other things all brought in pick-up trucks from Baghdad as she once told, they smell of home. These were of course smuggled before *Trebil* border crossing, the only one between Iraq and Jordan, was shut down due to the rise of ISIS in Iraq after 2014 and the destruction of the highway. There is something that needs to be understood here; while these items might seem like regular household items, they nevertheless embody a much larger collective meaning that is entrenched in the memories of many Iraqis. The *laleehs* were a feature of life during the economic sanctions (1991-2003) when electricity was scarce, often coming for 3 or 4 hours a day. The *Saboon Ragqi*, with its slightly deep green color that reminds you of the color of Iraqi watermelons and their oval shape; ironically, *saboon ragqi* in Iraqi Arabic translates literally to 'watermelon soap'. The *loofahs* crocheted from

rough and dried plant fibers, often from palm trees, are essential in many Iraqi households. The moment I, as an Iraqi exile myself, laid my eyes upon these items, I had realized the banal Iraqiness they symbolized. They are the material, mass-produced, and recycled remnants of an Iraq we once belonged to. I had not been to Iraq in more than 20 years, since I left as a child with my family due to the pressures of the economic sanctions imposed by the UN under U.S pressure. And yet, it is during these conversations with Um Warda, the 55-year-old street vendor, when my hands were wandering through the past by way of these material representations of it, that I had realized there is indeed something very Iraqi about Amman; despite the frequent hostility Amman itself has had for many Iraqis for a few years after 2003.

This research examines that relationship with the homeland. It looks at how individual and collective memories of the past in Iraq, in relation to the present predicament, shape how the homeland is recollected, imagined, and performed by Iraqis from different migration genealogies, socioeconomic backgrounds and political trajectories in Amman, Jordan. What narratives and practices of the past are borrowed to represent how the homeland is imagined in the present by Iraqis from these backgrounds, and for what purposes? Where is the homeland located, and when? This is particularly relevant in the Iraqi case, for Iraq is no longer the place they had once known, as it has been disfigured and metamorphosed beyond recognition by imperial invasions, sectarian violence, and more recently the rise of ISIS and para-state militias after 2014. Walter Benjamin (1996) had written that exploring the past is a process of digging, of excavating and unsettling the layers of memory that house that past, in order to excavate what is

buried beneath. In a sense, this research is about ‘unsettling’ the homeland, and the memories upon which it is constructed. A process of unsettling that dialogically engages the past with the present, the individual with the collective, the memorial with the historical, and the personal with the ethnographic. It aims to answer: why are certain narratives and elements of the past, but also of the present, employed in situating one’s relationship to the homeland, while other elements are ignored or forgotten? How do these elements, practices, and memories that are associated with the homeland feature in exilic life, and what does it tell us about the *notion of home*, as well as the reproduction of home beyond the homeland?

The terms ‘unsettling’ and ‘fragments’ in the title of this thesis are symbolic. *Unsettling* in this context is multifaceted. First, it refers to the systematic unsettling and disfiguration of Iraq by neocolonial and imperial aggressions on Iraq since 1989, in which Iraq’s infrastructure was almost completely destroyed. Second, it speaks to the repressive politics and oppressive practices of the Ba’athist regime that disrupted and unsettled the Iraqi society since the party rose to power, as well as the politics of post-occupation governments. Third, and as a result of the two earlier facets, unsettling also refers to the ‘discursive’ unsettling of notions of home and homeland in the memories and imaginings of Iraqis, in both exile and at-home. Finally, unsettling here hits out at dominant theoretical discourses on home-making and homeland in the context of the Iraqi exilic experience, and unsettles or decentralizes dominant perspectives. As a result of these multiple layers of unsettling, what remains of the homeland are mere *fragments*, both literally and metaphorically. I use fragments here in line with Veena Das’s (2008: 5)

construction, who suggests that fragments “allude to a particular way of inhabiting the world [...] in a gesture of mourning,” for it emphasizes loss and the impossibility of these fragments to construct a total or complete image. Hence, the narratives and stories dealt with in this thesis represent fragments of the homeland that evoke feelings of mourning and loss, and do not provide a complete picture. For after all, not only has the exilic experience destabilized and reconfigured one’s relationship with the homeland, but also, the condition of post-invasion Iraq has been one that is marked by political, social, and physical/material fragmentation, in which eventually, only some fragments of the homeland remain, while others are completely lost in the rubble.

Historical and Political Context:

According to Chatelard (2009), large migration movements from Iraq can be traced back to the fall of the British-supported monarchy in 1958, after which many Iraqi monarchists left Iraq for the UK and Jordan; the ruling family in Iraq were from the same Hashemite ruling family in Jordan. That migration movement was later followed by the larger exodus of many Iraqis, particularly communists, after the rise of the Ba’athist regime in 1968 (Al-Rasheed 1994). With the rise of repressive politics under the regime of Saddam Hussein, the prolonged Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, and the following UN imposed economic sanctions from 1990 until 2003, the numbers of Iraqis migrating away, mainly into neighbouring Arab countries increased dramatically. During the Gulf War between 1990 and 1991 alone, more than 1 million Iraqis and non-Iraqis crossed into Jordan from Iraq (Chatelard 2009: 22).

Since 2003, the Kingdom of Jordan, a non-signatory state of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, has become the largest receiving country for Iraqis escaping the devastation that resulted from the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq, particularly after the rise of sectarian violence in 2006. While the migratory movement following the occupation of 2003 was indeed the largest in the history of Iraq, many Iraqis had been sojourning to Jordan for decades, and had established multiple social and economical networks; prior to 2003, there were around 200 000 Iraqis residing in Jordan (Chatelard 2009: 15). Yet, most of the Iraqis who had established a ground in Jordan before 2003 were the elite, or merchants of war, who exploited the sanctions in Iraq for monetary profit. Statistics about the population of Iraqis in Jordan after 2003 have been highly contested and debated, much like those of registered Palestinian refugees which compose 2 million of Jordan's 9 million population. According to Norway's Institute for Labour and Social Research (FAFO), there were estimated to be around 500 000 Iraqis residing in Jordan until May 2007 (Stevens 2013); the Jordanian government had claimed that the number is more than 1 million in order to acquire more international aid and funding. Having said that, the number of Iraqi refugees registered with the UNHCR in Jordan by March 2016 was around 55 000 only, while recent government statistics suggest that there are currently more than 400 000 Iraqis in Jordan (UNHRC 2016).

This discrepancy in statistics is attributed mainly to the fact that not all Iraqis registered with the UNHCR, as well as to the circular, return, and transitional migration

between Jordan and Iraq (Mason 2011: 354), particularly after the fall of the regime in 2003 (Stevens 2013: 5). Here, it is important to note that during the UN embargo from 1990 to 2003, the border between those two countries remained open, and movement was relatively easy for those who could afford it (Mason 2011: 361). However, Iraqis' access to Jordan began to be placed under heavy restrictions after the occupation, and particularly after the 2005 hotel bombings in Amman, which were claimed by several Iraqis associated with Al-Qaeda. Following 2005, Iraqis wishing to come to Jordan would have to apply for a tourist visa that was in many cases refused, particularly for young men, and those wishing to remain in the country would have to apply for a residency permit requiring them to 'invest' 150 000 USD in a Jordanian bank account or real-estate; later that amount was reduced to 20 000 USD (Mason 2011: 362). In addition to these restrictions, fear of not being able to re-enter the country forced many Iraqis to overstay their visas for years, accumulating fines of 1.5 JD per day. Recognizing the massive numbers of Iraqis who had overstayed their visas, and aiming to relieve some of the 'economical' and 'social' burden (Bjawi-Levine 2009: 75), the Jordanian government issued several pardon and amnesty decrees for all Iraqis who had overstayed their visas; basically, allowing those who wished to return to Iraq to leave the country without the financial stress or fear of legal action.

Here, it is important to touch upon the perception of Iraqis in Jordan being an economical and social burden (Seeley 2010; Stevens 2013; Saif and DeBartolo 2007; Bjawi-Levine 2009). Representing Iraqis in Jordan as an economical burden has been widely perpetuated in academic literature (see Bjawi-Levine (2009) for example), official

state narrative (see Fagen (2009) for a report by the Jordanian Ministry of Affairs identifying Iraqis as an economical burden), and popular discourse, both socially and throughout many media channels. I had heard these claims relayed to me by family members in Jordan since 2004: “the usual; *you Iraqis! You have destroyed the country! You take all of our jobs! Everything is so expensive now!* They used to shout at us” my uncle once told me while his wife was recounting an altercation she once had in a mall with a Jordanian family, in which those same claims were thrown at her. The reality is far from those claims however, as I was once told by Abu Esra, an Iraqi businessman: “*people claim that we have taken their jobs, but in reality we have opened up many jobs for them. Here, this company you are seeing, and technically any company in Jordan, I am legally required to have 70% of my employees being Jordanian. The other 30% can be anything, and so I choose to hire Iraqis.*” According to a report published by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan (Saif and DeBartolo 2007: 11), the inflation that occurred in Jordan was due to the increase in food, fuel, and housing costs that resulted from the invasion of Iraq, rather than the surge of Iraqis into the country. Iraq after all was Jordan’s primary trade partner and its largest export market until the collapse of regime in 2003. Ironically, following 2003 the United States replaced Iraq as Jordan’s main export market (Said and DeBartolo 2007: 8). More importantly, Jordan’s import of oil from Iraq at “heavily subsidized prices” nearly ceased to exist after the occupation, forcing them to import more costly oil from the international market (Said and DeBartolo 2007: 9-10).

Fieldwork and Methodology:

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Amman, Jordan between May and September 2017, employing a ‘hybrid methodology’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) including participant observation, volunteering, workshops, funding campaign, interviews, conversation circles, and recording of life-histories. I had visited Amman twice before for short trips, once in 2004 and another time in 2016, and had established networks of family and friends, some of whom I had spoken with about this research when it was in the conceptualization stage. They were extremely helpful in guiding me towards major hubs of the Iraqi community; NGOs, cafes and restaurants, and community organizations. Thus, the ‘field’ was relatively familiar to me, or so I had thought. I had intended to start the actual fieldwork once I had settled my living situation, which proved to be a stressful time: rent prices usually sky-rocket in Amman during the summer months due to the large numbers of European and North American students coming to study Arabic, as well as researchers and NGO workers. However, I did not have to wait long, on my second day in the city, and with the first encounter with local taxi drivers, my fieldwork had actually begun the moment they realized I am Iraqi from the dialect of Arabic I spoke. This reaffirmed to me something I have always discussed with my supervisor; fieldwork is not a break or rupture in time/space, it is everyday life and living, and is always enmeshed within our positionality. It is an on-going process of becoming and unfolding (Deleuze 2006). In fact, my fieldwork had started back in Canada, when I was communicating with friends and family in Jordan about the research, when I was researching through Facebook and other social media platforms for

organizations and events organized by/for the “Iraqi community” in Amman. But more importantly, the fieldwork had started when I began questioning what Iraq and the homeland meant to me as an Iraqi exile myself; for after all, I am part of that larger exilic Iraqi community, and I have always been enmeshed within it. Moreover, the fact that even while writing this thesis I am still engaged with my interlocutors and their social fields, emphasizes fieldwork as this process of unfolding. After all, as noted by D’Amico-Samuels (1991: 72), we are “never really out of the field.”

Here, it is important to highlight how the conventional anthropological approach to the field has been problematized. In a globally interconnected world, and particularly when examining transnational issues of migration, exile, and belonging, the field ought not to be imagined as simply a geographical location; a discourse that has been rooted in anthropology’s obsession with otherness, and on the separation between ‘field’ and ‘home’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 8). Instead, one ought to think of it as physically, socially, and politically open, in which knowledge in its wider definition is differentially produced and shared across borders and multiple spaces, without an inherent/essential separation between the home and the field, or an overemphasis on a constrained field. To frame it within a Gramscian context (Robinson 2005: 2), it can be argued that hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices and discourses, both popular and statist, are not produced within an isolated field, but rather borrow from and depend on interconnected locational and temporal contexts, particularly within the context of present day capitalist imperialism (Amin 2014; Spector 2007). For example, one cannot examine the current social and legal predicament of Iraqis in Amman, without travelling through both time

and space in order to discern the local and regional historical events that situates them as such in the present. This conventional approach to the field is further complicated when the ethnographer is an exile him/herself (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 17), and thus going to the field places them in a double-exile bind, or as in the case of this ethnographer, the field feels, smells, tastes, and sounds of the homeland yearned for; the homeland of an exile's memories and desires.

This position as an Iraqi exile myself unfolded differently with different groups. From one end, I was seen as a compatriot; another Iraqi with a history of *hijrah/ighdirab/nafi* and be(longings) to Iraq, and who can relate to memories of the homeland. I recall how during a conversation with a friend of my father, who used to live in the house next to us back in Baghdad, nostalgic memories of their days in university started overflowing: "*Your father and I have a long history. Allah, what days were they. Our breakfasts in Abu Nawwas before heading to university. Spending nights at each other's homes because we needed to study. The dolma your late grandmother made for us. Do you remember Shireen?*" I remembered Shireen, his daughter, of course. The memories of us playing together with her hula-hoops and my accordion in the garden of our home are some of my memories in the homeland that remain, but I have not seen her since we left Iraq. These shared memories did not only allow me to rekindle my relationship with the homeland, but it also allowed me to establish rapport with many Iraqis, like my father's friend above, who were integral in carrying out this research. However, from another end, I was different and privileged. I had not lived through the struggles of being a refugee that many of my interlocutors had lived. I have completed

the journey of migration and reached a place of relative stability, the eventual goal for many refugees in Jordan. I am studying in a Western educational institute, and I no longer hold an Iraqi passport. This became clearly evident during one of my conversations with *Suha*, one of the Iraqi organizers of *Benevolent Hands* and currently waiting to join her husband who migrated to Finland illegally with her eldest son. While asking me about my studies, Suha reflected jokingly: “*Oh what worries do you have? You have made it. We should have left Iraq since the 1990s as well, but we had hope. Why don't you take us back to Canada with you?!*” This despair is a common sentiment among many of the Iraqis I have spoken with, but also some Jordanians, who cannot imagine a future life in Jordan for several reasons, primarily economic insecurity.

Throughout the fieldwork, I engaged in interviews and conversations with 15 Iraqi women and 13 Iraqi men from different socioeconomic and generational backgrounds, as well as different migration journeys. Some had been living in Amman for a few years, while others had just arrived from Iraq a few months before escaping the rise of ISIS. This group included Iraqis who often identified themselves as part of the *muthaqafeen*, the intellectual elite; mainly artists, writers, and activists. It also included previous government and army officials of the Ba'ath Party who were given sanctuary in Jordan, as well as working-class Iraqis who identified themselves as *al-Mas-hoqeen*; the crushed or stomped upon. Most of the meetings occurred more than once, with conversations lasting between 2 to 4 hours every time, and conducted at convenient public places such as their regular cafes or workplaces, and at times in their homes. In addition, I engaged in conversations with several Jordanian men, mainly taxi drivers and

shop owners, whose narratives were important in understanding how Jordanians viewed Iraqis, particularly in the capital, Amman.

I also volunteered with three non-profit organizations that provide assistance for the Iraqi community in Amman. *Benevolent Hands* is an organization established and run entirely by Iraqi women, and provides medical assistance, food rations, and workshops for Iraqis from different backgrounds, but focusing mainly on those who have arrived recently. The organization's funding is gathered entirely from the 'more fortunate' Iraqi community in exile, as I was told by Maya, the founder of the organization who is currently based in Australia after having gained asylum. Through the women working with *Benevolent Hands*, I was put in touch with the head of a local branch of the *International Relief and Development (IRD)* agency. The organization, located in a working-class neighbourhood in Amman that is popular among Iraqi and Syrian refugees, provides similar assistance to that of the other organization, in addition to organizing summer classes for Iraqi and Palestinian children between the ages of 6 and 17. Ahmad, one of the volunteers at IRD, told me that "*it is better for these children to come here. It gives them a place to interact with other children like them, something they might be missing at their schools, especially with the bullying, but it also eases the stress on their parents ... I even bring my son here whenever his mother is tired or busy.*" After spending around a month with IRD, I was informed of another community initiative organized by an Iraqi and a Jordanian woman, and offering summer classes for Iraqi and Palestinian children, in addition to cooking, Quran, and sewing classes for their mothers. During my time there, I was able to engage with another group of younger generation

Iraqis, as well as holding an arts workshop, during which we collectively drew how we imagined and remembered Iraq.

The Role of NGOs in Jordan:

Here, it is important to briefly comment on the experience I had with the UNHCR office. Prior to conducting fieldwork with the aforementioned organizations, I had planned to conduct research at the UNHCR offices, since I was informed by several acquaintances that it is possible to meet with Iraqis who are receiving social assistance, and who are seeking asylum abroad, mainly to Canada, Australia, and the US. So on one of Amman's hottest days, I packed a few snacks and water in my backpack and headed there, expecting to conduct vigorous fieldwork. The massive organization has one entrance on each side, and is located in Khalda, one of Amman's affluent neighbourhoods. The main entrance is for the organization's staff, and is manned by a security kiosk, while the other side entrance, which requires a 5-minute hike, is for the applicants. I first decided to follow where the applicants were headed since I assumed it is there that I would be able to meet Iraqis who are visiting the organization. I was informed earlier that there is a designated waiting area, but at this time it had been cordoned off. All of the applicants were sitting on the ground outside in the scorching sun; children, elderly people, disabled men and women, and large families. I decided to join them in hopes of striking up a conversation with some of those who were here to apply. But after 4 hours, and with only a few passing conversations with non-Iraqis, I decided to try my luck the next day. This continued for 3 days, in which almost everyone

who was visiting was either Syrian, Yemeni, Somali, or Sudanese. I had been told earlier by my uncle that assistance for Iraqis has been cut, and their asylum applications has been postponed for years, in favour of the recent influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan: *“Everyone is going back to Baghdad or leaving to Turkey. They said asylum applications at the UN offices in Turkey are processed much faster, but is not true, it is all the same. Iraqis are simply no longer a priority”* he once told me.

After exhausting the unofficial channels, I decided to try approaching UNHCR officials who could put me in touch with Iraqis who frequent the organization, or with refugee camps that some Iraqis currently reside in. However, that experience turned out to be one of the most dehumanizing experiences throughout my fieldwork, highlighting the power and institutional violence such NGOs impose on refugee populations. My first point of contact was the security kiosk, which was manned by two Jordanian men who were very sympathetic and interested in my research. After having explained the research, they told me that the person responsible for external relations and research is currently visiting a refugee camp outside of Amman, and that I should come the next morning, and so I did. However, for two weeks, and being unable to get inside the compound despite the several tries and cries by the extremely sympathetic security to put me in touch with anyone, we were not successful. Finally, in a final act of desperation one of the security personnel told me: *“Forget about them, yekhreb beithom. I will tell you what to do. Go to the same waiting area you went to earlier, and pretend you are an applicant and just say you don’t have any papers on you. They should let you in to the applicants’ area.”* I tried that, but it also proved to be futile so I decided to try to find the

contact information of anyone in the administration inside, with whom I could speak directly. After a bit of searching on the internet, I was able to get the contact information of another external relations representative; a Spanish woman in her 30s. I contacted her immediately explaining the research I wished to carry out, the nature of the fieldwork, and that I have all the ethical approvals required. However, her response shocked me: *“In order to speak with any Iraqi on our premises or in refugee camps, you have to get approval from us first. You cannot just speak with anyone as you wish!”* At that moment, I was fuming. I asked her to repeat what she said in order to confirm the words I had just heard, and she did. After a short argument about the absurdity, audacity, and dehumanizing nature of what she had just said, I thanked her for nothing, and hung up the phone, not wanting to deal with the UNHCR again.

