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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THERE'S A PLACE FOR US:
HOW ETHNIC IDENTITIES ARE REVEALED
IN ETHNIC-SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

CRYSTAL L. JACKSON

CHICAGO, IL

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To Ruby Pauline Simpson Jackson,
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Samuel Edward Jackson, Jr. in gratitude

There's a place for us,
Somewhere a place for us.
Peace and quiet and open air
Wait for us
Somewhere.

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ABSTRACT

Using identity, incorporation and inequality, as essential dimensions of American ethnicity, I describe how the political and civic work that occurs in two ethnic-specific organizations reveals group boundaries.

My data and analysis encourage the use of an ecological model for studying American ethnicity. This ecological approach evaluates the identity claims ethnic groups make in light of ongoing geopolitical changes that impact them, and the cultural imprint those events have on the American mainstream. By focusing on these factors I hope to add dimension to existing analyses of American ethnicity that identify how intergroup dynamics predict distinctiveness. Instead of determining how identities are formed in relation to other groups that participate in American society, I prioritize the content of identity claims groups make in the space of an organization, and the larger social and political contexts in which the claims are offered. I find that claims of ethnic distinctiveness are substantiated by specific histories and events that determine shared experiences within an ethnic group, and simultaneously reinforce boundaries of exclusion with other out-groups. I also find that the salience of the identity claims groups make is mediated by ongoing geopolitical projects that shape cultural discourses and accepted political wisdoms.

CHAPTER I
IDENTITY, INCORPORATION, AND INEQUALITY:
ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AMERICAN ETHNICITY

Ethnic-Specific Organizations as an Analytic Field

I grew up in a family that participated in a number of organizations that were primarily made up of other black people. For many years, my mother was very active in the National Urban League. My father was involved on a variety of church boards that sought to address the needs of people living in black communities. Two of my uncles were members of the Black Freemasons. One uncle, who grew up in the segregated south, also maintained a lifelong commitment to an organization made up of his high school senior class – a group of African Americans that were witness to Louisville, Kentucky’s long history of racial exclusion. As I grew older I also joined these types of organizations because I believed them to be pivotal ways for me to contribute to black communities I belonged to. My membership in a historically black sorority and college organizations for black students served as important entry points.

The spaces were always distinctive in that there was both camaraderie and a sense of urgency for social change. Conversations that almost seemed sacred occurred in the space of the organizations I participated in. They were spaces where people could vent frustrations or reconcile aggressions that seemed to be racially motivated.

In the space of those organizations people shed masks that were worn in other places that were primarily made up of whites.

The spaces also acknowledged a shared history of disenfranchisement and an expressed hope for the future. Goals we set focused upon the ‘community’ and ‘our’ people. Organizational work focused upon developing strategies that responded to experiences that seemed to reinforce inequalities. The work that we did around these objectives not only engendered solidarity, it also held social implications. We felt the work that we did could change the experiences that ‘we’ had.

And it was always “we”. Although the organizations I belonged to were spaces that advocated social justice and equality as universal objectives, the social justices we pursued were inevitably those that confronted the black community. It was as if social justice could mean nothing else. My participation in these types of organizations greatly shaped my activism and my outlook. I continue to participate in them today because I believe they make valuable contributions to the world in which we live.

Of course ethnic-specific organizations have long been features of American society. Historically, they have served as a means of preserving culture and history. They have also been sites where collective interests are pursued. Analysts have identified several functions for organizations. Moore (1996) suggest that organizations provide collectives with a platform for actors to convince the public of the truthfulness of the claims they make. They “identify a subject and a way to go about producing or engaging the subject (Moore 1996, p. 1598),” and through enrolling processes show that many people agree to the principles that the organization presents. Organizations therefore

legitimate action in response to specific claims that are made. As organizations make social boundaries visible and substantiate the existence of a unified group (Moore 1996), their actions may also impact the allocation of resources to groups and places (Marwell 2004). Environments change endogenously and organizations participate in developing systems (Levitt and March 1988). The arrival of ‘new’ ethnics to American society and increasing populations of other immigrating groups provide an opportunity to reconsider how these types of organizations are being used at points in time when the American social context is impacted by the dynamism of domestic and global social processes.

Examining American Ethnicity in Ethnic-Specific Organizations

Identity as a Dimension of American Ethnicity

This is a study of two ethnic-specific organizations: The United Iraqi Christian Council (UICC) and the Coalition for Cuban American Nations and Exiles (CCANE). Recent analyses (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006; Herring 2002; Murguía and Forman 2003; Song 2006;) suggest that groups like the Iraqi Christians and Cubans in my study have “honorary status” in American society’s existing racial hierarchy. Taking into account statistical analyses of objective data that evaluates employment and education outcomes along racial and ethnic lines, and other data that look at social interactional indicators (e.g., intermarriage and residential choices) scholars including Bonilla-Silva (2002) and Herring (2002) conclude that the traditional black-white binary is giving way to a new racial order that includes groups that occupy intermediary positions in the nation’s racial order. Analyses suggest that honorary racial groups act as “buffers” that reduce the racial tension between dominant (e.g., whites) and subordinated (e.g., blacks)

racial groups. For instance, Murguía and Forman (2003) find that factors such as command of the English language, skin color, surname, and social class standing impact Mexican Americans' association to whiteness. Similarly, Song (2006) describes the mapping of specific groups into the existing racial hierarchy. Song additionally notes that the inclusion of honorary groups into American society calls into question the “groups that do and do not constitute disadvantaged ethnic minority groups (p. 861).”

Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2004, 2006; see also Omi and Winant 1994) also argues that discrepant social and economic outcomes for those who are counted as black and those who are counted as white (and honorary), despite pivotal changes in the nation's laws and policies on racial exclusion. He finds that in racialized societies, social relations are conditioned by historical understandings of racial groups and the contemporary status groups maintain in an existing hierarchy. While dominant groups are positioned to receive various social rewards and advantages, systemic disadvantage is conferred to groups deemed as racial subordinates.¹ According to Bonilla-Silva, the entry of new ethnic groups will challenge the existing racial order, but not dismantle it.²

¹ Mills (1999) has further asserted that the racialized structure of societies is global (i.e., not specific to any one nation or country) and its negotiation is perpetual. Thus, while social structures may change, the maintenance of hierarchical relationships is preserved (Mills 1999; Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2006).

² Bonilla-Silva argues that the arrival of new ethnic groups to the United States will bring about a new racial order. The black-white binary that has defined the country historically will be replaced by a tri-racial system that includes white, honorary whites and collective blacks. Other scholars (see Lee and Bean 2007; see also Camarillo 2004; Kaufman 2003a, 2003b; Mindiola, Niemann & Rodriguez 2002) challenge this conclusion and maintain that a white-non-white binary is more likely to emerge.

These analyses are occurring at a time when immigration patterns are shifting. The most recent wave of immigrants to the United States includes a number of ethnic groups who do not easily fit into the black-white racial binary that has defined the nation historically (Alba and Nee 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2004). Some analyses find that new ethnics are resisting their assignment into racial categories (Kurien 2007; Bashi Treitler 2007, 2013; Valdez 2011). For instance, Bashi Treitler (2013) maintains that ethnic identity is something that people assert for themselves. Ethnicity and ethnic difference are based upon a, “self-knowledge process that results in self-naming that joins an individual to a group ...[Ethnicity] provides a shorthand reference to one’s people, culture, heritage, history, and homeland (p. 40).” Bashi Treitler (2007, 2013; see also Mathew and Prashad 2000, p. 520) also provides compelling evidence that shows how ethnic groups simultaneously engage in “ethnic projects” that secure economic and social opportunities along ethnic lines without challenging the existing racial order. Zulema Valdez (2011) finds that ethnic business owners shield themselves from the harmful effects associated with racialized identities like Hispanic or Latino by adopting ethnic identities such as Chilean or Cuban as their primary social identity. These findings suggest that in a context where racialization processes have resulted in the assignment of people into broad categories (i.e., whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, etc.), ethnicity provides groups with a language to challenge existing conceptualizations. These analyses also suggest that as ethnic groups make certain identity claims, the authenticity of those claims is verified (or rejected) by the appraisals of non-co-ethnics.

These studies add dimension to ongoing dialogues that seek to understand the differential outcomes groups experience. Yet with the exception of Bashi-Treitler's (2007) work, they do not identify specific social mechanisms that may allow for movement on the hierarchy. I intend to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by describing how the work that is carried out in ethnic-specific organizations impacts two groups seeking access to resources in the name of ethnicity.

The emergence of honorary groups like Iraqi Christians and Cubans is also occurring as Americans are embracing multiculturalism and diversity as cultural values. (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Embrick 2011; see also Embrick and Rice 2010). Prema Kurien (2007) argues that although multiculturalism was never adopted as a national policy, it is both an ideology and a practice in the United States. According to Kurien, the democratic assumption of equality that informs the multiculturalism ethic requires public acknowledgement and positive valuation of the cultural authenticity of its diverse citizenry. In her consideration of organizational work conducted by Hindu Indian Americans, Kurien (2007) argues that American multiculturalism leads to the institutionalization, politicization and transnationalization of ethnicity. She maintains that in multicultural environments, such as the United States, groups organize, "on the basis of cultural similarity and to have ethnic representatives 'speak for the community' and its concerns." She continues:

Multiculturalism has also made ethnic identification an important source of cultural capital in Western societies, contributing to ethnicity's politicization. Because official 'recognition' can secure a group social, economic, and political resources, the 'struggle for recognition' is now becoming a central form of political conflict in multicultural societies, spurring ethnic mobilization among a range of groups. Finally, the 'authenticity' demanded by multiculturalism requires

the transnational legitimation of ethnicity by traditional sources of authority and products from the home country. Again ethnic entrepreneurs work to obtain official recognition for their group by making their homelands and ethnic cultures visible to the public. (p. 4)

Thus, multiculturalism allows ethnic groups to claim membership in the American collective by pursuing a “cultural politics of presence (Mathew and Prashad 2000).”

The cultural politics of presence takes into account the collective experiences groups have here and other places, including their home-countries (Mathew and Prashad 2000). Studying ethnic-specific organizations may explain how, in an environment favorably disposed to the tenets of multiculturalism, social, economic or political benefits may be conferred to groups who use them.

These mediations have implications for the identity claims groups make. Ethnicity and race scholars have given considerable attention to the idea of ethnic identity in American society. Some analyses have considered how social practices and institutional arrangements determine ethnic and racial identity. For instance, analysts (Bashi Treitler 2013; Feagin 2006; Guglielmo 2000; Ignatiev 1995; Roediger 1981) have shown how the ethnic identities of several immigrant groups were effectively neutralized by successful “ethnic projects” that encouraged “racial uplift.” These constructivist frameworks explain how social arrangements that defined the country historically created different lived experiences for a number of ethnic groups. Researchers describe how restricted access to resources created durable racial categories that were arbitrarily distinguished by a group’s country of origin.³ Other researchers who consider this period of American immigration

³ To explain differences in incorporation in American society, Blauner (1972) distinguishes between colonized and immigrant minorities by describing the difference access each group had to opportunities. Janet Nakano Glenn’s (2003) work gives

focus upon the resolution of these discrepant experiences.⁴ In general, researchers tend to describe how the matriculation of white ethnics into a unified national collective (e.g., American) that was defined in opposition to groups considered as non-whites, especially black Americans.

Tanya Golash-Boza (2006) argues that ethnicity also invokes a language of place (2006, p. 34). The arrival of “new” immigrant groups like Iraqi Christians and Cubans provide the opportunity to consider how the identities associated with groups are contingent upon geopolitical projects that impact the places immigrants hail from.

comprehensive consideration to how race and gender created different opportunities for Mexican and white immigrants in the Southwest. Others have evaluated how access to resources shapes racial differences. For instance Roediger’s (1981) historical analysis of American society during the slavery era presents evidence to show how the black-white binary was constructed. He describes how white indentured servants were afforded psychological and material wages that effectively distinguished them from Africans including the right to paid labor and gun ownership. Moreover, even those who argue the contemporary applicability of assimilation (as a process leading to greater inclusion) concede that America’s newest immigrants who are perceived as black will likely experience restrictions in a way that is similar to the restrictions non-immigrant black populations have experienced (Alba & Nee 2003).

⁴ Thomas Guglielmo (2003) and Noel Ignatiev (1995) have described how Irish and Italian Americans gained membership in an emerging white collective as a consequence of social, political and economic opportunities that were afforded to them but were not given to other ethnic groups and racial minorities, especially black Americans. George Lipsitz maintains that the value assigned to whiteness in American society is an outcome of historic laws and policies that conferred more social and economic benefits to whites than non-whites. In her book *Facing up to the American Dream* Hochschild (1995) maintains that the extent to which narratives of equality are integrated into national consciousness is determined by the nature of social relations. Societies that are highly racialized – like the U.S. – are more likely to reject laws and policies that hold the potential to reduce racial inequality, despite the nation’s strong adherence to fairness and equality, as guiding principles. And while there is evidence (Wilson 1978) to support that blacks, arguably the most marginalized of all non-whites, have made significant inroads towards social and economic advancement in post-civil rights American society, other researchers (Frazier 1965; Collins 1983) maintain that only marginal integration has occurred.

Golash-Boza also maintains that identity-making is also partly determined by contextual factors in the U.S., such as the cities where immigrants live. I argue that studying ethnic-specific organizations in local context provides the opportunity to advance these understandings in ways that show the role collective experience plays in identity-making among ethnic groups.

Inequality and Incorporation as Dimensions of American Ethnicity

Among scholars of American ethnicity, questions of belonging are inherently bound up in larger discussions on incorporation and inequality. For instance, some analysts (Alba and Nee 2003; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway 2008) adopt assimilationist frameworks to understand how immigrants' access to different opportunity structures may introduce differential economic and social outcomes among ethnic groups, including many 'new' immigrants. Alba and Nee (2003) maintain that the social and economic experiences of 'new' ethnic groups in American society continue to converge with the experiences of the American mainstream. Others like Philip Kasinitz (2008) and his colleagues have investigated second-generation immigrants with the intention of comparing the pathways children of immigrants take to advance in areas like work and education to the pathways taken by native whites. The authors find that many second-generation immigrants are either experiencing greater or similar forms of incorporation as native whites. These analyses often describe the social and economic outcomes immigrants and second-generation immigrants experience relative to the experiences of native born whites and blacks. In these analyses the idea of ethnicity is

mostly a factor by which the relative success or failure of foreign-born groups can be assessed (Bashi Treitler 2013).

Earlier analyses such as Edna Bonacich's (1973) seminal work on "middleman minorities" takes into account how the social relations *within* immigrant communities, and the kinds of relationships immigrants establish in their host societies determine the positions they occupy in existing social hierarchies. Similarly, assimilationist Milton Gordon (1964) took into account how ethnic groups could experience variable kinds of inclusion in American political, social and economic life.

Others have adopted a constructivist approach to evaluate experiences of incorporation. For instance, Steinberg (1981) challenges the idea of American pluralism, contending that political and economic processes successfully mitigated ethnic distinctions between European immigrants, while reinforcing racial differences between those who were considered white and those who were considered black (or non-white) in American society.

Whether scholars evaluate experiences of inclusion that are associated with more recent waves of immigration, or focus upon investigations that look backward at historical migration trends, incorporation is understood an outcome of negotiations that challenged unequal statuses in the American social context. These analyses suggest that membership in the American collective is highly contested. Changing political and economic circumstances can render groups vulnerable to a number of social reprisals and structural impediments that effectively eliminate or reduce their ability to participate here. Taking into account this history and the social knowledge associated with it, I

examine how ethnicity is used as a platform for addressing unequal experiences in an environment that values multiculturalism. I understand ethnic-specific organizations as sites where experiences of inequality are evaluated and acted upon in ways that can encourage greater belonging. I am particularly concerned with understanding how these kinds of organizations may serve as a platform for what groups want to achieve in particular moments in time. I consider how organizational work contributes to the cultural understandings non-ethnic actors have of events or crises that impact ethnic actors.

