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Where politics and temporality meet

Shi'a political transnationalism over time and its relationship to the Iraqi state

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Abstract

How do we explain change in political transnationalism over time? In what way does this change affect diasporic identities? And how does this change alter the relationship and power of diasporic actors towards their homeland states? This paper addresses these questions in relation to Iraqi Shi'a political transnationalism between London and Iraq pre and post-2003. I argue that the confluence of political opportunity structures and temporality, as experienced by political actors, shapes transnational practices. As political events in Iraq unfolded over time, Shi'a diaspora mobilisation patterns changed in line with political opportunities/threats in the homeland structural context. Simultaneously, stressing the agency of actors, the temporal contexts of each period emphasised different Shi'a identities due to the interpretation of time by diasporic actors. Consequently as opportunities and temporalities shifted, political transnationalism towards Iraq also changed empowering different actors and causes. This relationship previously marked by a long-distance nationalism (Anderson, 1992) evolved to a transnationalism rooted in different ontologies. Observing political transnationalism over time therefore reveals the changing actors, shifting power dynamics, transnational identity politics and the relationship between diasporic actors and their homeland state.

Key words: Diaspora, Transnationalism, Shi'ism, Identity, Temporality

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Where Politics and Temporality meet: Shi'a political transnationalism over time and its relationship to the Iraqi state

Introduction

How do we explain change in political transnationalism over time? In what way does this change affect diasporic identities? And how does it alter the relationship and power of diasporic actors towards their homeland states? Issues of time and temporality are pertinent in the study of political transnationalism, yet have thus far received little attention in the literature. Observing change in diasporic political transnationalism is important if we are to understand the actors (dis)empowered in the homeland, which new actors arise, and who in the diaspora is empowering them, as well as how and why they are being strengthened. It also allows us to see how changing events in the homeland affect diasporic communities abroad, their self-identifications and the identities they propel. These events have repercussions for world politics as diaspora support for certain political groups may reify existing divisions, challenge the status quo or promote new movements and politics eschewing existing structures. National affiliations may give way emboldening ethnic or religious identities, which can also transcend state borders strengthening regional actors and populations across the world. New loyalties, allegiances and formations may arise that alter our political and social geographies, which may subvert, or exist in parallel, to the nation-state system (Kadhum, 2020). Examining changes in diasporic transnationalism also allows us to see how diasporic communities in the hostland are mobilising, where conflicts may be transported (Baser, 2012, 2015), become autonomised (Féron, 2017) or manifest in new movements, new identities or even become dormant.   This   paper contributes theoretically to the diaspora literature by addressing these issues, bringing together the concepts of *political opportunity structures* and *temporality* to the study of diaspora politics in a novel way. As this paper shows, both structural and temporal environments are key to understanding political transnationalism and capturing change in the relationship between diasporic transnationalism, the homeland state, and identity over periods of time. I argue

that the confluence of political opportunity structures and temporality at specific periods shape transnational practices over time. While political opportunities account for the structural context, which allows diasporic actors to respond to opportunities/threats, work with potential allies, and form coalitions (Tarrow, 2011), the temporal context informs the identity of actors, which in turn influences political actions towards specific goals.

Bringing these conceptual tools to the study of change in diaspora politics I investigate the case of the Iraqi Shi'a diaspora in London. The Iraqi Shi'a case study is pertinent and contributes new theoretical and empirical insights for the diaspora politics literature. First, Shi'a political transnationalism has been on-going since the 1980s until the present day giving ample time to analyse and observe political changes over time, the drivers of change, as well as the evolving actors involved over time. Second, it provides an interesting case of diasporic actors in opposition and exile who went on to rule in the homeland, underlining the power and importance of diasporic networks, as well as the role of political transnationalism in Iraq's continuing domestic politics. Finally, the case provides an original example of the role the diaspora has played in transporting Political Islam from the West to Iraq following intervention and the two way transnational exchanges between London and Iraq that continue to reinforce this.   The paper explores political transnationalism both before the 2003 intervention and following using a historical narrative framed around three significant time periods. The first relates to the pre-2003 opposition period, when Shi'a Islamic parties were mobilising towards regime change predominantly in the diaspora. The second I refer to as the 'Shi'a moment', when Shi'a diasporic parties transitioned from an opposition movement to governing the state from 2005. The third is from 2014, a time of existential threat from Islamic State and intra-Shi'a schisms.

As shall be demonstrated in the empirical section, as political events in Iraq unfolded over time, Shi'a diaspora mobilisation patterns have changed in line with political opportunities/threats in the homeland structural context. Simultaneously, the temporal contexts of each period emphasised

different Shi'a identities in reaction to the perceived opportunities and threats faced by Shi'a constituencies.

Observing these political and temporal contexts and their effects on Shi'a political transnationalism reveals the changing relationship between Shi'a diasporic actors and the Iraqi state as one marked not only by a long-distance nationalism (Anderson, 1992), but an evolving transnationalism rooted in different ontologies. While in the opposition period it could be characterised as threatening the state through long-distance Iraqi nationalism, the second was defined by a consolidation of state power through long-distance Shi'a patrimonialism and later Islamism. Meanwhile the third is marked by a transnational activism that shifts from the empowerment of governmental or state actors to non-state religious actors including, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani and the Popular Mobilisation Forces, guarding the Shi'a faith, contributing to a long-distance Shi'ism.

The paper reveals that political transnationalism alters not only due to POS in the structural environment but also in line with event temporalities, which shape identities and thus political actions across transnational space and time. Diasporic groups and their relationship to their homeland state is therefore not only dictated by their material capabilities, as much as the diaspora literature has emphasized, but also their subjective interpretation, experiences and understandings of time, which inspire or necessitate different practices, identities and actions.