This brief conversation highlights a general condition among the NGO “industrial” complex; one that I have experienced with several other iNGOs in Amman, including *Collateral Repair* and *Caritas*, and heard from many Iraqis as well. Such organizations not only claim the bodies of these refugees, but they also claim their narratives. As one Iraqi friend told me: *“It is humiliating. It felt as an investigation not an interview,”* in reference to their asylum processes with the UNHCR office in Amman, during which their narratives of trauma and migration were not only contested, but also invalidated. A similar narrative was relayed to me by my grandmother, when a few years ago she applied with her son and his family for asylum, and was disturbed by the violence of the process. She said: *“I told them to send me back to Baghdad. I do not want your country or this. At least in Baghdad I live with my dignity intact, and I suffer with my*

people.” As Fassin (2008: 535) emphasizes, the narratives of those who have experienced a traumatic event are more than often overshadowed by those of the observer, the *testis*, since these third-party narratives are seen as being ‘objective’. Thus, this framework fits within the general language of humanitarianism, which not only produces the prototypical ‘victim’, but also coopts their experiences by way of politicized narratives of psychology and human rights, rather than narratives of solidarity and resistance (Fassin 2008: 532-534). This ‘soft politics’ of NGOs does not exist in a vacuum, but is rather tied to and embedded within the imperial projects that produced those ‘victims’ in the first place (see Abdo (2010) for a discussion on the expansion of NGOs following the colonial meddling in Iraq). But how does this reflect on homeland discourse? I would be inclined to argue that the ‘false hope’ such organizations perpetuate, coupled with the dehumanization Iraqis and others suffer throughout their dealings with NGOs, place these exile communities under more precarity. For now, neither their hopes and aspirations of security for the *future* are achieved, nor do they have security in the *present* context, nor are they able to return to their homeland for a wide array of reasons. Indeed, it leaves them in a state of “*waiting for death to come,*” as I was told by Haifa. Within this discursive and lived space, the homeland is unable to exist. “*What homeland?*” I was told by several of my interlocutors during the fieldwork, “*ask us about how we are surviving here!*”

The other part of the fieldwork was participant observation. In addition to conducting participant observation in the organizations aforementioned, I also carried out observations at Iraqi art exhibitions/galleries such as Orfali Gallery, cafes and restaurants

such as *Fawanees Café*, and multiple Ammani neighbourhoods. Walking, and experiencing the Ammani physical and public environment, particularly those frequented by Iraqis, was an essential part of this research as it allowed me to get a glimpse of the everyday life in Amman. Walter Benjamin (2009: 50) had written that walking through a road, and by extension throughout a neighbourhood or a city, uncovers the “power it commands” and unfolds the memories and narratives that are embodied within its space. The city and its physical environment becomes a witness to the real life experiences of its inhabitants, and one can suggest that the world around us “can only be [fully] realized through embodied experience” (Bruck 2005: 47). In fact, it was through strolling in the streets and malls of Amman, that I was able to meet many Iraqis who informed this research, and examine the everyday mundane practices of Iraqis in the Ammani public sphere. Thus, one ought to consider the *‘flâneur’* as a practical ethnographic practice that not only allows us to realize the power and histories of the physical environment, but also to emplace ourselves within everyday practices and discourses that are shared in those ethnographic spaces; the ethnographer becomes a self-reflexive subject (Soukoup 2012).

On Diaspora and Exile:

Prior to delving into the theoretical framework, it is critical to first discuss certain terminological usages that are not only crucial for the development of the arguments in this dissertation, but also for appropriately framing the narratives that will follow. Beginning with *diaspora*; a term that has been stretched beyond comprehension in academic and popular literature, producing what Brubaker (2005: 1) termed a theoretical

diasporization of diaspora, and a problematic ‘ambiguity’ (Butler 2001: 189). Essentially, the central problem that has been prevalent in contemporary usages of *diaspora* as an ontological structure is that it constructs a generalized, static, and homogenized category and condition (Ndhlovu 2016: 28), rather than one that takes in consideration the internal subjectivities and diversities of becoming within and between groups. To borrow from Avtar Brah, *diaspora* ignores the “historically [politically and economically] contingent genealogies of dispersal and staying put,” shaping the ‘diasporic’ experience in the present (Serpente 2015: 50). To complicate it further, it also ignores how larger political and economical structures affect groups within a ‘diasporic’ community differentially. Such construction is not only problematic in that it masks the power relations within a ‘diaspora’, for now the diaspora is viewed as a homogenous community in complete horizontal solidarity, but also between different communities and groups under the nation-state. Furthermore, literature on diasporas has often adopted a dichotomous approach, in which the diaspora is often represented as beyond the host nation-state within which they are situated; simply talking about *the* diaspora suggests that there is an authentic or original community, and an adopted one that is beyond the host-nation (Ndhlovu 2016: 30).

At the same time as the diaspora constructs an essentialized and homogenous group, the constraints placed around identifying a community as a diaspora raises another problem. As emphasized by Safran (1991) and others, the three central factors that define a diaspora are dispersion, boundary maintenance, and an orientation towards the homeland; even though the latter was contested by several scholars, further contributing

to the collapse of the term (Brubaker 2005: 5). Yet, one ought to question what the limits of these boundaries are, and who constructs them? How are we to approach the different dispersal narratives and experiences within a diaspora? And more importantly, what if there was a lack of an orientation towards the homeland? For example, would an Iraqi girl living in Amman, who does not speak an Iraqi dialect, who is not familiar with her parents' homeland, and have assimilated within the Jordanian society and culture be excluded from the Iraqi diaspora? In such instances, what happens with those who are epistemologically excluded from the diaspora?

Academic literature on Iraqi migrants, often by 'diasporic' Iraqis themselves, is no exception to this trend and appeal, and has often employed the usage of 'diaspora' to describe Iraqi communities outside of Iraq (Kadhun 2014; Jones-Gailani 2012; Degli Espositi 2017; Al-Ali 2007), despite the lack of an equivalent term in Arabic or the lack of its usages in Arabic academic or popular literature. Here, another problematic arises as the closest term to diaspora that one could think of in Arabic is *shataat*, literally meaning dispersion or disintegration, and most often used in the form *mushatateen* to describe the condition of dispersion rather than as a category. This, however, was not used by any of my interlocutors, and thus I have avoided using it in both fieldwork and writing.

These criticisms of diaspora have led several scholars to suggest alternative applications of it, such as Brah's (2005: 178) "diaspora space" and Brubaker's (2005: 10-12) approach to diaspora as a "stance" or "claim" rather than a bounded category. Nevertheless, while the term might be useful in describing a general condition, or in

specific cases such as that of the Armenian diaspora (Tololyan 1996); the fluidity and ambiguity that it has adopted, in addition to the aforementioned complexities, renders it inappropriate for the purposes of this study. Here, it is important to note that this theoretical fluidity of diaspora literature and the fluidity of diasporic identifications themselves imply a degree of security and privilege in identity-making that is not necessarily reflected in the lived-experiences of migrants. Peters (1999: 34-36) suggests that the precarious conditions produced by certain political and economic structures in host-nations gear exiles towards the maintenance of ‘primordial identities’ that are rooted in the homeland, since it is through these identities that they can survive and retain their dignity. As an alternative to diaspora, I employ *exile(d)*, or *manfa/i* in Arabic, in this study as a condition, location, and category; a term that has been widely used in popular Iraqi literature, such as in the novels of Sinan Antoon and the poetry of Sargon Bolous and Abdulwahab al-Bayati, and throughout my fieldwork. In working with the Iraqi community in the UK, Saleh (2011) has also noted the term *exile* being used.

While diaspora lays a general ontological claim over the varying ‘diasporic’ experiences, exile on the other hand can be seen as counter-hegemonic stance since it arises from and is rooted within the subjective individual experiences; it “focuses on the individual figure” as emphasized by Israel (2000: 2) and is not constrained by specific definitional boundaries. More importantly, exile is “inherently political” and establishes both a “political claim” on the migration experience, but also on the relationship to the homeland (Betts and Jones 2012: 8). Moreover, exile establishes a discursive shift away from questions of assimilation, multiculturalism, and belonging in the host-state, to one

that focuses on the relationship to the homeland, the migration experience, and the anxieties in the host-state. As emphasized further by Israel (2000: 2), exile is situated within narratives of “location and identity,” and thus takes discussions of the homeland as a point of departure. Exile holds a poetic and emotional value; it exemplifies a ‘pathos’ that “diaspora” lacks, and has an affective capacity and not simply a descriptive one (Peters 1999: 30). In whatever way we choose to define *exile*, it is always traumatic, political, alienating, and rooted in the homeland (Peters 1999: 19). It is violent and continues to eat us from the inside out, as Lebanese poet and artist Etel Adnan describes it (Tumang and de Rivera 2006: 310).

On Home and Homeland:

This orientation of exile towards the homeland requires a critical analysis of the literature on two interconnected, and yet often conflated, concepts that are at the centre of this dissertation; home and homeland. Rapport and Dawson (1998: 9) defined *home* as a cognitive state that is not tied to a physical locality, but rather as the state in which one is able to become the ‘best’ of him/herself and carry out routine everyday tasks, and yet not necessarily be in a state of happiness. In a similar vein, Brah (2005: 4) also frames home within a discourse of everyday practices, however those practices are situated within a specific locationality and are not merely cognitive. More importantly for Brah (2005: 207), the subjective experience of the sociopolitical and economic context of home might produce individuals who ‘feel’ at home, but might not necessarily be able to establish a claim over it; in such instances home can become both a ‘place of safety’ and place of

terror/danger. Alternatively, Hamid Naficy (2013: 5) suggests that while home and house can be clearly defined, *homeland* on the other hand is one of those concepts that resists strict definitional boundaries, despite being rooted in a place.

Much like exile, representations of the homeland thrive on specificity, detail, and locality in both the past and present. *Home* for Naficy (2013: 5-6) is “any place; it is temporary and it is moveable; it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination,” while the *house* is the “literal object, the material place in which one lives, and it involves legal categories of rights, property, and possession.” Thus, the material house, combined with the sense of security and emotional capacity (Brah 2005: 163) it holds might become a manifestation of being at *home*, but it is only one aspect of the many features that may constitute a place as home; home is *beyond* the house. Furthermore, Naficy (2013: 5) argues that the relationship to the homeland is not only based on a physical or “material access” to a place, but also on “symbolic imaginings and national longings.” If one was to follow this framework, the rootedness of these longings within a national narrative might be the element that differentiates between home and homeland; home-making might employ material or discursive remnants of the nation, but not necessarily the nation itself. Interestingly, this conceptual difference between home as a place of belonging and security, and homeland is not reflected in Arabic; the term *watan* is used to refer to the homeland, but also to the home characterized above, rendering home as always situated within the homeland. This is inline with Peters’ (1999: 31) emphasis that in the discourse of exile, the home is always located *within* the homeland, and thus a loss of that homeland might render exiles as homeless. Having said

that, the purpose of this research is to question those constructions of home and homeland, and the meanings that are associated with them, and interrogate how Iraqi exiles in Jordan construct their own notions of home, homeland, and exile.

One problematic that needs to be countered here is that of the conventional representation of the homeland as a mythical, nostalgic, or utopian imaginary that is not rooted in a location. For if as Kasbarian (2015: 358), Brah (2005: 165), and others suggest that the homeland is a mythical place of desire, then that would not only imply the lack of a geographical location within which that homeland is situated, but it would also suggest that the individual, collective, and familial past recollected in the representations of the homeland was simply imagined, and not experienced or lived. Such a framing would not only jeopardize the existence of the homeland itself as a materialized entity, but it would also cast into doubt the claims exiles had and continue to have towards it. It suggests that the idea of return is impossible since the homeland exists only as an imaginary structure, and not as a 'real' one with political and cultural significance, rather than situating the 'impossibility' of return within the context of imperialism, oppression and persecution, and socioeconomic conditions. More importantly, it eradicates the suffering and trauma associated with the migration journeys of exiles, by relegating it to the realm of the discursive and imagined. In reality however, the homeland is not mythical, but is rather located in both time and place, discursively and materially, lived and remembered despite the disfiguration that might happen to it, and the multiple ways in which it might be represented. While one might not be able to return to the 'nostalgic' homeland of the past, the homeland itself still holds a material and

affective value even when it might no longer correspond with our familiar memories and experiences.

Memory and Remembering:

Since narratives of the homeland in exile employ both the past and the present, it is important to provide a theoretical framework on memory-making, remembering, and forgetting; three processes that go hand in hand dialectically (Ramos 2009: 59). In the same manner in which the condition of exile brings to surface discussions around homeland and belonging, Pierre Nora (1989: 12) suggests that the loss of the “real environment” within which the past was situated reframes discussions of the past in the form of individual and collective memories. Here, memory is seen as the imaginative and material ‘persistence’ of traces from the past that are relevant for the present (Berliner 2009: 200). It is a sociopolitical and historical enterprise as emphasized by Said (2000: 178). While academic literature on memory has often segmented individual and collective memories into two different categories, it is nevertheless important to establish that individual memories also feed off the larger collective experience, and are not produced in isolation from the larger sociopolitical context. More importantly, there is not a single collective memory, but rather there may exist multiple collective memories that arise from different individual and collective positionalities and experiences in both the past and present (Halbwachs 1989). As noted by Halbwachs and Nora (1989: 8), “there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual.”

Furthermore, while individual and collective memories may parallel one another, they can also contest and contradict each other. This internal and external heterogeneity within and between different forms of memories hints at the role played by memory as a signifier of power relations between/within different groups. Edward Said (2000: 177) noted that, this role played by memory as a signifier of power relations requires a shift from merely examining what past is being remembered, towards a discussion of memory-making as a process; how and why certain ‘traces’ of the past remain and are being remembered, while others are being forgotten and silenced. Such an approach would suggest that memory ought not be examined as solely discursive (Serpente 2010: 50), but also as embodied and performed by individuals, groups, and even by the state in the form of an official narrative, propagandist and otherwise (Campbell 2014: 20). In addition, literature on remembering has also extended to examine vicarious memories (Berliner 2009: 198) or post-memory (Hirsch 2008: 156) as forms of remembering that were not experienced first-hand but rather transferred and acquired vicariously through succeeding generations. This form of recalling the past was particularly evident during my conversations with young Iraqis who often borrowed their parents’ memories in narrating and representing the homeland.

In line with Medina (2014: 483), I approach memory in this dissertation as a form of praxis that is rooted in the past, and yet situated in the present, and directed towards the future. Remembering, as well as forgetting, certain elements of the past in exile, whether collectively/publically or individually, functions as a counter-hegemonic

mechanism challenging the recurring trauma of the past and the present conditions of precarity. Within such framework, the states position as the ‘central object of memorialization’ is displaced by the collective narratives of the past by the larger community; in this context, it is the exiled Iraqi community. This is important for while theorists like Pierre Nora situate collective memory within the discourse of national identity (Anne Whitehead 2008: 150), the approach I adopt here emphasizes that collective memories might also exist in a ‘tension’ with national identity and official history (Ho Tai 2001: 915), and might contest it passionately. Here, official history does not ‘annihilate’ or destroy collective or individual memories as suggested by Nora (2001: 165), but rather exists in a dialectic relationship with the remaining ‘traces’ of the past that are harboured by the larger society. Collective memory may undermine certain national projects, as much as it might support them. As emphasized further by Said (2000: 179), collective memories are often strategically used by both the state and the civil society to serve certain political projects and aspirations. Here, dominant representations of the past, even ones that have been contested or discredited, can remain important and relevant for dominant groups, even when they have lost their social and political positions of the past (Campbell 2014: 17); this became clearly evident in conversations with former Ba’ath government and military officials.

Medina (2014: 484) further elaborates that “memory as a praxis pushes us to find the common experience of subordination under capitalism [as well as neocolonialism and imperialism] from which people relate with the past,” and thus allowing for the establishment of bonds of solidarity and community by way of collective memorialization

and remembering. Here, it can be argued that when socioeconomic and political mobility in exile is hindered and the exilic being is under multiple layers of precarity (Peters 1999: 18), then remembering becomes the only form of ‘mobility’, albeit in the past, that allows for survival and resistance in the present. We remember not only because the past is no longer replicated in the present as suggested earlier by Pierre Nora, but because in remembering there is also survival. Remembering becomes the only remaining mechanism to make sense of our being and the surrounding world. As will be evident in later chapters, remembering is not merely discursive or imaginative, but also materially sensed, embodied, and performed, such as in the form of commemorative practices that not only resist the work of time and forgetting of certain memories within the group that experienced said past, but also works to preserve and transfer those memories vicariously and through generations (Campbell 2014: 76).

Here, forgetting ought not to be examined as an individual failure, but rather as a strategic process of erasure and silencing that is often carried out by dominant groups. In his seminal essay on forgetting, Paul Connerton (2008) identified seven types of forgetting, three of which are relevant for this research; repressive erasure, prescriptive forgetting, and humiliated silence. Since collective memories can be ruptured by history, repressive erasure denies “the fact of a historical rupture” and may function as a hegemonic mechanism “to bring about a historical break” covertly (Connerton 2008: 60). While Connerton argues that repressive erasure might not be violent, I nevertheless suggest that since any form of erasure entails the silencing of certain voices and narrative, then by extension it is also violent despite the possible absence of physical forms of

violence or force. This form of forgetting will be evident in chapter two on memories of the war experience of the Iran-Iraq war, and the systematic production of the Iraqi self through the state's narrative of the war. The second type of forgetting is 'prescriptive', which is seen as a 'publicly acknowledged' form of erasure that is in the interest of the larger society. While both of the aforementioned types are carried out primarily by the state or government, the third type, "forgetting as humiliated silence", is seen as a more individual process in which silence and forgetfulness becomes a form of survival and preservation of one's dignity, much like remembering is in other instances. This last type is particularly relevant in this context of traumatic experiences, for as Caruth (1995: 202) suggests, acknowledging the *realness* of trauma may produce a condition of 'absolute numbing,' and thus if the past itself is that of trauma then one can argue that forgetting and silencing it becomes a form of numbing that maintains ones being as a whole.