The nation's apparent value for multiculturalism can contribute to the "racial positionality" scholars describe.⁵ Yet, in her consideration of the work that Hindu Indian American organizations conduct, Kurien writes that,

A common critique of multiculturalism from the Left is that although the pressure for multiculturalism in the United States grew out of the demands of racial minorities for a more inclusive culture and society, it has currently become a way to sidestep the issue of racism and unequal structures by focusing on cultural diversity. The premise of Western multiculturalism is that there is no longer a dominant culture and that society is made up of a 'mosaic' of equally valued cultures. The reality, of course, is very different. (p. 241)

Thus, the nation's long history of racism and racial exclusion denies or can minimize multiculturalism's expectation for democratic incorporation and its intention to assign positive value all groups. Other scholars (Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2002, p. 6; Melamed 2006; Zamudio and Rios 2006) similarly suggest that the embrace of a liberal ethic has limited the ability for some groups – especially African Americans – to remedy continuing racial inequalities. The liberal ethic presumes that individuals rise

⁵ See Kim, C.J. 1999. "The Triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics and Society* 27(1): 105-38.

and fall on their merit (see Zamudio and Rios, p. 487). According to Zamudio and Rios, liberalism “works to deny the existence of the structural disadvantage of people of color, while simultaneously obscuring the structural advantage or embedded privilege of whites (p. 487).” Thus, petitions to resolve inequality in American society are juxtaposed between two discourses: a discourse on multiculturalism that seeks to meet the needs of the nation’s diverse citizenry, and liberalism, which places limits on how claims of inequality are received by the mainstream. In this environment, groups who are successful at claiming oppressed statuses can attain moral and material capital (Song 2004).

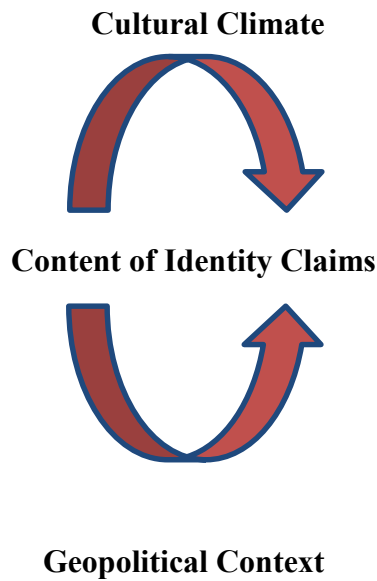
Furthermore, Williams (2013) suggests that immigrants’ campaigns for inclusion are impacted by racialized images that are bound up with religious and cultural identity and a civil religious sense of who is ‘really’ American (p. 246). He argues that shifts in the nation’s demographics, along with events like 9/11 and the election of President Obama, disrupts an implicit assumption that American society is a place that is white and Christian. According to Williams, the solidification of the nation’s “cultural triangle” of race, religion, and national identity has resulted in the “tribal othering” of immigrants and new Americans perceived as non-white and non-Christian.

Ethnic-specific organizations may serve as “free spaces” (see Evans and Boyte 1986; Morris 1984; see also Faist 2000) for ethnic groups. That is, ethnic-specific organizations may provide ethnic actors with the space to cultivate and put forth a sense of identity that contradicts other storylines that are emanating in the American social context. Organizations may also provide groups with a means of playing the “politics of

recognition” in that organizational platforms can bring necessary resources to groups or explain how they contribute to the national collective. Studying ethnic-specific organizations may explain how positive valuations of ethnic groups are achieved in racialized environments. Studying organizations like the UICC and CCANE may give an opportunity to understand how petitions to resolve inequality are evaluated in a contradictory social context.

By conducting this kind of analysis I intend to describe the maintenance or transformation of ethnic boundaries as they occur within ‘concrete, ongoing systems of social relations’ (Granovetter 1985:487). My study intends to provide a way to show how contextuality (i.e., social processes that are external to a group) and relationality (i.e., the responses a group has to their collective experiences within social contexts) inform conceptions of identity. Specifically, I advance an ecological framework that takes into account three factors: the geopolitical context in which American ethnics participate in, the national cultural climate that is shaped by geopolitical events, and content of the identity claims groups make when they petition for membership in spaces where they are absent or marginalized by either dominant or subordinated out-groups (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ecological Model of American Ethnicity



Using this ecological framework, I sought to answer three research questions. First, I considered how in ethnic-specific organizations, sites that confirm group boundaries (Moore 1996), the success of immigrant political projects may be impacted by dynamic social and cultural processes or events that occur in the U.S. and other places. Taking into account evidence that suggests that immigrant political projects are being carried out in an environment where the politics of representation are contingent upon continuing ties immigrants or ‘new’ Americans maintain to home countries *and* the collective position they occupy in American society, I consider which experiences of inequality are actually negotiated through organizational work. I ask whether work that focuses on experiences of inequality outside the U.S. may result in positive valuations of ethnic difference by others in American society. And lastly, I considered how the content of the identity claims organizational actors make in social interactions reflect larger social and cultural

processes, and how the content of claims predicts incorporation into the national collective.

Research Methods

I completed my fieldwork over the course of slightly more than one year. My work started in Detroit at the United Iraqi Christian Council (UICC) and its affiliated organizations in September 2011. I completed my research there in February 2013.

My decision to study the UICC and CCANE was informed by a database I created that identified ethnic-specific organizations in the United States. Before beginning my fieldwork, I used Associations Unlimited, a database provided by the Gale Research Libraries, to identify a field of ethnic-specific organizations. My database included over 300 non-profit (i.e., 501c3) organizations that primarily provided ethnic groups with a means of engaging in civic and political work, cultural and historical/archival work, or educational outreach. Organizations that were defined as primarily cultural, historical and/or educational were excluded from the analysis. Civic and political organizations that were not membership-based were also excluded from additional analysis.

On average, I spent four days a week in the office, working at least five hours a day. Not unlike other researchers in my position, I volunteered in the office to express my gratitude for being given the opportunity to learn more about the organization and the people who worked within it. I also used my time in the field to get a better idea about what organizational work looks like on the ground in the day-to-day. Over the course of my research in Detroit, I did a number of tasks from copying and filing, to evaluating data on Iraqi Christian immigration statistics, to meeting with clients who sought support

after their resettlement aid ended. Spending time in the office gave me direct exposure to the faces of people the organization sought to help and the decision-makers who sat in the proverbial driver's seat who intended to help them.

I completed my research at the Coalition for Cuban American Nationals and Exiles (CCANE) over an eight month period beginning in April 2012. Initially, I spent one month in Miami followed by two additional trips that allowed me to complete six additional weeks of fieldwork and interviews. As was the case in Detroit, I spent part of my time in Miami helping in whatever way I felt might be useful to the staff there. And because of the long history of Cuban immigration to Miami, I also spent part of my time at two universities in Miami that maintained large archives of Cuban history in the US.

Over the course of my fieldwork in Detroit and Miami I completed thirty-six formal interviews and twenty informal interviews with organization staff members, directors and board members. I used a semi-structured interview schedule at both research sites.

The average interview lasted approximately 56 minutes. The longest interview lasted over two and a half hours. The shortest interview lasted approximately 25 minutes. In Detroit, the average age of my participants was 39. In Miami, my participants tended to be older (52-69 years old). And while the gender distribution in Detroit was largely equal, I only interviewed one woman in Miami. All of my participants in Detroit were white. The preponderance of my Cuban participants were also white, but two interviews (one formal, the other informal) were also completed with Afro-Cubans.

The interview schedule I used included over thirty questions. I began each interview by getting demographic information including age, marital status, and educational attainment. I also asked each respondent to describe the role they played in the organization where they worked and how long (s)he had been working there. Similarly, when I interviewed people who were members of the organization (not employees) I asked how long they were involved in the organization and what kind role they played in the organization. I also asked each respondent to explain to me how they understood the role of the organization and how it might benefit people in their respective communities, or even people from other groups.

If a respondent's experiences included migration from their homeland to the United States, I asked questions to learn more about their immigration experience. In order to learn more about how respondents may conceive identity, incorporation and inequality in reference to collective experiences, I also asked questions such as, "What do you think the average American knows about your country of origin?" and "Does the work of the [organization] make it easier for immigrants to advance in American society?" I also asked respondents questions about concepts such as ethnicity to see how ideas about identity may be informed by experiences that are thought to be specific to a particular group. If a respondent's answers prompted additional questions or clarification, I included questions that were not on the interview schedule. The responses I received to unscheduled questions often gave me broader perspective on ongoing programs and organizational initiatives. For instance, additional questions helped me to understand how newly implemented programs differed from other programs or projects. Asking

additional questions therefore improved my knowledge of each organization's history. The additional questions I asked also tended to provide me with more personal information about the people I interviewed. For instance, I found myself asking additional questions about migration experiences after the initial responses I received suggested outmigration was motivated by political events or war. Learning how specific experiences impacted people directly gave me a better sense of how they made identity claims that indicated ethnic difference.

My interview response rate in Detroit was extremely high. Not one person declined my request for an interview. In fact, people continued to volunteer to be interviewed even after I completed my proposed number of interviews. My experience in Miami was completely different. Less than 30% of my interviews were completed based upon an initial request for an interview. The remainder of interviews were completed only after making *at least* one additional request. Several people, including those I came into contact with on a daily basis in Miami, chose not to complete a formal interview at all. They did, however, allow me to ask questions in informal interviews, knowing that their responses would inform my research. Because of the resistance I encountered in Miami, a large portion of my last trip to Miami was dedicated to completing interviews with organizational actors.

It is difficult to attribute the differences I observed in Detroit and Miami to one particular factor – whether that factor is race, gender or perhaps age. I do however, believe that the exceptional interview compliance I experienced in Detroit was informed by the fact that Iraqi Christians have more familiarity with African Americans in general

than did the Cubans I encountered in Miami. High rates of Iraqi Christian entrepreneurship in inner-city Detroit require the group to establish ongoing relationships with black people. It is feasible that the relationships community members shared with African American Detroiters provided a point of reference for engagement with me as a researcher. Qualitative differences in the tasks I was assigned as a volunteer in both organizations also suggest that my role as a researcher was valued more in Detroit. Beyond these factors, I also believe that my presence in the organization may have provided them with social currency among blacks. For example, I can recall being asked to accompany the director of the organization to a couple of events meant to improve relationships between Iraqi Christian store owners and black community members.

The relationships Iraqi Christians maintained with African American Detroiters seemed a tacit acknowledgement that they continue to negotiate membership in black space. The Cubans I encountered in Miami did not in any way have to address this kind of challenge. In fact, it seemed to me that the Cuban community claimed ownership over the city that Iraqi Christians could not assert in Detroit.

It is also possible that the resistance I encountered in Miami was informed by a longer history that is partly defined by experiences of oppression in Cuba and political disappointments that occurred in United States in the early 1960s. These experiences may remain a part of the collective memory of many of the Cubans I encountered in Miami. They may also promote a suspicion of non-co-ethnics (or racial others) like me.

Over the course of my fieldwork I also completed an archival analysis at each organization. I reviewed a range of documents and social media (e.g., organizational

webpages) with the purpose of using the knowledge I gained to evaluate organizational work in historical perspective. By doing so I could better determine how changing conditions in the social context impacted the strategies each organization employed. In total, the archival review at the UICC included over 1000 pages of information. The review at CCANE included approximately 200 pages. My review of university-maintained archives included approximately 200 additional pages. All the documents I considered were written in English. Documents that were written either in Arabic or Spanish were excluded from my archival review.

I have no ancestral or familial ties to either of the groups connected with the organizations I studied. I am neither Iraqi-Christian nor Cuban. Given the very obvious difference in my background, it would be disingenuous of me to suggest that my presence in both organizations was not a curiosity – especially in the beginning. As an African American woman, it was immediately clear to everyone I came in contact with in Detroit that I was not a member of the Iraqi Christian community. In addition to racial differences I would learn that Iraqi Christians are largely endogamous. To the extent that endogamy was not observed, community cohesion remained apparent along religious lines. Iraqi Christians who did not marry other Iraqi Christians tended to marry someone else who practiced Catholicism as they do. And while inter-racial marriages were not completely prohibitive, I was told they were a rare occurrence and that they were regarded in less regard when compared to other non-ethnic unions. So to the extent that I could even *theoretically* be Iraqi Christian, my status as an outsider may not fully go

away. Chances are I would likely retain a marginalized position in the community that prohibited my access to some of its inner circles.

My racial identity did not limit me in the same way in Miami. In fact, I was often mistaken as ‘Cuban’ when I attended public events the organization sponsored. Cuban-ness was also attributed to me in the day-to-day during my time in Miami. Indeed, revealing the fact that I was not Cuban to those I encountered almost always sparked other discussions that sought to put me into another ethnic group – be that Dominican, Puerto Rican or sometimes Haitian. It was always interesting to me to see a kind of bewilderment or even deflation that would come over the faces of those I met when they learned that I was simply African-American. Apparently in Miami it is easier to understand people, easier to interact with them, knowing that they are bound to a Latin or Caribbean ethnic identity – or at least what people understood as a non-American one. If my racial identity somehow allowed me to perpetrate Cuban-ness in CCANE or Miami more generally, revealing my inability to speak Spanish immediately identified me as an ethnic (and sometimes racial) other to the Cubans I met.⁶ It seemed that speaking Spanish

⁶ While not speaking Spanish certainly signaled my status as an outsider to the Cubans I interacted with at CCANE, I do not think my inability to speak Spanish interfered with my ability to study the organization itself. English is the language the organization uses to communicate in the organizational and institutional fields it participates within. I will make a similar disclaimer about the time I spent in Detroit. While it was highly typical for me to hear Arabic or Aramaic on a daily basis in the space of the UICC, English was the language the organization used to conduct its business. I believe that my inability to engage people in their native language would have been prohibitive if it were my intention to study a place or a group of people directly as opposed to using organizations as a unit of analysis. My intention here is to study the organizations themselves.

was held up as the hallmark signifier of Cuban-ness in the same way practicing Catholicism was for Iraqi Christians I encountered in Detroit.

Because of these complex nuances, I chose to make race (and my non co-ethnic-ness) a matter for open dialogue. Choosing to do otherwise seemed to me to ignore the elephant in the room that takes a chair at a very small table hoping for a good outcome. In Detroit and Miami, reconciling racial difference was sometimes revealed in the course of conversations I had with members of the Iraqi Christian and Cuban community respectively. I always engaged in these dialogues openly and honestly. I was careful not to make claims that sought to explain African Americans as a monolithic group, even though that sometimes seemed to be the expectation. Instead I tried to describe how my particular experiences as a black woman in American society informed who I was as a person, and perhaps even as a researcher. There were times when common ground was gained when I could confirm my understanding of something by saying that was how ‘we’ did things too – the ‘we’ being African Americans as a collective group.⁷ And there were other times when dialogues introduced different starting points for having discussions about the intersections between ‘them’ and ‘me’.

⁷ I also sometimes was able to convey a sense of sameness based off the experience I have living in a relatively rural place. That I could understand that people owned their own livestock for instance often boded well for me in conversations I had with Iraqi Christians who actually lived in small villages in Iraq. Similarly, the fact that I could understand the opinion that small towns performed community in a way that is different from the sense of community that emerges in urban spaces drew me closer to Iraqi Christians who could recall living in Iraq and Cubans who once lived in neighborhoods in Havana and other places in Cuba. The fact that I am familiar with some Catholic rituals like praying the Rosary and taking communion also seemed to demonstrate a sense of sameness to people I encountered in both organizations.

For instance, in one of my field notes I recount a conversation I had with a member of the Iraqi Christian organization in Detroit who remarked to me that ‘back home’ (in Iraq) it wasn’t unusual for Iraqi Christians to have contact with Africans. He also noted the close (relative to the US) proximity of Africa to Iraq. I took this conversation as his attempt to reduce the social distance between us. His discussion of Iraq’s proximity to Africa and social relationships Iraqi Christians maintained with Africans in Iraq seems to serve as a means of reconciling racial differences between blacks and whites that continue to be a part of American society. I got the impression that the context he provided allowed him to better understand how we could relate to each other. Similarly, in Miami I found myself sometimes participating in conversations that promoted the idea that Cuba was a racial democracy – at least prior to the election of Fidel Castro. Stories people (both Afro-Cubans and white Cubans) shared with me about [pre-Castro] Cuba emphasized the idea that there was no history of racial animosity, as there is in American society. These conversations seemed to serve the purpose of locating people in American discourses on racial difference that they ostensibly rejected. As was the case in Detroit, describing Cuba as a place that naturally supported engagement with racial others seemed to be offered for the purpose of reducing social distance between me and them. The way in which both groups used conceptions of homeland as a way of establishing themselves here in American society is a pattern I will return to at other points of my analysis. That said, I am not convinced that my racial identity was somehow neutralized in the space of these organizations – especially as it relates to my fieldwork in Miami where the relationships between blacks and Cubans have been particularly hostile

historically, and where there continue to be fewer opportunities for social interactions between the two groups (I will discuss the racial histories of the cities where the organizations are located in more detail below).

