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Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq, diaspora positionality and political transnationalism

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Abstract

This paper addresses how homeland political dynamics affect the transnational practices of diaspora and shape the type of engagement they have with their countries of origin. Drawing on the experiences of politically engaged Iraqi diaspora in the UK and Sweden following the 2003 US led intervention; this paper demonstrates how ethno-sectarianism in Iraq has affected the political transnationalism of Iraq's diverse diaspora. Using the concept of positionality I show how following intervention and following a change in the political system in Iraq, the social positions of individuals and groups in the diaspora were reconfigured impacting their levels of political engagement, as well as the type of politics they could be engaged in. I develop and build on the concept of positionality proposed by Maria Koinova (Koinova, 2012) by incorporating an intersectional analysis that offers a more nuanced understanding of how social categories of class, gender, race and other identity markers create positions of subordination and privilege that inhibit or re-shape the actions of some diaspora while privileging others. I argue that in countries divided along ethnic, religious or tribal lines, diaspora mobilisation may be limited, diverted or privileged depending on one's social position relative to the ruling ethnic/religious political parties.

Keywords: diaspora; ethno-sectarianism; positionality; political transnationalism; Iraq

Introduction

Since its humble beginnings to its latest evolution, the study of diaspora politics has provided us with rich empirical studies of the involvement of various diaspora in the politics of their country of origin. We have learnt a great deal about the practices and impacts of diaspora in ethnic conflicts, in times of peace and war and in helping to rebuild their countries of origin (Smith and Stares, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2008; Sheffer,

2003; Shain, 2007, 2007; Baser, 2009; Hammond et al., 2011; Dahre et al., 2007; Weiss, 2009; Laakso and Hautaniemi, 2014).

Many of these case studies have drawn attention to the factors or conditions that have encouraged political participation in homeland events. Some scholars have stressed attribute based qualities including ethnicity and its powerful draw in motivating nationalists struggles abroad (Sheffer, 2003; Shain, 2007). Others meanwhile have looked at other diaspora attributes including education, organisational capacity and level of activity (Rubenzer, 2008; Shain and Barth, 2003; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Portes et al., 1999; Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002).

Another set of literature has looked at hostland factors including citizenship and integration regimes and how they encourage or inhibit transnational practices (Koopmans and Statham, 2001; Marco Giugni, 2004; Joppke, 1999; Koopmans et al., 2005; Van Houte et al., 2013; Wayland, 2004). Others still have looked at the foreign policy of host states and how alignment with diaspora goals can create the means for successful lobbying or strategic partnerships (Shain, 1994; Shain and Barth, 2003; Shain, 2007; Sheffer, 2003; Rubenzer, 2008; Haney and Vanderbush, 1999; Koinova, 2014, 2013).

More recent scholarship has looked at the homeland perspective, through a focus on homeland government policies incentivising political participation through out of country voting, investments, diaspora institutions and development (Gamlen et al., 2013; Ragazzi, 2014; Kapur, 2010; Sidel, 2007; Patterson, 2006; Brinkerhoff, 2008). However, with a few exceptions from African case studies (Mercer and Page, 2010; McGregor, 2009; Lampert, 2009; Kleist, 2008; Kibreab, 2007; Feyissa, 2014) less explored in the diaspora politics literature is an understanding of how homeland

political dynamics shape political transnationalism, especially in relation to ethnically or religiously diverse diasporas from the same homeland. Often, the diaspora literature discusses diaspora as though they were a monolithic group attached to a homogenous ethnic homeland, with the same relationship and aspired goals towards their homeland states. Analyses of inter-group variation, and why political mobilisation amongst diaspora from the same homeland differs, are yet to flourish. Furthermore, while African case studies provide us with some examples, there are very few case studies from the Arab Middle East, a largely neglected region in the diaspora literature.

In this paper, I would like to redress this gap using the case study of the Iraqi diaspora in London and Stockholm in the aftermath of the Iraq war in 2003. I demonstrate how homeland ethno-sectarian dynamics in Iraq have affected the political transnationalism of Iraq's diverse diaspora. Using the concept of positionality I show how following intervention and following a change in the political system in Iraq, the social positions of individuals and groups in the diaspora were reconfigured impacting their levels of political engagement with Iraq, as well as the type of politics they could be engaged in. I also develop and build on the concept of positionality proposed by Maria Koinova by incorporating an intersectional analysis that offers a more nuanced understanding of how social categories of class, gender, race and other identity markers create positions of subordination and privilege that have inhibited or re-shaped the actions of some diaspora while privileging others.

I argue that in countries where there are ethnic, religious or tribal cleavages, diaspora mobilisation may be limited, diverted or privileged depending on one's social position relative to the ruling ethnic/religious political parties. As such for diaspora from ethnically diverse homelands, opportunities for political engagement

need to be analysed in relation to the social position of individuals in the homeland, which create different attachments and hierarchies of power, which have implications for transnational political practices. The case study also reveals how diaspora's heterogeneous claims reflect the struggles of state formation in weak and divided states where those who are excluded or included battle for different conceptions of the state. Finally, I argue that homeland politics not only affects diaspora's transnational practices but can also be entrenched by them as diaspora mobilise for their ethnic or sectarian kin, hindering a national identity from materialising.