The paper uses 28 semi-structured interviews and many more informal interviews conducted with members from the Iraqi Shi'a diaspora between 2013 to 2019, as well as secondary literature on the involvement of the Iraqi diaspora pre and post the 2003 war to form the basis of the argument outlined in this paper. Interviews were conducted with elites including Shi'a political party representatives in the diaspora including from the Da'wa party, the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, the Fadhila (Virtue) party, as well as former Ministers in Iraq originally from the London diaspora. Other interviews were conducted with community gatekeepers and Shi'a foundations, multiple Shi'a charitable

organisations, as well as second-generation Shi'a youth. Many of the interviews were selected because they were active Iraqi Shi'a organisations or well-known figures in the community, as well as through snowball sampling through various networks to avoid selection bias. It is also important to note that the findings are based on interviews conducted in London, which presented the diaspora there with its particular POS due to the fact that the UK was a key partner and ally of the US intervention in Iraq. However previously conducted research with the Iraqi Shi'a Swedish and German diaspora shows that these broader dynamics are observable in these contexts also. While the temporality was experienced in a similar way, the POS of each diaspora group in these countries played a significant factor in differences in how they mobilised transnationally towards the country[1].

The paper proceeds by addressing the concept of political opportunity structures and why it is useful for exploring change in political transnationalism over time. Second, I argue that along with POS, temporality is a neglected but important concept for understanding diasporic actor's subjective understanding of time, which impacts their identities, and in turn inspires different political actions. Third, I explore three time periods in Iraq's trajectory, which have influenced Shi'a political transnationalism to show how the juxtaposition of political and temporal time reveals changes in diaspora mobilisation and relationship to the homeland state and Shi'a identity. I conclude with some observations about time and temporality for the study of diaspora politics.

Political Opportunity Structures and Diasporic Transnationalism   The political opportunity structures (POS) literature underlines the importance of the political system in structuring collective action through the opportunities and constraints it grants political actors (McAdam et al., 1996). Underlining four

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[1] Fieldwork in Sweden was conducted between 2014 and 2015 and in Germany in 2016. For more information on the Iraqi Swedish Diaspora, please refer to doctoral thesis, Kadhum 2017, *'Diasporic Interventions: State-building in Iraq following the 2003 Iraq war'* and Kadhum, 2019, *Assessing co-development projects for civil society building in Iraq: the case of the Iraqi diaspora and Swedish institutions following the 2003 intervention in Iraq'*

areas where such opportunities may arise, Sidney Tarrow emphasises, "the attribution of opportunity or threat, the availability of potential allies, the formation of coalitions, both on the margins of and within the polity, and the framing of entire episodes of contention" (Tarrow, 2011: 163). Thus different regimes, political systems, rules and regulations in different political contexts can shape forms of mobilization by permitting some forms, and prohibiting others.   Political opportunities are important for understanding changes in political movements over time due to shifts in the institutional environment, which may solicit new opportunities/constraints, new social rules and new 'repertoires of contention' (Tilly, 1995). Therefore, they are useful for analysing difference in diasporic mobilisation, which may be rooted in multiple states as well as across a transnational de-territorialised space. This vast political landscape creates a multitude of potential opportunities and constraints for diasporic engagement towards homeland-oriented goals. The opportunities and constraints of any given diaspora group across its transnational social field may therefore explain differences between groups, within groups and as I contend differences across time within the same diasporic community.   Yet with a few exceptions (Wayland, 2004; Van Houte et al., 2013; Baser, 2015; Orjuela, 2018) the diaspora politics literature has not sufficiently explored political opportunity structures, their political outcomes, actions and changes over time. The majority of this literature has focussed largely on the hostland context in relation to two POS; hostland citizenship and integration regimes (Koopmans et al., 2005; Koopmans and Statham, 2001; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2000; Marco Giugni, 2004; Odmalm, 2009), and hostland foreign policy stances towards the homeland (Haney and Vanderbush, 1999; Shain and Barth, 2003; Rubenzer, 2008; Koinova, 2013).   While the above identified POS are informative for understanding hostland contexts and their enabling/constraining environment for diaspora entrepreneurs, there is also the homeland structural environment left to consider. In this regard, the diaspora literature has paid less attention to homeland opportunity structures. Some studies have emphasised links to homeland parties as enabling diaspora

mobilisation (Kadhum, 2018a; Burgess, 2018), while others have explored state-led outreach to diaspora populations as creating opportunities for homeland development or investment (Gamlen et al., 2013; Ragazzi, 2014; Mügge, 2012a; Mylonas, 2013; Tsourapas, 2018; Naujoks, 2013; Koinova and Tsourapas, 2018; Lafleur, 2013; Kapur, 2010). Very few studies, however, explore how political changes in the homeland, such as regime change, the rise of new political elites and threats to the state from non-state actors affect diaspora populations abroad. This study contributes to these gaps through the case study of the Iraqi Shi'a diaspora prior to and in the aftermath of regime change.

Diaspora mobilisation and temporality

While POS may help explain how the structural context affects actors' behaviours and actions, they do not shed light into human agency and how this influences strategic choices, identities and actions. For example, while POS may explain how a change in foreign policy may create opportunities for diasporic actors to influence hostland governments, we are none the wiser as to how diasporic actors interpret such a time and why certain actions or political identities are advanced over others. This is where the concept of temporality can aid our understanding of actors' subjective interpretation of events and provide us with a temporal context in which to situate their motivations, shifting identities and political actions.

Temporality and change in political transnationalism have not been given sufficient consideration in the study of diaspora politics. This is surprising considering that the very concept of diaspora carries with it temporal dimensions, schisms, and dichotomies. For James Clifford, the concept of diaspora is where "linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed future: a renewed, painful yearning (Clifford, 1994, p.318). Diasporic identity is neither here or there, but nourished/traumatised by both its links to an imagined past homeland and its present and future orientation as experienced in the hostland.

Diasporic identity however is not static. Due to its location in various spaces and times, it is always

evolving, in production and process, "always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall, 1990, p.51). Diasporic identities are always in motion, never finished and "always being remade" (Gilroy, 1993; 51). If movement characterizes diasporic identity, then I argue its transitional nature is conditioned by the cultural, social, and political temporalities of their transnational localities. Diasporic identity is neither fixed in a past temporality but is always transforming and "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1990, p.225).   If temporal dimensions are significant for understanding diasporic identities in all their complexities, I contend that temporality also informs their political transnationalism. Since diasporic identities are constituted by their spatial and temporal contexts, then their actions and practices are also shaped by them. Conversely, if spatial and temporal contexts are not fixed but evolving, so too are diasporic identities and their political practices, in line with the understood and experienced values, norms, and meanings which frame those contexts.