Race came up in less obvious ways as well. Over the course of my fieldwork in Detroit I noticed that there was often a distinction made between ‘whites’ and Iraqi Christians, and ‘Americans,’ and ‘blacks’. I found that people could not easily explain these distinctions, however. The distinction between ‘whites’ and Iraqi Christians seemed to be grounded in differences in cultural practices and social expectations. That is, while Iraqi Christians accepted that they were “white by law” and even white phenotypically (indeed, whiteness was a taken for granted assumption among the Iraqi Christians I met), they had particular experiences and practices that others who occupied that racial category did not. Discussions on Americanism, or being ‘American,’ were just as interesting in that conceptions of Americanism, or ‘Americans’ were often offered as a way of affirming ethnic difference. But it also substituted as a way of making racial claims. The racial connotation that seemed to underlie conceptions of Americanism was made more distinct when ‘Americanism’ was held up against blackness in conversation with me. I found it interesting that despite my experience as a native born African American, who’s family history in this country extends all the way back to the enslavement of Africans, did not seem to qualify me for inclusion in conceptions of Americanism. Rather Americans were spoken of as a group that did not include me. Conceptions of Americanism were not just defined by nationality or being born in the US. Invoking Americanism in conversation also spoke to membership in an aspired-to

social category. Perhaps it also served as a kind of tacit acknowledgement of differences in social incorporation. In other words, while blackness was not totally removed from conceptions of Americanism, it seemed to be understood as a bracketed identity that is integrated parenthetically, if at all, into a kind of imagined national collective.

I also found that reconciling difference also meant explaining to me, an ethnic outsider, what it meant to be Iraqi Christian or Cuban. In an effort to educate me in this regard in Detroit, I was invited into the community in a way that allowed me to observe the everyday things Iraqi Christians do that make them different from other people or groups. Often this meant enjoying particular kinds of foods or listening (and trying to learn) to their native language. I was also given the opportunity to learn more about Iraqi Christians through oral history projects that emphasized the group's long history in Iraq and its foundational ties to Christianity. If I was gently educated on matters like this, at times I was schooled more blatantly on others. Despite the fact that my blackness apparently limited my inclusion in conceptions of Americanism, there were times when I felt decidedly self-conscious about possessing privilege that may be unique to American society. For me, being American in the space of the organizations I studied meant not having to acknowledge how all of our experiences were actively shaped by geopolitics and war. That said, while I could never fully understand events that I did not experience directly, as a racial other in American society I could understand the feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement that were associated with them. I believe that shared sense of isolation became apparent in my interactions with the people I met in Detroit.

I was similarly challenged in Miami to simultaneously shed any American privilege I may have possessed and to demonstrate my ability to commiserate on experiences of systematic inequality. From my first day in Miami I recognized that *I* was the anomaly. To use a literary analogy it seemed as though I had fallen down the rabbit hole and up was now down and down was now up. Coming from Chicago I was certainly used to experiencing a variety of cultures and witnessing adherence to many different languages besides English. While Chicago may have a number of Polish, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Arab or African enclaves, leaving those spaces seemingly introduces a social expectation for the use of English. Not only did I not witness the same kind of depth and breadth of diversity in the time I was in Miami, I also did not see the same commitment to speaking English. In fact, people like me who didn't speak Spanish fluently were accommodated in ways non-English speakers tend to be accommodated in places like Chicago. Without question, speaking Spanish *was* the social expectation in the areas of Miami I came to know. The experience of Anglo-European, at least when it came to language, was not a part of my experience in Miami.

If not being able to speak Spanish somehow made me more conspicuous in Miami, the idea that I was African American seemed to give me some currency when it came down to understanding the organization's mission. In my field notes I recount conversations where a sense of camaraderie was built around shared histories of disenfranchisement *and* the civic actions taken to challenge those experiences. Perhaps for some (but not all) people in CCANE, the fact that I was African American meant that I somehow valued civic engagement in a way that someone who was not black might not.

Opportunity to reconcile difference also occurred in other ways that I did not anticipate. In Detroit, the majority of the staff in the organizations were American-born, and most of them were a similar age as I. That there was a dominant age cohort contributed to conversations about aspects of popular culture like music and television, shopping or even more personal things like whether or not someone had a tattoo. These conversations also seemed to reduce the social distance between us.

The fact that I was attending a Catholic university and that I had family ties to Catholicism (the maternal side of my family practices Catholicism) bought additional kinds of capital in Detroit and Miami. Interestingly, I found that my Chicago-ness also seemed to provoke interest, if not more willingness to forge a relationship with me, especially in Detroit. Invariably, when I was introduced to someone the fact that I was a researcher from Chicago was always part of the introductory script. Chicago seemed to be held up in a very positive light. I understood the reaction I received about my Chicago location as being informed by Detroit's relative state of economic decline. Chicago was what Detroit could be if only things were different.

My presence as an outsider also seemed to be mediated by the fact that I was pursuing my doctorate. In two communities that expressed a strong value for education, the pursuit of my doctorate degree seemed to speak something about my character and my personal values.

Beyond being able to build camaraderie in these ways, I also came to Detroit with some previous knowledge of the city. Because I have a host of extended family in Detroit, I spent a great deal of time there as a child. In fact, I can recall becoming familiar

with Iraqi Christians because I patronized Iraqi Christian-owned corner stores that were near my grandmother's house in Detroit's "Boston-Chicago" neighborhood. Acting as a researcher, it provided hindsight into my experiences as a child. Back then, it always seemed odd to me that when I would visit my grandmother, Iraqi Christians were the only non-black people I would see. Over the course of my research at the UICC, I learned there were reasons why Iraqi Christians owned businesses in neighborhoods like my grandmother's. It also became clearer how their presence in inner city space contributed to Detroit's racial dynamics and its local economy.

Miami is a very different city from Detroit. Miami is not experiencing the monumental economic crisis that faces Detroit. In fact, investments in the city have been on the rise over the last thirty years. The relative economic success the city continues to experience is due at least in some part to the success of Cuban entrepreneurship and the group's gradual insinuation into global marketplaces – especially those marketplaces that focus upon expanding trade relationships between the United States and countries in South America. The entrance of Cubans' into global marketplaces stands in great contrast to the commitment Iraqi Christian entrepreneurs continue to maintain in Detroit's local economy. The divergent economic qualities of each city indirectly shape racial dynamics. Iraqi Christians ongoing embeddedness within inner city space encourages, if not demands, social interaction with African Americans in Detroit. Cubans' embeddedness in global marketplaces do not require the same attention to local relationships – with African Americans or any other racial group. The continuing commitment Iraqi Christians have to achieving local incorporation and the increasing level of involvement

Cubans maintain in global marketplaces mirror critical differences I observed in the organizational work each group conducts in response to crises that impact them.

The experiences I had with Iraqi Christians as a young girl partly informed my choice to pursue my research in Detroit. Because Iraqi Christians had a strong presence in Detroit, I felt certain that important global events including the war in Iraq and the end of the Saddam Hussein regime provided an opportunity to better understand what organizational work that is conducted in the name of ethnicity looked like. Although I did not have the same personal frame of reference for the Cuban exile community, I felt that studying CCANE provided an opportunity to compare how a relatively new immigrant political project like the Iraqi Christian case compared to a longer standing one. By the time the war in Iraq began Cuban exiles in Miami were engaged in efforts to introduce democracy in Cuba for almost thirty years. Beyond these factors, my choice to study an organization serving the political and civic interests of Cuban exiles was additionally informed by my fieldwork in Detroit. The archival analysis included a review of a number of documents from state and federal agencies that provided statistics and migration histories of refugee groups to the U.S. Over the course of the review I found that I was drawing parallels and discontinuities between the Iraqi Christians in Detroit and the population of Cuban exiles in Miami. These similarities and distinctions lead me to ask more informed questions about the kinds of organizational work that was ongoing in Miami. Thus, my decision to study Cubans was ultimately partly informed by the knowledge I gained in my research site in Detroit and the subsequent understanding I gathered about the work CCANE was conducting in Miami.

Description of the UICC and its affiliates

The United Iraqi Christian Council (UICC) is located in Cypress Grove, Michigan, an affluent suburban community approximately twenty miles northwest of downtown Detroit. The organization's offices are housed in the same building as one of its affiliates, the Iraqi Christian Business Association (ICBA). Staff members of the community newspaper, the *Iraqi Christian Gazette*, and the Iraqi Christian Council on Health and Wellness (ICCHW) also have offices in the building. The building itself is impressive. The newly constructed four-story brick building seems a suitable component of an area of the Cypress Grove that is primarily dedicated to commercial endeavors. The offices sit alongside a four lane highway that serves as one of the main thoroughfares for Cypress Grove, providing local access to other businesses, shopping, and entertainment venues. Stores and restaurants like Whole Foods and Panera Bread are located within a one mile radius of the office. Semi-hidden entrances into comfortable residential enclaves are located directly off the expansive highway where the organizations' offices are located. From the street it is easy for passersby and those seeking to do business with any of the organizations to locate the building in that the ICBA's name is prominently affixed to its exterior.

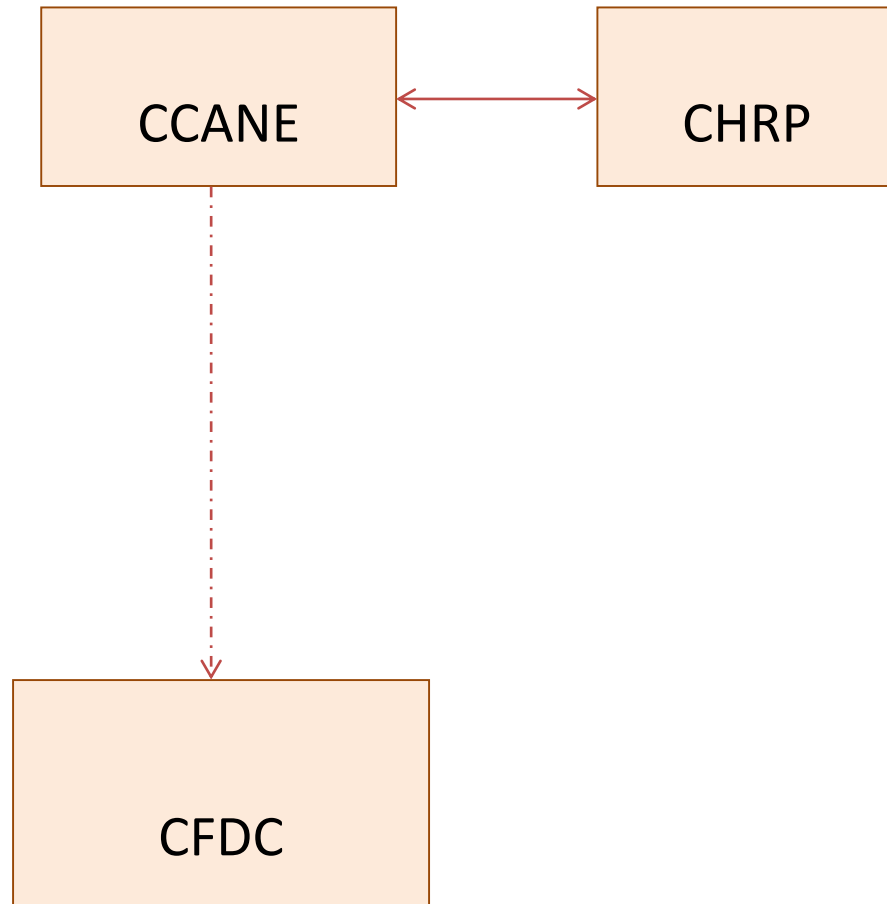
The UICC was founded in 1981. It is a "grass roots" community, non-profit umbrella organization that seeks to establish community based charitable, educational, and humanitarian relief to Iraqi Christians living in Iraq and other places around the world. Several different organizations are affiliated with the UICC including the ICBA, the ICCHW and seven others. While the UICC is the "umbrella" organization for all

affiliated organizations in the community, it receives some of its funding from the ICBA. In fact, the ICBA not only provides funding to the UICC, it also provides the majority of the financial support for the services the ICCHW offers. Historically, financial shortfalls in the UICC or ICCHW have been addressed with state and federal funding. Membership dues and other membership related fees including advertising and fees associated with attending organizational events support the majority of the ICBA's efforts. Additional support is provided from corporate donations and state and federal grants. Two professional organizations that support Iraqi Christian attorneys and physicians in the Detroit area are also included under the UICCs umbrella. There is also a women's charitable organization that provides assistance to the community's refugee population by sponsoring fundraisers and hosting other events. For instance, in 2012 the women's organization published a cookbook that included a wide selection of Iraqi Christian staples. All of the profits from the cookbook went directly to the refugee community. In 2010 the community also started a cultural center in the Rolling Hills Country Club. Rolling Hills, which is also located in Cypress Grove, is approximately three miles away from the UICCs offices. While the club is open to non-Iraqi Christians, the preponderance of the membership comes from the community. The community cultural center is the Iraqi Christian community's effort to document its ethnic history in Iraq and American society. The group of affiliated organizations also includes a social service agency that is based in San Diego, California, where another sizable population of Iraqi Christians resides.

It blends almost seamlessly into the background of the neighborhood. Unlike the building that houses the UICC and the ICBA in Detroit, there is no signage on the exterior announcing the organization's presence. In fact, it is the kind of building one might pass one hundred times without truly noticing it – without stopping to give thoughtful consideration as to what might be inside. It is a simple and non-descript three-story structure that sits quietly off the street. The lack of hustle and bustle that generally defines the neighborhood where CCANE is located serves only to make the offices somehow more obscure.

Currently, CCANE shares the building with one organization called the Cuban Human Rights Project (CHRP). CHRP has a similar mission as CCANE and the staff of both organizations frequently work together. CHRP mission does differ slightly from CCANE's, however, in that it is more directly focused upon providing support and assistance to Cubans living in Cuba. Another organization affiliated with CCANE, the Coalition for a Free and Democratic Cuba (CFDC), is now defunct. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Coalition acted as a political action committee. CFCDs work was based out of Washington, D.C.

Figure 3. Organizational Structure of the Coalition for Cuban American Nationals and Exiles (CCANE)



Organization of the Chapters

Chapter two and three are closely related and linked. Chapter two describes organizational work that is conducted in the Iraqi Christian Business Association (ICBA), one of the UICC's affiliates. I consider how the ICBA enables Iraqi Christian-business owners to negotiate their continued participation in inner city Detroit. I describe how the ICBA responds to three challenges. The first challenge involves reconciling racialized antagonisms that were leveled against Iraqi Christian entrepreneurs in the weeks and months following the events of September 11th. The second challenge occurred in 2003

when members of the organization needed to respond to city-sponsored raids on their business establishments. Lastly, I consider the organization's response to the introduction of two national grocery franchises into the city of Detroit. I argue that the ICBA is a free space that provides Iraqi Christians in Detroit the opportunity to contradict other storylines about the group that challenge their assertions of ethnic authenticity. Specifically, I find that organizational work provides the opportunity to challenge potentially harmful conceptions of Iraqi Christians emanating in the public sphere. Taking into account events that occur over the course of the organization's work, I also conclude that there is a relationship between the transactional context in which identity claims are made and the viability of those claims.

Chapter three takes a similar look at the work CCANE conducts in Miami. Taking into account important political crises such as the Mariel Boatlift of 1981 and the end of the Cold War in 1990, I consider how events support organizational actor's claims of ethnic authenticity. I describe how events allow organizational actors to contradict storylines that understand the group as immigrants to another version that gives primacy to their experiences in exile and experiences of political oppression.