It is necessary at this point to delineate how I define diaspora and political transnationalism in this study. My definition of diaspora is an individual or group of people with continued senses of belonging to an 'imagined transnational community' (Sokefeld, 2006) who are mobilised politically through various "stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices," (Brubaker 2005: 13) to support, change or challenge domestic politics in the 'homeland'. Political transnationalism refers to both direct political engagement in the formal politics of the homeland as well as political activism and campaigning in the hostland to aid, alter, change or challenge domestic politics in the country of origin.

For this paper I draw on research conducted in London from October 2013 to August 2015 and in Stockholm from October 2014 to July 2015. Over 60 first-generation diaspora individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured method about their political engagement towards the country since 2003. The respondents were selected through gatekeepers from within the Iraqi diaspora community, which eventually led to a snowball effect where other respondents were identified and interviewed. In addition to this I sought out political representatives from Iraq's political party branches and organisations in the diaspora from Iraq's diverse ethnic,

political and religious groups in London and Stockholm. This included, Shia and Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Farsi Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Yezidis and Turkmen.

In the sections that follow I proceed with a discussion on diaspora and political transnationalism briefly outlining how hostland contexts have received the largest share of the literature's focus (McGregor and Pasura, 2014) and the gaps in the literature this study builds on. I then discuss the concept of positionality and its use for understanding differences in the political transnationalism of groups from the same homeland. I build and develop the definition outlined by Maria Koinova (Koinova, 2012) by bringing in an intersectional frame to the analysis. I argue that diaspora positionality as defined in this study is helpful for understanding who, how and what diasporas are mobilising towards in their countries of origin because it allows us to see how their contexts can limit or encourage their political mobilisation but also how their social positioning in their country of origin can place them in a position of inclusion or exclusion which can inhibit, shape or grant access to specific political practices and claims. In the final section I apply this concept to the Iraqi diaspora in the UK and Sweden and show how positionalities changed in light of the 2003 intervention in Iraq and new ethno-sectarian political dynamics, which have created different opportunities for Iraq's diverse diaspora to mobilise both in the hostland and the homeland.

Diaspora and political transnationalism

The study of diaspora politics has informed our understanding of the political ties that individuals and groups living abroad have with their countries of origin. A plethora of issues and practices of various diaspora groups from the Jewish, Armenian, Kurdish,

Cuban, Albanian, Somali, and Sri-Lankan diaspora, amongst others, have widened our understanding of the multiple ways that diasporas are contributing and impacting ethnic conflicts, development, peace-building and national struggles (Shain and Barth, 2003; Shain, 2007; Sheffer, 2003; Wayland, 2004; Tölölyan, 2000; Koinova, 2013; Baser, 2009, 2012; Kleist, 2008; Haney and Vanderbush, 1999; Rytz, 2013; Ogelman et al., 2002; Fair, 2007; Abdile, 2014; Hammond et al., 2011).

From these detailed case studies the study of diaspora has been able to ask more interesting questions about the hostlands in which diaspora have settled and how policies and conditions in hostland states impact their political transnational practices. Significant amongst these studies has been the comparative work in the area of hostland incorporation regimes. By comparing immigrant claims-making across exclusive, assimilationist and multicultural¹ integration models citizenship scholars have drawn insightful conclusions about the relationship between national citizenship and diaspora mobilisation. This literature has yielded counterintuitive results. One set claims that inclusive citizenship regimes, defined by more open access to the political community, stimulate diaspora mobilisation, and another stresses that exclusive citizenship regimes encourage diaspora mobilisation.

Those who side on the exclusive political systems argue that an inability to access the political system orients claims-making towards the homeland due to high barriers to naturalisation and accessing the hostland's political institutions (Koopmans and Statham, 2001). Furthermore, Odmalm (2009) states, citizenship also confers the type of relationship it has with newcomers through their labelling. In Germany, immigrants are called *foreigners*, an inherently exclusive label that restricts their entry into the hostland's political community and directs their mobilisation towards the country of origin (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2000).

Indeed, the diaspora literature has repeatedly addressed how discrimination in hostlands encourages the maintenance of homeland identities (Basch et al., 1994) and is said to encourage political transnationalism (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001; Koopmans and Statham, 2001) because, simply put, immigrants are unable to integrate into their hostland societies (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992) and therefore cling to their homeland identities. This argument is certainly valid and there is much empirical evidence to suggest that communities who are considered as ‘others’ will have more transnational politicised identities (Wald, 2008). In other words, exclusive citizenship models prohibit political integration through the mechanism of exclusive and discriminatory laws and denial of rights.

On the other side of the debate on integration and diaspora mobilisation, it is argued that more inclusive political systems encourage diaspora mobilisation. Therefore by providing the political space for minority representation, they give diaspora communities the opportunity and access to formal political institutions and the ability to mobilise towards homeland issues (Van Houtte et al., 2013). Furthermore, open access to citizenship allows a two pronged approach whereby diasporas can travel to their homelands and mobilise whilst simultaneously lobbying their host state governments (Wayland, 2004). Additionally, it is argued that more inclusive political systems can encourage developmental projects between diasporas and host state governments (De Haas, 2006). Inclusive citizenship regimes therefore facilitate diaspora mobilisation through an open access political system, thereby encouraging transnationalism through a mechanism of accessibility.