Highlighting some of these dimensions, recent studies have started to incorporate issues of time in diaspora politics revealing the pertinence of temporality for understanding diasporic actions. Some scholars have for instance focused on event temporalities, such as crises and critical junctures, which can motivate actions, identities and create different opportunities and constraints for action (Koinova, 2018; Mavroudi, 2018). Meanwhile, Orjuela has discussed the concept of past-presencing amidst the Rwandan and Sri-Lankan Tamil diaspora. Her case studies reveal how the past informs present political actions, where personal experiences and a shared collective memory motivate diaspora mobilisation for transitional justice claims, which are contributing to statebuilding processes in Rwanda and the legitimation of Sri-Lanka's separatist project and imagined community (Orjuela, 2018).   These studies have begun an important conversation about the significance of temporality in understanding diasporic identity and actions, which is most welcome in diaspora politics. However, while these studies discuss either specific events or moments and their affects on diaspora mobilisation or how the past influences particular types of mobilistation such as

transitional justice, this paper instead tries to show the inverse relationship; how individual actor's experiences and interpretations of time affects their self-understanding, identities, and as I argue here, their political practices. In the sense proposed here therefore, temporality is not about events or crises per se, but rather defined by how diasporic actors' experiences and interpretations of time/event temporalities and their sense of self in relation to them, affects their identities and thus their political choices and strategies.

My line of argument is inspired by IR scholars who have inspected the concept of time in world politics, and how it can enhance our understanding of various facets of international politics and practice (Hutchings, 2014; May and Thrift, 2001; Hom et al., 2016; Hassan, 2010). Yet while these works explore the very concept of time, I am more interested in how the time we live in influences our sense of self and what we feel our capabilities to be. I therefore draw on the work of Martin Heidegger, whose seminal work, *Being and Time*, published in 1927, put the issue of time at the centre of our very existence (Heidegger, 1988).

In Heidegger's thesis, the key to understanding being is time, and time is understood as the meaning of being (Gorner, 2007). Time frames our being because it captures not only where we have come from (our past) but also where we are headed (our future). In this sense, our being, and who we understand ourselves to be is formed from three indivisible temporalities of our past, present and future (Watts, 2001). In other words, the temporality in which we subjectively inhabit is shaped by our past, because our interpretation and experience of the past shapes how we view ourselves in the present and also determines the conception we have of ourselves in terms of future possibilities (Ibid., 2001). As such our existence can only be understood within this temporal, three-dimensional totality, which defines and dictates who we are and where we are going.   This is what Heidegger describes as the historicity of being, which he argues is what delimits our place in the world, and emphasises the fact that we are not timeless beings but rather shaped by the temporal contexts of our time. I therefore also contend that political events and actions that lead to change do not occur in a timeless space, but rather during temporal moments entrenched with meaning and

different values (Hutchings, 2014). Contextual understandings of the time in question thus "shape, constrain and inform [their] experiences and actions"(McIntosh, 2015, p.466).

This is where human agency interprets 'moments in time' and where the temporal context is constitutive of an actor's experience and behavior (McIntosh, 2015, p.472). Temporal contexts thus capture the experiences and behaviour of actors so that "for the actor acting 'in the moment' time is an inescapable element of their reality (Ibid., 2015, p.472).

Consequently, I claim that diasporic political practices are occurring not only across a transnational space, but also across a transnational time, which carries with it an evolving temporality for diasporic actors engaged in politics. Both time and space create "forms of the most immediate reality" (Bachtin et al., 2011, p.85) for human interaction. It is in the interpretation, construction and experience of this subjective social reality, that meaning is given to people's lived experience (Peeren, 2007). Within this spatio-temporal context, a world is constructed where only certain narratives, practices, or identities can take place (Ibid., 2007; p.71), which therefore shapes political identities, stances and actions. Temporal dimensions thus become crucially vital for understanding diasporic strategies and identities in different spatio-temporal contexts, and importantly for this study, understanding changes over time.

As shall be demonstrated in the empirical section below, change in diasporic political action over time have corresponded to new POS in the political environment of the homeland, which has propelled specific diasporic political action and varying relationships to the Iraqi state. Simultaneously, temporal contexts have informed and prioritised specific diasporic identities in order to achieve specific goals.

The Iraqi Shi'a diaspora and political transnationalism over time
In this section, I show how Iraqi Shi'a political transnationalism has evolved in response to shifting political opportunity structures in the homeland, as well as showing how diasporic identities have shifted in line with the understandings,

values and meanings of homeland political temporalities by diasporic actors. The hostland context has also afforded the Shi'a diaspora opportunities to mobilise due to the tolerant and democratic public sphere in the UK, which has allowed Iraqi Shi'a to protest, practice their rituals, and lobby governments. This POS has remained constant throughout the periods under study, I therefore largely focus on the homeland POS and how these have informed Shi'a political transnationalism.

I explore three significant time periods, including pre-2003, post-2003 and post-2014 to analyse how Shi'a political transnationalism from London has changed over time. I argue that not only have POS and temporal contexts influenced Shi'a political transnationalism, but they have also altered the relationship of the diaspora to the Iraqi state. During the opposition period Shi'a political transnationalism worked to topple the Iraqi state, and is characterised as threatening the state through long-distance Iraqi nationalism. The second was defined by a consolidation of state power through long-distance Shi'a patrimonialism and Islamism as Shi'a political parties from the diaspora seized power. Meanwhile the third is marked by a transnationalism that empowers non-state actors guarding the Shi'a faith, weakening the legitimacy of the Iraqi state, and thus contributing to a long-distance Shi'ism.