In chapters four and five I take into account how the rhetorical strategies each organization employs allow them to meet their respective organizational aims. First, I explain how each organization uses the idea of ethnic authenticity as an organizational logic. In chapter four I describe how the UICC's efforts to resettle Iraqi Christian refugees in Detroit are informed by three aspects of the group's ethnic history: its indigenous ties to Iraq; its foundational association to Christianity; and social

differentiation of local Christians that resulted from living in a predominately Muslim society. Similarly, in chapter five I describe how CCANE's efforts to bring about a civil society in Cuba rely upon claims of authenticity that describe Cubans' collective experience with political oppression.

I then consider how organizational rhetoric is shared in social interactions with outgroups in ways that encourage cultural citizenship in the American mainstream and institutional belonging in other forums where organizational work occurs. In chapter four I describe how the UICC and ICBA's participation in "emplotted stories" on "the west" and Americanism in interactions with U.S. lawmakers, federal agencies encourages incorporation. I also explain how the use of rhetoric on religious exodus or displacement and allows the ICBA to build important local collaborations in Detroit that bring resources to resettled Iraqi Christian refugees. In chapter five I describe how CCANE's participation in culturally accepted narratives Americanism, democracy and human rights achieves incorporation in the American mainstream and international forums on human rights.

My data and analysis encourage the use of an ecological model for studying American ethnicity. The final chapter explains how adopting an ecological approach provides the opportunity to evaluate the identity claims ethnic groups make in light of ongoing geopolitical changes that impact them, and the cultural imprint those events have on the American mainstream. By focusing on these factors I hope to add dimension to existing analyses of American ethnicity that identify how intergroup dynamics predict distinctiveness. Instead of determining how identities are formed in relation to other

groups that participate in American society, I prioritize the content of identity claims themselves, as they emerge in the space of ethnic-specific organizations. I find that claims of ethnic distinctiveness are substantiated within organizations by specific histories and events that determine shared experiences within an ethnic group, and simultaneously reinforce boundaries of exclusion with other out-groups.

CHAPTER II

MANUFACTURING DETROIT: CHALLENGING THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF PLACE THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION

Historically, entrepreneurship has provided immigrants with a means of achieving socioeconomic incorporation into American society (Bonacich 1973; Gold 2010; Logan, Alba and McNulty 1994; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Jenson 1989). Many “middleman” entrepreneurs establish their businesses in predominately black neighborhoods that do not include supermarkets and other chain stores. Gold (2010) argues that tension and hostility between merchants and patrons is common in these communities. Black customers, who have limited economic resources, can harbor resentment for store owners who they feel do not offer low-cost goods and services that are available in the suburbs. And in an effort to safeguard their investments, merchants “harden their shops and remain vigilant against theft (Gold 2011:3)” In this environment, routine business transactions can lead to violence and humiliation (Abelman and Lie 1995; David 2000; Gold 2010).

For the last forty years, Iraqi Christians business owners have maintained a large presence in Detroit, a city that is over eighty percent African American. In this chapter I describe how the Iraqi Christian Business Association (ICBA), one of the affiliated organizations of the UICC, provides Iraqi Christians with opportunities to respond to crises that challenge their position as entrepreneurs in inner city neighborhoods.

Migration, Economics and Politics in the Motor City

Once during the course of my fieldwork at the UICC I had the opportunity to travel from Chicago to Detroit by way of Amtrak. The train wound its way through many picturesque lakeside Michigan towns, providing a glimpse of what life might be like for some people who live there. Those picturesque scenes stood in contrast to the images that welcomed me and other passengers upon arriving to Detroit. Gritty storefronts, along with shells of burned out buildings that somehow managed to remain standing on the edges of sparsely traveled city streets, and neglected vacant lots filled with discarded aluminum cans and paper, betrayed the storied image of a once thriving American industrial city.

The scenes of urban blight were however, strong evidence of the pervasive economic problems the city has experienced over the last fifty years. Economic disinvestment in Detroit has been a pattern since the 1960s when it and other major U.S. cities began experiencing unparalleled suburban growth. Then, not only did perennial urban dwellers leave the city in favor of assuming residence in pristine suburban enclaves, so too did businesses and large corporations.

The city's social problems seem to have worsened since then also. Unprecedented gang and drug violence during the 1980s and 1990s earned Detroit the infamous title of 'Murder Capital of the U.S.A.' But illicit crime was not Detroit's only problem. Corruption in the city's government did nothing to encourage economic reinvestment or public confidence. All of these issues seemed to come to a head in March of 2013 when

Governor Rick Snyder declared the city in a ‘state of financial emergency’ – effectively signaling the city’s imminent filing for bankruptcy.¹

Detroit’s racial makeup has been impacted by the simultaneous experiences of urban disinvestment and suburban expansion occurring since the 1960s. The outmigration of mostly white groups and the continued occupation of city space by mostly African Americans, created contrasting neighborhoods and communities. ‘Whitopias’ emerged miles away from a rapidly declining ‘Chocolate City’.² For Detroit’s mostly African American population, who remained within the city limits, the pattern of disinvestment and expansion meant that livable-wage employment options were limited. African Americans were also first-hand witnesses to failed policies meant to reconcile urban inequality; ineffective city management, along with apparent limitations of federal policies (e.g. urban renewal), and the budgets that accompanied them, left little opportunity for progressive urban development plans to come to fruition.

Geographic sprawl and economic investment in suburban areas also introduced consequences for other groups as well. By the 1960s, Jewish Americans, who once were a tremendous presence in the city – especially in its local economy, began leveraging their entrepreneurial success to buy homes in the developing suburbs. The group’s economic success also encouraged them to begin new endeavors in professional

¹ <http://nation.time.com/2013/03/01/governor-declares-financial-emergency-in-detroit/>

² In the book *Searching for Whitopia: An Improbable Journey to the Heart of White America* journalist Rich Benjamin defines whitopias as predominantly or extremely white suburban or exurban enclaves. The term Chocolate City is an urban colloquialism referencing the geographical separation of whites and blacks in suburban and inner city spaces respectively.

occupations. The migration of Detroit's Jewish community to points northwest of the city, along with their matriculation from the merchant class, meant the closing of many small businesses in the inner city over time – beginning with businesses in the Hastings Street neighborhood to the east in the early part of the 20th century, to those in the Dexter Boulevard area on the Westside of Detroit in the 1960s. It also brought about neighborhood racial change in many of the same areas. African Americans replaced Jews and other white ethnics who were leaving for suburban destinations. By the 1980s many of Detroit's Jewish community had settled in affluent suburban areas.³

While expansion and disinvestment instigated the migration of Jewish Americans over time, Arab groups – especially Lebanese and Syrian immigrants, who began arriving in Detroit after WWI, have maintained a consistent presence on the western outskirts of the city. Arriving mostly in search of economic opportunities, many early Arab immigrants attained jobs with the Ford Motor Company, who made their headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan. High matriculation of Arab groups into manual labor positions at Ford in the 1930s and 1940s encouraged the emergence of a distinctive Arab community in the Detroit metropolitan area.⁴ The persistence of the enclave has supported the subsequent migration of other Arab groups west of Detroit's border since the 1960s. In fact, the first wave of Arab immigration, along with immigration that occurred thereafter,

³ Jewish history in Detroit obtained from the Jewish Virtual Library, a project of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise:
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/vjw/Detroit.html>. Website accessed on May 3, 2014.

⁴ For an expanded discussion of Arab immigration to Detroit see Laurel D. Wagle (1974); Sameer Y. Abraham (1983); Kim Schopmeyer (2011)

brought into existence an Arab American enclave that is unrivaled by most others in the United States.⁵

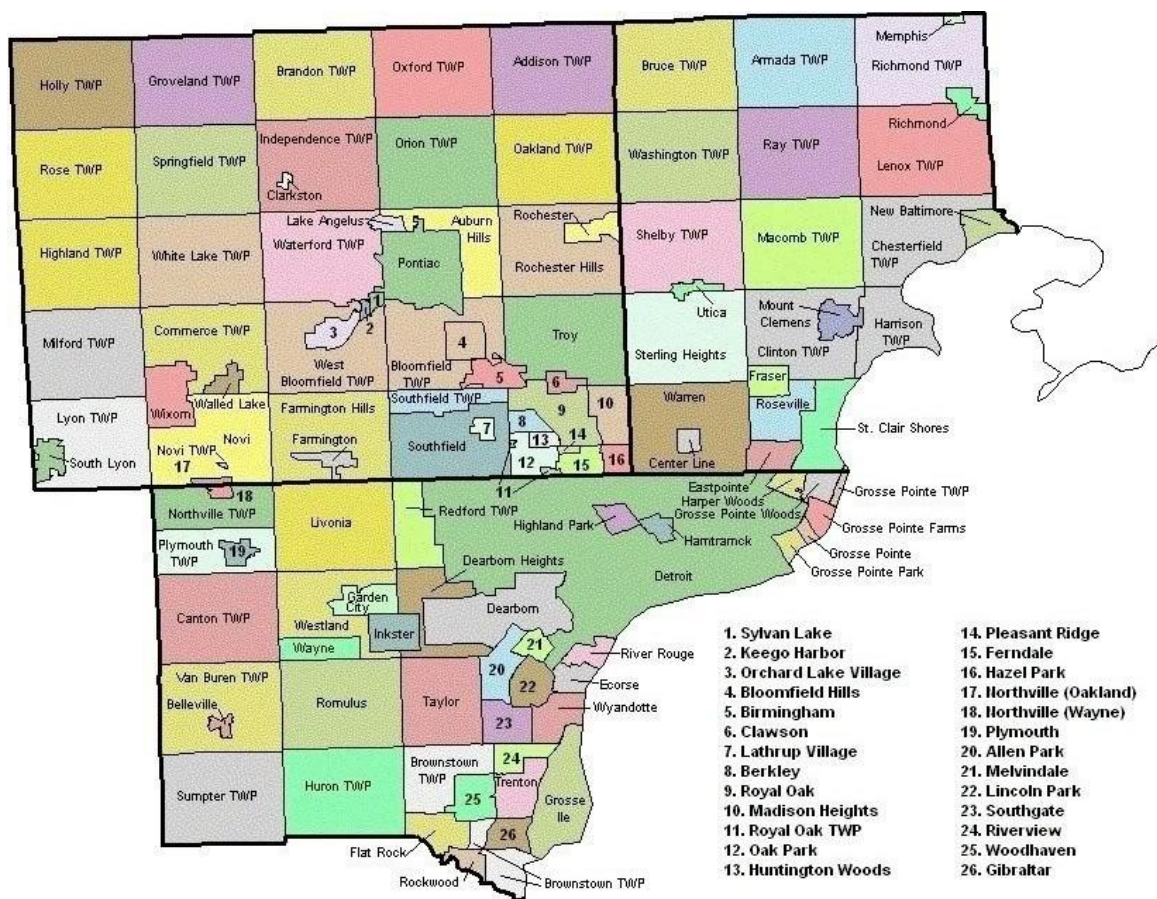
Still other groups remained closer to the city center despite suburban development and economic disinvestment processes. For instance, the city of Hamtramck, Michigan, whose boundaries are actually etched inside Detroit's borders, remains an active enclave for Polish Americans. While German immigrants initially occupied the area at the turn of the 20th century, the arrival of the Dodge manufacturing plant in 1914 encouraged the settlement of a large contingency of new Polish immigrants.⁶ In recent years Hamtramck has been an appealing settlement site for immigrants from Southeast Asia, especially those from Bangladesh. But the city's main thoroughfares, which include a host of Polish bakeries, restaurants and Catholic churches, continue to reflect the historic presence of early Polish immigrants to the metropolitan Detroit area.⁷

⁵ According to the Center for Immigration Studies, the state of Michigan had one of the largest Middle Eastern immigrant populations in the nation in 2000. Also, Michigan was one of two states that received the highest number of Arab immigrants.
<http://www.cis.org/articles/2002/back902.html>

⁶ See JoEllen McNergney Vinyard. 1998. *For Faith and Fortune: The Education of Catholic Immigrants in Detroit, 1805-1925*. Urbana: University of Illinois, pp. 182-184. See also the website for the City of Hamtramck, Michigan.
<http://www.hamtramck.us/about/history.php>. Website accessed May 3, 2014.

⁷ Website for the City of Hamtramck, Michigan:
<http://www.hamtramck.us/about/history.php>. Website accessed May 3, 2014.

Figure 4. Map of Detroit Metropolitan Area



Iraqi Christians in Detroit

The same processes that shaped Detroit's social landscape and economic structure also impacted Iraqi Christian migration in the city. The aims and the strategies the UICC and its partners adopted were determined in this complex social and economic terrain.

Iraqi Christians have maintained a substantive presence in Detroit for over 100 years. Not unlike other ethnic groups, Iraqi Christian immigrants began arriving to the U.S. in the early 20th century – coinciding with the first wave of Arab immigration by Lebanese and Syrians. By the turn of the century the population was on the rise in Detroit, due in part to the city's burgeoning auto industry.⁸ The population expanded again between the 1970s and 1990s when a second wave of voluntary immigrants arrived from Iraq.⁹ While revisions to census policy make it difficult to accurately chronicle population growth over time, the most recent population estimates place the number of Iraqi Christians in Detroit at well over 30,000 people.¹⁰ Currently, Detroit has the largest population of Iraqi Christians outside of Iraq. Furthermore, expectations for population

⁸ See Sameer Y. Abraham (1983)

⁹ See Kim Schopmeyer (2011:31)

¹⁰ This total population of Iraqi Christians estimated by the Census is strongly disputed by the UICC and its affiliated partners, who place the number of Iraqi Christians in the Detroit area to over 100,000 people. See <http://www.arabamerica.com/news.php?id=291>. Schopmeyer (2011: 32) suggest that undercounting of Iraqi Christians and other Arab groups in the US Census results from sampling effects, mistrust of government surveys, and faulty methods for identifying Arab groups. Schopmeyer reports adjusted Census data that yields a population estimate (i.e., 129,296) that is consistent with the estimates reported by other sources.

growth are high, in that the majority of the Iraqi Christian refugee population is anticipated to resettle in the Detroit area.¹¹

The immigration of the first Iraqi Christians to Detroit was instigated by the economic opportunities the auto manufacturing industry brought. However, unlike Lebanese and Syrian immigrants, Iraqi Christians were largely unable to attain jobs in the manufacturing industry upon their arrival.¹² The limited access the group had to jobs in the auto industry meant that other sources of employment needed to be found. Entrepreneurism held the most promise for many in the emerging community. Acting as merchants was not a role that was unfamiliar to the group. Iraqi Christians have historically acted as merchants in Iraq – opening stores in urban hubs like Baghdad and Mosul where the crops of Iraqi Christian farmers could be sold. And as one of the few purveyors of alcohol in Iraq, many Iraqi Christian merchants also owned liquor stores (Bailey and Bailey 2003; Sengstock 2005).

The Iraqi Christian American ethnic economy in Detroit grew dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s when ‘white flight’ not only began to affect the city’s neighborhoods,

¹¹ Since the war in Iraq began in 2003 Christians living there have become increasingly susceptible to violence and social reprisals. In 2007 the U.S. Congress recognized the group’s vulnerability with the passage of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act. Under the law Iraqi Christians and other minority populations are provided with special immigration status. The existing Iraqi Christian population in Detroit, along with the ongoing organizational work being conducted on the group’s behalf has encouraged high rates of resettlement in the metropolitan Detroit area. The vulnerabilities confronting Christians living in Iraq as a consequence of war are also discussed in more detail in Chapter four. See also Schopmeyer (2011:50)

¹² See Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce website: <http://chaldeanchamber.com/community-overview>. Website accessed May 4, 2014.

but also its local economy. Then, when small businesses operated by independent storekeepers (mostly owned by Jewish Americans) and large corporate-owned supermarkets started to move out of the inner city, Iraqi Christian entrepreneurs began moving in. Since that time entrepreneurship has remained a defining socio-economic characteristic of the group in Detroit. Today, sixty percent of Iraqi Christian Americans in Detroit own at least one business, and 39 percent own two or more.¹³ Not unlike some other ethnic groups, the entrepreneurial acumen of Iraqi Christians is most apparent in small business enterprise, especially grocery and liquor stores (Bonacich 1973; Bonacich and Modell 1980; Light 1984; Logan, Alba and McNulty 1994; See also Sanders 2002). However, in recent years, the group's economy has diversified. More and more, businesses are being located in affluent suburban areas in the metropolitan region.¹⁴ And Iraqi Christians now also own a wider range of businesses than those traditionally associated with the group.