As the vast literature on this topic suggests there is no doubt that citizenship and integration regimes affect diaspora engagement, and this an important variable for explaining inter-state comparisons between diaspora groups. However in the case of

the Iraqi diaspora in the UK and Sweden, experiences of gaining citizenship and integration have largely been similar. The UK's multicultural citizenship regime's rejection of assimilation and recognition of ethnic and cultural identities (Joppke, 1999: 13) is welcoming and encourages their inclusion, as at least in theory there are no barriers to their participation. Equally in Sweden, their multicultural approach to citizenship caters for the provision and maintenance of ethnic cultures and native languages (Borevi, 2013). Interviewees from both hostlands repeatedly stressed the freedom and the political space they felt to protest, hold meetings and campaign politically towards homeland issues.

Other studies have compared the political system of the hostland emphasising that the more open the political system is to influence from outside groups the more diasporas can and do engage towards the politics of their homelands. Yossi Shain and Barth address this liberal approach to understanding diaspora politics. They argue that states, which are 'weak' or highly permeable, such as the United States' 'inviting' constitutional process, the more societal groups can have an influence on them (Shain and Barth, 2003: 60). Therefore diaspora in more 'inviting' political systems are more able to exert influence on the hostland state to affect change in the homeland. Maria Koinova's comparative study of the Albanian diaspora's mobilisation towards Kosovo independence also affirms Shain and Barth's thesis that more permeable institutions encourage diaspora's political activism. Indeed her study found that Albanian elites instrumentalised the use of their US diaspora over their UK diaspora due to their ability to more effectively lobby US congress (Koinova, 2013). Both Shain and Koinova's research demonstrates that diaspora's hostland political context is important for encouraging or limiting diaspora's mobilisation towards the homeland, whether it be initiated by diasporic organisations as in the example of the

Jewish and Armenian lobby or homeland elites as in the case of Kosovo.

Yet another area of comparison has been the hostlands' foreign policy towards diaspora's strategic goals. Research supports the thesis that diasporas who enjoy foreign policy alignment with their hostland states are more likely to influence hostland governments and create opportunities for collaboration (Haney and Vanderbush, 1999; Shain and Barth, 2003; Rubenzer, 2008; Koinova, 2013).

The above comparative studies have greatly contributed to our understanding of the policies, conditions and factors that can affect political transnational practices. Yet the majority of this body of work has been focussed on the hostland (McGregor and Pasura, 2014). Comparative studies that look at homeland political contexts and how they shape transnational practices of diasporas from the same country of origin have not been given sufficient attention in the diaspora politics literature.

Examples from the African continent exemplify the importance of looking at the homeland political context and its impact on transnational practices. For example, in Eritrea ethnic/tribal and religious divisions at home affected the way diasporas from Eritrea around the globe identified with the Liberation Front, mobilising towards individual factions rather than contributing towards a national vision for an independent Eritrea (Kibreab, 2007). Consequently in the post independence period several factions who eventually did not form part of the legal opposition boycotted involvement in the subsequent referendum and drafting of the constitution that took place. Others still refuse to pay the 2 percent tax expected of Eritreans in the diaspora or are supporting opposition groups so that nation-building in Eritrea has been compromised by political divisions (Ibid., 2007). The political situation in Eritrea is a good example of how changes in the homeland can affect the transnational practices of those in the diaspora as some groups are privileged and others are excluded from

participation, which can halt their engagement or direct it to other forms.

Similarly in Nigeria, ethnicised politics has affected the Nigerian diaspora in the UK, with consequences for Nigeria's national vision as hometown associations echo ethnicised organisations at home and work on the basis of sub-national, geo-ethnic identities that range from the 'village', 'hometown, kingdom' and 'clan' and to broader categories of 'tribe' and 'ethnic nationality' (Lampert, 2009: 170). In this way, these transnational practices often entrench ethnic divisions at home as funding, lobbying and solidarity campaigns are done in the name of ancestral or indigenous towns rather than on behalf of the nation and all its citizens.

In Zimbabwe, the politics of the Zimbabwe diaspora in the UK reflect the legacies of settler colonialism and the international solidarity networks created by the nationalist mobilisation and the international struggle for independence (Mcgregor, 2009). These have provided UK Zimbabweans privileged access to the corridors of power as well as supporters among the UK's political classes (Ibid., 2009). At other times, homeland politics and dynamics are altogether shunned by diasporans who choose to focus on humanitarian or developmental projects as a means to overcome ethnic divisions. The case of the Somali diaspora is also illustrative here as one Somali migrant organisation in Denmark decided to re-orient their activities away from divisive homeland politics towards humanitarian relief and integration issues (Kleist, 2008). In doing so the aim was to discourage identifications with clan lineage and encourage more regional identifications more conducive towards nation-building and state formation (Ibid., 2008). The Somali diaspora's choice not to enter into homeland politics by choosing to engage with their homeland through other transnational practices is also a political act, which rejects the divisions of the warring factions at home and seeks to create a more national identity that can confer peace to

the country.