Chapter Breakdown:

Each of the chapters in this thesis begins with a poem by an exiled Iraqi poet that speaks to certain themes on exile and about/from the homeland that emerge in the narratives of the people I have spoken with. These poems ought not to be critiqued or analyzed in the space of this thesis, but rather to be read as part of the larger experience of exile for Iraqi men and women. Chapter Two looks at the narratives of Tarek and Sabah, two former Ba'ath officials who have been exiled to Jordan, with whom I had multiple conversations in an Iraqi café in Amman. In that chapter, the role of the official Ba'ath state narrative and the experience of the 'Iran-Iraq' war emerges as a central

theme in the homeland reproductions of these two men. These narratives, which converge to a great extent with the official narrative of the Ba'athist regime, are juxtaposed and read concurrently with Jamal's recollections, an Iraqi artist and writer from the South of Iraq, whose memories and experiences of the Iran-Iraq war construct the homeland differently in relation to those of Sabah and Tarek.

Following that, Chapter Three focuses on the life-history of Um Warda, an Iraqi street-vendor, as well as Leila and Yasmine, whom during our multiple conversations, themes of the neighbourhood and urban space, sectarianism, and the economic and legal precarity of life in Amman emerge in shaping their relationship with the homeland. In that chapter, the role of nostalgia as a form of praxis and coping mechanism with the loss of the homeland is approached critically and theoretically within the particular experience of Iraqi exiles. The chapter looks at how gender and socioeconomic conditions work in remembering of the past, and the constructions of homeland imaginings.

Chapter Four is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I return to Jamal and his wife Sura, to discuss how the homeland is reimagined in relation to their present exilic life in Amman. In this part, I look at how sensory memories of smell and taste, as well as the memories of the landscapes of their past(s), emerge as evocative elements in the reconstruction of the homeland, and I argue in defense of sentimentality. In the second part of this chapter, I engage with Samir, an Iraqi writer who left Iraq in the mid-1990s for New Zealand, only to return to Amman after a few years. This part illuminates how a double-exile, as well as a first and final return to the homeland following exile,

situate one's relationship to the homeland differently. The narrative of Fahmi, an Iraqi engineer who had been living in Amman for more than 20 years is also introduced in this part of the chapter. His experience illuminate's important ways of thinking of exile and homing-desires. In both of their recollections and stories, I examine how Iraq's ancient history and natural landscape emerge as key elements of homeland reproduction, and I engage with literature on landscape and memory.

In addition, in all of the chapters there were several recurring theoretical themes that are essential in understanding the narratives of my interlocutors, such as nostalgia and affect, forms of remembering and forgetting, and class and nationalist discourse. The final chapter in this thesis looks at some of the difficulties of writing about exile from exile, and tries to tie all of the chapters together in order to unearth and highlight alternative ways of thinking about both exile and the homeland within the context of the Iraqi experience. The chapter also mentions some drawbacks of this thesis and proposes future directions to which this analysis on exile and homeland may be taken. Finally, it is important to mention here that the narratives provided in this thesis do not encompass the entirety of the ethnographic data collected, for I have completed interviews and workshops with Iraqi youth, conversations with retired Iraqi men, and other interviews with Iraqi men and women that will be incorporated into future projects.

Chapter Two

*I took a brush
Immersed in death
And drew a window
On war's wall
I opened it
Searching
For something
But
I saw another war
And a mother
Weaving a shroud
For the dead man
Still in her womb*

When I Was Torn by War (Baghdad, 1990)
From "The Baghdad Blues" by Iraqi poet Sinan Antoon

Introduction:

For many decades, traditional coffee shop, or *Maqha/Qahwa*, culture has been an integral everyday practice in the lives of many Iraqi men, particularly in the cosmopolitan society of Baghdad, in which the café became a 'sacred' space of ritual that bypasses socioeconomic and generational differences. I remember my grandmother telling me that "*if your late grandfather did not go to his café after lunch, then we knew something wrong had happened that day!*" Frequenting the café with co-workers and friends, drinking the extremely sweet and steeped (half sugar/half tea) Iraqi chai in the *istikan*, and playing dominos or backgammon were, and still are, common practices among those Iraqi men in the homeland. This significance of the traditional café is also reflected in popular culture, in which many songs and books have been written about the sociohistorical relevance of these spaces, such as the 19th century *Qahwat Azzawi* that has

been portrayed in both music and literature. More recently, ‘diasporic’ Facebook groups and documentaries have been made about or in reference to *Shahbandar Café*, one of Baghdad’s oldest remaining iconic intellectual hubs in Al-Mutannabi Street (see for example Emad Ali’s (2007) documentary *A Candle for the Shahbandar Café*). Both *Shahbandar* café and Al-Mutannabi Street, the latter known for its outdoor booksellers, have gathered attention in many Western popular and academic circles after they were targeted by a car-bomb in 2007, which was seen as another attack on Iraq’s intellectual and cultural heritage (see for example *Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here* campaign in Beausoleil and Shehabi (2012)). For many Iraqis, they became even more representative of Iraq’s larger predicament after that bombing took the lives of four of its current owner’s sons, Haj Mohammed, as well as his grandson.

Sabah and Tarek: Drinking Tea with Ba’athist Elite

Much like in the larger Middle East, the Ammani society is not foreign to that traditional coffee/tea shop culture. Driving around Amman, one is immersed in an urban city that is bustling with life, from the global franchises of *Starbucks* and *Costa* cafes often frequented by a younger generation of men and women, to more traditional cafes that are more often than not frequented by men, as well as coffee and hookah lounges that mainly target tourists from the Gulf region. Yet, within these public spaces, Iraqis have successfully carved out places of socialization that mimic those of the *homeland* in differing ways. One such place I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in was *Fawanees Café*, known among Iraqis in Amman as the *Qahwat Al-Ba’ath*. Almost every Iraqi I

spoke with in Amman had either recommended I visit the café, or avoid it entirely. Those who opposed visiting it suggested that associating with the café's community could put me in an unnecessary political risk in the eyes of the Jordanian state, due to the crowd's presumed political affiliation. Yet, regardless of how some Iraqis viewed it, *Fawanees* was known among the larger Iraqi community in Amman as the hub for former military and government officials of the Ba'ath regime, most of whom fled Iraq after the invasion. To me, this was an opportunity that I could not ignore on both a personal and ethnographic level, particularly after I had refused the possibility of meeting with Saddam Hussein's eldest daughter Raghda; at the time she was residing in Amman with her family. After failing to convince two Iraqi friends I had made in Amman to accompany me to the café, both of them stating that it might pose a risk to their legal status in Jordan, I decided to visit it by myself one afternoon. Whether these fears expressed by many Iraqis were reasonable or not, it remains extremely important to note how that 'culture of panic' many Iraqis lived under the Ba'athist regime, and later in post-occupation Iraq, had travelled with them from the homeland and had been replicated into exile. This culture of panic was perpetuated through multiple facets by the Ba'athist regime, such as the targeting of dissident voices, imprisonment and torture of activists, and the monitoring of social life in public spaces, and at times in private spaces through government informants and many other mechanisms.

I had planned that this first visit would be merely to familiarize myself with the place. Indeed, the moment I had sat down in the outdoor area I could notice several groups of Iraqi men, most of them had passed their 60s, speaking with a familiar Baghdadi

dialect. Several of them wearing those safari/khaki suits that are a distinctly Iraqi dress for retirees, particularly those from the military or government. It was during these observations here, that the collapse of the Western construct of public/private sphere had become clearly evident (Weintraub 1997). For in such interactions, the private realm, such as one's political affiliations and personal memories, became part of the larger public sphere and is not necessarily hidden or shielded. I could hear some of the conversations around me, which revolved around recent political events in Iraq, with one of the men describing the current Iraqi state as a "confused state" that is led by a group of oblivious and corrupt Iraqis, a sentiment shared by the majority of Iraqis. These political conversations are of course a new theme in such café environments, since for Iraqis who lived under the Ba'athist regime, politics was a taboo subject. In fact, I was told that during the Ba'athist regime one had to be extremely careful, for even the people whom you trust most could turn out to be informants for the Ministry of Interior. A 'culture of fear' that was instilled by the Ba'athist state through multiple mechanisms of monitoring and control of both the cultural and political spheres (Chatelard 2009). In fact, some Iraqi scholars like Sami Zubaida had suggested that the political and cultural spheres were "totally incorporated into the authoritarian state," rendering them as tools of the state's hegemony (Chatelard 2009: 12). For example, I was informed by many Iraqis that each university in Iraq had students or professors who concurrently worked as informants and reported any suspicions to the state. Those perceptions also exist among the Iraqi community here in Amman, and many friends and family had warned me, out of similar fears, to avoid certain political topics, such as sectarianism and Ba'ath, especially with Jordanians. After all, one can argue that this condition of perpetual fear or panic is a

prevalent condition among many post-colonial repressive states, particularly in the Arab world, and is rooted in the histories of colonialism and imperial hegemony (Scott 2004).

But more importantly at *Fawanees*, it seemed that everyone knew each other as the men on one table interacted and conversed with other groups of men around them, while the mostly Egyptian migrant staff waited on them. This became more evident during my second visit, when *Samir*, an Iraqi journalist and writer in his 60s whom I had recognized from reading his articles in a UK-based Arabic newspaper, told me that everyone here meets twice a day: “*we all have nothing to do besides meeting here in the early morning for coffee, and then later at night for tea and a game of dominos. Just like the olden days in Baghdad,*” advising me to come later in the night as the men are more willing to talk then. Later that day, I followed Samir’s advice and went back to *Fawanees* at night. This time it was much busier, and some of the men whom I had seen for the past two days during my afternoon visits had been there as well. I had gained more confidence now, for after all, the men had seen me here before and I was familiar with one of them already, and he could vouch for me. Thus, after having a cup of much needed black Turkish coffee to settle my mind, I decided to approach *Sabah*, an Iraqi retired professor in his late 60s, as I waited for him to finish a phone call. *Sabah*, who was a member of the Ba’ath and used to teach at Al-Mustansirya University in Baghdad before the occupation. He first came to Amman in 2008 and had been living here since, returning from time to time to Baghdad as his wife still works there:

We left Iraq in 2008 if I recall, after the Tai'fiya [sectarianism] had reached unbearable limits on a social level not only political, you know, almost everything in Baghdad became framed in a religious language. But we did not realize how expensive living in Amman was. I tried to find work here, but you know, no one hires Iraqis here. I had already had a heart attack by then, and the only option we had was for my wife to get back to her job in Baghdad at the university. I spend most of my time here, especially since I need constant medical attention after the stroke, and one of my daughters lives here in Shmeisani anyways.

While he was skeptical in the beginning of our conversation as I was introducing the research I am carrying out, he became more comfortable, and opened up after I shared some of my family's history with him. This relationship between the anthropologists and the interlocutors is particularly complex when both parties occupy multiple identities that are not necessarily salient, and that from one end can be seen as shared, but from another might put the anthropologist and the interlocutor in oppositional positions. For example, in her work with Iraqi women in Toronto, Nadia Jones-Gailani (2017: 88) had emphasized how during one of her awkward conversations with an Iraqi Jewish woman, she was hesitant to discuss "religion and identity" in fear that her background as coming from a Sunni family would cause conflict. Yet, once their initial brief and cold conversation ended Jones-Gailani found out that the woman's 'dismissiveness' was not due to sectarianism, but rather to the woman thinking that Jones-Gailani was not Iraqi, and was quick to apologize and open-up afterwards. In a similar manner, after opening up to Sabah about my family's history in Baghdad, it did not take much for both of us to get

emotional and open-up as I asked him how he sees Iraq in the present. “Is it still a homeland for you?” I asked:

Iraq is like a warrior, he is wounded, but he will rise again and fight all these people controlling the country now. We are a very giving and productive nation, and we will rise again. We will produce a new generation that will build this country again, look at yourself. This country's history has shown so much resilience as we go through these periods. From the days of Mesopotamia and Hammurrabi and until this day. It will always be my homeland because of that history we all belong to. Look at how much wars we have had in the long history of Iraq, both between us and from outsiders, and yet we have risen and developed extensively, even at moments of war. We were in a war with Iran for 8 years, and yet when a bridge was bombed or a street became cracked, they [the government] would fix it within a few days!

Sabah is hopeful, and yet filled with anger, as he borrows the image of the Mesopotamian warrior, and extends the Iraqi nation in time to its Mesopotamian civilization. Throughout his talk, I kept remembering the portion of the Ishtar Gate, one of the gates to ancient Babylon that depicts the *Lion of Babylon*, I had seen earlier that year housed in the British Museum. Evoking that image ironically, a popular moniker for Saddam Hussein among Ba'athists, Saddamists, and Ba'ath sympathizers had been the *Lion of the Arabs* or *Lion of Mesopotamia*. But returning to Sabah, throughout our conversations he acknowledges the current predicament of corruption and chaos in Iraq, but sees a way out by reflecting

and borrowing from past glories, and then jumping to the present to proudly point out the liberation of Mosul from ISIS by the “heroic” Iraqi military. This pride was an interesting reflection, for while he identified the US occupation of Iraq as the initial and fundamental injury that allowed for “these people” to control the country, he still retained pride in the nation and its military, despite the destruction and fragmentation it suffered. This destruction of Iraq by the US-led coalition led to the strategic and complete dismantling of the Iraqi military, and the establishment of a much weakened military force based on ethno-sectarian lines by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) under Paul Bremer (Ismael and Fuller 2009). But who are ‘those people’ that Sabah, and several of my interlocutors, have claimed hijacked their country, and what makes them beyond the nation as he imagines it? For Sabah at least, some of these people that hijacked Iraq were Kurdish secessionists, whom he had described as “traitors,” as he went on a tirade against Kurdish independence (see Kirmanj (2013) for a deeper analysis on Ba’athist-Kurdish relations).

By borrowing two central narratives that have been appropriated by the Ba’athist regime in representing what the homeland means, namely, the Mesopotamian past and the Arab present, Sabah epitomizes the double consciousness or internal conflict that grasps the core of the Iraqi identity; a theme that is central in Ali Al-Wardi’s (1951) controversial and problematic text *The Personality of the Iraqi Individual*. For while Sabah recognizes the diversity of Iraq by returning to the non-Arab past of Mesopotamia, the deployment of Iraq’s constructed Arab identity to counter the risk of secessionist narratives emphasizes the strategic usage of the past in politically constructing the

homeland. This became more evident when Sabah reiterated that “*Iraq has always been a diverse and harmonious nation, and we shall return to that.*” I did not press Sabah more on the topic of Kurdistan as I wanted to maintain the rapport we had established, and did not want to lose the trust we had established by contesting the narrative he had presented. From one end, Sabah sees the homeland as a place lost in-between, in which different groups struggle to claim it; a place of antagonisms and contestation that ought to be defended. And yet from another, the homeland is seen as having an inherent and ‘natural’ affinity to all those who claim an ‘Iraqi’ identity regardless of their ethnicity and religious sect. This latter framing has been argued for by several Iraqi scholars, who reductively suggest that *Iraqiness* entails a ‘natural’ and ‘affective’ belonging to an Iraqi identity rooted in a shared Mesopotamia ancestry (Matar 1997; Al-Janabi 2004). Such a framing is of course problematic, since it suggests a fixed identity that may exclude those who do not have an affinity towards that past, and thus do not construct the homeland in accordance with its ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Here, it is also important to note that unlike popular perceptions which locate the construction of Iraq as an exclusively ‘Arab’ nation, mainly in reference to the ‘Arabization’ campaigns carried out by the Ba’athist state, the historical realities during the colonial and early post-colonial period highlight that through divide and rule, the British administration had also carried out similar campaigns on a political and cultural level (Kirmanj 2013).

Later that evening with Sabah, we were joined by two of his friends. One of those men was Tarek, a previous high-ranking officer in the Iraqi military under the Ba’athist regime, and a member of the same tribe Saddam Hussein came from. Sabah introduced

me to him, and before I could explain the research to him in more depth, Tarek took the initiative to bluntly ask about my family's life in Iraq: "*Ahlan wa Sahlan! Where are you and your family from Iraq Abdallah?*" Having known already that he was a high-ranking officer in the military, I thought I would be able to establish good rapport and evoke certain memories by telling him about my late grandfather's political and governmental affiliations, as I introduced my family's background. For after all, remembering is a selective process that is not only dependent on the present lived realities of those retelling their memories, but is also influenced by the audience's, in this case myself, passive or active involvement and participation in that moment of recollection (Campbell 2014: 93). And indeed, it turned out that he was vaguely familiar with my grandfather and our family, and moreover, was living in the same neighbourhood our family had lived in Baghdad. Tarek, who is in his mid-70s now, was educated and taught at several universities and military schools in Europe during the 1960s and 70s, and had a stint as a professor in Al-Bakr Military University in Baghdad; one of the most important post-graduate military schools in the Middle East at the time, from which many Ba'ath officials graduated. A very well and soft spoken man, Tarek was forced to leave Iraq in the early months following the US occupation, after the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) led by Paul Bremer dismantled the Iraqi military and began the de-Ba'athification campaign; a campaign that is still entrenched and highly debated within the Iraqi political environment. The de-Ba'athification Orders 1 and 2 generally referred to the removal of all senior, and often low-ranking, members affiliated with the Ba'ath Party from any public sector and state institutions, the dismantling of the Iraqi military and several state institutions, and the politicized state sanctioned targeting of the Ba'athist

era intelligentsia (Ali 2011: 233). Currently, the adaptation of this narrative by the Iraqi state has extended to prohibit the re-employment of any senior ex-members of the Ba'ath Party in the public sector, and even opened up the possibility of prosecution. In fact, in the case of Tarek, the state not only confiscated all of his and his family's assets and properties, but it also issued an arrest warrant that is still valid against him; a common experience among previous Ba'ath officials (see Ali (2011) for a further analysis on the targeting of Iraq's old-order). Thus, when I asked him if he had returned since then, or if he wishes to return, he cynically emphasized that there is nothing for him to return there anymore; neither a house, nor anything of the symbolic and material past that once marked his history, identity, or status:

What do I have to return to? My wife and kids go back every once in a while, but they have already built their own lives abroad. I do not need to go. I have nothing left there but memories, and those memories here I am talking about them with you so I do not need to be there to claim them, they travel with me as I move. Why would I want to return to it now in this sad condition?" he told me as he dismissively waved his hand.

Tarek feels betrayed by the homeland and the Iraqi people, as he reiterated that 'the people' have changed; *"there are no good people left in Iraq. When the Ba'ath fell, all those who had grudges not only against the Ba'ath, but also Iraq and Iraqis rose"* he repeated often. This sentiment is common among many Iraqis in exile. It was relayed to me during my fieldwork in Jordan, but also in stories and conversations I have heard

from my Iraqi family and friends dispersed across the world in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and in the Gulf. For many Iraqis, the occupation did not only destroy the infrastructure of Iraq, but it also assassinated and transformed the Iraqi society and its moral fiber literally and metaphorically. Indeed, following the occupation many Iraqi academics, intellectuals, and doctors were either assassinated or forced to exile (Rubin 2004; Jalili 2007); my uncle was one of those forced into exile after being threatened by one of the many para-state militias that rose after the occupation. What is critical to note in this context however, is the coupling of one's homeland with the people who are making it in the present. For both Sabah and Tarek, the homeland no longer feels like home since the society has been transformed to one that they no longer identify with. Unlike Sabah, and while both are from the same generation, Tarek is hopeless and sees no future for Iraq as the social transformations that have occurred are too drastic to be 'reformed'. For Tarek, this reform is equated with a return to the patriotic moralities instilled by the Ba'athist regime; a return to the past. In fact, Tarek interjected multiple times when Sabah was reemphasizing his faith in the people of Iraq to rebuild the country: "*almost 15 years have passed and you are speaking of hope and rebuilding? You sound just like the Americans!*" he interrupted Sabah passionately. "*This country will not be fixed if we do not have someone like Saddam again. We need someone with an Iron hand to rule us. Otherwise, you get this chaos*" he continued. Of course, I had heard this narrative many times before from many Iraqis, some of them merely revered the figure of Saddam Hussein and not necessarily the Ba'ath as a political ideology, while others were always against the Ba'ath; that is at least until they had lived the realities of death and

chaos in post-occupation Iraq, in which the Ba'athist period and the figure of Saddam felt much better and safer in comparison.