The pattern of expansion and development that characterized Detroit after the 1960s was also revealed in the group's migration pattern in the city. Like Jewish Americans in Detroit, Iraqi Christians initially lived in the city. And like Jewish Americans the migration of Iraqi Christians in metropolitan Detroit also progressed northwest – moving from communal enclaves located on the city's east side to those on the far west side. By the 1970s the group found itself in areas west of 7 and 8 Mile Roads

¹³ Source: 2008 survey of Iraqi Christian households conducted by the Iraqi Christian Business Association

¹⁴ This pattern is not unprecedented. See Min Zhou (2004).

and Royal Oak, a suburban community located just beyond the city's northernmost boundary. By the 1980s, largely due to their entrepreneurial success, the group began living in the same areas as Jewish Americans in Detroit. In fact, Cypress Grove¹⁵, the area where the preponderance of the Iraqi Christian population currently resides maintains a sizable concentration of both Jewish and Iraqi Christian Americans.¹⁶

The progressive northwest migration of Iraqi Christians to Cypress Grove stood in geographical contrast to the stable western enclave Arab groups established in Dearborn. The physical separation of the two groups is compounded by the development of Detroit's interstate highway system. Suburban expansion in Detroit brought about the corresponding growth of the federal interstate highway system over time.¹⁷ The concentration of Iraqi Christians in the northwest suburbs and Arab Americans in the western suburbs is separated by two major interstates: I-94 and I-96 – highways that run in opposing directions. The introduction of these manmade barriers makes direct access to either community infeasible. It also eliminates any possibility for the two communities to have social interaction in residential space.

¹⁵ Cypress Grove is a pseudonym

¹⁶ For an expanded discussion of Iraqi Christian residential patterns in Detroit see Sameer Y. Abraham (1983); see also Schopmeyer (2011:39-41)

¹⁷ For an expanded discussion of how the evolution of the federal highway system transformed American cities see Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*.

The Construction of Black Space in Detroit

A host of economic and social processes that began in the 1960s created an undeniable black space in the city of Detroit.¹⁸ Since then the maintenance of that space has been supported within a number of city institutions. Culturally, black space has been defined by the city's association with Motown Music and the black artists that created the 'Motown Sound' – an era of music, when at its height, managed to break the color barrier on radio stations across the nation – despite racial hostilities, which were motivating a growing Civil Rights Movement. Black neighborhoods were also created by other processes, including the 'redlining' of the real estate market in Detroit.

City politics also fortified black space in Detroit. Not unlike other major U.S. cities, Detroit was a racially contested space prior to the exodus of most white groups to the suburbs beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During the time when whites were still living in Detroit, black city residents alleged that racial discrimination created unequal opportunities. Despite their large share of the population, blacks living in Detroit from the 1930s through the 1960s had little access to equal housing or employment

¹⁸ Fainstein and Fainstein (1986) understand the city of Detroit as a city in relative decline compared to other Western cities that implemented more effective restructuring plans like Denver and San Francisco. According to Fainstein and Fainstein, the creation of black space in Detroit was facilitated by the loss of jobs and income – especially in manufacturing – by the city's residents, population out-migration to the suburbs, restructuring efforts including the development of the federal interstate system, housing policy and failed redevelopment and human renewal efforts. In the same volume Child-Hill notes that the suburban expansion and urban disinvestment occurred simultaneously with politicized uprisings of black Detroiters – further consigning the space to blackness. Still other processes like the construction of suburban manufacturing plants in the late 1940s and early 1950s further encouraged racial exclusionary geographic boundaries.

opportunities in some of the city's public works departments, including the police department and city hall.

The absence of black workers from these areas of city government, coupled with ongoing incidents of brutality, especially instances of violence by city police officers, contributed to divergent political opinions. Support for liberalism and the social programs implemented under the New Deal resonated with white and black progressives in the city, while the idea of liberalizing opportunity inflamed the political and social sensibilities of white conservatives. Still other groups in Detroit intended to advance the political strategies of black militants, which held little faith in the good intentions of liberal policies and utter disdain for the prejudicial viewpoint of white conservative groups.¹⁹

Coleman Young, Detroit's first African American mayor rose to power in this challenging political climate. A friend to liberals, including John Kennedy, Young entered office in 1973 with the intention of advancing New Deal and Civil Rights policies. However, because of his inability to strike mutually beneficial public-private contracts, along with his unapologetic commitment to the black community and intolerance for white political conservatives, Young racially polarized Detroit politics instead.²⁰ The public perception that 'black' politics meant more than 'white' politics

¹⁹ For an expanded discussion on the politicized battle lines that were developing in Detroit in the 1960s, see Thompson (2001:232).

²⁰ See Thompson (2001:242). Wheeler (1994) also argues that Young himself created racialized boundaries that the white establishment had never before encountered. Young's profane language, which was often on public display (for instance Young had an office nameplate that read, 'MFIC', which stood for Mother Fucker In Charge) seemed to lessen his credibility with whites, and his overall ability to strike beneficial political relationships with white-led companies – including the auto-manufacturers. Wheeler

overshadowed Young's ability to address economic inequality through the introduction of liberal policies.

Over the course of his tenure in office the color of politics in Detroit also changed. Young's election created black space in City Hall, one of Detroit's most vital institutions.²¹ The city also hired an unprecedented number of blacks to civil service positions, including those hired into the police force. For some white Detroiters the emergence of these black spaces in Detroit signaled the end of their civic participation in the city.

The ICBA: Transforming Institutional, Geographical and Organizational Places in Detroit through Organizational Work

By the 1980s, Iraqi Christians no longer resided within the city limits but they continued to run businesses in black neighborhoods. Recent estimates indicate that Iraqi Christians currently own 86% of the grocery stores in the inner city and 90% of its liquor stores.²² The group's prominence in Detroit's local economy is made more evident by the virtual absence of national supermarket chains like Meijer, Kroger and Whole Foods.

notes that Young's insinuation into Detroit politics was, "perceived as encroachment upon territory already spoken for, a social trespass that many suburbanites not only appl[ied] to Coleman Young but extend generically to all of the black people who have unofficially annexed Detroit (p. xiii)."

²¹ On the idea of Detroit as black city, Lonnie Wheeler writes, "In a country still fundamentally white, a black city stands self-consciously underdressed and frightfully isolated amid surroundings that it cannot assimilate ... within the greater society; a tangent and, to some, a terrifying culture. The city's overwhelming color identification suggests to those white former Detroiters that it has been snatched from their dominion (1994: x)."

²² Source: 2008 survey of Iraqi Christian households conducted by the Iraqi Christian Business Association

The Detroit metropolitan area not only contains the largest population of Iraqi Christians outside of the Middle East, it also has one of the largest populations of Arab-Muslim groups outside of the Middle East. Just as in other cities, the 9/11 terrorist attacks inflamed prejudicial attitudes against Muslims living in the Detroit area. And while there are tremendous cultural differences between Iraqi Christians and other Middle Eastern groups – religion and (native) language perhaps being the most significant – those distinctions were largely lost on people who were apparently primed for retribution. As a consequence, Iraqi Christians, including business owners in Detroit, found themselves on the receiving end of racist antagonisms. The failure to bring about effective case-by-case resolutions for the negative sentiment the group was experiencing contributed to the establishment the ICBA.

After the attacks of September 11th, Middle Eastern incorporation into the national collective was contested. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) the number of hate crimes against Middle Eastern groups increased by 1700 percent after the tragic events occurred (see Sheridan and Gillett 2005). Arab-Muslims also reported increasing levels of direct and indirect discrimination following September 11th.²³ Because of their Middle Eastern background, Iraqi Christian business owners were also susceptible to these hostilities. Public identity claims the organization made distanced them from Arab-Muslims. For instance, the following account was offered on the organization's website in 2003 after its founding:

²³ Self-reports from Arab-Muslims in the U.K. found that levels of indirect discrimination increased by 83% following the events of September 11th. Levels of direct discrimination increased by over 70% (Sheridan 2006)

[Iraqi Christians] are the indigenous people of Iraq who speak a form of Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus Christ... [Iraqi Christians] are Eastern Rite Catholic, led by the Patriarch of Babylon and affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church ...The population enjoys steady growth thanks to a constant influx of Christian refugees who have fled Iraq in the face of religious persecution. The community feels a deep kinship to these victims of war and helps them in many ways... (UICC website)

By invoking a foundational association to Jesus Christ, the organization and its members locate themselves in a narrative on Christianity that is fundamental to American society, as Judeo-Christian nation. The group's practice of Catholicism further illustrates their close association with other Americans who are Christian. The website additionally implies that since the start of the War in Iraq (a consequence of 9/11), local Christians have been susceptible to religious persecution. That religious persecution against Christians in Iraq was increasing at a time when the United States and its allies were at war there suggest that they share commonalities, and even political allegiances, with Americans (or Westerners) that other non-Christian Middle Easterners may not.

After its founding in 2003, the ICBA also began participating in inter-organizational forums that sought to address racial and ethnic antagonisms in Detroit. The ICBA's participation in these spaces provided additional opportunities to introduce alternate storylines about the Iraqi Christian community that countered perceptions that conceded Arab Americans in Detroit were a monolithic group.

During an interview Eli, the President and Executive Director of the ICBA, described the role the organization plays in mediating public perception in the Detroit. While the ICBA has only been in existence for approximately ten years, other Iraqi Christian organizations provided the group with a blueprint for conducting organizational

work. For instance, Eli recalls participating in two young-Iraqi Christian organizations as a college student in the 1990s. One of the main goals of both organizations was to work on the “image” of the community. He describes how the early organizations he participated in as a college student worked:

Eli: One of the things that I realized [back then] is that I think we have an image problem - which still occurs today.

CJ: With whom?

Eli: We have an image problem to the general community. [Iraqi Christians] are just the stereotype...because if you talk about [Iraqi Christians] you assume party storeowner. So we had to tell our story...you know that the party store owners ... there's always been a perception, they don't pay taxes. They [outgroups] don't understand how they own so many businesses. So they assume that they have a seven-year tax [break] ... It's crazy!

In the days following September 11th, Iraqi Christian business owners in Detroit were susceptible to prejudicial attitudes about people from the Middle East. Much of the antagonism was informed by the idea that Middle Easterners not only practiced a religion that was different from most Americans, but that that religion encouraged radical actions that could harm them.

At that point, social differences between Iraqi Christians and other Middle Easterners in Detroit, including religion, were lost in public dialogues in Detroit. Within this context, hostilities between Iraqi Christian merchants and black patrons increased. Eli's comments suggest that the ICBA provides Iraqi Christian business owners with a means of neutralizing harmful characterizations the “general community” may have had about them. The identity claims the ICBA put forth, which emphasized their Christian identity, revealed commonalities that could potentially decrease the social distance

between them and most other Detroiters – including black patrons of Iraqi Christian-owned stores.

Olivia, the executive administrator at the ICBA, also explained how correcting stereotypes that are associated with the group is part of her job. According to Olivia, the need to manage the community's image often becomes apparent in community forums that are sponsored by the City of Detroit or other non-profit agencies. *Diverse Detroit* or *D²*, the main forum the ICBA participates in, is a citywide organization whose goal is to provide the Metropolitan community with opportunities to learn about other cultures. It is also a site where people come together to devise plans that can aid in the city's growth. For the city's Middle Eastern groups, the open dialogues that occurred in forums like *D²* created the opportunity to reconcile antagonisms that emerged after September 11th.

Olivia routinely participates in forum roundtables. During the meetings she is sometimes called upon to address some of the same misconceptions Eli mentioned, including the assumption that Iraqi Christian store owners receive tax exemptions. During an interview she described how forums like *Diverse Detroit*, and even the ICBA, whose membership is not limited to Iraqi Christians, are “branding” opportunities.

Olivia: We always ... We're not selling a specific product. We're selling *us*, you know?

CJ: It's like a brand?

Olivia: Exactly. We're selling a brand! I'm not selling you a recorder [taking note of my recorder], a telephone or something. But, I'm like, “Come in!” This is what we do. And you'll come. You need to impress people. And if people aren't impressed, they will not come to you. It's just basic. To me it's common sense. Think about what we do. Think about how [you can] get the same thing from Sears, but we have to get it from Nordstrom ... or I had to go buy it at Saks.

So for Olivia part of managing the community's image entails combating storylines such as the one that suggest Iraqi Christian store owners do not pay taxes. But another component of organizational work includes advancing the idea that the group has expertise that is of value to others. Therefore, the organization not only puts forth the idea that Iraqi Christians share commonalities with dominant groups (i.e., Christian Americans), they also explain how they contribute to the city in ways that other groups cannot do as effectively.

The organization's participation in inter-organizational forums also provided a means of achieving other organizational goals. The ICBA is the primary funding arm of the affiliated organizations of Iraqi Christians in Detroit. For the last five years, one of the main organizational concerns has been to generate revenue to meet the needs of Iraqi Christian refugees, who have resettled in Detroit due to deteriorating conditions in Iraq.

In order to meet this imperative, the ICBA is represented on a number of committees sponsored by the Governor's office and other citywide initiatives. These forums intend to address issues of diversity and equal opportunity, and to create programs that respond to social and economic disparities. When the ICBA began participating in these forums they encountered difficulty explaining how the needs of Iraqi Christian community differed from other Middle Eastern groups in Detroit. Their Middle Eastern background often led to solicitations to serve on state and city committees that attempted to resolve Arab-Muslim antagonisms in the city. Eli explains how the organization's membership on these committees didn't allow them to address issues like the ones confronting the group's refugee community:

Eli: This is [an] ongoing debate, you know? Yes, we're from the Arab World. We share a lot in common. We speak Arabic. So to the outside – you're Arabs. And so we need to tell our story. We don't think that they [other Middle Easterners] have our [same] interests. You know? We're different ... I served on a committee appointed by the previous governor on Arab and [Iraqi Christian] affairs. And most of the issues were about [racial] profiling. I wanted to talk about other issues and not necessarily [about profiling] ... The new governor asked me to be appointed again and I told him I'd do away with the commission. We don't need a token committee for Arab or [Iraqi Christians]. We just wanna participate in the general committees, you know?

Eli's comments suggest that although they are "from the Arab World," Iraqi Christians were not in search of solutions to issues such as racial profiling. That those differences weren't being recognized in inter-organizational forums meant that ICBA goals, including providing support to refugees, weren't being met.

Olivia compared the difficulty the organization faced by recalling conversations she had when she was a young girl:

Olivia: You know even when I was growing up, everyone's like, "There's no difference between an Arab and [an Iraqi Christian]." And I said no, I'm [Iraqi Christian]. You know – I'm Catholic. I said all [Iraqi Christians] are Catholic. All Arabs are not Catholic ... I wasn't insulted. It just wasn't what I was. It's like saying [to someone] OK ... you're Chinese. No, I'm Japanese. No. It's the same thing.

The failure to recognize group differences held implications. Demonstrating specific needs tended to lead to the receipt of state-sponsored grants. In an effort to put the needs of Iraqi Christians in the forefront, the ICBA started a PAC (Political Action Committee) in 2008. Eli describes the PACs objective:

So the PAC helps with those things. ... A lot of the folks in Lansing [don't know about Iraqi Christians]. [We] educat[e] them, [so they will] give us funding for our Foundation – for the refugee crisis that we're facing ... If you look at our counterparts in the Jewish community, the Arab community ... you know their organizations are getting \$8 to \$10 million – sometimes \$12 million a year. So I think we have a lot of opportunity.

After 9/11 state and city-sponsored committees in Detroit attempted to reconcile perceived differences between Arab Muslims and Westerners (or non-Arabs). Early on in their participation in these forums, the ICBA was included in dialogues that did not allow them to pursue their specific interests. By establishing a PAC, the ICBA hoped to counter the idea that Iraqi Christians were a part of an undifferentiated group of Middle Eastern Americans.

In 2004 the ICBA confronted another challenge to their membership in Detroit's local economy. At that time, Detroit's now disgraced mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick, began raiding Iraqi Christian-owned stores in the name of protecting citizens against a number of health and safety violations presumed to contribute to neighborhood decline. The raids came on the heels of moratorium issued by the City of Detroit in 2003 that prevented the opening of new stores that sought to sell beer and liquor. The stings targeted irresponsible store owners thought to sell expired products or allow minors to purchase alcohol. The city also intended to identify store owners who turned a blind eye to drug sales that occurred on their property. By 2004, the Detroit Police Department had inspected over 300 stores, most of which were owned by Iraqi Christians.