These case studies above are illustrative for the case study of Iraq and show how homeland contexts can influence the transnational practices of diaspora groups and individuals, as their social positioning vis à vis the homeland can inhibit/encourage transnational practices and also shape the form they take. However the case studies above discuss cases from the African continent, which though illuminating have their particular colonial and political legacies distinct from those found in the Middle East and especially Iraq, which was re-colonised more recently under the Coalition Provisional Authority headed by Paul Bremer in 2003. Secondly, the case studies above do not discuss the positionality of diaspora beyond ethnic or tribal categories and how this impacts how diaspora mobilisation is affected by homeland political dynamics and not how this impacts opportunities for diaspora to contribute directly in the homeland. The case of the Iraqi diaspora following the 2003 intervention shows how social categories related to ethnicity, sect, class, gender and sexuality can intersect and create different positionalities, which can privilege some while marginalising others. The case study thus provides new insights into how political dynamics at home can entrench homeland divisions and fragmentation but also limit, shape or create spaces for political transnational practices depending on their social positioning with regards to the ethno-sectarian nationalism being promoted, as the empirical section will show.

Positionality and Diaspora

Clearly both homeland and hostland contexts matter for understanding diasporic transnational practices. Yet if we are to understand differences within groups and between them considering positionality across this transnational space is paramount

for understanding diversity and difference. Positionalities in hostland and homeland states and intersectional social categories create differences in who and how diasporas engage in transnational politics. It also enables us to appreciate why there may be variation in the meanings, type of attachments, and asymmetries of power within and between groups.

The concept of positionality was established in feminist theory by Linda Alcoff as a means of addressing the deficits within the cultural feminist and post-structural feminist approaches to the concept of woman (Alcoff, 1988). Alcoff saw that the concept of woman was either being essentialised into inherent female characteristics or traits, that were a challenge to male constructions of femininity, or so deconstructed that the category of gender lost its significance. Alcoff proposed instead that the concept of woman was neither found in fixed ideas of femininity or the dissolution of gender but rather better understood as one's position in a given social context. As she convincingly argued the positional definition makes "identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on." (Ibid., 1988, p.433). Understood in this way, women's individual experiences could be understood through looking at her external position in society and in relation to those around her.

The idea of positionality proved to be powerful not only for understanding issues of gender but also race and the politics of belonging. Sociologists and other legal scholars adapted its use to understanding how social categories including race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, religion amongst others created different hierarchies of power (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Yuval-Davis et al., 2006; Anthias, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Maher and Tetreault, 1993; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Yuval-Davis et al.,

1989). Kimberley Crenshaw meanwhile discussed how these different positionalities worked in a cross-cutting way, where the intersections of race and gender created different positions of disadvantage and discrimination for women of colour (Crenshaw, 1991, 1989).

Though the concept of positionality was developed in feminist theory to depict the positioning of women relative to their cultural and social context, I argue it is a fitting concept for understanding the relative position of diaspora within their transnational social spaces and how this impacts their political transnationalism. What is interesting about diaspora's positionality is that it is constituted across the spaces of two or more states, where one's position vis à vis each hostland or homeland is also intersected by identity markers of gender, race, ethnicity and religion amongst others. Floya Anthias' work is illustrative here as she draws attention to the shortfall in the concept of diaspora, which does not take into account positionality for understanding diversity and difference within groups (Anthias, 1998). Anthias is critical of diaspora scholars who either essentialise the concept or homogenise its populations, without taking consideration how issues of class, gender, race and other social categories create different attachments, feelings, and belongings that create their own material outcomes (Anthias, 1998). She draws attention to the differences not only within groups but also between groups exposing how different social positionings within and between groups create different power hierarchies and calls for a closer look at the positionality of diaspora as a means of addressing this deficit and appreciating their differential social formations (Anthias, 1998, 2002, 2008).

With the exception of Maria Koinova's work (Koinova, 2012), the diaspora politics literature has not paid significant attention to the idea of positionality and how

this impacts political transnationalism. For Koinova, positionality is the “relative power that diaspora entrepreneurs perceive as deriving from their social positions occupied in a specific context” (Koinova, 2012, p.100). According to Koinova, these may be related to proximity to the majority race and religion, lack of blockage to political participation from other powerful lobbies, comparative advantage of place vis à vis other segments of the network and connectivity to other transnational networks with regard to political mobilisation (ibid., 2012, p.102).

Indeed, Koinova’s study of the Palestinian, Armenian and the Albanian diasporas in the UK found that their positionality in the host state affected their sovereignty-based claims in differential ways (Koinova, 2014). Looking at diaspora’s positionality and the hostland foreign policy towards the homeland she found that mobilisation patterns of the Palestinian, Armenian and Kosovan diaspora in the UK affected their transnational practices directing it either to hostland channels, transnational channels or both depending on their perceived positionality towards the hostland (Koinova, 2014). So for example, Palestinians perceived their position as relatively weak in the UK, where there is a more powerful Israel lobby, which has seen their transnational mobilisation largely conducted through and with political factions, Islamic organisations in Palestine or through humanitarian organisations in the hostland rather than lobbying the hostland state.