Pre-2003: from opposition to governing the state

The Iraqi Shi'a community in the UK emerged slowly and through different migration waves that corresponded with their persecution in Iraq. Beginning in the 1970s and 80s with the witch-hunt of Iraqi Shi'a political activists in Iraq (Walbridge, 2001), many Da'wa party members escaped Iraq and made their way to the UK through Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, Turkey or Syria (Kadhum, 2017). Others were accused by the Baath regime of *taba'iya Irania* (Iranian ancestry) and later deported by the regime as tensions between Iran increased ahead of the Iran-Iraq war (Tripp, 2007). This wave also included Iraqi Shi'a Faili Kurds who were doubly persecuted for their Kurdish ethnicity and their Shi'a sect. Later following the Shi'a uprising of 1991 and its subsequent brutal suppression by the Baath

regime during the first Gulf War, Shi'a families, particularly in the South of the country, were heavily persecuted for their alleged involvement and many fled the country to protect their families (Kadhum, 2017). Chain migrations to the UK where family members and friends resided were now common and this further increased the size of the Iraqi Shi'a community in London.

 As more and more families arrived in the UK, there was a need for Imams and Shi'a organisations to cater for the community's needs[2]. Gradually many of these were established in North-West London in the borough of Brent where a now vibrant and populous Shi'a community resides supported by Shi'a foundations, mosques, charities and Hussainiyat (Scharbrodt, 2018).

Iraqi Shi'a political parties and organisations have been active in transnational opposition politics in London since at least the early eighties following intensified state persecution of religious Shi'a clerics, which led many to leave and continue their political activism abroad (Corboz, 2015, p.132). Prior to 2003 there were three major Shi'a groups in the Iraqi opposition movement, who by no means were united in their visions for Iraq, but were certainly united in their actions towards regime change. These included, the two prominent Shi'a political parties of Da'wa and the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq (SCIRI), and the Al Khoei Foundation. There were also other prominent Shi'a figures including Muhammad Bahr Al Uloum and Sheikh Muhammad Muhammad Ali (Allawi, 2007), though my analysis will focus on the three groups mentioned above.

Shi'a political transnationalism from London operated through transnational opposition networks and nodes in Iran, Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and various European and North American cities where Iraqi Shi'is resided. Both SCIRI and Da'wa had previously been involved in previous plots to affect regime change - the former through Mohammed Al-Hakim's transnational links to powerful elites in Jordan and Tehran in 1974 (Corboz, 2015, p.133). The latter through underground and violent campaigns against the Baa'th, led by one of the Da'wa founders, Mohammed Baqir Al-Sadr,

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[2] Author interview with Respondent 8, 5 July 2019, London

which failed and would eventually lead to his execution in 1980('Abd al-Jabbār, 2003, pp.231–235).

The Iraqi Shi'a transnational field was vast and included linkages and relationships with states, international organisations and grassroots movements. Being within easy reach and proximity to major political centres in London, Washington, Arab governments, the EU and UN made their positionality ideal for political activism towards homeland issues (Kadhum, 2018a).

Despite the strong mobilisation of various Shi'a factions, it was only when the international context changed following the 1991 Gulf War that the international community turned against the Baa'thist regime in Iraq allowing a new POS to emerge[3]. This political opportunity was further consolidated following the Clinton administration's Iraq Liberation Act (ILA) in 1998, whose explicit aim was removing Saddam Hussein from power. The ILA effectively sanctioned the financing of Iraqi opposition groups in support of a democratic Iraq (Herring and Rangwala, 2006, p.10).

Thus by the late 1990s, this structural shift in the international environment led to two significant opportunities for the Iraqi opposition[4]. Firstly, it created an opportunity to lobby for regime change, especially as the international community's narrative towards Saddam altered towards democracy, human rights and freedom for the Iraqi people, which called for different actions to be legitimised. Secondly, it created the POS for alliances to take place between the Iraqi opposition groups and the US led coalition. Western powers were now interested in meeting with Iraqi Islamist groups, previously held under terrorist lists, including the Da'wa party (Allawi, 2007, p.74). This new foreign policy moment positioned Shi'a opposition Islamist parties not only at the right place, but at the right *time* to take action.

For Shi'a Islamist parties and organisations working for many years against Saddam's regime in exile this was a time of symbolic meaning. This temporal context signified more than an opportunity for regime change and the

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[3] Author interview with Respondent 25, 6 January 2014, London
[4] Author interview with Respondent 25, 6 January 2014, London

disposal of Saddam Hussein. It was interpreted as a time of vindication against centuries of Shi'a victimhood prevalent in Shi'a history, which now necessitated a specifically Shi'a political response (Allawi, 2007, p.75).

Within this temporal context, an emerging Shi'a consciousness and political identity was taking root, fuelled in large part following the failed Shi'a uprising in 1991 (Ibid., 2007, p.75), where thousands of Iraqi Shi'as were brutally quashed by Baa'thist security forces (Tripp, 2007, p.247). Shi'a victimisation by the Baa'th was by now well documented by both SCIRI and Al Khoei in London and at the United Nations[5]. The Da'wa party was publishing its opposition papers including *Lua' Al Sadr* and *Sawt Al Iraq*[6], while one respondent interviewed by the author recalled distributing an opposition paper published in Syria called *Al Badeel* from his home[7]. Important talks and seminars were held at the Al Khoei Foundation. Meanwhile other publications were written and disseminated by various Shi'a academic, religious, tribal and military figures[8] discussing the plight of the Shi'a in Iraq, and calling for an end to institutional discrimination against the Shi'a, as well as leaving open the idea of a Shi'a region (Allawi, 2007, p.75). As such, it is in this temporal context of human rights violations, Shia repression and an indefinite exile, that a Shia political identity slowly emerged.

Looking to the future, the only way to end Shi'a victimhood however was to position themselves at the coalition power table. In order to do so, Shi'a Islamist parties had to present themselves as an Iraqi united opposition in front of coalition forces (Kadhum, 2017). For this reason they joined in Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC) in the early nineties following the Salahuddin opposition conference in 1992, where the INC was firmly established (Allawi, 2007, p.53). Furthermore, to satisfy coalition criteria of their democratic credentials, Shi'a diasporic parties needed to adjust their more radical discourses and adopt certain democratic identities. Indeed, the Da'wa party, reformed its ideological programme and adopted a new manifesto based on social democratic

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[5] Author interview with Respondent 11, 6 November 2013, London and Author interview with Respondent 2, 24 October 2013, London
[6] Author interview with Respondent 10, 5 November 2013, London
[7] Author interview with Respondent 25, 6 January 2014, London
[8] Author interview with Respondent 2, 24 October 2013, London

principles with Islamic religious roots in 1995 (Allawi, 2007,p.74). This reportedly stressed Iraqi nationalism over Islamic Revolution (Yamao, 2008, p.263). Similarly, SCIRI, in its dealings with the UK Foreign Office, acquiesced to the principles of political democracy, stressing that it would not impose an Islamist Republic in Iraq (Allawi, 2007, p.74).