Race played a role in the public dialogues that ensued about the raids. Some black Detroiters took issue with the fact that Iraqi Christian-owned stores rarely hired black employees. Other black Detroiters took exception to the idea that store profits were taken away from Detroit and invested in suburban communities where Iraqi Christian store owners resided. Still others, including members of the city's government, took the opportunity to contest the fact that few stores in Detroit were black-owned. The *Detroit*

News quoted one black Detroiter who suggested that the number of stores owned by Iraqi Christians in the city promoted differences between the city and suburban life: “There’s too many stores in one block. There’s one at this corner, one on the next and one up the street. You see this in black neighborhoods; you don’t see this in the suburbs.”²⁴

The ICBA had two responses to these claims. The first response focused upon how Iraqi Christians remained in the inner city while other people and businesses moved to the suburbs. Presenting the opinion of Iraqi Christian-store owners, Judy Lin of the *Detroit News* wrote, “Store owners and other residents say the stores provide a much-needed service to the residents [who lack] transportation to make it to big chain grocery stores in the suburbs.” In an online forum Eli argued similarly noting that,

For over forty years the [Iraqi Christian] community ... has worked in and with the city. It is clear the mayor wants these stores out of Detroit. Why? What will replace them? While chain stores have left the city in droves – despite tax abatements and subsidies – Detroit’s party store owners have stuck it out, time and time again.

During an interview with me, Eli confirmed this position:

Eli: It has to do with [taking] ownership. And so ... a lot of the work [of the ICBA] has been focused on talking about our contributions to this region. Not just as [Iraqi Christians]. We’re not an insular group, but rather contributing to the overall economy.

When the raids on Iraqi Christian-owned stores began in 2004, the ICBA responded by countering racialized storylines that jeopardized the group’s membership in Detroit’s local economy. One of the ways they addressed the crisis they faced was to explain how

²⁴ Party Store Crackdown Creates Rift: Tensions among Chaldeans, blacks rise during yearlong raids in Detroit by Judy Lin, *Detroit News*, February 14, 2005.

Iraqi Christians continued to contribute to the city. Unlike other people and businesses that moved to the suburbs, they had not abandoned Detroit.

The second response challenged the storyline that Iraqi Christian store owners were self-serving and took advantage of blacks in Detroit. To challenge the idea that Iraqi Christian-owned stores carried unhealthy or low-quality products, the organization introduced a website that patrons could use to make informed decisions. Eli explained to me how the website served the community:

Eli: We talked about image. You always hear these stories: “Detroit's a food desert, there's no place to buy fresh foods”. It can't be any further from the truth. And so we're launching [a website]. It's going to be for the general public. If you type in an address in the city, it will take you to a store that has fresh fruits and vegetables, a supermarket ... there's photos of each of these supermarkets, customer testimonials, sales papers ... I mean just last week there [was] a story that's negative. And all the media picks it up. We're constantly combating [that]. The website dispels a lot of the myths or the stereotypes: How many African Americans they employ at their stores, how long they've been in business, the types of food that they carry – ‘cuz they say, “Oh, there's no organic products.” Again, we have photos of it all.

The organization also countered the challenges they faced by liberalizing storylines that seemed to pit black Detroiters against Iraqi Christian business owners. In this regard, the ICBA publically questioned the city's ability to create an environment that promoted social and economic success for everyone.

For instance, in online forums and the local news outlets, the ICBA maintained that Kilpatrick's indiscriminate and repetitive raids stymied the city's already struggling business economy. The organization contended that money allocated to the raids could be spent on programs to address other issues such as crime and unemployment, instead of turning up minor health violations and legal breaches in Iraqi Christian-owned stores.

The organization also claimed that the actions the city took against Iraqi Christians were discriminatory. They argued that the stings disproportionately impacted Iraqi Christian businesses and not large franchise chains such as CVS drug store, who also sold alcohol and perishable items. And lastly, the ICBA asserted that despite the continued service of Iraqi Christians to the city, the mayor had yet to appoint a member of their community to a position in his administration.

In 2005 when the raids ended, the Mayor's Office issued a statement that read in part,

We are, like never before, fortifying efforts to attract and retain businesses to the city, especially middle market businesses... Based upon the needs of the [Iraqi Christian] business community, we will do what we can to serve those needs... If we don't reach out and stand up to support those who are here and support their success, the city won't be successful. We talk about the financial health of Detroit. We have to support the financial health of the businesses in Detroit. We are 100 percent committed to working with the [Iraqi Christians].

In an environment where racial belonging in black space was being used to challenge Iraqi Christians' continued participation in Detroit's economy, the ICBA introduced alternate storylines that protected their business interests. First, the organization explained how Iraqi Christians were perennial contributors to the city's economy, unlike other groups and businesses that abandoned the city. Second, they challenged the assertion that the social and economic position of black Detroiters would be improved by closing Iraqi Christian businesses.

In 2009, the ICBA found itself defending the presence of Iraqi Christian grocers in the inner city again. But this time, the defense was not just mounted against the city and a renegade mayor. It was also aimed at the state of Michigan and two of the nation's

largest grocery chains, Whole Foods Market and Meijer. Under a plan the state of Michigan implemented, which intended address the absence of healthy food options in Detroit, one Whole Foods and one Meijer store would be opened within the city limits by 2013.

While the addition of two grocery stores may not drastically alter the buying habits or the food options of most Detroit residents – a population of 700,000 people – the announcement of their arrival was a sign of a changing economic landscape. For Detroiters the arrival of both stores ended a long exodus of national grocery chains from the city limits. The announcement also impacted members of the Iraqi Christian business community, who had long maintained a veritable monopoly over the city's food sources. The addition of Whole Foods and Meijer meant that Iraqi Christian grocers would have new competition for the patronage of some of the city's residents.

Not long after the city announced the development plans for both stores in 2009, the ICBA started a campaign explaining the disadvantages of the Whole Foods and Meijer deals. The position the ICBA took was made part of the public dialogue in many of Detroit's local presses, including *Crain's Detroit Business*. The organization's campaign advanced two major points. The first point conveyed the idea that they, as independent grocers of Detroit, had remained in the city when no one else wanted to be there. Articles appearing in local press reinforced the fact that they have been around the

city for over 30 years. They also described how Iraqi Christians remained present even in underserved areas that chain stores long abandoned.²⁵

The deal struck between the city of Detroit and Meijer and Whole Foods responded to recent state legislation that sought to create a healthier community in Detroit. Under Public Act 231, implemented in 2008, the city and the State of Michigan intended to bring Detroit its first ‘real’ full-service grocery stores (i.e., those with at least 10,000 square feet of aisles, and dedicated meat, dairy, produce and frozen food sections) – a claim Iraqi Christian grocers disputed based upon their own estimations. Under the proposed plan a Whole Foods store would open in June of 2013 in Detroit’s Midtown neighborhood, which includes the Detroit Medical Center and Wayne State University. The Meijer store planned to open in May of 2013 at 8 Mile and Woodward – along the border the city shares with the more affluent suburban communities of Royal Oak and Birmingham. The proximity of each store therefore held little potential to rectify the access most Detroiters had to national grocery stores. Rather the stores would mostly serve to increase the resources in two of the city’s more resource rich communities.

²⁵ The following articles are given as examples of the public discussion brought forth by organizational actors: <http://metrotimes.com/columns/the-whole-truth-1.1315684?pgno=2>
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203961204577269723768076382?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052970203961204577269723768076382.html>
<http://www.freep.com/article/20120514/BUSINESS06/120514018/Whole-Foods-Midtown-Detroit>
<http://mydetroitgrocers.com/the-detroit-news-local-grocers-snubbed-for-whole-foods/>
<http://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20110727/FREE/110729897/-4-2-million-in-incentives-key-to-whole-foods-deal>

Detroiters living in underserved communities stood to receive little to no direct benefit from the introduction of the flagship stores.

During an interview Myron, an executive staff member at the ICBA, explained his objection to the state's initiative. Myron cast doubt on the genuineness of the proposal's aim of improving access to healthier and broader food options to underserved neighborhoods in Detroit:

Myron: Where are you putting them really? They're putting one in Midtown - which is - kind of like ... a more affluent part of Detroit, where it's kind of yuppies, who live and work for the hospital system. And then the other one that they're putting on 8 mile and Woodward – right on border of Royal Oak ... So they're trying to get really the Ferndale, Royal Oak demographic ... Oh so you're really thinking about the city? It's crap... they don't care about the city.

Myron's comments suggest that the strategic placement of the proposed stores fails to meet the state's objective of alleviating the poor access Detroiters have to full-service grocers. His comments also pose a contrast between the two national chains and Iraqi Christian-owned stores. By locating in the city's more stable and middle-class communities, Whole Foods and Meijer failed to demonstrate the same commitment to the city as Iraqi Christians. Contrasting the ideas of community health and access with commitment to the community provided Iraqi Christian business owners the opportunity to remind Detroiters of their long-standing membership in Detroit.

The ICBA emphasized both of these limitations in press and public hearings repeatedly from 2009 to 2011. For instance, the organization's website provided the following historical point of reference:

Metro Detroit has the world's largest population outside of Iraq, with an estimated 121,000 people...Like many ethnic groups, [Iraqi Christians] began immigrating to the Metropolitan Detroit area in the 1920s in search of better economic,

religious and political freedom and opportunities. While some were lured by Henry Ford's famous \$5-a-day working wage, in true [Iraqi Christian] fashion entrepreneurial endeavors quickly took hold – particularly mom and pop food markets. Today, an estimated 9 of 10 food stores in Detroit are owned by [Iraqi Christians]. (ICBA website)

The history the website offers explains the group's membership in the city of Detroit and likens their experiences to a host of other immigrating groups that are part of its local collective. They also call upon a longer ethnic history of the group that began in Iraq to qualify their participation in the city's local economy as entrepreneurs. That the group experienced entrepreneurial success in their home-country explains their position within Detroit's local economy.

The ICBA also sought to make public the financial details of the deal surrounding the development plans. Under Public Act 231, financial incentives, in the form of property tax deductions, would be awarded to retail food companies who established stores that expanded, improved, or opened in underserved areas in Detroit.²⁶ The economic benefit of the Act was estimated to have the potential for \$852 million in sales and to enable the creation of over 3000 additional jobs in Michigan. According to *Crain's Detroit Business* the deals struck between the City of Detroit, the State of Michigan and the federal government on one end, and Whole Foods and Meijer corporations on the other, included almost \$5 million dollars in financial incentives.²⁷ For Iraqi Christian

²⁶ http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mda/FINALPA231FactSheet_290187_7.pdf

²⁷ In September 2009 CBS Money Watch reported that, "the Michigan departments of Agriculture and Treasury have developed Public Act 231, which provides incentives for retail food businesses that expand, improve, or open in underserved areas", creating the potential for \$852 million in sales and over 3000 additional jobs in Michigan.

business owners the idea that Whole Foods – a store that billed itself as ‘the world’s largest natural and organic grocery store’ – and Meijer – a financially comparable company – would receive financial incentives to build stores in Detroit deserved public outcry. Iraqi Christian grocers wanted to promote the idea that such support encouraged an uneven playing field that disadvantaged independent grocers in the city of Detroit. That companies who had not demonstrated the same commitment to Detroit that Iraqi Christian grocers had, despite never receiving similar incentives to open stores, was a fact that needed to be shared with Detroit residents.

The ICBA also wanted to counter the argument put forth by the city, Whole Foods and Meijer that the development of the stores would provide Detroiters with much-needed livable wage jobs. The ICBA responded this argument suggesting that the city’s support of these deals over others, which feasibly could bring better jobs, failed to meet the real needs of Detroiters. In an interview Myron described how the organization worked to combat the development plans as it related to financial incentives and employment:

Myron: ...For example when Meijer and Whole Foods got government subsidies to open stores in Detroit – you know – no one knew. There's tons of [independent] grocery stores in the city of Detroit - where they receive nothing. They're just all out on their own ... So we did a FOIA, and [said] let's see what the real story is. So we [learn they] have ... I mean tons of subsidy money ... multimillion-dollar subsidies to these groups – to Whole Foods and to Meijer ... and no one [else] gets nothing. So we published it. It went national. It went everywhere...And just the subsidy that these groups are getting and local businesses don't get anything – especially a private organization like Meijer ... I mean you could look up Whole Foods tax returns. They profit like \$90 million. I mean do you really want to be in Detroit then if you need that kind of subsidy to put a store there?

[CJ: Did a Whole Foods, Meijer, anything like that ... open in Detroit?]

Myron: Not yet. But they will. I mean they're still going through with it. But there was a lot of backlash. You know from state representatives in Michigan ... the government put a freeze on their money. So it ... a lot of good things happen. And it's not just [good] for people who own grocery stores... they're giving away the small tax dollars that everyone's giving in the city of Detroit to give to large organizations. They can afford to build it if they want. If you really want to be there, you don't need the people's money. Are you gonna pay back to the community what you've taken? No, I guess not. [He goes on to talk about the prospect of bringing jobs to the city] Oh, well we're [Meijer and Whole Foods] providing jobs. - Oh, who cares [his response to that argument] Take that 9 to shit somewhere else. Yeah. Hey, we're hiring people! At eight dollars an hour? ... I'm pretty sure they could find them someplace else really...

The public responses the ICBA had to the deal to bring Whole Foods and Meijer to Detroit suggested that the deal would not level the economic playing field for anyone in Detroit. Black Detroiters in need of livable-wage jobs were not going to benefit from the addition of minimum-wage job opportunities. The ICBA maintained that the deal stood mostly to benefit corporations that were disengaged from the city and its people. The organization intended to explain how the interests of people committed to Detroit, including Iraqi Christian store owners, were being overshadowed by unfair corporate contracts. The organization's work seemed to produce results. By May of 2012 the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) awarded three Iraqi Christian storeowners low-interest loans to update their facilities.

Conclusion

Between 2001 and 2009 Iraqi Christian business owners in Detroit experienced three crises that challenged their ability to participate in the local economy as inner city entrepreneurs. The first crisis arose after September 11th. In an environment that created “us” and “them” categories that separated “Americans” from Middle Easterners, Iraqi Christian business owners became susceptible to anti-Arab hostilities. The second crisis

occurred when the city of Detroit began raiding Iraqi Christian-owned businesses in the name of protecting the health and safety of Detroit residents. The third crisis began when the state of Michigan approved Public Law 231, which paved the way for two national supermarket chains to open in Detroit.

As a voice for Iraqi Christian business owners, the organization implemented strategies to protect the group's business interests. In response to each crisis, the ICBA introduced alternate social understandings about Iraqi Christians and the role they played in Detroit. One of the strategies involved explaining to Detroiters who Iraqi Christians were as a people. In public forums and in inter-organizational space, the organization described the group's religious practice. They also explained how local Christians in Iraq were vulnerable to religious persecution from members of majority groups. The organization made these claims as challenges to Middle Eastern incorporation were occurring in Detroit. Zulema Valdez (2011) argues that in order to avoid association with racially marginalized identities like Latino or Hispanic, people use ethnic identities as anchoring or primary identities. After September 11th Arab (or Middle Eastern) groups in Detroit were more susceptible to racial hostilities. The identity-work the organization conducted in this environment challenged the assumption that people of Middle Eastern descent were a monolithic group defined by shared interests and beliefs that differed from the beliefs of other Americans.

The work the ICBA conducted in response to the city-sponsored raids on Iraqi Christian-owned businesses occurred in an environment that was defined by racial divisions between whites and blacks. To Kilpatrick proponents, the raids were an attempt

to resolve a long-standing pattern of exploitive practices that reinforced differences between the city and the suburbs – or black and white Detroiters. Opponents of the ICBA suggested that Iraqi Christian-owned stores in Detroit were harmful to city residents. Public dialogues also concluded that stores owned by Iraqi Christians were inferior to stores located in suburban areas.