Koinova’s study is insightful for understanding how diaspora positionality affects the capabilities of diaspora to mobilise towards homeland issues and how this affects their strategies. Yet her focus thus far has focussed on the hostland context, not the homeland context and how this impacts mobilisation as this paper seeks to address. Furthermore, while the concept of positionality as outlined by Koinova helps to understand why some diaspora groups use different channels for their political

strategies and goals, it does not take into consideration how categories of class, gender, and other social categories play into these positionalities to affect political outcomes. Are we to assume for example that diaspora positionality is homogenous for all the diaspora population? How do class, ethnicity or gender affect the positionality of diaspora individuals and groups and their claims-making towards sovereignty based claims? And how do these play out between groups from the same country of origin?

Re-inserting and stressing the importance of intersectional categories, including age, nationality, sexuality, gender, class and religion, amongst others, is thus much needed in the study of diaspora politics for dispelling the notion of a unified diaspora and instead understanding difference. Diaspora's social positioning vis à vis their homeland and hostland state invariably carry with them different meanings for individuals, which then affect their practices and actions. For example, if a diaspora group was in a hostland that was receptive to its claims-making but lacked the sufficient resources to take advantage of this, then their privileged position in the hostland is rendered meaningless unless we understand that class is also a factor in shaping mobilisation practices. Similarly, a diaspora woman from a dominant ethnicity in the homeland is limited in what she can do if the homeland she is from upholds patriarchal norms and practices and her gender precludes her from participating in specific political spaces. Unless we look at the intersections of social categories and how these affect positionality, then we cannot begin to understand differences within and between groups and why their causes, practices and the locations these take place vary.

I therefore build on Koinova's definition by also drawing on the concept of intersectionality. Positionality is also intersected by social categories such as race,

class, gender etc. as well as those associated with institutional contexts. Thus I redefine positionality as the relative power of diaspora in relation to homeland and hostland social and political contexts, institutions, and transnational networks but also relative to intersectional social categories, including and not limited to age, nationality, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, class and religion. This new definition helps us to understand that the ability of diasporas to contribute politically to their countries of origin is not only attributable to hostland political opportunity structures including favourable hostland political systems (Shain, 2007; Koinova, 2013), citizenship regimes in which they belong to (Koopmans, 2004; Koopmans and Statham, 2001; Wayland, 2004; Van Houte et al., 2013) or foreign policy alignment (Haney and Vanderbush, 1999; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006; Shain, 1994; Shain and Barth, 2003; Koinova, 2013) but also to intersecting social categories, which create different power positions in the hostland and homeland, which as I will argue can also inhibit, shape or create differential political transnational practices.

The Iraqi Diaspora, positionality and political transnationalism

Previously denied any involvement under the strict reign of Saddam's dictatorship, Iraqi political dissidents at home or abroad faced arrest at best and execution at worst. Generally speaking for this specific subset of diaspora, the homeland represented a location of exclusion, resulting in a politics of opposition that united the politically active Iraqi diaspora in the UK against the regime of Saddam Hussein, though there was certainly no unity in how regime change should occur or what kind of Iraqi state should replace the present one.

Yet after the removal of Saddam and his Baathist regime by the US led coalition in 2003, many Iraqis in the diaspora were for the first time able to return to

Iraq, re-connect with family members, and become involved in Iraq's new political process. The change in the political context in Iraq immediately changed the positionality of the diaspora from one of exclusion to one of potential inclusion. One politically active female respondent described the mood at the time, "At first we had immense happiness at the removal of Saddam Hussein we celebrated in front of the embassy, even my son came who has nothing to do with politics."

Despite the increasing violence following the 2003 intervention, it can be argued that during the period before Iraqi's first national elections, in 2005, there was still hope for many in the diaspora. Even those who were against the intervention joined in the political process by becoming involved in campaigning for their respective parties, returning to Iraq to help their former political parties or create new ones and vote in the national elections. Indeed the joy and hope was manifest in the 7,785 political candidates, 111 parties and coalitions registered during this time (Dodge, 2005: 26).

Yet once the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its partners took over, they put in place a governing structure based on ethnic and sectarian quotas (Allawi, 2007). The CPA thus created an Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in July 2003 that institutionalised an ethno-sectarian political structure, which has plagued and fragmented the country and its politics ever since (Herring and Rangwala, 2006; Allawi, 2007; Al-Ali, 2014).

Due to the support given to the IGC by the US led coalition, the election results worked comfortably in their favour consolidating ethno-sectarian rule with the Shia and Kurds gaining the lion's share of the votes in 2005 (Dodge, 2005). This result would repeat itself in 2010, when once again the Dawa party and the Kurdish KDP and PUK duopoly, would come out victorious. In the wake of this now

consolidated ethno-sectarian political structure the social positioning of individuals and groups within the diaspora changed in line with this new reality in the homeland as the political system privileged the dominant ethno-sectarian political parties at the expense of Iraq's other minorities.