Consequently, the confluence of POS and temporality provided the structural and temporal contexts, which enabled Shi'a diasporic parties to seize an opportunity to involve themselves in pre-intervention plans, while ahead lay a time where Shi'a leadership was palpable. In order for this future projection to be realised, an Iraqi Shi'a identity was promoted pre-2003 under the umbrella of a united Iraqi opposition movement, which would lead to a long-distance transnationalism that threatened Iraq's Baa'thist state.

It is crucial to note that the social positioning of the Shi'a parties was not identical vis à vis the Iraqi state and the Anglo-American coalition. Certainly there was no united Shi'a front (Kadhum, 2018a). Yet regardless of their stance towards the occupying powers, Shi'a parties understood the post-intervention period as a time of Shi'a revival. Working with the Anglo-American coalition was thereby a means to fulfilling their imagined destiny, which for so long existed in a time of opposition. It was now time to strike, transform and discontinue Sunni dominance in Iraq.

The 'Shi'a Moment': From victimhood to victory

With the ousting of Saddam Hussein, the Shi'a moment had arrived. Now mobilising inside the country, Shi'a diasporic parties were facing a long-oppressed majority Shi'a population, who after the fall of the Baa'th expressed their grievances through their Shi'i identity (Haddad, 2013). This along with the Sadrist Shi'i movement that had been fomenting for several years prior to occupation (Baram, 2010), created favourable conditions for the Shi'a parties who had a constituency in waiting. It was therefore understood as a time for Shi'a consciousness to be consolidated into a Shi'a political identity and mobilised in order to seize power in Iraq. The political opportunity structure, which then allowed the Shi'a diasporic politicians and parties to gain power was the

formation of an unlikely coalition between the Shi'a parties as shall be elucidated below.

In the temporal context of Shi'a ascendency, and positioning in Iraq, new possibilities arose for the Shi'a diasporic parties, who were now firmly at the parapet of power. The two dominant Shi'a diasporic parties were now locked in competition to govern the country and win the hearts and minds of the people. SCIRI remained one of the most important groups for the coalition (Bremer and McConnell, 2006; Allawi, 2007, p.69), though it was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the popularity of Da'wa, with its legacy as Iraq's oldest Shi'a opposition movement and as Saddam Hussein's most ardent political enemy (Allawi, 2007, p.393)

Being embedded in the opposition and coalition network, however, would pay off, as the occupying powers now needed Iraqi political parties to govern the country creating a POS for the diasporic parties and politicians as they were *potential allies* of the US-led coalition. As Iraq's political process unfolded ahead of the 2005 democratic elections, political appointments were needed to govern the allocated ministries and governorates[9]. The need for political personnel was further exacerbated following the de-Baa'thification process, which created a further bureaucratic vacuum but also weakened Sunni control of the state apparatus (Ismael and Ismael, 2015, p.2,61,218).

To seize this Shi'a moment and tighten their grip on the political process, Shi'a diasporic parties exercised long-distance patrimonialism, by tapping into their Shi'a diasporic social and political networks to recruit family and friends from Iran, Syria, London, and Lebanon, and other cities in Europe and the US to fill political positions[10]. In doing so, their grip on power was accelerating as Shi'a diasporic henchmen loyal to each party were employed, irrespective of ability or education (Kadhum, 2017, 2018a). This was further aided by having British citizenship, which permits dual citizenship allowing diasporic political entrepreneurs to travel easily between London and Iraq and

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[9] Author interview with Respondent 23, 23 November 2013, London

[10] Author interviews with Respondents 23, 23 November 2013, Respondent 25, 6 January 2014 and Respondent 26, 13 January 2014, London

participate in continuous circular migration between the two countries. As one respondent declared, he was "shuttling to and fro 12-14 visits a year. So almost two weeks here two weeks there"[11].

It is within this temporal context of competing nationalisms, redemption and future power, that an exclusive sectarianized national identity arose displacing an inclusive Iraqi national identity espoused by the Shi'a parties in the pre-2003 era. As one female respondent who was part of the London opposition elites stated, "In opposition we were more united, we all of us we were going to al i'tisam al mustamir[12] for more than 6 years every Saturday. We were asking for putting Saddam on trial but after 2003 every faction goes to their roots and direction"[13].

Shi'a victimhood and historical memory combined with ascendant Shi'a political identity to mark a new temporality underlined by Shi'a hegemony and power. In this temporal context of transformation, foes became friends, and a new POS thus opened up with the *formation of a coalition* between previously antagonistic factions. Indeed, one interviewee who would later become Minister in Iraq was called by the then Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi to help with bringing the Shi'a factions together, "At that time Ayad called me up again in 2005 and wanted me to come. I had prior connections with the Islamic opposition movement so I could play a role."[14]

Indeed an unlikely alliance was made between SCIRI and the Sadrist movement (Baram, 2010: 154), which united the major Shi'a parties under one united alliance and empowered the Shi'a faction. It was further strengthened when it was given a holy stamp of approval from Iraq's highest clerical authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who was keen for the political empowerment of Shi'is in Iraq (Dodge, 2005, p.27) and fear of a Shi'a split (Baram, 2010: 154).

Unsurprisingly, the Shi'a parties topped the results of Iraq's first democratic elections in 2005 under a Shi'a United Alliance. Most of the leaders

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[11] Author interview with Respondent 23, 23 November 2013, London
[12] Arabic for 'continuous picket'
[13] Author interview with Respondent 12, 12 April 2019, London
[14] Author interview with Respondent 25, 6 January 2014, London

occupying top positions were Shi'a diaspora leaders residing in London or Iran including Iraq's first prime minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, who was a Senior Da'wa party, Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim with SCIRI, Hussain Sharistani and Ahmed Chalabi. Not since the Middle Ages had the Shi'a been in power in what is now known as Iraq (Wiley, 1992). Yet in 2005, the Shi'a 'moment' had reached its apex paving the way for Shi'a diasporic parties to successfully transition from an opposition movement in exile to governing the state.