In response, the ICBA put forth campaigns which maintained that Iraqi Christians worked with the city in a way that other groups had not. The ICBA also asserted that while big business left the city, they had remained. By doing so, the organization drew a line between Iraqi Christians and whites who lived in the suburbs and the businesses that served them. The work the ICBA conducted when the raids occurred suggests that ethnic groups, like Iraqi Christians, that presumably receive the benefits of whiteness (e.g., suburbanization) can set aside their achieved racial status to assume others that are positively valued in multicultural environments. Not only can ethnic groups reject their assignment into racially marginalized categories (Valdez 2011), they can set aside their membership in dominant groups as well.

The ICBA also played a role in ongoing public dialogues about the arrival of two national grocery stores in inner city Detroit. Entering into these dialogues provided the opportunity to challenge the idea that the public-private partnerships between the city of Detroit, the state of Michigan and corporate actors truly benefitted the needs of Detroiters. The organization focused upon explaining how the deals that were in place did nothing to resolve economic inequality for *all* Detroiters, including black Detroiters

living in underserved areas *and* Iraqi Christians who continued to own businesses in inner city neighborhoods despite urban blight and white flight.

Analysts (Evans and Boyte 1986; McAdam 1985; Morris 1984) that consider voice and processes of change suggest that places such as the ICBA are “free spaces” that allow groups to learn “...a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue (Evans and Boyte 1986:17).” Voice allows groups to challenge objectionable states of affairs (Hirschman 1970:30). That organizational efforts provided Iraqi Christians with the means to introduce storylines that challenged the business proposals the state of Michigan and its partners advanced suggests that spaces like the ICBA also act as “horizons of expectation” (Griswold 1993), where social understandings about Iraqi Christians are the product of local constructions of meaning between ethnic and non-ethnic actors (e.g., stakeholders and institutions). The organizational work the ICBA conducts shows how group identities not only reflect *internal* processes that give ethnic actors voice, but also how social understandings about groups emerge from complex social negotiations between different actors. Organizational action provides Iraqi Christians with the opportunity to forward their perspective on what distinguishes them as a collective. It also provides the opportunity for non-co-ethnic actors to accept new, contrasting or alternate social understandings of a group.

In her consideration of race and civility in urban cities, Lee (2002) contends that race can impact merchant-customer relations in different ways. Interactions may be polarizing and even spark protest that leads to intergroup conflict. She writes that in these social interactions, “Groups constantly jockey for position in America’s racially and

ethnically stratified society (p. 143).” Fong and Shibuya (2005) write that, “today’s urban structures and processes reflect relations among various racial and ethnic groups in the city ... these structures and processes are shaped by the presence of various racial and ethnic groups and the groups’ preferences [and] the urban structures and processes, reflecting various minority group relations, in turn shape urban structures and processes involving whites and minority groups (p. 298).”

Objections to Iraqi Christians occupying black space in Detroit were made at a time when Middle Easterners were conspicuous identities in American society. Song (2004) argues that whites engage in “civic ostracism” by constructing Asian Americans as alien and unassimilable (p. 863).” In that calls for the closure of Iraqi Christian stores occurred at a time when Middle Eastern presence was being contested in Detroit and other places in the U.S., suggests that the claims black city stakeholders leveraged against Iraqi Christians had a similar impact. Thus, while Iraqi Christians, as a collective in Detroit, were recognized as white (by the relative economic position they maintained in reference to blacks and their proximity to “white” Detroit suburbanites), their cultural citizenship in the American collective (in Detroit) was at stake. To the extent that the political and social context allowed Iraqi Christians’ membership in the national [cultural] collective to be questioned suggest that cultural citizenship is a mediating factor that partly determines how groups experience incorporation.

Lee (2002) also argues that black communities are rare places that symbolize black culture, pride, and autonomy. She writes that, “African Americans recognize that they are American in terms of nationality, but they stipulate that regardless of their

American citizenship, they feel they are not accorded the same privileges and status as other racial and ethnic groups in America (p. 158). Black communities provide refuge from the feeling that they are not completely American. The negotiations for black space that occurred in Detroit highlight may reflect a desire to maintain control over a part of the social world that is not *culturally* impacted by racial strife. In this light, opposition to Iraqi Christians may serve as a way of preserving a kind of autonomy that is largely unavailable to blacks in other social realms they are required to inhabit.

CHAPTER III

PARA CUBA LIBERTE'!

NEGOTIATING THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL IN A CONTEXT OF POLITICAL CHANGE AND CONTESTED CITIZENSHIP

People in Cuba look at Miami like ... I don't know ... as what Cuba **could** be. And that's the idea. People have this kind of legend about Miami. For example, they believe that Calle' Ocho is a magical place. ... [Cuban] people from everywhere – and I've met Cubans in Bulgaria, Bolivia, Poland, The Czech Republic – they always dream about Miami. They always dream about coming to Miami. And even some of them who are married, and have children and have good jobs ... and they are doing good in this country [where they are living]... but they have this image of Miami. There is this idea that if you are outside Cuba – if you live outside Cuba – you have to come to Miami at least once in your life. ... I would say [Miami is] some sort of beacon of freedom for the Cubans inside Cuba because they look at Miami and say, 'That's Cuba with freedom.' ... It's a very powerful symbol for the Cuban community.
– Armando, CCANE Director of Human Rights

Writing on the Cuban influence in the city of Miami, David Reiff of the *New Yorker* wrote that, "In Miami Cuba is everywhere... Indeed, many tourists seem to act as if they landed not in a provincial American resort city but in the capital of a foreign country... Cubans in Miami sometimes behave as if they never left their island. It is one of the odder aspects of the Cuban exile... that parks and monuments in Miami often bear the same names as similar parks and monuments in Havana or Santiago de Cuba." Reiff's commentary suggests that unlike the Iraqi Christians in Detroit, Cubans in CCANE were not challenged to find ways to enter into city space in Miami. In fact, by 1981, when

CCANE was founded, the ‘Cubanization’ of Miami was quite discernible, especially in the city’s various business sectors. Beginning in the 1970s, many of the early Cuban emigrants who arrived to Miami seeking political refuge from the Castro regime started what would become a thriving business community (Portes 1987; Portes and Bach 1985; see also Perez p.91).

Thus, while CCANE would provide Cuban Americans in South Florida with similar opportunities to pursue their interests through political and civic engagement, the organization emerged under quite different social circumstances than Detroit. And while the ICBA’s work focused upon democratizing local space (e.g., Detroit), CCANE worked in other forums where national and international politics, and fundamental human rights were actively being negotiated.

In this chapter, I describe the environment in which CCANE was founded. I then describe the forums in which organizational work occurred. Taking into account the organization’s work in the last thirty years, I also consider how organizational logic changes over time. Specifically, I describe how changing historical conditions encourage CCANE to adopt different approaches to reconcile experiences of inequality.

Cultivating a Politics of Exile in Miami

The insinuation of Cuban emigrants into the city of Miami and the development of their business enclave seemed to mark a new period in Miami’s history. Prior to the influx of Cubans Miami received in the early 1960s, the city’s local economy was largely limited to tourism. A large portion of its population was also composed of retirees from points north and east, whose move to South Florida was prompted by the city’s warm

climate and largely unhurried lifestyle. While initially the business enclave that emerged catered mostly to the cultural needs of the city's growing Cuban population, by the 1980s Cuban business owners also entered into 'non-ethnic' markets. Then, as the impact of global expansion was being made apparent in many South American countries, Miami became a natural hub for businesses seeking stronger ties in the United States. Sheila Croucher (1997) argues that many of Miami's Cuban business elite recognized the strategic role they could play in an increasingly global economy. During this time, many Cuban business owners became gateway agents enabling more international business relationships to develop. Their participation in both local and international markets effectively transformed the city of Miami. Over the course of approximately twenty years, Miami had transitioned from a city whose blighted downtown evoked images of economic disinvestment, to one that was characterized as the "gateway city to Latin America (See Croucher 1997, p. 114, 130-131)." Unlike the Iraqi Christians of Detroit, who were challenged to enter into an existing business community, Cubans business owners seemed to occupy the city's *only* business community.

The tremendous presence of Cuban business and industry throughout the 1980s impacted the city's local economy. It also shaped the lived experiences of Cuban entrepreneurs themselves.¹ By the end of the decade, Cuban emigrants comprised the

¹ According to Portes and Bach (1985), the first wave of Cuban immigrants included much of Cuba's "entrepreneurial class." Cubans who arrived to the U.S. in the early 1960s included people who possessed a wide variety of skills that could be successfully applied to self-employment in American society (Portes 1987; see Perez p.91).

largest ethnic group in South Florida and Cuban-owned businesses had become perennial contributors to the local economy.²

The negative commentary on Cuba, along with U.S. insistence that their political stance was correct, gave way to an environment that promoted the incorporation of “worthy” Cuban refugees into American society. Providing a safe haven and opportunity to Cuban immigrants was understood as a moral imperative (Croucher p. 108).³ Croucher writes that,

The Cuban revolution dealt a serious blow to the United States in its ideological struggle with the Soviet Union, and the exodus of Cuban refugees from the island provided the United States with potent material for an ideological counterattack. Widely publicized accounts of Cubans risking their lives to escape tyranny served to discredit the revolution and the ideological principles upon which it was founded, and photographs of Cubans kneeling to kiss the ground in Miami portrayed the United States, and the principles for which it professed to stand, as an option superior to communism. (p.129)

Croucher’s analysis suggests that Cubans who arrived to the United States after 1959, entered American society *already* occupying a political space. That space was defined by

² While out-migration of Cubans to American society may not have started with Castro, it impacted it far more than any other political or economic vacillations had done. According to Portes and Stepick (1993) 135,000 Cubans arrived to the U.S. between January 1959 and April 1961. By 1965 the total had grown to 210,000. And by 1973 another 340,000 Cubans arrived seeking political asylum. The Cuban diaspora expanded again in 1980 during the Mariel boatlift, which ultimately brought an additional 125,000 emigrants to the U.S. or to South Florida more specifically.

³ Croucher (1997) notes that the director of the Cuban Emergency Relief Center stated, “This is one of the largest and most generous refugee programs any nation has ever organized. There are several reasons for this. One is the fact that the Communists for the first time have established themselves close to our shores and we have been touched by the plight of its victims. We have felt a need to demonstrate the freedom that we profess and opened our hearts to these dispossessed (p. 108).”

the nation's commitment to anticommunism and its collective objection to the Castro regime's version of it.

Furthermore, the notion of the 'Cuban Miracle' allowed the group to fit nicely into a long-standing narrative on the Immigrant – as a person who comes to the U.S. and makes his way through hard work and sacrifice, only to achieve the American Dream in the end. The success Cubans experienced in business and industry and other professional endeavors squared with two accepted cultural ideas. First, Cubans' experience in Miami validated the idea that the American social context held opportunities for immigrants that were not easily afforded in other nations.⁴ And perhaps equally important the group's successful business endeavors confirmed the common understanding that incorporation into the mainstream was both the desired outcome and the predictable result of hard work.

In fact, Croucher (1997) argues that the geopolitical contest between the United States and Cuba encouraged a particular understanding of Cubans living in American society. She maintains that this understanding "served well the foreign and domestic policy interests of the United States and simultaneously helped to transform Cuban exiles from a refugee population in South Florida to a powerful political and economic force... (p. 108)."

⁴ Similarly Robert Smith (2001) and his colleagues take note of the 'immigrant analogy'. They write that the, "immigrant analogy compares the socioeconomic fates of African Americans and non-black immigrants and uses the greater historical success of the latter group to infer the moral culpability of native minorities and exonerate the larger society of any responsibility for structuring those different trajectories (p.3)." Taking into account the discrepant outcomes between racial groups in American society in the post-civil rights era, Jennifer Hochschild (1995) argues similarly.

But the fact that some Cuban emigrants had “made it” was not the story that people in Miami’s exile community wished to put forth. They wanted to forward a different immigration story that was less about their successful in American society and more about their continued absence from Cuban society. They wanted to explain that despite the group’s entrepreneurial success in South Florida, many Cubans remained concerned about conditions in Cuba.

During an interview with me, Alfonso, a former executive director of CCANE, explained how he understood the exile community in Miami then. Alfonso came to the United States in the early 1960s not long after Castro came to power. Soon after his arrival, he began studying for his doctorate in political science. After completing his studies, he worked for a number of Cuban-owned private firms before focusing his time in CCANE. Alfonso is soft-spoken and mild-mannered, but his reputation for making even-handed decisions and his thoughtful approach to organizational work gains him tremendous respect in CCANE:

Alfonso: ... Many of us had had a very formal education. And others had participated also in industry and in the military and all sorts ... And we were becoming proficient in working and understanding the [U.S.] system and somehow we adapted to the system. We adapted very well. But still we didn’t. We were not able to effect, or realize the potential or the power that we saw developing in our community. People were talking about us and all of that. But still our main concern at [that] time was Cuba (and continues to be for a very long time for our community). Because different from other exiles – European exile communities during the Cold War and all of that, and of course other immigrants ... The Cubans at *that* time – of the 60s and 70s came with a conviction that this was temporary. That we were really not going to establish ourselves here. To some extent I believe was a reason why we didn’t dedicate ourselves to really develop political power here – in the United States. And we realized we have to use this time without forgetting what we have to do back in Cuba for our people. We have to use this time to see how we can advance our profession[al] skills, and

educate ourselves and create a family ... and we were doing that. We were going ahead.

Alfonso's comments suggest that in the early 1980s Cubans remained tied to political life in Cuba in a way that European and other immigrating groups did not remain tied to their homelands. He also suggests that despite the group's relative economic and social success, the migration experience of Cuban emigrants differed from the experiences of other emigrants. Unlike other immigrating groups, full incorporation into American society was not the end goal of the Cubans living in Miami in 1981. Returning to their homeland was the expectation. From Alfonso's point of view, Cubans were temporary residents, not permanent ones. They were exiles, as opposed to immigrants.

The more prominent the group became in business and industry, the more able they were to effectively convey their story of contested migration from their homeland. The unprecedented emigration of the Cuban elite, along with their relative success and growing influence in South Florida enabled a powerful mindset to emerge (Croucher 1997). This mindset countered ideas of what it meant to be an immigrant in American society. It took into account what Cuban emigrants considered as their involuntary emigration and the non-democratic system of government in Cuba that allowed it to happen. Unlike some other immigrating groups who ostensibly sought full incorporation into American society, Cuban exiles evaluated their plight in the United States as one that was defined by the experience of exodus and the expectation of return.⁵

⁵ Croucher (1997) discusses the formation of the exile identity as it contrasts with the notion of the immigrant. She maintains that while some immigrants came to the United States in search of opportunity, Cubans considered their incorporation as temporary. The United States was a place that could provide refuge until they could return to their

The Mariel Boatlift of 1980 reinforced the exile ideology that was forming in Miami's Cuban community. At that time over 125,000 Cuban refugees arrived in South Florida.⁶ The arrival of the Marielitos prompted delicate discussions by Washington lawmakers, including President Carter, on how best to handle the influx of Cubans arriving to South Florida. The incident called for the Carter administration to craft an effective potential response to an unprecedented domestic situation. The response also had to be consistent with other decisions that were made in regard to U.S.-Cuba relations.

The Mariel event occurred one year before CCANE started. Among CCANE founders, the arrival of the Marieletos was received with mixed emotions. On one hand, the Mariel event allowed thousands of their brethren a degree of security and opportunity that was not afforded on the homeland. On the other, the arrival of the refugees had

homeland. She notes that in Miami, Cuban immigrants held mock elections for the future president of Cuba and started campaigns (i.e., *El Primero en Regresar* [The first to return]). It was in this environment that *la causa* (the cause) was also cemented into the identity of Cubans living in America and even some U.S. political advocates, including the CIA. Perez also talks about the 'exile ideology' that defines Cubans in Miami. She defines the ideology by four principles and interrelated characteristics that include: (1) The primacy of issues and concerns that deal with the political status of the homeland, (2) Uncompromising struggle against and hostility toward the current Cuban government, (3) Lack of debate allowed about the "exile" ideology within the community, (4) Overwhelming support for the Republican party among Cubans in Miami. For additional discussion of the Cuban exile experience in the United States see also Aviva Chomsky (2011), *A History of the Cuban Revolution*.