Generally speaking for Sunni Kurds and the Shia Iraqi communities in London, this new political reality in Iraq has altered their positionality both in the hostland and the homeland. Both were previously persecuted groups in Iraq, whose social position prior to 2003 was defined by exclusion, a lack of representation and rights, which ultimately led to their migration and exile. Their political transnationalism reflected this and was shaped by raising awareness about the persecution of their ethnic and sectarian kin, and eventually a strong politics of opposition to change the incumbent regime. It is important to note however that the Kurds in the Kurdish region of Iraq did have de-facto autonomy since 1991 following the first Gulf War but still faced an unpredictable Baathist government who still controlled state resources and apparatus including that found in the Kurdish region (Tripp, 2007).

However, since intervention and especially since Iraq's first democratic elections, these two groups now effectively rule the country, with the Shia Islamic parties in Baghdad and the KDP and PUK duopoly in the Kurdish region. They are now the powerful, the included, the politically represented and this has inevitably altered their positionality and informed their emotional and political attachments to the country.

Indeed, under this ethno-sectarian climate and the fragmentation of the state of Iraq (Herring and Rangwala, 2006) Kurdish ethno-nationalism has catapulted in the diaspora as the Kurds have gained further power and concessions from Baghdad.

Similarly for the Shia in the diaspora, Shia identity has increasingly become politicised and the primary category in which many identify with the nation. Being Iraqi thus means very little in the diaspora unless we look at how ethnicity, sect, gender, sexuality intersect with an Iraqi ethno-sectarian nationalism and create very different attachments and political actions.

Consequently for those in the diaspora whose ethnicity, sect and ideology fits in to these Kurdish and Shia social spaces, opportunities for political engagement with their country of origin have increased both in the homeland and the hostland. As one male member of a ruling Shia party in Iraq stated,

“ Yes, now we feel free in our work. We have people in government in Iraq, they have connection with British so now it’s easy for us to be in touch with Foreign ministers and MPs, politicians, with the community. They look at us as government people not just as refugees this is a good impression”.

Opportunities for political engagement in the homeland have opened up for Kurdish and Shia diaspora individuals who identify with these ruling ethnic and sectarian categories due to their position of power in the homeland political context. Their mobilisation has thus been conducted along ethnic and sectarian lines, and many have been able to directly engage in the political process in Iraq to further their party’s political goals. The returnees I interviewed were from either Kurdish or Shia Islamic parties who were able to return and were contributing to Iraq’s state-building process in various ways. A Kurdish Minister formerly residing in the UK diaspora I interviewed stated that he had developed the KRG’s education syllabus, drafted an investment law, human rights education for public officials and much more. Another returnee I interviewed who was a minister in 2006 and was associated with the ruling

Shia list in Iraq recounted how he was able to help reconstruct debt, introduce a social security system, and the country's first economic development plan for the country.

In the hostland too, the positionality of both Shia and Kurdish political figures in the diaspora created opportunities to engage with UK institutions and government officials. Respondents described relations with members of parliament, the House of Lords and the FCO with whom they clarified political party positions on various issues, corrected 'misinformation' about events inside the country or lobbied about critical homeland events as well as sought counsel and partnerships related to democracy-building and human rights in Iraq.

The Kurdish political parties in the diaspora have particularly benefitted from a close and active relationship with the British government, as their positionality has been strengthened by a partnership that has been supported and facilitated by the Kurdish All Parliamentary Group, set up in 2007 "to encourage the development of democratic institutions in the Kurdistan Region as part of the democratic and federal process in the rest of Iraq"². These partnerships have created diplomatic and trade partnerships that have strengthened the profile of the Kurdish case for independence as the Kurdish Regional Government also has its own special representatives both in the UK and Sweden that work to support the Kurdish diaspora as well as the development of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Yet the intersection of ethnicity, with class or gender can also elevate or demote social positions in the homeland. The majority of diaspora returnees interviewed for my research were men who had been able to become involved in the political process due to their ethnic or sectarian elite socio-political networks or were often from middle class or upper class prominent families. There were only 3 female returnees from the UK and Swedish diaspora interviewed who were able to take up a

political position, and incidentally all worked for liberal political parties or for the regional governorates and not the ruling ethno-sectarian political parties. Ethno-sectarian nationalism has limited the space for women to enter the political process. Despite the 25 percent quota, most of the women involved are largely related to political figures from the ruling ethno-sectarian parties who are mouthpieces for their sectarian or ideological agendas (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2016). For example a Kurdish Sunni female respondent active in Women's rights issues explained that due to the position of women's rights in the Kurdish regions, her attachments to the country were largely emotional due to her family being there. As a result gender norms have affected her positionality, and consequently what she has been able to contribute politically inside the country. While it has inhibited her ability to work in Iraq, it has directed her work to grass-roots activism in the hostland where she is lobbying the UK government to put pressure on the Kurdish Regional Government to affect change with regards to women's rights and honour killings. It's important to stress here that the intersection of gender and class also produce power hierarchies as this middle class Kurdish female activist has at her disposal educational and material resources that allow her to continue her work in the diaspora that may otherwise prevent other women who are limited materially. Furthermore her position as a Kurdish woman defending women's rights in Iraq position her favourably vis à vis the hostland public who is receptive towards issues of women and human rights.