Shi'a victory now signified Shi'a hegemony. Yet it was also a time of fearfulness about the return of the Baa'th party (Kadhum, 2018b). Thus in this temporality of victory and paranoia, Shi'a politics and transnationalism during the years between the 2005 and 2014 elections were marked by a relationship of power consolidation, which necessitated long-distance Shi'i Islamism. Since the Iraqi state was now led by former Shi'a diasporic parties, Shi'a transnationalism worked to maintain this status quo at all costs by continuing to recruit family and friends from the diaspora loyal to maintaining the power of Shi'a Islamic parties and their agendas[15] and preventing any possible return of Baath rule.

Finally it is important to note that while this time was defined by Shi'a omnipotence, it also emphasised intra-Shi'a competition as Shi'a parties wrangled for political power. Shi'a transnationalism was not homogenous and was divided along clerical and political lines. It reflected political events in the homeland but was also conditioned by the legacy of the two parties who dominated in exile, the Da'wa Islamic Party and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI though formerly SCIRI). Shi'a political transnationalism was therefore split mainly between followers of the Da'wa party (who had by 2014 produced three of Iraq's prime ministers) and to a lesser extent ISCI.

An existential threat to Shi'ism from outside and within

The threat posed by Islamic State in 2014 not only threatened Iraq's territorial sovereignty but it also threatened Shi'ism itself. This *attribution of threat* was the POS, which shifted political transnationalism between London and Iraq, eliciting

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[15] Author interviews with Respondents 23, 23 November 2013, Respondent 25, 6 January 2014

a different response from the diaspora. This in conjunction with intra-Shi'a fighting in Baghdad and political disillusionment with the Shi'a diasporic parties sparked a new temporal moment defined by an existential threat from outside and within.

For many Shi'a, both inside and outside Iraq, and especially since the fall of Mosul in 2014, the Islamic State has posed an existential threat. The deliberate targeting of Shi'a individuals, best exemplified by the Camp Speicher massacre, where more than 1,700 largely Shi'a soldiers were killed, have revived narratives of victimhood and fortified the extra-territorial Shi'a community.

The weakness of the Iraqi state's security apparatus in confronting this threat led to the rare interjection of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani into Iraq's political affairs to defend Iraq's territory and sovereignty and to protect Iraq's Shi'a (BBC News, 2014). Ayatollah Sistani issued a *wajib al kifa'i' fatwa* (ruling) for Iraqis to mobilize against the terrorist group in 2014, calling citizens to defend the country, its people, and its sacred places (Al-Qarawee, 2018, p.10). This ruling was met with an astounding response in Iraq where tens of thousands volunteered to join the Iraqi Security Forces.

Answering this call, the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) (*Hashd Al Sha'bi* in Arabic) emerged within this context to defend Iraq from the encroaching threat of Islamic State. A paramilitary force of between 60-140,000 fighters, grouped from around 40 factions, which are predominantly, but not exclusively, Shi'a (Jabar and Mansour, 2017). The *Hashd* were instrumental in the fight against IS, especially following the collapse of the 600,000 Iraqi Security Forces following the fall of Mosul in 2014 (Rudolf, 2018, p.11). Their largely Shi'a composition, their support by the marja'iya and political elites, and sacrifice for the country in 2014, has popularised them both in Iraq and transnationally as a "sacred force".

When in 2017, Iraq's prime minister declared the liberation of Mosul from IS, he thanked Sistani for his 2014 fatwa, which ultimately saved Iraq from the

brink and the *Hashd* for their sacrifices in defending Iraq [16]. This public acknowledgment by the Iraqi Prime Minister of the role played by Iraq's most powerful non-state actor has empowered the authority of the Shi'a clerical establishment as well as Shi'a paramilitaries, changing Iraqi political transnationalism towards a defence of Shi'ism. A much echoed response from interviewees was "we feel that without Sistani Iraq would be gone"[17]

This has been evidenced in London since 2015 when several events to commemorate the PMF have been organised at the Al Khoei Foundation, at the Iraqi Embassy, Dar al Islam and solidarity marches held at Marble Arch. Videos of the crowds at Marble Arch were witnessed by the author, where both first and second generation Iraqis were present. According to one respondent interviewed whenever the names of Sistani and the PMF were mentioned, impassioned cries would be heard[18].

PMF fighters were also invited to London during these events, videos were shown of their heroic fights, poetry was recited and talks were given to attendees who included political party representatives and other clerical and political elites[19]. The *Hashd* also organised their own event where they in turn honoured the diaspora for their support. In March 2017, the PMF media team organised a film festival in collaboration with Dar Al Islam[20] in London to showcase films of PMF fighting Islamic State. The Iraqi Ambassador to the UK, religious clerics from Iraq, and political party representatives in the diaspora attended this event. The *Hashd* handed out awards to diasporic organisations that supported their cause bearing the *Hashd* emblematic logo[21]. The high profile attendees from the UK and Iraq bare witness to the growing power and support the PMF enjoys across the Shi'a political spectrum in Iraq and in the diaspora. Press releases were

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[16] Video of this clip can be accessed on YouTube here, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCYH9xCNl2Y [Last accessed 22 July 2019]

[17] Author interview with Respondent 12, 12 April 2019, London

[18] Author interview with Respondent 3 , 19 March 2019, London

[19] Author interview with Respondent 3 , 19 March 2019, London

[20] Dar Al Islam is a Shi'a centre in London, which has been historically affiliated with the Iraqi Da'wa party.

[21] Author interview with Respondent 7, 2 April 2019, London

issued to publicise the London event both on the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, as well as the PMF official site[22].