While Sabah employed the Mesopotamian past in representing the homeland, Tarek on the other hand spoke of the past glories of the Iraqi army and its strength as one of the most sophisticated military institutions in the region, during our conversations. For Tarek, the memory of the homeland is situated within that past, and within the glories of Ba'athism as a political ideology. Here, there is one clear difference that one can relate to Tarek's subjective experience of the military institution. Whereas Sabah is capable of constructing a homeland-view for the future by way of the strategic employment of the ancient past, Tarek invokes the recent past to point out to the total annihilation and loss of the homeland. Tarek speaks with pride about the past under the Ba'athist regime, particularly focusing on the Iran-Iraq war experience; the homeland for him seems to be, at least in that particular moment, either Ba'athist or non-existent. From one trajectory, Tarek's nostalgic narrative is a form of 'restorative nostalgia' that aims to uncritically re-establish and recreate the past and its hierarchies. Such forms of nostalgia "proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" in the present by employing the national memory to return to an "original stasis" (Boym 2008: 129-148). Here, it is important to note that during and after the Iran-Iraq war, the Ba'athist state claimed authority over the war-experience by disseminating a "limited [and gendered] vocabulary" that homogenized and centralized the male soldiers' experiences, in order to construct a collective "memory for tomorrow" that shaped this generation of Iraqis (Khoury 2013: 182-184). Not only were such narratives disseminated through mass-

media and speeches by Saddam Hussein, but also by the production of a war literary genre, *adab al-harb*, that was instrumental in shaping a generation's perception of the war, Iraqiness, and Ba'athism (see for example the writings of Beelind Al Haidari, Sami Mahdi, and Hameed Saeed). This official narrative centralized the soldier's figure and experience as one that belonged not only to those who fought during the war, but also to the larger civilian public who was encouraged, if not instructed, to construct their recollection of the war through that discourse, and embody that experience themselves (Khoury 2013: 195). In relation to homeland imaginings, this past becomes important in the present for the way people experience the historical events that occur in the homeland, are not fixed in the past only, but also travel and manifest into the present, shaping the imagining of and belonging to the homeland itself.

Both Sabah and Tarek represent "affective subjects" who are differently shaped by the historical events they experienced. Despite the shared history, their multiple positionalities in the past engages dialectically with present realities in both the homeland and in exile to orient them differently in this present (Ramos 2010: 58). Yet, the Mesopotamian past as central to historical constructions in Iraq, or even the region, is not limited to Ba'athists. Rather, it has been employed by succeeding states throughout the history of modern Iraq as they sought to construct an Iraqi national identity (Abdi 2008: 20). While this narrative was disseminated by state institutions, the media, and art and literary productions during both the early period of the Iraqi Republic under Abdul Kareem Qassem and later under the Ba'athist regime, it was mainly Saddam Hussein who established a 'personality-cult' regime where he portrayed himself as a descendant of

Mesopotamian kings, such as Nebuchadnezzar (Reid 1993). This ‘personality-cult’ around the figure of Saddam Hussein, as Khoury (2013: 181) suggests, rendered him as the prototypical Iraqi; “he was the embodiment of the ideal soldier who merged all [aspects of the nation] in his person” on which the Iraqi-self was to be molded around.

Thus, it was not surprising to hear Sabah employ the ancient past of Iraq nostalgically in how he imagined the homeland in the present, but also how he imagines it in the future. For after all, as much as one’s relationship with the homeland is forged through lived-subjective experiences (Kasbarian 2015: 366), the state’s role in constructing nationalist belongings and imaginings influences how the homeland is imagined by ordinary people (Naficy 2013: 5) Yet, unlike Tarek’s restorative nostalgia, Sabah’s employment of the past is a critical and reflective form of nostalgia that “uses the past to unsettle the present” loss and destruction (McDermott 2002: 408). Here, it is also important to recognize that while such employment of the ancient past can be problematic, as suggested by several scholars (Baram 1983; Davis 2005; Sassoon 2011), nevertheless, how the past is invoked is deeply political, and within the context of imperialism such narratives can also mobilize people in anti-colonial struggles, or in the case of Iraq, against imperial meddling that precisely aims to dismantle the Iraqi nation (Werbner 1998: 1). In a similar way, the relative precarity of present reality in which neither Tarek nor Sabah seem to have much economic and social capital to influence the conditions of their homeland, remembering of the homeland in a manner that evokes a ‘Golden Past’ that was seen as ‘glorious’, to them at least, may be seen as form of praxis and reaction against their present realities, as well as a reclamation of homeland

narrativization from those who have claimed authority over its history; mainly the U.S occupiers and their global and local allies. Remembering in this form becomes a politicized ‘critique of power’ as emphasized by Richard Werbner (1998).

Both Sabah and Tarek represent a Ba’athist generation whose socioeconomic and political status improved following the Ba’athist coup in 1968, which partially explains their favorable outlook on that period. However, it remains important to not conclude that this was a universal worldview, since many Iraqis inside Iraq opposed the state-sanctioned narrative of the war, and the Ba’ath ideology altogether. Although much of the counter-hegemonic practices and narratives of resistance were launched by Iraqi exiles, some of whom later in-collaboration with imperial British and US governments in the years prior to the occupation of 2003, and who today provide the bedrock for the post-occupation Iraqi government, many other Iraqis assumed larger risks by resisting the state and its manipulation of the past from the inside, and were capable of forging alternative political projects without colluding with imperial agents (Chatelard 2009: 2). This form of long-standing resistance from the inside did not only include organized political parties, such as the Iraqi Communist Party, but also groups such as students, activists, labourers, and intellectuals who organized underground collectives in their respective hometowns (Chatelard 2009: 10-12).

Jamal: Memories of Defiance

Here, I am reminded of Jamal; an artist, writer, and former professor from the south of Iraq whose life in Amman has been that of precarity since his arrival to Jordan in 2007, and whose narrative will be central in chapter four, along with his wife Sura, who is also an artist herself. Born in the mid-1970s after the Ba'athist coup, Jamal left Iraq in 2007 after being threatened by para-state militias for what they claimed as the dissemination of 'secular/anti-Islamic' rhetoric during his lectures at a university in the south of Iraq. While he refused to succumb to these threats in the beginning, Jamal was eventually forced to leave Iraq after they assassinated his sister, who was a local journalist in their hometown; the latter is a story that Jamal's wife Sura recounted frequently to me, often noting as justification of why she would never return to Iraq: *"wallah I would rather die here and live in the street begging rather than return after everything that has happened to us"* she once told me. Jamal and Sura represent this generation of Iraqis who came of age during the Ba'athist regime, and unlike Sabah and Tarek who were much older, the only Iraqi government they knew and experienced was that of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Thus, while Sabah and Tarek might have lived under the Communist or Monarchist governments of Iraq, Jamal and his generation only learned about them through the individual and collective memories of their elders, and other media, including state-sanctioned history.

As Jamal, his wife, and myself talked about life in Iraq throughout our almost weekly meetings, the Iran-Iraq war experience did not feature as a central theme, but

rather we were more engrossed talking about the Iraqi ‘music of the golden age’ that we enjoyed, Jamal’s life in the village as a young boy, and the current politics of Iraq. In these fleeting moments when the war was brought up, Jamal often talked about the little acts of defiance that he tried to carry out in order to not participate in a war that he felt was unnecessary, particularly when it might postpone his education; *“I was a student at one of the region’s most esteemed art institutions, something I had dreamt of since my days in Basra ... I was neither a soldier, nor I was going to be a martyr”* he said empathetically once. Most often, men who did not want to participate in the military would try to obtain a forged medical note citing a medical condition that would exempt them from being enlisted in the military. While Jamal was able to obtain such a note through his family’s social network, upon providing the note to the commanding officer, something had happened:

You know, it was a moment of poetic justice in a twisted way. I went to the office, submitted the note, and was called to meet the officer assigned ... he looked at me, and told me ‘you are an artist, no?’ And we talked a little bit about art. He then looked at me again and said he was not convinced with the medical note. At that moment I knew it, I was going to be sent not to some regiment in the north, where they sent most of us from the south, but to the actual battlefield on the borders!! Deep inside I could hear myself saying, ‘Oh mother! Help me!’ But then, at a moment of mercy, he asked me to bring another letter, and meanwhile I would be assigned to a military base a few hours from my hometown. This time however, the note has to be issued by the base’s doctor. Now how can I solve

this?! I do not have any medical condition! If they do a medical test they will find me fit to serve! But look at how one's sincerity can bring so much luck; the doctor at the base turned out to be a friend of my father! Later I had discovered that the assigned officer had sympathized with me and intentionally assigned me to that base because he knew that the doctor was from my same town, and thus would be understanding. For the next 4 months, the time I spent in the military, he would ask me to bring a new note every couple of weeks to convince him of my medical condition. In return for his gesture, every time I would visit him in the base, he would ask me to paint murals and Arabic calligraphy for his offices! In a sense, I was exempted not because of the medical condition, but because my calligraphy skills were in demand and the officer needed an artist! The irony was that the officer was not interested in art himself, but rather he was expecting regular inspections of his offices from higher ranks, and needed to maintain it in shipshape. Thankfully by the time I had to enlist in the military, our war with Iran was almost over. But unfortunately, another war was knocking its doors.

This 'other war' Jamal was referring to, was the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and subsequent U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003. Throughout my conversations with Jamal, the war was not central in how he remembered and imagined the homeland, despite it having a dramatic effect on the lives of Iraqi men and women, including Jamal. In a sense, Jamal, despite being a low-ranked officer, is resisting the Ba'athist state narrative, by decentralizing the narrative of the 'war-experience' as a central axis of the national collective memory, and by resisting the "formulation of an Iraqi private-self" that is

rooted in the violent experience of war (Khoury 2013: 182). In fact, even in Jamal's art, whether in his paintings or in his digital art, he refuses to recycle those conventional images of the homeland, as he told me once:

Just because I am an Iraqi artist, it does not mean that my paintings have to be about palm trees, the two rivers, the homeland destroyed, or employ these orientalist representations of the homeland that we as Iraqis have often co-opted and recycled. I am tired of victimizing Iraq and Iraqis, and I have criticized some of my artist friends who do that a lot of times. But, after all, the image of Iraq in the global art market is an orientalist image, and for them to sell and exhibit they have to do that. I am an Iraqi artist, and Iraq will always be my homeland. But my homeland is not only about these conventional and sellable images of the mosque, the shanasheel (wooden balconies), or even those of the Mesopotamian past, like Hammurabi and other images. The homeland is also about me. It speaks of me, and I speak of it through my art, and those artistic productions are not limited to those images. If I do not sell my art, which has happened many times, because of the stylistic and thematic approach I take, then so be it.

Jamal emphasizes that while these images might be part of the nation's constructed history, he nevertheless is neither interested in recycling them in the present, nor did he accept them in the past. For Jamal, the homeland's history is not situated as a dichotomy between war/destruction or civilization, but rather encompasses the everyday mundane realities that made his life there, and continues to make him in the present; music, college

life, and spending his childhood in a small village in Basra. He refuses to accept the violence of/in the homeland as a banal reality of the everyday, and refuses to render it as a feature of the material, social, or/and political ordinary (Das 2007). After all, as suggested by Remedi (2004: 514): “for people to be empowered – to access the level of power – and to challenge and replace the current cultural hegemony, [they] need to be able to engage in other kinds of cultural production, that is, other than merely choosing from, or responding to mainstream cultural flows,” particularly since the cultural is also political. Yet, despite Jamal trying to forge an alternative discourse of the homeland to that of his generation, the on-going realities of corruption and violence in post-occupation Iraq forces him, as it does for many Iraqis, to momentarily return to the familiar representation of the homeland constructed by the Ba’athist state narrative. Such representations include borrowing from the ancient Mesopotamian history of Iraq to emphasize resilience and pride, as was seen with Sabah and Tarek, as well as a return to the memory of the homeland as a diverse non-sectarianized society; a narrative that was emphasized by both Jamal and his wife Sura, and will be central in the next chapter on Um Warda, Yasmine, and Leila.

Chapter Three

*Homeland, I am not your mother,
so why do you weep in my lap like this
every time
something hurts you?*

From “*Tablets*” by Iraqi Poet Dunya Mikhail
Translated from Arabic by Kareem James Abu-Zeid

Introduction:

A few blocks from *Fawanees* Café, sat Um Warda whom I had introduced earlier, near the entrance of one of Amman’s busiest Iraqi food stores in Gardens Street. The street, which is one of Amman’s major and busiest areas, is marked by a range of Iraqi businesses and stores such as: currency exchange shops, clothing stores, speciality supermarkets, music stores, and restaurants enmeshed within the global, regional, and local franchises that have become representative of the Jordanian market. Um Warda was the only outspoken woman out of the three Iraqi women who sat at the strip-mall that housed these Iraqi stores and bakeries. Her voice was strong and confident, yet broken and humble, as she greeted those who walked by or stopped to buy some of the things she had furnished on the ground in front of her. Most of the Iraqis I had spoken with in Amman were familiar with Um Warda, as they immediately brought up her name the moment I told them that one of my interlocutors was an Iraqi woman who sat near *Mahalat Ghaith*. Yet, despite this familiarity, almost everyone from more affluent classes had also cautioned me from believing everything she said; as one friend told me: “*she is there to grab money from those who are better off, telling different stories to different*

people.” This was not the case with me. After approaching Um Warda and asking her about the products she was selling, I began talking with her about how I have not seen these Iraqi olive oil soaps, *saboon ragki*, since I was a child, and we began chatting about the different origins of the stuff she was selling. I introduced myself as an exiled Iraqi researcher writing about memory and the homeland, to which she responded: “*What homeland, youmma? Do we even have a homeland now? It is a wreck. But do not worry, I have a lot to say so comeback any time!*” Thereupon we exchanged phone numbers in order for us to meet again at a more convenient time; I was planning to visit *Fawanees* that afternoon. But, I felt an instant nostalgic warmth towards Um Warda as she used terms of endearment while chatting with me, like *fedwa* and *weledi*, that I had not heard for years, but are common phrases of endearment among elderly Iraqi men and women. She would often greet me with *Hala Youmma* [an Iraqi phrase of welcoming], as she offered me a piece of thin and torn fabric to sit on instead of the dirty floor.

Um Warda, Yasmine, and Leila: Home is a Dark Place

Born to a small farming family in Al-Kot to the south of Baghdad, Um Warda spent most of her adult life in Baghdad after getting married to a man from Al-Adhamiya, one of Baghdad’s oldest neighbourhoods. Until the passing of her handicapped husband in a car bomb that struck the *souq* where he used to sell fruits and vegetables, Um Warda was a stay-at-home mom taking care of her eldest son and two young daughters:

My husband was a beautiful and gentle man. He was a typical Adhmawii [someone from Al-Adhmaya neighbourhood]; beautiful and generous. But the war changed him. After the war with Iran, he became crippled and had to use a wheelchair. That devastated him. It took his soul away. He no longer was that joyful and talkative man I once knew ... Did I tell you he was Sunni? And I am of course Shi'iya, but my father's tribe is both Sunni and Shi'i. So like most Iraqi tribes, we are mixed. After the Americans came we thought things might get better, but they only got worse. Life in general became even harder, and the last straw came when he was killed in a car bomb in Ras al-Hosh, you know it of course? It was the market in Adhmaiya. I tried to take his place in the market selling vegetables and fruits, but it was too hard and I am a sick woman. Then I began selling cigarettes and chewing-gum in Al-Thawra [now called Al Sadr City] where we moved after he was killed, and that barely helped us survive. Maher, my son left school and worked with me for a while, until he was kidnapped during Al-Tai'fiya [sectarian fighting 2006-2007], he is around your same age now. It was like we were cursed, and truth be told we were indeed. Iraqis are all cursed, except those who had money, the thieves who stole our kheirat [good resources] under Saddam and after. Anyways, after he was kidnapped, I had to sell our house, which was more like ruins rather than a house, in order to pay the ransom they had asked for. Fortunately, I was able to get my son back, but what son?! Much much like his father, he was half of a man ... He was so traumatized from the torture that he developed different diseases; blood pressure, diabetes, nightmares, ... everything you can think of he has right now.

Until this day, he is still traumatized, he is often scared to leave home, which is why right now he does not work regularly. This is why I came to Amman, at least here I can find better work and get assistance from organizations like the UNHCR and others, and send the money back home for my children to pay their rent. My eldest daughter, Warda, is married already, and has her own family, but the younger girl and Maher are still in madinat al-Sadr, and I have to work to pay for the rent of the house, which is really just a small room.

[At this moment her daughter and son called from Baghdad]

This was one of my early conversations with Um Warda; conversations that were often emotionally exhausting as we shifted between anger and sadness, tears and cynicism, and restlessness and hope. Indeed, these conversations showed how the homeland is seen as a place of despair, death, and chaos both in the past and the present; a place that has been ‘cursed’ as she described it. However, what drew my attention mostly was Um Warda’s ease when talking about religious identities and sectarianism in the homeland. Not only did she underscore that she and her late husband came from different sects, countering and resisting the sectarian discourse that emerged following the US invasion, but she also was clear on how the post-occupation politicization of sectarianism (Ismael and Fuller 2009) has rendered the homeland as a place of contestation and violence; Um Warda’s son was after all a victim of that sectarian violence. She often commented: “*I tell you, we did not ask or care what sect someone came from before ... look at my late husband and myself.*” In a way, while this language is a product of the post-occupation political

atmosphere in Iraq, Um Warda's employment of it can be seen as a form of subversive action against imperial and local intentions in the political, and often social, spheres as a tool of oppression/disintegration, and instead reaffirming that the Iraqi society coexisted peacefully despite its diversity. Nevertheless, the mere prevalence of sectarian terms or language in the public discourse (Haddad 2013: 116), whether it is challenged or condoned, indicates a shift not only in how the homeland is lived in the present, but also how the realities and experiences of its past are being renegotiated within the present discourse.