Restrictive gender norms in Iraq have discouraged many women from wanting to return also due to security fears and violence against women who do not conform to the gender norms propagated by ruling ethno-sectarian parties. Several female respondents who had planned to return to contribute to improving women's rights in the country had to rethink their plans, and instead accept that they could only work

from the diaspora to support women on the inside by challenging the ethno-sectarian state through transnational political activism from the diaspora. One female interviewee who has long been active in supporting Iraqi women's rights from the diaspora did return to set up a centre for survivors of torture under Saddam's reign, only to have her life threatened, her torture files stolen and consequently chased out of the country.

Just as the category of gender has created differential positionalities for men and women in the diaspora and their transnational politics towards Iraq, sexuality also intersects with gender to create positions of discrimination and disadvantage for homosexual men and women in the diaspora who have attempted to spread more democratic practices in Iraq. Iraq's first Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement, Iraqueer, was set up in the diaspora in Sweden by a Kurdish/Iraqi male activist whose sexuality prevents him from working inside the country. As a result, transnational networks of LGBT activists inside and outside Iraq work to support Iraq's persecuted homosexual community by providing them with shelter, medical services, and asylum amongst others. Furthermore, the movement also advocates on behalf of the Iraqi LGBT community in Iraq and raises awareness outside the country. As a homosexual man the space to mobilise on issues related to the LGBT community is not only limited but completely denied in Iraq as homosexuals have routinely faced death threats from both central and KRG governments, Islamic militias and also friends².

The positionality of homosexual men and women advocating for LGBT rights is therefore limited in Iraq and thus diasporans active in these issues can only actively work in hostlands that are open to LGBT claims. In Sweden and the UK, where homosexuality is not a crime, LGBT Iraqi diasporic activists can mobilise politically

though they too face stigma from certain Iraqis in the diaspora. As a result their work is mainly oriented towards the hostland and international public and their networks on the outside are largely Western organisations such as MADRE and OutRight Action International.

Yet male heterosexual privilege may hold with regards to the dominant ethnicities and if one adheres to the ethno-sectarian nationalism taking hold of the country, however for Iraqis in the diaspora who do not form part of Iraq's ethno-sectarian dominant groups, opportunities to engage politically inside the country are limited and thus their transnational practices are directed towards a different type of politics. Minority groups such as the Turkmen, the Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians have been limited in their ability to contribute politically inside the country following the 2005 elections. Their marginalisation in Iraq has weakened their positionality and consequently what they have been able to do politically both inside the country and in the hostland. The few who are politically active have attempted to put pressure on the Iraqi government to be included in the nation, by lobbying the UK and Swedish governments and raising awareness about land grabs in Kirkuk and the Ninevah plains where disputes with the Iraqi government and Kurds are on-going. As such their position of exclusion in the homeland has limited what they can do in Iraq, yet their inclusive position in the hostland provides them with the political space to lobby parliamentarians to intervene on their behalf. As such their positionality in the hostland provides them with resources that extend across multiple locations. As one female political activist representing a Turkmen political group in the UK stated,

“We can't get our land back from the government. Even if a Turkmen is more skilled than anyone else, they don't have the right to be in a ministerial position. This made us in a democratic country like the UK and especially one that took part in regime change to demand our rights. The British promised us that after 2003 the democratic regime that was to take place in Iraq was to be inclusive of all and no one would feel their rights denied. But we still feel our

rights are denied day after day, so we have to promote our case here.”

However, even in the hostland, the Kurds’ strong relationship with both the UK and Swedish governments means that the Turkmen, Chaldean, Syriac and Assyrian mobilisation efforts in the hostland are obstructed by a more powerful diasporic competitor with far more political leverage and resources at its disposal due to their powerful positionality in the homeland. This example demonstrates how the positionality of diasporic minorities in Iraq has been shaped by their positionality vis-à-vis the homeland context. Denied the space and political space to mobilise *there*, their political mobilisation has been diverted to the UK or Sweden, the only location where their politics towards the homeland can physically occur. As such their political transnationalism has been directed to imagining a different community, a democratic conception of the state and their political activism is a fight to be included by mobilising as a transnational Iraqi civil society.