Amongst second generation Iraqi Shi'a in London support for PMF has also escalated. In fact, following Sistani's 2014 fatwa, many Iraqi Shi'a men in the diaspora reacted to mobilise on his orders, even though those residing abroad were urged to refrain from doing so[23]. This was a time of "symbolic meaning" (Hutchings, 2014) necessitating action and many in the diaspora wanted to contribute and help in the fight. When I questioned one respondent about this emotional response from the second-generation he stated that instead of going back to Iraq to fight, young Iraqi Shi'a men were encouraged to support the PMF through media outlets and also to donate money towards PMF families in Iraq who had lost "martyrs" in the fight against IS[24]. Another second generation respondent interviewed discussed his experience of this temporality as marked by an anti-Shi'a narrative he wanted to combat and help fight:

> "I gave it a lot of thought at the time, and if I wasn't engaged at that time I would have gone. Maybe not as a military personnel, with my journalism skills, with my ability to write in English and in Arabic, with my photography skills, it would have been a good opportunity to counter the anti-Shi'a propaganda that was in full swing and that remains in full swing by these Israeli funded, American funded think tanks that will do everything they can to belittle Shi'a achievements and Shi'a rebellions against Daesh[25]"[26].

Indeed, support for the PMF has catapulted on social media. Many Iraqi non-state political actors, including the PMF have their own official accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, where they disseminate their political messages, showcase their victories and promote key fighters[27]. As such, social media has become a new transnational channel for the diaspora, especially the

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[22] The PMF webpage can be found here, http://al-hashed.net/2017/03/07/ [Last accessed 22 July 2019]. The Ministry of Iraq webpage can be found here, http://mofamission.gov.iq/ab/UKLondon&article=10804 [Last accessed 25 February 2019].

[23] Author interview with second-generation Shi'a gatekeeper, 18 October 2017, London

[24] Author interview with Respondent 3 , 19 March 2019, London

[25] Daesh is the Arabic acronym for Islamic State

[26] Author interview with Respondent 17, 19 September 2019, London

[27] Their website can be accessed here, http://al-hashed.net/2017/03/07 http://mofamission.gov.iq/ab/UKLondon&article=10804

second-generation, to connect to Iraqi politics and assert their Shi'a faith. While for political actors in Iraq it has become an effective mode of gaining support transnationally.

The threat from IS has also led to a new phenomenon witnessed during the month of Muharram where Shi'a historical memory, rituals and politics are merged as a form of defence and protest. In London, thousands march annually in a procession starting in Marble Arch and ending in Trafalgar Square to commemorate the killing of Imam Hussein in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD[28]. Though previously apolitical and focussed on the historical and religious events in Karbala (Collyns, 2004), since the rise of the Islamic State in 2014, the processions have become increasingly politicized. Shi'as in the diaspora have used the event to highlight the plight of Shi'a killed by IS, linking the killing of Imam Hussein to the current killing of Shi'a in Iraq, as well as interpreting Imam Hussein's message as that against tyranny and more recently linked to terrorism to dispel the idea of the Islamic State representing Islam (Kadhum, 2018b).

In 2015, the Hussaini Trust UK, who organise the march every year, decided to use the march as an anti-terrorist platform to mobilise against the threat against the Shi'a faithful. The organiser of the march, Waqar Haider states, "For us it was a controversial move to go political. Normally we don't mix politics with mourning. However with what's happened recently, we thought we had to make sure we as a community totally disassociate ourselves with what's happening elsewhere in the world." (Sandhu, 2015). The Slogans and banners carrying messages, including "from Iraq to the UK, Muslims will defeat IS" are carried alongside other banners reading "90% of ISIS victims are Muslims" ('(110) London Becomes Karbala 2017 - YouTube', n.d.).

Alongside the external threat from Islamic State, intra-Shi'a fighting and schisms in Baghdad threatened Shi'a power and led to political fragmentation both within Iraq and the diaspora. The two previously dominant parties both faced political fissures and splits as the Da'wa party divided between those who follow Nouri al Maliki and those who support Haider al Abadi. Similarly, ISCI has

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[28] Imam Hussein is the third Imam in Twelver Shi'ism

fragmented following the departure of its leader Amar al Hakim, who formed his own political party, the National Wisdom Movement (Al Hikmah).

Disillusionment with Shi'a political parties, sectarian politics and the political process more generally were reflected in the May 2018 parliamentary elections when for the first time in Iraq's recent history a cross-sectarian alliance between Shi'a cleric Moqtada Al Sadr and the Iraqi Communist party won the majority of seats in parliament ('Cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's bloc wins Iraq election', 2018). Having dominated politics following intervention, Da'wa and ISCI were finally knocked off their political perch in 2018. The low turn out in Iraq, where only a reported 44.5 percent of the population turned out to vote compared to 76.4 percent in 2005,(Chmaytelli, 2018) was reflected in the diaspora where extra-territorial votes amidst the diaspora also reflected this trend. The number of votes in 2018 had dropped from around 63,000 thousand in 2005 to 12,500 in 2018[29].   The threat from Islamic State and a failed Shi'a-centric statebuilding project in Baghdad (Haddad, 2013) has led to a re-evaluation of political priorities within this temporal context. This has led to a political transnationalism that defends the Shi'a faith and a distancing from party politics, more in line with the quietist tradition held within Shi'a Islam and particularly embodied by the marja'iya of Sistani. Consequently, during this time and the temporality experienced by some Shi'a diaspora, both Sistani and the PMF were viewed as defenders of the Shi'a faith, and commanded the strongest allegiances from the diaspora. As one respondent remarked about Sistani, "he stood up for the Shi'a and Iraq"[30].