Here, it is important to note that the employment of the discourse of sectarianism in discussing the homeland was prevalent among those Iraqis I interviewed whose precarious living conditions did not improve following the collapse of the Iraqi regime in 2003, and in fact it might have been exacerbated afterwards; this applies to those who remained in their homeland or migrated to Jordan. This became more evident during a conversation circle I organized with a group of Iraqi women who had recently arrived to Amman after escaping ISIS in Nineveh. That same discourse around sectarianism was brought up as a topic when they were talking about their life in Iraq, despite their different locations and experiences of the homeland. As we were sitting in one of the empty classrooms at the building which *Benevolent Hands* was using as a food and ration distribution centre, Leila, an Iraqi woman in her mid-forties, reminisced on how she had to leave Baghdad with her family to *Qaraqosh*, a small Christian town near Mosul:

I was a geography teacher for a school in Baghdad, and my family had lived there for decades, we never thought we would leave, especially to Mosul out of all places! We were Baghdadis to the bone. But after 2003, life gradually became unbearable. We started fearing for our lives not only as Iraqis, as we might have once felt in the early days of the occupation, but now as Christians. It started after we noticed our friends leaving Baghdad, whether they were Christians or not. Everyone around us was leaving, and the neighbourhood started to change. Our neighbours' attitudes began changing as well. I don't know whether they were fully aware of what they were doing, or they also were in fear. And then it really hit us with the events at the church [here she is referring to the attack on Sayidat Al-Najat church in 2010]. After that, I told my family, that's it. We packed our bags and took our things and moved to Qaraqosh ... It is this sectarianism. Sunnis and Shias, and we as Christians were lost in between and targeted by both. Where have we been before?! When had we ever talked about religion before?! I tell you I grew up in Baghdad and went to college in Baghdad and did not know who of my friends and neighbours was what?! Nor did we care! It is the Americans who brought this. We never knew what Ta'ifiya [sectarianism] was until they came, and when they left they brought us Da'esh instead! ... Who had thought that even when we were in our community, that sectarianism will follow us as well? From where did god send Da'esh on us I do not know. Haven't we had enough? [...] And here I am now in front of you, humiliating myself and begging these kind women, god gives them strength, for a bag of rice and canister of oil, how is that fair?

In the midst of Leila's story, Yasmine, a friend of hers and one of the women in the circle, interjected to ask me if I was Christian or not. I had been accustomed to that question, like many Iraqis have been, in the post-occupation Iraqi community whether in exile or not and I have always refused to answer it, as I continued to do so with Yasmine. In fact, much like Leila, I did not know what sect my family came from, until a few years after the occupation, when that sectarian discourse became prevalent in the homeland, and was later adopted, at times more extremely in exile. Nevertheless, I asked Yasmine about the relevance of this question, to which she replied that she just wanted to know if I was familiar with the Church of the Hour:

I am asking you because as Leila was talking, all I could think of was our church in Mosul, Church of the Hour. You know Da'esh bombed it to the ground? What do we have left? I am from Mosul, and I stayed there because it is my hometown even though my husband was kidnapped there in 2004 and we still do not know anything about him. I have remarried now and I have three children. They tell you about Ta'ifiya this, Ta'ifiya that, but you just heard Leila; we did not care if someone was Muslim or Christian or Buddhist. Yes, there were tensions before under Saddam, but nothing out of the ordinary; marriage and stuff, but that was normal. It never reached this level we have now. Even this Ta'ifiya thing I do not believe in it anymore after Da'esh. These people do not have a god. Okay tell me then, why did they take down Al-Hadba' Minaret? Was not that symbol for Islam?

Yasmine and I continued to talk more about her life in Amman for a while afterwards, and how she sees Amman as a checkpoint, a test of *saboor* (patience), in her migration journey to the United States or Australia. But, what is important to note here is how a discourse that focuses on sectarian identities have become a critical and recurring theme in the positioning of many Iraqis' relationship to their homeland.

Here, it is important to further touch upon the narratives that situate sectarianism as a product of the post-invasion political environment in Iraq (Damluji 2010). In line with the stories and memories of Um Warda, Leila, and Yasmine, Dina Rizk Khoury (2010: 325-326) had observed that while the Ba'athist regime was indeed violent, this violence nevertheless was not rooted in sectarian antagonisms, but rather was based on a "logic of security" and control; the Ba'ath regime did not frame itself, or create "categories of difference" based on sectarian lines. Furthermore, during the Ba'ath's Faith Campaign (*al-hamla al-emaniya*) after 1992, in which the state shifted from secularism and began embracing and promoting a return to religiosity and conservatism to counter the economic and social hardships caused by the U.N imposed embargo (1991-2003), the Ba'ath state narrative in itself did not employ a sectarian language (Zubaida 2015: 195). Thus, in conversations with many Iraqis from different religious backgrounds, and who experienced life as adults under the Ba'athist regime, many of them had observed that the Ba'ath or Saddam were not necessarily against Shi'a, but rather against any group that challenged their rule or power. For example, a number of my interviewees pointed to the targeting and silencing of the Iraqi faction of the Muslim Brotherhood as a proof that the Ba'ath Party was not specifically targeting groups based

on sect. Of course that is not to say that Saddam's regime did not oppress Shi'ites, Kurds, or other groups whose political aspirations were often framed within ethnic or religious discourse. But to put it clearly, the Ba'athist state was an "equal opportunity oppressor" as Khoury (2010: 336) explained it. From one trajectory, the emphasis on Iraq's non-sectarian past by many of my interlocutors, as well as by large segments of the Iraqi society in both the homeland and exile, can be seen as a form of 'prescriptive forgetting' or erasure that counters the present realities of politicized sectarianism. For while many Iraqis, including my interlocutors, do talk about sectarianism as a general condition in post-occupation Iraq, reference to the sectarian violence between 2006-2008, or even after, is almost glossed over or forgotten. In such constructions, one can argue that forgetting or burying the violence of sectarianism in post-occupation Iraq works in the service of social and national interests that aim to unite Iraqis in the present. Here, I am reminded of *Ana Iraqi* (I am Iraqi), an anti-sectarian social media and grassroots campaign that gained huge prominence, in Iraq and beyond, after the sectarian violence of 2006-2008 had relatively subsided, and aimed to counter the discourse of ethnic and religious sectarianism that had seeped into the Iraqi society. One manner in which the campaign tried to counter that sectarian discourse was, as its name suggests, through a return to an Iraqi national identity that is rooted in Iraq's pre-occupation past.

But, what happens to one's relationship with his/her homeland when secular national projects not only collapse, but are unable to be rejuvenated and are instead replaced by sectarianized projects and identities? For Um Warda, this does not change

anything. “*I know I am returning to nothing*” as she told me when I asked her if Iraq is still a homeland she would return to:

I know I am returning to a dark place. But anything is better than here. Baghdad is in my blood, wleedi [my son]. What is more beautiful than Madinat Al Sadr and Al-Kerrad neighbourhood? The people and its narrow alleys. You know, I even think if all of Iraq changes, Al-Kerrad will always remain as I once knew it.

Um Warda’s precarious position in present exile, as well as the impossibility of hope for a future beyond Jordan or Iraq, renders the homeland as the only location where she can emplace herself, despite its insecurity, chaos, and darkness. The homeland for Um Warda is not emplaced within the ancestral or civilizational past, nor did she live a privileged past to which she can reminisce about, but the homeland is rather emplaced in the familiar working-class district where she and her family lived and continue to live, *Al-Ker’rad* quarter in Sadr City. After-all, “cities are also [affective] sites of human experience” and within/between its spaces “social relationships, memories, [and] emotions” are negotiated (Low 2015: 296). Here, it is important to note briefly that Sadr City was first established in the late 1950s by Qassem’s government to house Iraqi labourers who came from the South of Iraq, mainly from the marshlands and other regions. Thus, a working-class solidarity has been harboured between its inhabitants, who not only share in socioeconomic class, but also in place of origin. Even more illuminating is that at its establishment, the district was first named *Al-Thawra* [Revolution] *City*, in line with the state’s popular image and motto at the time, only to be later claimed by the

Ba'athist regime and changed to *Saddam's City*, and eventually *Sadr City* after the occupation, in reference to the Shi'i clerical family of Al-Sadr and their history of resistance. Currently, it is considered one of the largest 'slums' in the world with a population of over 3 million (Davis 2006). Yet, this particular framing of and attachment to the homeland in the familiar becomes even more critical for Um Warda when the present is that of heightened precarity, insecurity, and oppression:

Jordanians are not compassionate like us, nor are they generous or kind. They do not allow us as Iraqis to live like human beings; you are an animal to them, an animal living in fear, even though this life they are living now is because of our blessings. I cannot say more; you know the situation here with Jordanians [...] Right now, I am living with three other Iraqi women in a small room in Wehdat, and the Jordanian man we rent it from requires us to pay our rent daily, and had seized our passports because of debt we owe him. What life is this? Even if I want to return now I cannot until I pay.

Here, Um Warda was referring to Al-Wehdat, one the largest officially recognized refugee camps in Jordan. The camp, which has a negative reputation particularly within the middle/upper-class Jordanian society, much like the reputation of Sadr City among elite Iraqis, was established in 1955 to house Palestinian exiles after 1948 (Achilli 2015: 263), but has recently become the living quarters for working-class labourers from Egypt, as well Iraqi and Syrian refugees (Hamarnah 2002: 15).

While Um Warda's bitterness and negative perception of Jordanians is based on real and lived experiences she and many Iraqis like her have encountered with their hosts, it nevertheless ought not to be generalized. There is no doubt that in the early years following the occupation, and with the influx of Iraqis to Jordan, tensions between Jordanians and Iraqis reached high levels as Iraqi exiles themselves were often accused of 'stealing' Jordanian jobs and inflating the cost of living (Nanes 2007); an argument that has been debunked by Saif and DeBartolo (2007) as noted earlier in the introduction of this dissertation. In reality, Iraqis were welcomed and assisted by many Jordanian families and individuals in various ways, especially after the first Gulf war in 1990/91. However, this does not preclude popular perceptions that are heightened during economic crises, whereby the 'newcomer' becomes the scapegoat and accused of causing social and economic instability. While negative perceptions of Iraqis still persist among some, this perception has significantly decreased, especially since the Syrian refugees as the more recent comers took over the blame for upsetting the status quo, including by Iraqis who had since become more established in Jordan. In fact, throughout many conversations I have had with Jordanians, particularly working-class taxi drivers, Iraqis were most often portrayed positively as a brethren community that is not only educated and respectful, but also as helping the Jordanian economy grow. For Iraqis in Jordan, Syrian refugees were not only seen as another competitor in an already tight and exclusive labour market, but also as competitors in the assistance registered Iraqi refugees receive from the UNHCR. As I was informed by several of my Iraqi interlocutors, some of them registered with the UNHCR themselves, social assistance to Iraqis registered with the UNHCR in Jordan had

been completely cut off since the massive influx of Syrian refugees was seen as a priority, and their asylum applications have been put on hold for an indefinite period.

After I learned of the massive debt Um Warda had accumulated, I felt a sense of responsibility, not necessarily as a researcher, but more as an Iraqi exile myself to help. Thus, once my conversations with her were done and we had said our goodbyes, I decided to approach some of the ‘well-off’ Iraqi friends and family members who had been living in Jordan in order to carry out a small funding campaign to support Um Warda financially. Yet, this experience was both unfortunate and illuminating. Almost everyone I approached had either belittled her suffering or completely branded her as a money-grabbing thief. “*Do not bother yourself*” one family friend said, and advised me not to trust her, since she has always made up a different story to grab money: “*Ya’ani what is different about her? There are so many like her*” he said. While this experience left me extremely disappointed and angered, it nevertheless signified an example of the disconnect and gap between Iraqis from different socioeconomic classes. Um Warda had earlier voiced her frustration about this noting that:

The late Yusuf Al-Anni [a pioneer of the Iraqi theatre and cinema] used to visit me here a lot, as well as Jawad Al-Shakarchi [a famous Iraqi actor]. We would talk and cry about our homeland, but that is it. The elite, those with money, never sit with us and talk to us as Iraqis like them, let alone help us financially. By ‘us’ I mean those who have nothing; Al-Ma’adomeen [the nonexistent]. Not all of them of course, there remain ‘good people’ out there. Those that make your blood boil

however are the ones who suddenly got rich after the fall, and unlike us did not open their eyes to khayr [bliss].

Poetically, and yet facetiously, the term she used to describe those living in precarity like herself, *Al-Ma'adomeen*, can also be translated to mean 'the executed'. And indeed, to a certain degree Um Warda and others who identify with her experience do see themselves to have been already executed. Yanar, an Iraqi woman in her 50s and who currently works as house cleaner in Amman since her arrival less than a year ago, described her life in Jordan as a "*post-death*" experience, "*we lost our interest in life, let alone in living*" as she once told me. For many exiles, this experience of life in the present as a 'loss' is borne out of the dispersion and fragmentation of the self, as well as that of his or her homeland, that transforms how time in itself is experienced and lived, and throws it out of its normalcy (Naficy 1991: 285). The trauma associated with the past had rendered both the present and the future as an empty shell, a façade devoid of any value.

But here, one's relationship with the homeland is further complicated, if not emptied. For this disconnection with the larger Iraqi community, particularly the exilic community from which one might preserve and practice his/her collective memories, further drains the homeland of what it might have represented in the past, but also what remains of it in the present. For what becomes of the homeland if it no longer embraces the people who make/remake and made/remade it? What becomes of the homeland when it only makes/remakes one as an individual, and not the collective? Evidently, one response to that reality is a particularization, or reterritorialization, of the homeland

around the familiar, and individual, elements/memories that we are still able to retain or claim despite their disfiguration in post-occupation Iraq (Zangana (2010) and Mehta (2013) provide an extensive discussion on the destruction of Baghdadi urban space and demography after 2003). In Um Warda's case, the familiar was her quarter in Sadr City. Um Warda's proclamation of her neighbourhood as a symbol of the homeland is critical when one considers the history of Sadr City in particular, for it can also be seen a reaction against the 'bourgeoisie culture and memory' of Baghdad, as well as a resistance against the colonial and imperial aggressions on Iraq (Tamari 1983; 2003; Sayigh 2012).

While conversing about her memories in Sadr City, Um Warda often asserted that "we [people from Sadr City] *are not shr'roog as many brand us,*" *Shr'roog* (Batatu 2012: 70) is the pejorative term used colloquially by middle and upper class Iraqis to describe the working class from the south (the term is equivalent to that of *Chavs* in England and *Nawar* in the Levant). "*We have a history here, unlike those new characters that suddenly rose to prominence in Iraq*" she continued to assert. This history she was referring to is that of resistance movements which fought against oppression by the successive Iraqi states, and the subsequent imperial aggression on the nation. Sadr City was not only one of the bases of resistance against the occupation in 2003, which was mainly led by the controversial figure of Muqtada Al-Sadr whose popular base was there, but it also was the historical base for the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in Baghdad (see (Ismael 2008) for a history of the ICP in Iraq).

Here, it is also important to take in consideration the role gender plays in shaping how the homeland is remembered and constructed in the present. What became evident

throughout these conversations with Um Warda, Yasmine, and Leila who are all from a working-class background, and whose socioeconomic status in Jordan remains precarious, is the prevalence of the ‘neighbourhood’ in their recollections and reconstructions of the homeland in the present. Examining the construction of a French national identity, Ho Tai (2001: 918) in her seminal critique of Pierre Nora had underlined how collective memories that established the basis of French nationalist discourse were often framed through a gendered-language. Embarking from this critical emphasis, it also important to acknowledge that the way different Iraqi exiles in Amman construct their collective memories of the homeland, and by extension the ways the homeland becomes imagined, is not only shaped by socioeconomic and political background, but also informed through the gender-roles of the past in the homeland and the present in exile. Thus, returning to the aforementioned conversations with the three women I interviewed, all of them had recalled their respective houses, as well as neighbourhoods, as central in how they imagined and remembered the homeland. Um Warda reminisced about her family house in Al-Adhmaiya and later in Sadr City, Leila talked about the neighbours she grew up with in Baghdad, and Yasmine as well. Unlike the men of *Fawanees*, who emphasized the role of the coffee/tea shop in their social lives in both the past and the present, the homes and neighbourhoods of these women were the familiar and recurring social spaces of interaction that marked their everyday life in Iraq.

That attachment to the house and its memory was also evident whenever my grandmother talked about the past in the homeland:

What beautiful home we had! The garden! Your grandfather, may god rest his soul loved taking care of it. Let alone our neighbours, what good-hearted people they were. Did I tell you, um, what was his name, used to live next to my family's home back in the day? Whats his name, oh allah?"

She pauses as she tries to remember the name of Abdul Kareem Qassem, Iraq's late prime minister from 1958 to 1963. I already knew the story, as she had recounted it to me several times in the few weeks I have been here in Amman, so I clicked my fingers and excitingly told her his name, to which she replies:

Yes, yes. Abdul Kareem Qassem. He lived right next to my mother's house in 'Elweya [one of Baghdad's neighbourhoods], we shared a fence! That was before he became prime minister though, he was still a military general or something. He was such a humble man. I remember clearly, he did not have any extra security or the luxuries you see now. Just him and his driver, and he would often siesta on the patio. I remember, whenever my mother made dolma, she would send me to put a plate for him on the concrete fence our houses shared, and he would bring it back the next day to thank us. Alhamdellah, wherever we moved in Baghdad we had wonderful neighbours."

This gendered analysis of the memory of the homeland is not to say that men did not or could not reminisce about their neighbourhood or house, Jamal and Tarek talked about these element often as was shown earlier. Neither is it to suggest that Iraqi

women's memories and experiences were limited to these spaces (Al-Ali 2005 and 2007). Instead, it suggests that the homeland is represented by multiple layers from the past that are employed in varying intensities as certain experiences and elements of the past become more salient for others due to the different social positions, roles and experiences, people occupy. It emphasizes how factors like gender, class, and political leanings dialectically influence the construction of collective and individual memor(ies) and the dialogic relationship between them, as much as these factors influence the forgetting and silencing of certain memories (Connerton 2008). For these women, and men, their houses in the present, whether in Al-Wehdat for Um Warda or Rabbiyeh for Tarek and Sabah, are not a *home*, and the only house that was both a home and a physical/material place of residence and dwelling was in the homeland, emphasizing further the situatedness of *home* as a place and affect in the (home)land.

In Defense of Homeland Nostalgias:

It is important to note here that Iraqi exiles employ both nostalgia for a *past* and longing for a *present* homeland in the different ways they construct the homeland, and not depend on only one or the other. The homeland is enmeshed within both the past no longer attainable, as well as the familiar present. This past and its recollection is "at once collective and personal" as suggested by Delisle's (2013: 377) work on Iraqi exilic post-memory and media. Here, nostalgia is a desire not only for the elements of the past that once made the homeland a *home*, such as security, family, community and location, but also for the material elements of the present homeland that still hold an affective value

despite being disfigured; it is both a temporal and spatial/physical longing. This affective 'value' is after all "ascribed socially" through both the past and the present, and is "related to the life-histories" of these elements (Renfrew 2004: 26-27). In such instances, nostalgia is borne out of a "decline of the present time, of shock in the future to come," as much as it is a coping mechanism and sedative for the traumas associated with exile and migration, and with witnessing one's homeland collapse (Naficy 1991: 299).