More excluded still are the new and emerging Sunni diaspora largely, who became institutionally rejected by the de-baathification process instigated under Paul Bremer’s government in Iraq in 2004 (Bremer and McConnell, 2006), regardless of whether they were true party supporters or otherwise. The controversial policy was meant to act as a reassurance to native Iraqis that the era of Saddam had ended, similar to de-nazification (Sky, 2015). De-baathification, however, left the country with effectively no senior administrative staff to run Iraqi ministries, senior management positions in hospitals, universities and other public institutions. Meanwhile disbanding of the army left the vulnerable Iraqi state with no security apparatus and a widening security vacuum with roughly 400,000 armed and now unemployed army personnel (Herring and Rangwala, 2006; Stewart, 2006). What’s more it has prevented many in the diaspora who left the Baath party in the 70s and

80s to be staunchly excluded from belonging to the nation, as sensitivity towards the Baath regime still looms large in the consciousness of Iraqis. A Sunni Iraqi man from Baghdad who left Iraq in the 1970s stated that he has not been able to go back to Iraq or work politically from the outside because he is accused of being a Baathist and he can no longer return to the country. Denied a place in the new Iraq, former Baathists or any one associated with the party have been stigmatised and constructed as the nation's "other". Hundreds of thousands have had their political rights and attachments severed under occupation and subsequently by the new political classes, leaving them outside the imagined community (Anderson, 2006). Some fled into permanent exile, detached from the context of Iraq and where their attachments are located in memories and in new symbolic acts. Meanwhile others re-directed their politics to an extreme and fundamental form as we have witnessed with the rise of Islamic State (IS). In this respect the rise of IS can be understood as a reaction to the politics of exclusion, of feeling the need to recreate an alternative imagined community by redrawing a new geography of belonging through an Islamic Caliphate.

A by product of this exclusionary politics has been the entrenchment of ethno-sectarian identities in the diaspora so that Iraqi Christians are now Assyrians, and Iraqi Kurds are simply Kurds. Ethno-sectarian power dynamics have also encouraged sectarian identifications if only to gain government or political positions. Examples of previously non-religious individuals who upon returning adopted a sectarian identity to engage in homeland politics abound in the diaspora. A diaspora interviewed identified with the Iraqi Communist party stated that he had been approached by Islamists parties in Iraq who wanted him to join if only he would confess his Shia allegiance and identity. To be political you have to belong and to belong you have to

fall in to the demarcated ethno-sectarian boundaries from which the political structure has been founded.

For Iraqis thus positioned as Iraq's others, whether due to their gender, minority status, sexuality or political ideology this has led to a modification of their political mobilisation strategies due to the positioning within the hierarchy of power that either privileges or discriminates in relation to the accepted identities of Iraq's ethno-sectarian and masculinised, heteronormative nationalism. Most can only work from the hostland and those who attempt to work inside Iraq can only work outside the structures of power through civil society organisations and associations. As such their transnational practices are akin to transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) by acting as Iraq's transnational civil society, though their fight is for particularistic rights and a democratic conception of the state.

Conclusion

Using examples from the case study of the Iraqi diaspora in the UK and Sweden this paper has attempted to show how diaspora positionality vis à vis the homeland is important for understanding heterogeneous positions and political stances of diaspora from conflict or divided societies. In the political context of ethno-sectarianism and ruling Kurdish and Shia Islamic parties, the positionality of individuals in the diaspora reflected their social position in Iraq, which ultimately has shaped the type of diaspora politics they have been able to engage in. As shown above, for those whose positionality was empowered by ethno-sectarian dynamics, political transnationalism has created various opportunities for building the state that resonates with their ideological agendas both directly in Iraq's political process and from the hostland by working with hostland governments and institutions, or transporting initiatives to help

with policy or state infrastructure. In doing so, diaspora actively working to consolidate their party's grip on power and thus entrenching ethno-sectarianism in Iraq. On the other hand political transnationalism among Iraq's minorities has been directed towards challenging ethno-sectarian nationalism and the state that supports it. Denied the political space to mobilise inside Iraq, Iraqis in the diaspora are diverted to working mostly in the hostland and are acting as a transnational civil society from abroad fighting for a more inclusive and democratic conception of the state.

What does all this have to say for our understanding of diaspora and their political transnationalism more generally? In the first place and as I have argued here understanding positionality both in terms of hostland and homeland contexts as well as intersectional categories within each context can help us understand differences in the engagement of groups from divided and conflict societies such as Iraq's. If political, ethnic, religious, sexual or gender minorities are excluded from participating in the political process and feel they have no avenue to express their concerns, political transnationalism may as in the case of Iraq lead to other forms of engagement outside the structures of power as a transnational civil society through grass-roots activism, or alternatively lead to weak and low levels of political engagement. As such we can begin to understand perhaps why some diaspora individuals or groups from the same homeland outlive others, maintain strong homeland links or perish if their connections to their former homelands are obstructed or denied. In these instances links to homelands may retreat into the imagination, the symbolic, or gradually diminish leading to assimilation in the country of settlement, especially for second and third generations.

Furthermore, my research stresses the need to treat diaspora communities not as homogenous groups but rather heterogeneous actors with intersectional

positionalities in countries of origin and settlement. In doing so we can better assess diaspora individuals and groups' point of departure for why, how and what they politically mobilise for. We can also thus avoid simply focusing on the hegemonic diaspora discourses or seeing them as the legitimate voice of the community if we can understand how positionalities are constructed and who they privilege.

Notes

¹ Register of All-Party Groups - Kurdish Region of Iraq
www.publications.parliament.uk [Last accessed 27 April 2016]

² Personal communication with the founder of Iraqueer, 13 May , 2016.

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