Ultimately Shi'a transnationalism has transformed once more because of the attribution of threat posed by Islamic State to Iraq and the interpretation of this time by Shi'as in the diaspora. One respondent spoke of this temporality for the second generation,

"So IS played a big part in making Shi'a youth more conscious of the seriousness of divides and sectarian rhetoric and extremism and how geopolitics

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[29] Author interview with Shi'a Iraqi gatekeeper, London, March 2019. The figures are anecdotal and have not been verified by the Iraqi Electoral Commission.
[30] Author Interview with Respondent 4, 20 March 2019, London

and how super powers play a part for the Shi'a. So it becomes charged and come to their door step as they have family members in Iraq, some of our community who have family killed, other had family who fought against IS so that obviously changed the way they feel about the conflict."[31]

The inability of the state to defend the country and Shi'as, meant that it was a time of existential crisis, which has put Shi'a lives and identity at stake. With this new understanding and meaning of time, a new POS emerged where political transnationalism transitioned from a long-distance Shi'a Islamism to a long-distance Shi'ism, prioritising Shi'ism above Shi'a Islamism. The result has been the weakening of the state in the eyes of the Iraqi Shi'a diaspora whilst elevating non-state actors, including Sistani and the PMF. In recognising the weakness of the Iraqi state and those who govern it, Shi'a transnationalism during this period has effectively eschewed the state, undermining its legitimacy whilst elevating the authority of the guardians of Shi'ism inside Iraq.

Table 1. Shi'a Political Transnationalism over time pre 2003 to 2019.

Concluding discussion

This paper sought to answer three questions: how do we explain change in political transnationalism over time? In what way does this change alter the relationship and power of diasporic actors towards their homeland states? And what does change in political transnationalism tell us about diasporic identities?

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[31] Author interview with Respondent 10, 9 April 2019, London

It addressed these issues in relation to the case study of the Iraqi Shi'a diaspora in London and its political transnationalism towards Iraq by looking at three distinct time periods; pre-2003, post 2005 and post 2014.

I argued that understanding change in political transnationalism requires looking at the confluence of political opportunity structures and temporality. POS explain how opportunities for change occur in the structural environment, which diasporic actors can seize on, while temporality demonstrates how the interpretation and meaning given to time by diasporic actors promote different identities and consequently, as I argued, different actions. Each timeframe produced different opportunities and threats, which inspired different identities within the Shi'a diasporic imagination.

What this indicates is that temporality plays a key role in identity formation. Diasporic actors and their understandings of time demonstrate that diasporic identities are formed not only in reaction to present situations but also to past grievances and future aspirations. This totality of three-dimensional time is important to consider when analysing actor's projected identities, choices and actions in world politics. Indeed, this original contribution to the literature of the identity-forming capacity of temporality highlights not only how the past shapes the perception of our present. The present and its POS equally shape how we view our past and employ it to form individual and collective identities and use them for communal or political mobilisation. It is precisely this subjective perception of temporality, when analyzed, which allows us to understand better why certain identities and actions were mobilised by different groups at different times. As such it is an important theoretical contribution that is applicable beyond the case of Iraq, drawing our attention to the importance of temporality while simultaneously allowing for a better understanding of any diasporic actor or group and their political actions at specifics moments in time, as well as over time.

As the case of the Iraqi Shi'a diaspora has shown, historical persecution led to a Shi'a collective consciousness, which was awakened politically when regime change was decided by coalition forces. Within this temporality past injustices were channelled towards regime change as a means of reclaiming a

place for Shi'a in the Iraqi nation, which necessitated promoting an Iraqi national identity. Once in power, the past continued to stoke fear and paranoia however, driving transnational politics towards empowering Shi'a Islamism in order to consolidate a Shi'a political identity and Shi'a power in Iraq at whatever cost. Meanwhile, the existential threat from Islamic state was yet another assault on Shi'ism reviving old narratives of victimhood, which sought refuge not in politicians but rather defenders of the Shi'a faith. This period emphasised a Shi'a religious identity instead of a political identity as individuals in the diaspora turned to their clerical authority and the Popular Mobilisation Forces for guidance and protection.

The meanings given to time therefore inspired or necessitated different identities, which ultimately led to different actions altering political transnationalism and ultimately the relationship that diaspora had with the homeland state. In this regard identity was firstly experienced and interpreted in 'time' in the minds of individual actors and their self-identified place in the world at specific moments in 'time' before it was mobilised by diasporic entrepreneurs for strategic goals towards the homeland state. From posing a threat in 2003, to empowering the state in 2005 and to bypassing the state altogether in 2014, events in Iraq and the projected identities of Shi'a during event temporalities have thus dictated the relationship that the diaspora have with the homeland state.

The changing linkages to the Iraqi state and its political actors is revealing of the prior hope and later hopelessness of Shi'a Islamist statebuilding in Iraq. Due to its failure to protect Iraqi territory and to function politically, the failure of Shi'a Islamist governance has therefore affected transnational politics and re-directed it instead towards powerful non-state actors including Sistani and the PMF as well as more grass-roots mobilising in the form of charitable organisations.

Consequently, while Shi'a diasporic transnationalism depicts the weakening relationship between the diaspora and the Shi'a government, conversely it shows the strengthening of the Shi'a diaspora to Shi'a spaces and Shi'a actors defending Shi'ism. The linkages and mobilisation prompted by

Sistani, pilgrimages to Iraq and the binding of religious events in the diaspora to politics bolsters Shi'ism outside of Iraq (Kadhum, 2020). In turn it fortifies Shi'a power inside because of the donations given during pilgrimages, visits to shrine cities and the Shi'a *khums*. These transnational linkages may tip the power balance between the religious establishment in Iraq and the Iraqi state, empowering clerical authority and their further encroachment in Iraqi domestic political affairs, albeit in a quietist and clandestine manner, as compared to the Iranian style, *Wilayat al Faqih*, Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. Furthermore, the political seats won by some *Hashd forces and figures* in Iraq's 2018 elections may be analyzed as a direct result of the popularity enjoyed both nationally and transnationally.

It remains to be seen how Shi'a transnational linkages will continue to evolve between London and Iraq, though it is clear that Shi'a political transnationalism will continue to respond to the opportunities and threats faced by the Shi'a constituency in Iraq over time. This suggests that an imagined Shi'a community exists in the minds of Shi'a diasporans, which motivates Iraqi Shi'a transnationalism in whatever form is needed to protect the Shi'a nation. At the same time, the Shi'a nation, for now at least, remains largely rooted to a homeland state, and so analyses alluding to a Shi'a crescent remain premature and misinformed (Ibid., 2020). Only time will reveal whether future generations of Shi'a in the diaspora will be wedded to their homeland geographies or the transnational geography of the Shi'a transnational community.

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