Um Warda is the embodiment of *homelessness* many Iraqis exiles claim. She exists in this liminal space; a state of in-betweenness. She is neither capable of returning to her homeland due to economic strains, nor is she capable of rooting herself in her present location. The more Um Warda and I talked as she sat on the floor of her regular spot in front of the Iraqi grocery store, the more we both felt there was much more left unsaid and the closer our relationship was getting. I am still not entirely sure what brought us close together beyond our shared Iraqiness. Whether it was the fact that I reminded her of her son, a sentiment she often repeated, or if it is because I was one of the few Iraqis who were actually interested in listening to and talking with her. But what remains touching and beautiful to me about Um Warda was that despite her being in an economically dire situation, she always checked if I needed anything here, reaffirming to me that I can rely on here if I needed anything; a sense of dignity and solidarity that she took pride in. What remains true of my experience with Um Warda is the nostalgia we both experienced and performed; a nostalgia that would have been left untouched had she not been sincere in her stories, memories, and emotions. Nostalgia is not a reactionary sentiment here, but rather an act of resistance, and a counter-hegemonic discourse and affect that reclaims the

homeland and reaffirms one's relationship to it; as Naficy (1991: 285) described it in the case of Iranian exiles, it is "a feature of exile" after all. For as further suggested by McDermott (2002: 389-391), nostalgia can function as a 'political strategy' in the present that is geared towards the future, for after-all, one cannot recollect and employ the past as a 'source of change,' or point of reference, without being nostalgic.

Nostalgia's role as a performative and material act of resistance and survival, and not merely discursive, becomes even clearer in Um Warda's case as a street vendor selling these everyday home goods that were/are essential for the Iraqi household back in Iraq, and have become an essential element in the recreation and maintenance of one's relationship to their homeland. During one of my chats with Um Warda, an Iraqi man approached us and asked whether she had "our" olive oil soap from "before", to which she lifted one olive-green block from the stacks she had and said: "*Yes, my dear. Here it is, 2 JD. Smell it, it has the smell of our homeland. Take it, if you do not like it bring it back to me.*" The man held it close to his nose, read the engraving on the soap, and replied: "*This is not from Baghdad. It says Italy on the back here?*" as if just by its smell, his suspicions were automatically alerted and made him doubt the soap's origin.

Defensive, and slightly disheartened, Um Warda replied: "*True, my dear. I have not been receiving a lot from Baghdad these days, you know the border has been closed. The market has changed. It is no longer familiar. Just give me 1 JD, it's okay.*"

Understanding, and yet slightly disappointed, the man paid Um Warda the 1 JD and took it anyways as he continued to browse through the other things Um Warda was showcasing: candles and loofahs from Baghdad, prayer beads and evil-eye amulets from

Najaf, facemasks from Karbala, and lanterns from Ramadi. Here, a quintessentially Iraqi past and nostalgias for Um Warda, her customers, and other markets are given a ‘transactional role’ as suggested by anthropologist Olivia Ange (Ange and Berliner 2014: 195). In her ethnographic research in agricultural fairs in the Argentinian Andes, Ange shows that nostalgia has often been ‘economically instrumentalized’ in the buying/selling bartering encounters in these communities, often in the form of allusions to ancestral codes of ethics, among other employments of ancestral morals of the past. But in Um Warda’s case, the persistence of the homeland and its nostalgias is not only in the discursive encounter of buying/selling, but more importantly in its material aspect and the kinds of household items she is selling. These materials, and their commodification, have ‘biographies’ that are not only economically produced, but also culturally constructed through time and place (Kopytoff 1986: 64-67). Not only are they a reminder of past memories from the homeland, but from one trajectory, they also speak to the migration journeys of many Iraqis, who themselves have also traversed that border between Iraq and Jordan. The powerful nostalgic capacity of these items is further expanded when it is acknowledged that Iraqis from different socioeconomic backgrounds seem to seek, if not reproduce them, in the Ammani society. In addition, the memory of the homeland persists through these materials due to their relative accessibility and affordability; almost anyone can buy those soaps or loofahs. Here, such items do not only represent an aspect of the Iraqi collective memory from the homeland, but they are also reminiscent of individual everyday memories, practices, and attachments.

Chapter Four

*Jaykur, Jaykur - where is the bread?
 Where is the water?
 Has night taken over? Are the guards asleep?
 Travelers, sleepless with thirst and hunger -
 the wind moans on,
 fills the horizon with its echoes.
 A desert, vast, nowhere a road to be found.
 Night's skies are blind.
 Jaykur, stretch the door open for us to enter
 or entertain us with the luminous dance of stars.*

Excerpt from *Return to Jaykur* by Iraqi Poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964)
 Translated from Arabic by Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard

Introduction:

It was the summer of 2016. I had just arrived to Amman for a short visit to see my grandmother for the first time in more than ten years. It was also the first time that I would be so close to Iraq in almost twenty years, yet it still seems so far and unattainable. The idea of being in such close to proximity to my homeland was frightening to me, but I had prepared myself for an emotionally taxing, yet rewarding experience that could satisfy some of the longings I had for Iraq. After-all, friends had told me beforehand that you will feel, see, smell, hear, and taste a lot of Iraq here in Amman. As I was preparing for the trip, Randa (my supervisor) and I had often wondered how do our nostalgic longings transform when we are in a place that not only has constant reminders of/from the homeland, but is also in such a close proximity to it that we could nearly smell the breeze travelling from Baghdad. Do we feel our nostalgias intensifying and deepened, or are they soothed and quenched? For me, these nostalgias became an even larger burden and weight on my chest. This chapter however is not about me, but rather about the

experiences, nostalgias, and memories of four of my interlocutors and fellow exiles; Jamal and his wife Sura, Samir, and Fahmi.

Jamal and Sura: A Sensed Homeland

Jamal and I had first met virtually, through a contemporary art blog I started and developed to feature and document Iraqi art a few years ago. Jamal had noticed that I showcased some of his work and sent me a message of appreciation using the platform. In his message he emphasized how important such initiatives were for upcoming Iraqi artists in particular, but also for Iraq in general, as it portrayed the diversity of our nation's arts movement. Since then, we communicated intermittently through Facebook, and hoped that we would cross paths in the future. Thus, I was extremely excited to meet with him when I first went to Amman, as I wanted to reconnect with other Iraqi exiles, particularly those with whom not only do I have a shared interest in art and literature, but also shared (be)longings for Iraq. In reflection, these transnational networks which facilitated connecting with or staying in touch with other Iraqis, reaffirmed and validated my Iraqiness after living in exile for more than twenty years and being disconnected from the larger Iraqi exilic community in the Middle East. In a sense, I was eager to be among the Iraqi community in Jordan, whose performance of their Iraqiness is not only supported by the size of the community, but also by the familiar and shared elements of Amman, such as the shared language, Arab culture, or even the city landscape and its nature. Although Jamal and I tried to meet during my brief visit in 2016, the meeting did not take place until the summer of the following year when I went back for fieldwork.

During my fieldwork stay in Amman, Jamal and I met almost regularly for the several months I spent in Amman, at times accompanied by our partners' Sura and Yusur, respectively. Our meetings were often held at their house in Lweibdeh, at a café Jamal and Sura frequented and were familiar with in their area, and at *Darat al Funun*; the latter being one of Amman's oldest art galleries and cultural houses. These regular meetings were facilitated by the fact that we both lived in the same vibrant and accessible area of Amman, Lweibdeh. The neighbourhood, which is one of Amman's oldest and yet fastest to be gentrified, has been known for its vibrant cultural and art scenes, as well as the recent influx of expats/students from Europe and North America. This latter reality has been critiqued by many locals, who find that this influx of 'Westerners' has contributed to the rising rent prices in the neighbourhood and the erasure of its local culture, particularly since Lweibdeh has had a long history of anti-imperial/colonial political activism and resistance (see Dilworth (2017) for more on Lweibdeh's history). Walking around Lweibdeh you are bound to notice the signage of organizations that are steeped in a history of resistance, such as the local Anti-Zionist League and a branch of the Palestinian Communist Party. In fact, the neighbourhood's relevance in Jordanian society was also immortalized in *Café Fairouz*, a novel by Iraqi writer Ali Shakir, in which the main events of the novel take place at *Fann wa Chai*, one of Lweibdeh's popular cafés and hub for many locals and others interested in cultural events. Yet, I wondered why Jamal and Sura chose to live in this neighbourhood in the first place, considering that it has very few Iraqis, if any, living in it. One evening as Jamal, Sura, and I walked back

under the midnight sky from our regular café, where I had also become a regular visitor. Jamal and Sura described their feelings and views about the neighbourhood:

Jamal: *You know, when we first came here we did not know anyone, and in a sense we still do not. We do not have any family here. And the Iraqi art scene is very bourgeoisie and elitist, and I try to avoid it. It is not an environment I enjoy socializing with a lot, unless I have to, for example, if I have an exhibition or something, so I did not build many connections here. But, I knew from another Iraqi artist and friend currently in London that Lweibdeh provided a quieter environment than the chaos of other parts of Amman, and it had a good arts scene with many galleries so it would be a good opportunity to be close to these while we stayed in Amman. Little did we know we would be here till now! But you know, there is a sense of community here, its isolation on the top of the hill enabled it somewhat to forge its own identity. Look at the architecture around you, it has recorded so many memories. But of course, it is changing. I mean you were telling me that your studio apartment cost 250 JD, but when we first came here in 2007 you would pay that same rent for a fully furnished three-bedroom apartment. It is crazy, but that is Amman in general. It is becoming extremely expensive to live here.*

Sura: *Yes, yes! Also, honestly though smell the air now. Take a breath now. Does not the smell of gardenia and jasmine remind you of our*

neighbourhoods back in Iraq! Every time I pass by I cut a small bunch from a house we always pass by on our walks back. But it is everywhere here, always reminding you of home.

Jamal: *Indeed! This is another thing about this neighbourhood, and maybe Amman in general. When the spring and summer comes, and the gardenias and jasmines blossom, it makes you feel like you are back home for a fleeting moment. I have even planted some in the small make-shift garden we made in the balcony of our house here. I will show it to you when you come by [...] You know, what I like about our house here, beside it having a small room with a window that I have transformed into my studio, it is how cold the ka'shi [floor tiles] gets even in the summer. Walking on it barefoot, and feeling the cold travel through your body in the midst of summer reminds me very much of my days in Baghdad.*

As Jamal and Sura were talking, I became more aware of the role sensory memory plays as I recalled an Iraqi poem, *The Rail/Train and Hamad*, by one of Iraq's famous poets, Muthafar Al-Nawab. The poem, which was transformed into a popular song in the 1980s called *We Passed by You Hamad* and gained popularity across the Gulf region, features a travelling man yearning for a lost lover who reminded him of his home. One of the verses that I recounted to Jamal and Sura then goes: *We passed by you Hamad, on the night train/ we **heard** the grinding of coffee, and **smelled** the scent of cardamom.* The moment I had brought up that song to them, the three of us became engrossed in a nostalgic

conversation about Iraqi music. “*Jamal has a beautiful voice, by the way,*” Sura interjected. “*He used to sing to us all these beautiful, yet very sad, songs of Fouad Salim and Qahtan Attar when we had friends over. Not much anymore since we moved here though.*” Jamal replied: “*That is true. But right now a person has no energy, or will, to do so. We do not have these gatherings we used to have **mal gabbol** [of before] anyways.*” I had noticed here how the phrase ‘of before’, or *gabbol* in the Iraqi Arabic dialect, was used by many of my interlocutors, to refer both to a temporal past, as well as a spatial one that is located in the homeland and its memories. This time/place ‘of before’ is however remembered in multiple ways, and could be represented differently by different Iraqis, despite it being always located in Iraq. This of course contradicts the problematic view of several scholars (e.g. Chou 1991; Rushdie 2012; Mishra 1996) that situate the homeland as mainly ‘imagined’ or ‘imaginary’. Thus, to reaffirm, the past for Iraqi exiles is always emplaced in the homeland despite one’s physical displacement.

This reference to the past in the form of a time/place *of before* or *gabbol* is not always brought up as a melancholic nostalgia for a past that will never return, but that nostalgia is often used ‘reflectively’ and productively to create ‘change’ in the present, as emphasized earlier by Boym (2008). Change in this context is conceptualized as any process that can alleviate the trauma of exile and situate the self more securely in the present, or even contribute to the rebuilding of one’s homeland for the better. In this sense, Kasbarian (2015) has noted that in the Armenian diaspora, maintaining nostalgic longings formed a stronger bond with the homeland, and could be seen as one of the elements that inspired ‘diasporic’ Armenians to return to Armenia and help rebuild their

country. In a similar manner, and yet from a different trajectory, Lewis (2008) has also found that Iraqi girls who preserved and performed their Iraqi identity in Toronto, a process that by nature required acts of nostalgia, were charged with a desire to return to their homeland and help rebuild it. This latter example was evident among a few of my younger interlocutors, like Reem and Samar, who expressed a desire and responsibility to return to Iraq one day and help rebuild it, despite remarking that their parents no longer wish to return. Memory-work is after all critical for the present, since the past always informs our constructions of present realities, and otherwise we will be doomed to repetition (McDermott 2002: 390).

Sensory memories that transport us through both time and space by hearing, smelling, tasting and even touching, float “just beneath the surface of consciousness” as they are “evoked spontaneously” throughout our interactions with the material environment around us (Wehner 2002: 68). The built/material environment around us and what makes it is after all a “mnemonic for memor[ies]” that are rooted in individual, familial, and ancestral histories (Ramos 2010: 59). In the case of Iraqi exiles such as Jamal and Sura, sensory memories evoke the ‘authentic’; those experiences that are rooted in a real and material homeland that they had experienced. Yet, despite evoking the homeland and one’s memories of it, the elements that motivate these nostalgic evocations in exile, such as the smell of gardenia, are more often than not seen as qualitatively subordinate and secondary to those ‘original’ ones located in the homeland (see *The Scent of Jasmine: Coming of Age in Jerusalem and Damascus* by Anan Ameri for example). That is of course, until one returns to the homeland and realizes that even

there, these familiar elements and the sensations they evoked have changed with the homeland's disfiguration, and no longer represent what they once did, where metaphorically speaking, the present and not the past had become a *foreign country*, to borrow from David Lowenthal's book *The Past is a Foreign Country*. For after all, the "sensory qualities of places [and elements]" also change with the transformations that occur to the homeland's urban space, and with these changes new meanings are socially and culturally produced, while others are relegated to memory (Low 2015: 296). Thus, as suggested by Morse (1999: 65) articulating these sensed memories might often lead into a much critiqued, and reactionary, sentimentality and romanticism. However, if one was to associate sentimentality with nostalgia, then as was elaborated in earlier chapters, an attack on nostalgia and sentimentality ignores the realities of their employment as mechanisms of survival, coping, and praxis in the present. Nostalgia or sentimentality can be thought of as giving a critical "sensory depth to our awareness of the other places, times and possibilities" (Atia and Davies 2010: 184); a depth to our being and existence. This became clearer when Jamal, Sura, and I sat one evening at Aristotle Café chatting about Iraqi food:

Jamal: *Did I tell you we found 'denees' here in wast el-balad, it is very similar to our Subor in Basra [a kind of fish popular in their hometown of Basra]?!*

Abdulla: *Really?! How is that possible? Did they import it from Basra?*

Sura: *Yes we did! It was also very cheap because it is frozen! It is so good!*

Jamal: *No, sadly it is not the 'Subor' of Basra. Apparently they brought it frozen from India or Thailand, I am not sure. But you should have seen me, I was so ecstatic like a child. Not only do I love fish and we eat it almost daily; You know us Basrawis we cannot live without our fish and masmoot'a [a Basrawi fish stew]. But 'Subor' in particular was a staple in every Basrawi household, it took me back to my teenage years when I used to go with my father to the fish market, or they would send me to get it, so that my mother could make masmoot'a. Sura makes wonderful masmoota' but one's mother's food always tastes different. But of course, denees here tastes different too from the Subor we used to get from Shatt Al-Arab to Basra. My dear, one just has to think of all the fish from Dijlah [river Tigris] we had in Iraq that we can no longer taste. Tell me, where will you find this?*

Sura: *Ya m'awad [Oh please], look at Dijlah right now! It became a garbage, as if it is sewage water. One cannot even swim in it like we used to before, let alone for any kind of fish to survive in it. God help those fishes for being born in Iraq! Neither the people, nor the government seem to take care of it anymore. Look how it was before/gabbol, and look at it now, look at its color. The pollution has completely destroyed it. Even the fish in Basra now is not Iraqi, but most of it is coming from Iran.*

Literature from anthropology and other sister fields on food, cooking, and memory has recently blossomed, particularly in studies on ‘diasporic’ and exilic communities (Holtzman 2006; Alexeyeff 2004; Abdullah 2010; Duruz 2010). Not only were sensory memories, food and taste, brought up again in how Sura and Jamal remembered the homeland, but more critically these memories were tied and located in the physicality and materiality that is part of what makes the homeland (Jones-Gailani (2017) noted the role *qahwa* and *kleiche*’ plays in the Iraqi diaspora in a similar way). Here, it is important to emphasize that the memories food and cooking resurface and unearth are not only about the particular food or the smell of Jasmine; for the “sensual means more than describing the way things look or smell” to quote Paul Stoller (1989: 9) in his ethnography of the Songhai. Rather, sensual/sensed memories are about larger social relationships in particular contexts that certain smells or tastes invoke, such as the scent of gardenia evoking the memory of one’s house garden, or nights out with friends in Baghdad and so on. As suggested by Ingold (2012: 432), we should not “think of the properties of materials as attributes” but rather as “histories” that are political and social. Memories evoked by the senses are steeped in both the local and the national, for the way people/Iraqis prepare certain dishes or consume certain foods, or even become familiar with certain scents, might differ from one community, region, or family to another. For example, *Masmoot’a*, the Basrawi fish stew Jamal was referring to, might not hold the same social value and nostalgic capacity for Iraqis from Baghdad or Mosul, who were not steeped in or familiar with the local history and traditions of Basra. From another trajectory, certain foods like *Masmoot’a* or the *Subbor* fish, which have always been associated with the working-class of Basra due to their relative affordability and ease of

preparation, might not be a significant element in the recollections of Basrawis from a higher socioeconomic class (Bourdieu 2013). Yet, there are also national dishes, like Dolma, that are claimed as markers of the Iraqi cuisine, and are prepared differently from one city to another, and from one family to another using different spices or vegetables; emphasizing the role of food and cooking as a “source and marker of social distinction [or diversity]” after-all (Sutton 2010: 213).

In exile, the memories evoked through one’s senses, such as taste, not only speak to the transformations that occurred in the homeland, but they also speak to local and regional histories and differences. Food, to borrow from Holtzman (2006: 364) is a “locus for historically constructed identities.” In addition, sensory memories also emphasize how exile has rendered one’s life away from home as a struggle to retain and reassemble those elements of the homeland that can still be reclaimed. Within such contexts, one would not be surprised then to find an abundance of Iraqi restaurants in Amman, for after all they work on preserving the homeland and one’s relationship to it, and despite being business projects, they nevertheless respond to the nostalgias of the larger community; they too are culturally and social constructed. For once a restaurant or café that is distinctively Iraqi is established, it becomes a community hub and a public space for many Iraqis to congregate, and perform, recreate, and remember their collective memories of the homeland in different ways. Interestingly, *manfa*, which refers to exile in Arabic, and *manfi* to refer to the exiled individual, come from the rote *nafi* in Arabic to mean ‘negation’ or ‘negated,’ further emphasizing the desolation of exile as a both a state

and condition. It renders the individual in a state of complete ‘nothingness’ and bleakness now that the he or she had lost his/her homeland.

Yet, in his essay on food and home-making in the Lebanese ‘diaspora’, Ghassan Hage (2010: 417) suggested that home is a feeling, an ‘affective construct’ that may be replicated in exile as long as the elements that construct it are accessible. Thus, in the case of the Lebanese diaspora in Australia, cooking Lebanese food was highlighted as one of the ways in which ‘feeling at home’ is fostered. However, constructing ‘home’ only as an affective state that may be replicated anywhere raises two problems. First, it dislocates home from its history, from the materiality and physicality of the homeland; one may conclude from arguments that discuss home as an ‘affective state’ that the *homeland* is not a prerequisite for home-making, for it can be made and remade anywhere. While locating home in the homeland might produce an essentialist construction, careful and critical essentialism in such instances can be employed as a strategy of resistance against the loss of one’s homeland, and by extension home, and against the forces, imperial or local, that are threatening its existence (Sylvain 2014). Essentialism here emplaces one’s being and existence. Second, constructing home merely as an ‘affect’ ignores the fact that for many exiles, such was the case with many of my interlocutors, the quality and intensity of the elements that make the home are always viewed as inadequate and lacking relative to those that originate in the homeland. Nevertheless, Hage (2010: 418) also identifies home as a ‘feeling’ of “security, familiarity, community, and a sense of possibility or hope.” The first two elements are central ones for they are what make the latter two, building a community and a sense of

hope, possible. After-all, how can human life be sustained and lived without the two ‘values’ that make it feasible; security and freedom (Bauman 2016). All of this is not to say that practices that recreate or forge a ‘feeling of home’, or the elements reminiscent of the (home)land, do not help construct a “better-life” in exile as Hage (2010: 424) suggests, and as was evident in the many ways my interlocutors drew from the past to construct their lives in present exile. Rather, it is suggested that they ought to not be approached as a replacement for one’s home or homeland, for the political implications of such constructions, particularly in situations of settler colonialism and imperial aggressions, can further contribute to the disfranchisement of the homeland.

Of course, the exaggerated dark image about Dijlah as portrayed by Sura earlier is not entirely accurate now. Despite the pollution, the river still hosts some life and several campaigns have been established in the past few years to rejuvenate and clean it, albeit with a lot of resistance from political elites and with little success (see Al-Ali (2014) for further analysis on the destruction of the natural environment in the south of Iraq during the occupation). Nevertheless, Sura’s narrative implies a larger meaning as it is also seen as a denunciation of the desolate condition to which her homeland had succumbed to following the occupation. After all, it was the occupying forces, both British and American, that were primarily responsible for the dismantling of Iraq’s society, and the destruction of the natural and archaeological environment of Iraq (see Hamilakis (2009) on the usage of archaeological sites in Iraq as military bases, for example). This mutilation of the once embracing/ed homeland has rendered it as a place of danger instead of security, a place of death instead of life. Yet, Jamal and Sura’s reference and

discursive return to Dijlah (Tigris) and Furat (Euphrates) also hints at a construction of the homeland that is situated in a localized, as well as ancestral, tie to their natural environment, landscape, and the city of Basra itself. One may even suggest that the two rivers as markers of the homeland's (Iraq) natural environment are not only 'given meaning' by way of the ancestral history, but that they also inscribe and give meaning to the national identity of Iraqis (Ingold 2012: 431-432). For after all, Iraqis have embraced what 'Mesopotamia' literally represents, *the land between two rivers*, as one the cultural repertoires that mark their collective consciousness and identity.

This is even more important for Basrawis, who have built deeper ancestral ties to the two rivers and *Shatt Al-Arab* (where the Tigris and Euphrates meet), that were and still are, central to their way of life, whether it is fishing, dhow trade, or date palm cultivation. In fact, one of the recurring themes in my conversations with Jamal about the homeland were his memories as a child in the village. Memories in which the landscape of Basra figured as central to what the homeland represented to him growing up: the farm, the palm trees, the different kinds of dates his father cultivated and the farm animals. In fact, Basra's landscape figures as a main and central theme in the literary productions of Basrawis in Iraq and exile; for example, in the short stories and novels of Muhammad Khuddayir, and the poetry of both Sa'adi Yousef and the late renowned Iraqi poet Badir Shakir al-Sayyab.

This recollection and reconstruction of the homeland that is rooted in the land(scape) is of course not unique to Iraqi exiles, but is also found in Palestinian oral

history, where the land and landscape was also essential for Palestinian exiles whose connection to the land is deeply rooted not only due to the continuous loss of that land through settler colonialism, but to the landscape's deep ties to their ancestral way of life and self-consciousness (Masalha 2012; Sayigh 1998). In her work with rural Palestinian men and women, anthropologist Randa Farah (2006) had shown how the land and its agricultural products were invoked as one of the central narratives in the imagination and reproduction of Palestine. In a similar way, in her own representation of the homeland and its (be)longings, Farah (2016) invoked collective memories of the Mediterranean and the *Karmel* (Mount Carmel) when talking about Palestine. Furthermore, Nefissa Naguib's (2009) work with Palestinian rural women in the village of Musharafah shows how water as a natural resource and feature of their landscape plays a social and political role in the formation of rural women's way of life and self-consciousness, and thus in the making of individual and collective memories of/from the homeland. Landscapes are not only sites of memory-making, and thus remembering, that shape a group's "social imagination," but they are also *witnesses to*, as much as they are *victims of*, the "shifting social [and political] circumstances" throughout history, particularly the colonial and neocolonial (Cruikshank 2014: 12). The act of witnessing of these historical changes/events by the natural environment is thus a testimony to how the homeland, and our relationship to it, has changed with time/space.

Samir and Fahmi: Remembering against the Current

We are on the second floor of Yassir's bookstore in downtown Amman. The place is packed with Arabic novels and poetry collections, books on history and art, and a section dedicated entirely to Marxist literature. Yassir and I had just finished talking about the literary productions of two of my favorite Iraqi folk poets, *Mudhafar al-Nawwab* and *A'ryan Sayyid Khalaf*, "We are still digitizing our collection," he said as he searched for some of their works through the rich storage of used books. Yassir, the Palestinian owner of this bookstore, was an ex-member of a Palestinian leftist organization, and had established the bookstore with his older brother. He is in his mid-50s now, and I often see him and his brother managing separate floors of the bookstore whenever I went by, or just chilling with their friends over tea and cigarettes:

This place is not a business, comrade [the term he was used to having being in a socialist party]. It is a place of culture. This is why it is still operating despite the financial burden. It is here for the young generation, like you, from all walks of life. A place for them to access any book they want to read. You have already seen, many of the books here do align with my political beliefs, but it is nevertheless important to read them. Look, I even have books of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr [a prominent Shi'i cleric from Iraq] which are banned here, they are a fascinating read!

Yassir tells me as he was standing over his computer to check the prices for some of the books I had asked him about. “*But tell me, what are you doing in Amman anyways?*” he continues. I replied that I am here to do fieldwork with Iraqi exiles and briefly explained my research to him. I noticed a smile growing on his face before he commented proudly:

Really? Walak, you have just come to the right man! I know most of the Iraqi community here. Just tell me who you want to meet and I can put you in touch with them. Communists, writers, novelists, poets, even Raghad [Saddam’s eldest daughter] ... anyone you are looking for, they are all my comrades. Or I tell you, I will call comrade Samir now. He is a well connected Iraqi writer and archaeologist here and knows many more Iraqis in Amman.

Yassir picks up the phone, calls Samir, and tells him about me and the research I am conducting: “*I have with me comrade Abdallah, he is an Iraqi young man doing research about the homeland and memory, and I thought you two should meet.*” A few moments later Yassir hands me the phone, and after a brief introduction and pleasantries, Samir and I agree to meet the next night at a café in Lweibdeh, after he insisted that we meet at a place close to where I live since I do not have a car.

The following night, I headed to *Fann wa Chai* café [literally, *art and tea café*], one of Lweibdeh’s landmarks of art and culture that I had become familiar with during my stay in Amman, and waited for Samir excitedly at the second-floor balcony of the café. Half an hour later, Samir showed up with his Jordanian wife Haneen, and

immediately proceeds to comment that I was much younger than he expected, jokingly reflecting that I was right in referring to him as *'ammo* or uncle when we first spoke on the phone. We exchanged pleasantries as we waited for the *Qahwa Saddah* the three of us had ordered, then I began talking about the purpose of the research I am carrying out here in Amman, to which Samir responded that it is a form of “*archaeology of the past in the Foucauldian sense*” that is much needed in the Iraqi community.

Samir, who is in his mid-40s now, currently works as a consultant for an international organization that is involved in archaeological and cultural preservation projects in the region. Yet, he is also an activist and writer who has published a book and several articles on Iraq’s archaeological heritage; a theme that permeated throughout his narrative and language as we talked about Iraq. After all, Samir was a student of one of Iraq’s leading archaeologists, the late Behnam Abu Alsoof, who happened to be a close friend of my family back when they lived in Baghdad; a coincidence that brought Samir and I closer having found we had a common family friend.

Like many Iraqis, Samir was forced to leave Iraq in 1995, during the height of the economic sanctions. Having forged his military service in order to avoid being enlisted, Samir had to rely on another source of income to survive life in Iraq. Through his social connections in both Iraq and the region, Samir was able to smuggle telephone units into the country, which he later sold to a foreign embassy in Baghdad. But, having not acquired a permission from the Iraqi government, the process of selling these ‘risky’ units was deemed ‘illegal’ by the state, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Samir recalled:

Imagine, not only had I faked my military service, but technically, I had deserted the military in the eyes of the state, and you can imagine what happens to deserters!! But, because of my stupidity and naivety, I had sold these telephones to a foreign government under the table. You know, with the sanctions these electronics were very hard to get, so as a business it was very lucrative at the time. Anyways, so from 1995 and probably until the occupation, the government was actively looking for me. To the degree that our house in Baghdad was being watched by the mukhabarat [secret service] almost daily in case I drop by. Imagine, they would come to our house and ask my mother if she had seen me or if I had called, as if she would tell them! After a while, my mother became close and friendly with them, and started bringing them lunch and dinner. Of course, I had already left Iraq to Jordan with fake documents, and from there I immigrated to New Zealand, only to return a few years later to Jordan. Life in New Zealand is both relaxing and exhausting. Exhausting in the sense that you feel disconnected from the rest of the world, especially from the things that remind you of the homeland. This was one of the reasons I was ecstatic to accept work here, it reminds me of the homeland. At least I am around many beautiful Iraqi people like all of you, speaking our dialect!

Samir's narrative here is another example of the many strategies and ways Iraqis, like him and Jamal, tried to resist the state, as well as larger imperial policies, such as the sanctions in this case. For both Samir and Jamal, *surviving* in the homeland required the

adoption of alternative methods that were simultaneously resisting the state, while at the same time resisting the effects of an imperial hegemony. Yet, despite Samir voicing his explicit opposition to the Ba'athist government and Saddam Hussein throughout our conversations, he also expressed dismay at how the Iraqi society and state had become reconfigured beyond recognition after the occupation. Talking about the condition of post-occupation Iraq, Samir lights up a cigarette he had borrowed from me, and says:

Let me tell you. I went back to Baghdad for the first and last time I think in 2008, and in the few weeks I stayed there I had seen enough. I thanked god, whoever he/she might be, a thousand times that I left before the occupation and did not witness what had happened to it firsthand. I do not think I could have survived it. I will tell you one thing I remember clearly. I needed to get some papers done one day, and usually one goes to his neighbourhood's or local office. So naturally, I went to the office in Karrada. By the way, I am the son of Karrada. I was born there and my family had lived there for years. And you know, Karrada has always been a diverse neighbourhood, but after the occupation the demography of Baghdad in general had changed [...] Anyways, so I go to the office there, and to my surprise, they tell me that my papers had been moved to 'Adhamiya, a majorly Sunni neighbourhood! Oh dear, why? I ask them, and they blatantly reply that you people now deal with that office, that is your place. After arguing about how sectarian this is, and with them replying to me that these are rules coming from above, I take my papers angrily and leave [...] But imagine the degree of this sectarianism. That someone who belonged to this neighbourhood across

generations -I know nothing better than Karrada- is being assigned and affiliated to another area based merely on what sect they might belong to!

This demographic change that Samir referred to was the product of strategic census campaigns, walling of neighbourhoods, and military checkpoints that were carried out mainly by the U.S military and the CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority), and later by the Iraqi government and para-state militias, in order to further homogenize Baghdadi neighbourhoods along ethno-sectarian lines (Zangana 2010; Niva 2008). Yet, what is more critical here is how the urban landscape, much like the natural environment, not only becomes a marker of and witness to the political and social transformations in the homeland, but also to how the “urban memory” of this space shape representation of the homeland in the present (Belanger 2002: 72). For Salam and other city dwellers, their everyday life and practices were embedded within the familiar urban space of Baghdad, and thus not only was their construction of the self being made and remade within and by that space, but also their relationship to the homeland was established through that making of the self in the urban space. Here, I am branching off from Belanger (2002: 81) who suggests that “civic life is embedded in collective processes through which” urban city dwellers (re)construct their individual and collective identities. In addition, Bruck (2005: 47) suggests that “controlling the way people move through space,” and the physical environment itself, can work to “reproduce dominant perspectives on the world” by producing new ways of situating oneself in relation to the physical environment, as well as by limiting the production of alternative and subversive forms of knowledge. Here, it is also important to emphasize that altering and controlling space does not only

work on the present lived-experience, but it also shapes remembering of the past and memory-making for the future, particularly since the physical landscape functions as a “mediator” and “mnemonic marker” of the past (Tilley 1994: 204). Thus, as Samir observed, the urban space of Baghdad in general, and his neighbourhood of Karrada in particular, was thrown out of the familiarity that once made it an essential facet of the homeland in his experience and imagination; the familiarity that once shaped his childhood and housed his memories.

In such instances of fragmentation, and to assert the rootedness of the homeland, other elements or facets resurface and become more essential in the reconstruction and preservation of the homeland. These elements are nevertheless rooted in socioeconomically and politically subjective individual/collective memories (Naficy 2013: 18), and may differ from one person or another, as earlier chapters show. For Samir, reclaiming and drawing on Iraq’s ancient civilizational past is one way to help him situate his Iraqiness in present exile:

*Here is the thing about us Iraqis. Our connection to the homeland is something that is unique about Iraqis in particular. It is as if there is a genetic connection between our bodies and the land. Like the umbilical cord between a fetus and his mother. Even after it has been cut, traces of that connection remain. You just have to think about Iraq’s original name, Uruk. When it is written in cuneiform, the symbols refer to a place of settling and dwelling, to a homeland! Which is why, our relationship and belonging to the past, to the homeland, to Iraq is an **organic***

one in the Gramscian sense, unlike other nations. I mean if you look at other Arab exiles, Iraqis are the only ones who maintain and preserve their Iraqi identity abroad, who maintain a connection to the homeland.

Of course, this last statement is an exaggeration, since many Arab exiles from different countries and with diverse migration journeys have maintained a connection and sense of belonging to their homelands' (Hage 2002; Swedenburg 1996; Abdelhady 2011). Yet, there is a critical implication in Samir's claim that the connection of Iraqis to the homeland is an organic and umbilical bond. On the one hand, it can be seen as a dangerous essentialist position, yet on the other hand, it was clear to me during my interview with him and other Iraqis that it was also form of 'strategic essentialism'. Invoking ancient history was not only a way to reclaim the home(land) itself, but also to reclaim the authority to narrate the homeland's past and present (Field 1999: 198). This form of essentialism is not necessarily risky for it does not "presume that communities are bounded [or] fixed," neither does it "negate the plurality of identities" within the homeland, particularly when it is coming from Iraqis from different backgrounds and not outsider groups (Azoulay 1997: 102). Rather, it becomes a political and cultural strategy to counter the imperial policies that aim to further divide and fragment the nation, and to counter the remaining traces imperialism that are seeping through local politics. Stuart Hall (Azoulay 1997: 102-103) put it most eloquently:

Political identity often requires the need to make conscious commitments. Thus it may be necessary to momentarily abandon the multiplicity of cultural identities

for more simple ones around which political lines have been drawn. You need all the folks together, under one hat, carrying one banner, saying we are for this, for the purpose of this fight, we are all the same, just black and just here.

During my conversation with Samir, his friend Fahmi had already joined us and was nodding in agreement. Unlike Samir and most of my interlocutors, Fahmi left Iraq more than 25 years ago and has been living in Jordan since then, which explained the slight Jordanian accent he spoke with. Yet, Fahmi had also escaped Iraq to Jordan fleeing military service, an experience that Fahmi and Samir bonded over deeply, despite the temporal difference: *“Beautiful memories and suffering that remind us of Iraq, eh wallah,”* Fahmi reminisced proudly as they remembered their days in hiding and their memories of being smuggled out of Iraq. It was at that moment when Samir ecstatically cried: *“This is why I love Amman! Where can you have gatherings like these, with the beautiful breeze that reminds you of our gatherings back at home! Tell me do you have these in Canada?!”* Of course, I did not. Samir then pulls out a plate of dessert he had prepared, and says: *“Here! I even made you halawat jeddar [an Iraqi carrot dessert] in honor of this blessed gathering and in memory of our homeland. What is more Iraqi than halawat jeddar?!”* There were indeed many things that are Iraqi about Amman, as I and many Iraqis like Samir felt.

But more importantly, Fahmi’s coupling of the memories that make the homeland, as beautiful yet as those of suffering, is representative of the larger discourse of homeland among Iraqis from different backgrounds. It highlights, once again, how the

homeland can simultaneously be a place of desire and a place of danger (Brah 2005: 207). Framed as such, one can suggest that the homeland-exile relationship renders exile as a place of constant insecurity and non-belonging, since the homeland, despite it embracing both desire and danger, remains the central place of belonging and identification. Yet, when I asked Fahmi if he had returned to or wished to return to Iraq in the future, he replied:

Well, I did not want to return. But I was forced to return. I was deported. Someone I used to work with accused me of embezzlement, and after spending a few months in prison, I was thrown across the border, this time the other way around, with nothing in my pockets but a few dollars. Imagine, I arrived in Baghdad not knowing anyone and with literally nothing but the clothes on me. A place that is completely unfamiliar to me as I have not been there since I left. Imagine, after living here for 15 years, someone could easily be thrown out of the country and not be able to return [...] Alhamdulillah, after a while I was able to find a job through some of the connections I had made in Jordan with Iraqi business men [...] But throughout all this stay in Baghdad, which lasted for more than 6 months, all I was thinking about was how can I return to my family, to Jordan! I did not feel myself in Baghdad, nor did I know who I was even when I returned to Basra for a few days during that stay.

Fahmi was finally able to return to Jordan after getting a royal pardon issued by the Jordanian Royal Court, whom he had contacted through email from Baghdad; a method

of communication that Fahmi is still surprised worked. Yet interestingly, despite being rejected by both the homeland and exile, Fahmi seems to feel a stronger bond and belonging to Amman than to Iraq. It is the place where he had established social, familial, and career roots/routes (Hall and Back 2009: 661). It is also a place where he seems to feel a strong affinity to its natural environment, as became evident when we were browsing through some of the Jordanian landscape photographs, such as *Petra* and *Wadi Mujib*, scattered across the walls of *Fann wa Chai*, despite him being originally from Basra like Jamal and Sura. Fahmi is not only extensively familiar with the Jordanian natural landscape, but he also spoke about it with a sense of pride as he recalled some of the valleys and mountains where he had conducted some photography projects that were later exhibited at a few local art galleries. Having not brought up the Iraqi landscape in conversation himself, or referred to it throughout, I asked Fahmi if these photographs reminded him of anything similar in Iraq, to which he hesitantly and dismissively replied:

*Not really. Wadi Mujib is something extravagant. The rock formations, and the water running through. I mean look at this photograph. Look at how the black and white colors give it a much deeper glory. I have to ask Layla [the owner of the café and friend of his] about the photographer! But, even in Basra we do not have such beautiful natural environment, not that I remember anymore at least [...] **Their** natural sites and reserves are magnificent here, and unlike us, they know how to take care of it.*

Fahmi's hesitance and refusal to remember and narrate the homeland through its

landscape is interesting. From one trajectory, he realizes that he does not belong to the Jordanian landscape as he clearly uses “their” to refer to the Jordanian’s landscape and “we” to the Iraqi and Basrawi natural landscape. Yet from another trajectory, the landscape and natural environment is still relevant to Fahmi’s construction of the self, but the loss of his homeland’s landscape, both literally and metaphorically, was replaced by an adopted and ‘alternative’ one that speaks to the affinity and connection he as an Iraqi from Basra has to the land. It is important to note here, that the landscape does not necessarily evoke pleasure or pride, particularly when it has been abused by imperial and colonial aggressions, for “it can be associated sometimes with loss, with pain, with social fracture and *sense of belonging gone*, although the memory remains, albeit poignantly” (Taylor 2008: 2). During that conversation with Fahmi, Samir, who was browsing through some of these photographs, overheard us and immediately commented:

I heard you talking about conservation projects? Let me tell you an incident that happened to me a while ago here, in Amman, so that you realize how many of us Iraqis are oblivious to our rich natural environment. We had planned to organize an educational and funding event here in Amman to ‘Save the Waters of Dijlah’ from the pollution that has occurred to it after the occupation. We thought that if we approach members of the Iraqi elite community, they would be interested in supporting us, at least logistically; it is the land of their homeland after all. So, while looking for a conference hall to hold the event, we approached an Iraqi businessman and the owner of one of Amman’s popular hotels, in order to rent the conference room in their hotel for one day at a cheaper cost, or maybe even

for free considering the little funding we already had [...] The man listened to us as we explained the project and the financial difficulties we had, and then turns to me and says: “you want to save the waters of Dijlah, no? Well, you know Abu Nawwas, right? [a neighbourhood in Baghdad famous for its restaurants] Go and get your money from the people eating the fish of the river there, they are the ones affected by it not me. Do not come and ask me for money or help. This is not my job!”. Ya’ni Abdallah, I listened to his words with shock, and I felt as if I had just been slapped, and then slapped again. My eyes were swelling with tears, and I almost broke down hearing his words. I mean, was he not an Iraqi like us? But then reality hit me. This is the reality of the elite Iraqis in Amman, they were the ones who stole our country under the Saddam, and then later during the occupation. What did I expect? Why would they care about Iraq, let alone Dijlah?

To Samir, like Um Warda before him, this incident not only highlighted the tension between those Iraqis “*who have everything, and those who have nothing*” as he phrased it, but also to the new-elite’s relationship with the homeland, which he described as no longer meaningful or existent. For now, even River Tigris, or *Dijlah* in Arabic, no longer holds a value to them despite it being a marker of the homeland and one’s Iraqi identity. Samir also blamed the Jordanian state for further extending the power and authority these Iraqi elite have, while at the same time putting obstacles in the lives of many other Iraqis who are barely surviving in Amman. In fact, at the time of writing this dissertation the Jordanian government announced that foreign investors can now acquire Jordanian citizenship, if they invest a certain amount (a total of approximately 4 million USD) in

Jordanian banks and corporations; a move that was seen by some as catering to the new and old Iraqi elite in Amman.

At the time of our conversation, one of the projects Fahmi had worked on was scheduled to be exhibited at Orfali Gallery later that year. Reflecting on Fahmi's narrative, it is hard to really identify one element that seems to influence how that relationship and affinity to Jordan is constructed. Whether it is the sense of economic security he acquired here, or because he got married into a Jordanian family and his children are now in university; *"when you ask them, they say they are Jordanian. And in reality they are. They do not know any other place, and I did not instill Iraq in them. It felt for the better. They do not speak with an Iraqi dialect for example"* he observed as he talked about his children. Whether it is the sense of abandonment he feels from the homeland, or its foreignness now that he has spent almost half of his life in exile. Nevertheless, Fahmi remains holding tight to some memories of the homeland that are beautiful and yet painful, as he described it earlier. He is still "organically" bound to it, to use Samir's description that Fahmi agreed with, despite the hidden anger he has towards what it had become.

Chapter Five

Beginnings

The writing of this thesis has been both a personal and academic endeavour that raised more questions than answers. It is personal in the sense that while analyzing the narratives of my fellow Iraqi exiles in Jordan, I was contrapuntally interrogating my own longings for and belongings to the homeland. The more I wrote about their stories and delved into their memories, the more I was struck with questions about my own relationship with the homeland, about what remains of my own memories, and about my family's history. At the same time, I also began doubting and critiquing memories where I had firmly situated and entrusted my homeland and sense of be(longing). Yet, these interrogations and suspicions of the memories I had held on to were often the means which allowed me to rediscover the ties I had to the homeland, while at the same time dispel some myths I had embraced. While I have consciously avoided turning this ethnographic research into an auto-ethnography, it was nevertheless infused with personal reflections that not only were important in understanding the larger contexts of my interlocutors' memories, but also to how I was positioned in relation to the interlocutors and their narratives. This ethnography is also an academic quest in a larger study on memory-making by Iraqis in Amman, Jordan, and I was quite conscious of my responsibility to portray their narratives in ways that respect their own voices, yearnings, and interpretations, and I made a concerted effort to not "speak for them".

The ethnography also speaks to shared experiences in the sense that throughout the analysis and writing, both theory and stories I heard were engaged dialogically with one another, as well as allowing the multiple narratives of my interlocutors to speak with and engage with one another throughout the text. Rather than trying to mold these narratives on home and homeland into a homogenous and singular narrative that fits within a theoretical paradigm, or attempt to impose theoretical concepts that fit directly into the narratives of my interlocutors, I tried to allow both theory and ethnographic material, to interface in ways that reflected the more nuanced reality of exile, and the diverse experiences and interpretations of exile that circulate and change over time. For many Iraqis, the homeland is like a mirage that manifests itself in many images, and yet remains unattainable and unreachable. Thus, at one level, this ethnography might be understood as a quest to reclaim the *homeland*, and reaffirm its material and affective existence in both the past and the present.

When read in its entirety, this thesis sheds light on the many ways Iraqis from different backgrounds imagine and remember the homeland, and how their relationship to it is forged through life in present exile in Amman, Jordan. Reflecting on these stories upon the completion of my fieldwork, they seem as containing ‘fragments’ of the homeland in exile. They diverge in certain places, but converge in others despite the different genealogies of their construction. More importantly, they do not encompass a complete or singular narrative of the homeland, but only represent part of what remains of it in the memory of Iraqi exiles, both individual and collective. For the homeland’s disfiguration had not only transformed the fragments that were retained, but it has also

eradicated many other elements that no longer exist; a rubble, both metaphorically and literally.

Based on my fieldwork, I propose that there is no ‘authentic’ way to define the homeland for the Iraqi exiles in Jordan who participated in my research, but since such imaginings and constructions are rooted in the subjective experiences and positions of the individuals reconstructing it, the *homeland* is spoken for in a manner that employs a diversity of elements from the past and the present. After all, not only are exilic memories in a state of constant flowing in “history and change with time” (Naficy 1991: 299), but also whatever happens in the homeland affects one’s exilic life (Rangi 2015).

More importantly, for the purposes of this study, and despite this ‘polyphony’ of the homeland, my research shows that at least for Iraqi exiles in Amman, the *homeland* is always located in Iraq. But, when one incorporates the notion of *home*, as approached in the earlier chapters, as being entwined with the homeland, the question becomes more complicated. For while *home*, as both an affect and a place, was always situated in the homeland, it nevertheless was situated within different temporalities. Thus, while some of my interlocutors, such as Um Warda, felt that Iraq will always remain concurrently a home and homeland, the majority of them no longer feel ‘at home’ in Iraq, neither do they feel at home in exile, despite claiming Iraq as a homeland. The existential relevance of this suggestion is critical, for it hints that life in exile, particularly when the home has been disfigured beyond recognition, is marked by a state of eternal homelessness and liminality. For now, exiled individuals exist in this state of in-betweenness, a state where

they are neither capable of reclaiming home in the homeland, nor are they interested in claiming Amman or any other place of exile as a home. To cite Said (1993: 114) on the general condition of exile: “Being skilled at survival becomes the main imperative, with the danger of becoming too comfortable and secure constituting a threat that is constantly to be guarded against.” This is of course despite the existence of ‘homing-desires’ for many Iraqi exiles, or at least exilic recreations of practices from the homeland in hopes of constructing a “better-life” in Amman, to use Hage’s (2010: 424), which more than often work as a temporary anesthetic to the pain of loss, rather than as a healing process that eventually culminates in the engendering of new ‘homes’. In this context, reflecting on Fahmi’s narrative and his expression that he had adopted Amman as a home, I am very hesitant to argue that the work-of-time in exile may eventually force the exiled individual to adopt the place of their exile as a home, despite some literature supporting this suggestion. This hesitation stems from the fact that I have met many Iraqis in Jordan, as well as beyond, who have been living in exile for decades, and yet refuse to claim their exile as a home, let alone a homeland. Thus, it is safer to suggest that the time spent in exile has no reflection on one’s emplacement and claiming of *home*, and may only gain salience when it is coupled with a multiplicity of highly politicized factors; such as generations in exile, economic security, family-making, and political orientation that may eventually override and undermine one’s relationship to the homeland. It might be safe to question whether one may claim the place of exile as a home, *only* when the homeland itself has been affectively and physically abandoned and disowned by the exiled individual him/herself, and when exile is no longer imagined as a place of *exile*?

Having said that, the interviews and conversations I engaged with shows that regardless of the different positions and backgrounds Iraqi exiles in Amman occupy, there were two main anchors or structural frames that infused all their stories of home and homeland: The Ba'athist past and the US occupation of Iraq in 2003. As the stories and recollections in the chapters above reveal, almost all of my interlocutors referred to the Ba'athist past and/or the occupation in their remembering and construction of the homeland, whether they were empathetic or hostile to Ba'athism and Saddam Hussein. Yet, I propose that the particularities and manner in which these two central themes were evoked, were to a large extent and to some degree related to the subjective experiences of class, gender, generation, and place of residence. For example, Um Warda's memories of the Iran-Iraq war were framed within the discourse of loss and mourning of loved family members, while that 'war-experience' for Tarek and Jamal were situated within the military experience, despite the different relations they had to it.

Another critical conclusion that my research reveals is that, contrary to popular perceptions, none of my interlocutors engaged in a sectarian discourse or representation of the homeland; rather, almost invariably they all reaffirmed the secular view that Iraq has throughout its history been a diverse society. Iraqis who discussed with me their views on Iraq, affirm this past with a view for the future, for this is also their desire; namely that the future homeland should be diverse and non-sectarian, despite the current prevalence of sectarian politics on both social and state level. This non-sectarian framing of the homeland, and by extension of the Iraqi national identity, was also affirmed by Nadia Lewis (2008), who found that Iraqi women in Toronto, Canada frame their ties to

the homeland and Iraqi identity within the discourse of national and class belongings, rather than religion or ethnicity.

Another important aspect is the question of power. As posited by Edward Said (2000: 176), processes of remembering and forgetting highlight and speak to power relations, both in the present and the past. Since imagining the homeland requires drawing on individual and collective memories, then the different ways Iraq is imagined and reconstructed can itself be seen as a 'critique of power'. Evoking the homeland in exile and maintaining one's belonging to it, becomes a critique and resistance against the forces, local and imperial, that not only have rendered the homeland beyond recognition, but also produced the exilic condition of its population. Thus, critically reading the narratives of Jamal and Um Warda in relation to those of former Ba'athists like Sabah and Tarek, can be seen as hitting out at power dynamics that were rooted in class and political differences of the past, and also in the present in relation to the larger Iraqi exilic community in Jordan, despite all of them living in a present marked by the precarity of exile. In the same way, albeit from a different political trajectory, Tarek's framing of the homeland through the lens of the Ba'athist past, is also a narrative of resistance that hits out at both the imperial aggressions and the post-occupation political corruption that have destroyed the homeland he was familiar with.

In general, I propose that in such exilic realities, remembering the homeland and maintaining one's ties to it in varying ways may be read as a political act of resistance and defiance, not only against present and past material realities, but also against the

works of time and forgetting. Indeed, one of the goals of this research was to decentralize the neocolonial/imperial narrative not only about representations of the homeland, or even the constructions of one's relationship to it, but also about Iraq and Iraqiness. This is of particular importance since Western academic literature on remembering and forgetting has often failed to politically and historically contextualize memory-work, and its role as a praxis (Campbell 2012: 104). Moreover, recollecting and reconstructing the homeland through ephemeral sensory memories (Morse 1999: 63), such as taste and smell, or even touch, may also be seen as another act that counters the wounds and injuries of exile (Jones-Gailani 2017).

Raymond Williams had elaborated that in the making of one's positionality and subjectivity in the present, there are 'structures of feelings' continuously working in the production of the self. For Williams (1977: 129-135), these 'structures of feeling', or experiences, can be thought of as the elements constructing one's social relations and practices in the present, but which are also rooted in the past, and influenced by factors like class and gender, only to be later reflected in cultural and social expressions. Williams also noted that "structures of feelings' are particularly relevant "to signal that what is at stake may not yet be articulated in a fully worked out form;" that is, it is still in a process of becoming (Buchanan 2010). Borrowing from Williams, I suggest that imagining the home and homeland is always in a state of perpetual becoming, that is influenced by different 'structures of feeling', such as class and cultural practices, that are rooted "in the process of the moment" (Huehls 2010: 419). The 'moment' in this context however is stretched beyond its temporal connotation, to identify and mark 'exile' in

itself as both a temporal and spatial moment of subject-production; exile *is* the moment.

Also using the notion of ‘structures of feeling’, Akhil Gupta has argued that the

“structures of feeling that produce a location called ‘the nation’ [and nationalisms] are not identical in differently situated places” (1992: 63). Thus, in essence, the stories

mentioned in earlier chapters showed how different ‘structures of feeling’ operate

differently in the reproduction of the homeland for Iraqi exiles in Amman, and how these

structures “bind space, time, and memory” in these reproductions (Gupta 1992: 76).

Extending from this framing, I believe that developing this argument further may serve as a critical point of departure for discussions on homeland and exile in future projects.

Where Do We Go Next?

In *Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals*, Edward Said (1993: 114-124)

had written the following on exile:

Exile is one of the saddest fates [...] The fact is that for most exiles the difficulty

consists not simply in being forced to live away from home, but rather, given

today's world, in living with the many reminders that you are in exile, that your

home is not in fact so far away, and that the normal traffic of everyday

contemporary life keeps you in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with

the old place [...] You can't go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable

condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with

your new home or situation.

This wound is even more painful when one is witnessing one's homeland being disfigured and turned into rubble from thousands of kilometers away in exile. Unable to share with his/her fellow Iraqis in their physical suffering, the exiled succumbs to feelings of guilt and existential loss, and turns to mourn the homeland as a final act of solidarity and survival. Throughout the writing of this thesis, as well as during the fieldwork, mourning and loss were often recurring emotions that still shape the everyday life of Iraqi exiles in Jordan, something I as an Iraqi exile share with them. I leave this thesis in hopes that I have been sincere to the tears, laughs, and longings of the interlocutors I have engaged with, and in hopes that it has provided an outlet for their narratives to be reclaimed in the making/remaking of their homeland. This thesis is by no means conclusive, and as elaborated earlier, has opened up many more questions that I hope to investigate and research in the future, hence the title of this chapter - *Beginnings*.

There are several ways from which it can further benefit in answering questions related to home and homeland in the context of Iraqi exiles. First, a more comprehensive analysis of the official state discourse, both that of the Ba'athist regime but also current government, in shaping the Iraqi 'national' identity, and the extent to which this top-down nationalism informs how the homeland is imagined through time, and for the future. Secondly, comparatively examining how Iraqis in Iraq imagine the homeland in relation to Iraqis in exile can further complicate this research, opening up new ways on theorizing processes of homeland-making. The first two points of departure would illuminate the tensions/convergences in the ways Iraqi exiles and non-exiles imagine their

homeland, Iraq, for the future. Third, the research would also benefit from a more elaborate generational analysis that examines how Iraqi exiles from younger generations, as well as Iraqis with longer histories in Jordan, relate to concepts of home, homeland, and exile. Fourth, the research would also benefit from examining the narratives of Iraqis who sojourn between Iraq and Jordan, and how they imagine the homeland when it becomes accessible and is being 'reconstructed'. I plan to conduct further research on some of these themes and questions in my Ph.D. program.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Form



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board
NMREB Full Board Initial Approval Notice**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Randa Farah
Department & Institution: Social Science\Anthropology, Western University

NMREB File Number: 109119
Study Title: Memory and the Notion(s) of Homeland Among Iraqi Exiles in Amman, Jordan.

NMREB Initial Approval Date: May 16, 2017
NMREB Expiry Date: May 16, 2018

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		2017/04/17
Letter of Information & Consent		2017/04/17
Instruments	Sample Questions	2017/03/07
Other	Participant Observation Addendum - Received for Information	2017/03/07
Letter of Information & Consent	Arabic Translation - Received for Information	2017/05/15
Other	Translation Attestation Letter - Received for Information	2017/05/15

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 0000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair

EO: Erika Basile ___ Grace Kelly ___ Katelyn Harris Nicola Morphet ___ Karen Gopaul ___

Curriculum Vitae

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