⁶In April 1980 in response to an unprecedented act of collective defiance, Fidel Castro declared that the Port of Mariel, located twenty-five miles west of Havana, open to any Cuban wishing to leave so long as (s)he had someone to pick him up. The Castro regime's decision led to a mass exodus of Cubans that lasted over four months. By the time Castro closed the port to those wishing to leave over 125,000 Cubans arrived to the US.

alleviated the kind of momentum that could have led to monumental changes in Cuban political life. They believed that with tens of thousands of disenchanted Cubans now gone from the island, the likelihood that the Castro regime would implement favorable changes – or possibly even experience its downfall – was greatly reduced.

Calls to start the organization became stronger as political dialogues on Mariel continued in Washington. CCANE founders believed that Washington lawmakers failed to take into account important factors about ongoing struggles in Cuba that they believed were brought on by the nation's oppressive government and the absence of vital social institutions. The founders of the organization thought that the political conditions that motivated the mass exodus of the Marieletos were reminiscent of their own experiences in Cuba. They felt that the same set of political circumstances that caused their emigration, also caused the outmigration of the Marieletos. They also believed that addressing the issues that promoted exodus required different interventions than those being put forth by political actors in Washington. CCANE founders felt that while the situation of the exile community was included in public dialogues, political wisdoms in Washington did not acknowledge the story of Cuban emigration from the point of view of the exile.

Despite their contribution to Miami's economic and social landscape, and the emergence of a dominant mindset on Cuba, Cubans living in South Florida remained largely absent from local, state and national political arenas. In the early 1970s less than 20% of the Cuban population in Miami was United States citizens. Cubans in South Florida also held no local political office (Croucher 1997, p.133). But by the end of the

decade and through the 1980s, a powerful Cuban political bloc emerged that proved capable of demonstrating important effects on Miami's industry, and its political practices. The political power Cubans eventually attained in Miami's political landscape is reflected in the city's decision in 1992 to prohibit Dade County from awarding a contract to any U.S. corporation whose foreign subsidiaries traded with Cuba for instance (Croucher, p. 112). The clout that Cubans attained in business and industry, along with the group's growing political power, provided a backdrop for CCANE to work on behalf of the city's growing exile community. Acknowledging the group's initial period of political abstinence, during an interview Alfonso stated:

Alfonso: But then suddenly we started to realize that there was something missing. And that was that we were not having a real impact in both in our community and also with our concern toward the situation in Cuba. And perhaps a watershed of that was the Mariel Boatlift. Cause in the Mariel Boatlift we saw that ... again that decisions were made that didn't make sense whatsoever.

CJ: Decisions on this [U.S.] side and that side [Cuba]?

Alfonso: Yeah. Specifically on this side. On the United States side. We knew what Castro was trying to do. We understood very well ... But then we saw that again the United States was making a lot of mistakes – the same mistakes that had been done before during the invasion – [clarifying] The Bay of Pigs Invasion – and the [Missile] Crisis and all these times.

CJ: Well what did they do specifically with Mariel that was ... that you all felt was inadequate?

Alfonso: Well the response to it... the response to Fidel Castro was not only inadequate but totally wrong. Uh, Carter at that time said that uh ... I will open the arms and receive everybody that wants to come in. And that was the message. And that was totally wrong message for Fidel Castro because Fidel Castro – that was exactly what he wanted. He wanted to use that escape for the pressure ... for the pressure valve. For the pressure that was building inside the island. ... Of course. So we [thought] this is *not* what you should be doing. We realize[d] that uh ... a million people [were] going to come, or 2 million people [were] going to come. But we also realize that Fidel Castro was going to use it as propaganda.

And also to try to destroy the image of the exile community in the... because we had been very successful economically and professionally. And all of that. But not as um... in political terms. So at that point we recognized that even if our station in the United States was not going to be a permanent thing – it was going to take a long, long time to really change things back in Cuba and therefore we better look at how to try to gain some political power so we could be a part of the decision making and the solutions because they were going to affect us directly.

From Alfonso's point of view the Carter Administration's decision on Mariel was another bad decision in a series of inadequate responses Washington had to Cuba. Alfonso suggests that CCANE believed Carter and other U.S. lawmakers failed to recognize the effects an open door policy could have on Cuba. Allowing the Marieletos to come to the United States ended growing political pressure that could have introduced real political changes in Cuba. The political decision that allowed the Marieletos to stay, and others that preceded it, meant prolonging the exile community's temporary exodus from their homeland.

Alfonso's comments also suggest that CCANE's founding coincided with a general trend that found the Cuban exile community taking greater interest in American politics. His comments indicate that Cuban exiles could harness their growing economic power and status in ways that could support their interests through political participation.

In 1981, in an effort to have a voice in Washington and to build partnerships with lawmakers, the organization began lobbying on its own behalf. Early on in its political work, CCANE found common ground with Reagan-era Republicans.⁷ Although the

⁷ Perez (1997) Perez notes that the 1980s saw an increase in the number of Cubans becoming US citizens and registering to vote. She argues that the insinuation of Cubans into electoral politics in this way did not signal their abandonment of exile politics. Rather it acknowledged shared political visioning on matters of foreign policy that were being put forward by the Republican Party – especially Ronald Reagan. She writes that,

Republican Party's strict anti-communism viewpoint resonated in CCANE, the steps each group thought necessary to alleviate the situation in Cuba differed greatly. For instance, CCANE viewed the Cuban embargo as an important mechanism that effectively reduced the power of the Cuban government. In their opinion, prohibiting any form of trade with Cuba pressured the Castro regime into adopting more democratic laws and policies. But by end of the 1980s, some congressional lawmakers were proposing new legislation that would significantly loosen the existing regulations. As CCANE saw it, the chasm separating Washington and Havana could not be sufficiently evaluated and acted upon without intervention from the exile community.

In an interview Alfonso explained the organization's objectives in its inaugural years. He recalled that in the years preceding the formation of the organization how he and others in the exile community – many of whom were founding members of CCANE – discussed the best way to proceed. According to Alfonso, one of the things they realized was that they didn't know "how the system worked":

Alfonso: At the beginning we didn't know. The only ... understanding of the system that we had is the American movies we were used to seeing ... would portray. Which was completely different ... totally different from the reality [laughing a little at the comparison] so this is what created a sort of ... virtual reality for us. And we were playing without knowing really what exactly where to move ... So out of that ... came out the conception that we have get out of the ghetto! We have to project ourselves outside this ... relationship that we have established within Miami in which we think that by talking on the radio to ourselves and doing all these things – we are going to change things. NO! So the conception that in order to be effective we had to have political power ... We have

"The ideology of the Republican candidate on foreign policy was appealing to many Cubans, and this ideology caused Cuban exiles to register and vote in the United States. Participation in the U.S. political system, therefore, is not necessarily an abandonment of the concern with the political status of the homeland, but may actually be an extension of those exile concerns (p. 102)."

to get out of the ghetto... We need to actually convert that into something very palpable.

Thus, as Alfonso and other founding members of CCANE saw it, political involvement was the most effective way of making their voice heard. Effective political action meant supplementing local work that had been in progress for years in Miami with work that brought their message to a broader audience that included federal lawmakers.

CCANE felt that in order to have the voice of the Cuban exile community heard, it needed to leverage the political relationships they nurtured to gain entry into the political arena in Washington. So in 1981, the Coalition for Free and Democratic Cuba (CFDC), a CCANE affiliated Political Action Committee (PAC), was established. CFDC, whose members worked directly from Washington, provided CCANE with an outlet to distribute research it had collected on Cuba to members of Congress.

Throughout the 1980s, CCANE and its affiliated partners published a series of books that made the case for their position on Cuba and U.S. foreign policy on Cuba. By doing so they hoped to leverage enough support to bring about political and economic change in Cuba that allowed for the return of the exile community, and the creation of viable opportunities for those who remained on the island.

The organization had two primary objectives. The first objective was to demonstrate an impact on the Cuban government. Through organizational work CCANE intended to provide a strategic response to what it saw as an oppressive system of government in Cuba. The organization wanted to challenge the current political regime and introduce the possibility for a new democratic government. The organization intended to make known to people outside the Cuban community the repercussions that

inadequate government and non-existent civil institutions had on Cubans. Organizational actors intended to explain how Cuba's oppressive government prevented Cubans who were living on the island from benefitting from the virtues of a true democracy.

The second objective, which was indirectly related to the first, was to demonstrate an impact on the American popular imaginary about Cuba. The island nation's ongoing association with communism promoted a storyline that was antithetical to American values and beliefs. CCANE wanted to combat this conception by describing how Cuba actually shared values and beliefs with America, but that achieving those goals had been interrupted by an inadequate and oppressive government. By garnering support for both objectives, CCANE hoped to change conditions on the island in ways that benefitted people living there and Cubans who were living in exile in the United States.

By the early 1990s relationships the organization built in Washington seemed to aid the achievement of the first goal. CCANE and the CFDC participated in dialogues that led to the implementation of two new laws, which strengthened the power of the embargo. The first law, the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, supported CCANE's efforts by prohibiting foreign-based subsidiaries of U.S. companies from trading with Cuba. The law also prohibited United States citizens from traveling to Cuba and made illegal the transfer of family remittances to Cuba. The second law, the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, placed further restrictions on trade with Cuba by extending the embargo to apply to foreign countries that had trade agreements with Cuba.

CCANE also wanted to convince lawmakers that providing Cubans living on the island with information that was not filtered by the state's government was an important

step in realizing a free and democratic Cuba. In 1981, the organization proposed to establish a South Florida-based radio broadcast to Cuba. Similar to the intentions of Radio Free Europe, the proposed station would give Cubans in Cuba access to news and information that was not government-sponsored.

CCANE and the CFDC gained the support of a number of lawmakers including Senators Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Paula Hawkins of Florida, who regarded the radio station as “an important foreign policy initiative.” In a speech to Congress Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders noted the proposed station would “give Cubans the means they now lack to know what kind of society has been imposed on them; to have a source of news that is not manipulated by the state; to find out what is really happening in their country...” In August 1981, only seven months after the founding of CCANE and its partnered affiliates, the House voted to authorize the new radio station. By September the Senate had also approved the bill.

CCANE’s second objective involved explaining how the persistence of the Cuba’s current system of government precluded the nation from claiming its rightful membership in economic projects that were underway in the U.S. and other Western nations. According to CCANE, Fidel Castro’s regime was the primary reason Cubans living in Cuba continued to experience debilitating economic and social conditions there. The nation’s system of government was also the reason that kept those in its diaspora from returning so that they might contribute to the nation’s growth and success. According to CCANE, Castro’s “totalitarian regime” was the reason twenty percent of Cubans were living outside of Cuba by the 1990s.

The political momentum of the day and the prevailing economic sentiment that supported it were reflected in publications the organization distributed in Washington.

For instance, a mission statement published in 1992 asserted that:

... the vision of a nation based on human freedom and participatory democracy within a free-market environment capable of achieving for all of the Cuban people the prosperity that Castro has denied them for 33 years... Those of us in exile must promote peaceful change in Cuba by gaining consensus among Cuban exiles and international leaders in favor of isolating Castro's repressive regime and delivering a message of hope to Cubans on the island for a peaceful transition to a new era of democracy, prosperity and self-determination. (CCANE)

Similarly, another document indicated that the key to assuring growth in a post-Castro Cuba involved,

Liberalizing the economies by opening trade and market opportunities. This means allowing competitive market prices to prevail in the economy and permitting the formation and operation of new enterprises. Growth typically comes through expansion of the private sector and reform and significant privatization of state enterprises. (CCANE)

CCANE's messages on economic participation and those that invoke membership in a larger democratic collective were read during a time when Cold War antagonisms were heightened and when the nation's political economy was changing to accommodate the goals of Reaganomics and neoliberal policies, more generally. That CCANE's goals coincided with those of the Republican president and many of the nation's lawmakers gave the organization momentum to achieve its objective of creating a democratic society in Cuba.

CCANE's work in Washington during the 1980s and early part of the 1990s unfolded in a political environment that was capable of supporting many of the organization's goals. CCANE's stance against communism and its intention to bring

democracy (i.e., the Free Market) to Cuba reflected presiding political and economic ideologies in Washington. Sharing political views and conceding common interests allowed CCANE to enter into dialogues with powerful political actors. Within this advantageous context, CCANE became a site where the interests of Cuban exiles could be pursued.

The end of the Cold War seemed to bring about new political understandings of Cuba. The elimination of the communist threat after 1991, along with the introduction of a new enemy in the form of Islamic radicalism, seemed to render discussions on U.S.-Cuba relations to the political background. Beyond these apparent shifts in political attention, a new dialogue on the issue of immigration was also emerging. The dialogue sparked public debates that seemed to question the viability of immigration as a vehicle for incorporation for some groups, especially immigrants from Latin America.

The forums on Latin American immigration to the United States were not forums CCANE actively participated in. After all, the organization's focus was never upon gaining political favor to come to the U.S. CCANE was committed was to instigating a politics of return. Dialogues on immigration that were emerging in the late 1990s were engaging different histories and experiences than those that informed Cuban exiles in Miami. The Latin American groups that were seeking access to the United States, especially Mexicans, did not share Cubans experience of exile. Similarly, Cubans did not share the economic experiences that resulted from the introduction of NAFTA, which some analysts reasoned to be the driving force behind outmigration from Mexico (see

Fernandez-Kelly and Massey 2007). Additionally, Cubans had never been subjected to the intense scrutiny that ‘illegal’ aliens were experiencing.

Changes in the political climate coincided with changes in CCANE’s strategies. Instead of using American politics to bring about a democracy in Cuba, CCANE began supporting the efforts of grassroots activists in Cuba. The change in strategy was reflected in programming implemented on Freedom Radio, the Miami-based radio station that broadcast to Cuba, as well as other island-based initiatives the organization supports.

Since 1982 Freedom Radio has successfully aired daily broadcasts from Miami. However, CCANE actors maintain that how Freedom Radio has served the organization’s mission changed over the years. While initially the station primarily served as a means to provide Cubans on the island with information that did not come from the government, over the years it has moved toward providing dissidents in Cuba with a way to publically promote their activism.

According to actors in CCANE, more recently, the station has also provided people with a means of describing everyday experiences that contradict the opinion of the Cuban government. As activism on the island has increased, Freedom Radio has become a place where dissidents can discuss their ongoing efforts and perhaps gain support from others on the island.

Armando, CCANE’s human rights director, came to the United States in 1992 as a political dissident. His arrival marked the end to a seemingly infinite number of arrests and detentions in Cuban jails for speaking against the government and organizing around ongoing human rights violations on the island. Armando, an Afro-Cuban in his early 50s,

was one of the founding members of a human rights movement that started in Cuba in 1988. The movement he and others led then coincided with sanctions the United Nations initiated against Cuba in 1988.

His work with the movement was informed by his own experiences growing up in Havana, especially during his time at university in the 1970s. He described the environment at the University of Havana where he attended school as “politically charged and repressive.” His work with the human rights movement in Cuba sought to rectify what he considered fundamental violations of human rights in Cuba, including being denied the right to free speech, and rights associated with freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. According to Armando, the absence of these and other essential human rights shaped all aspects of life in Cuba then, and they continue to create a culture of fear on the island. For example, during an interview with me Armando explained how today university students run the risk of being expelled if they express ideas that contradict those of the Cuban government. He also contended that receiving approval for travel in and out of Cuba is almost impossible for most Cubans. According to Armando, having unregulated access to internet is unlikely. Armando described how this image of Cuba contrasts with other conceptions that imply Cuban society is defined by far less restrictive laws and practices. Armando explained that the broadcasts that focus upon Cuban politics often feature interviews with dissidents on the island. He stated that the interviews served the purpose of conveying information about activist’s efforts to listeners in Cuba.

Armando: And it is a powerful vehicle I’ll just say. Probably most of the dissidents that are alive right now – like [names a CCANE employee] said, they

all, even myself – relied [on] the assistance of [Freedom Radio]. Because it changed the whole game, you know? People outside Cuba knew about the dissidents. People inside Cuba knew about the dissidents... it was a powerful vehicle to demonstrate what was going on inside of Cuba... And we know that that show is being heard by a lot of people in Cuba because a lot of dissidents always call [and say] I want to be on the show because we know that people are listening. So we want people in Cuba to listen.

Armando's comments suggest that Freedom Radio is a site where the common efforts of Cuban exiles in Miami and activists on the island merge. As a medium of communication, the radio station can facilitate an exchange of dialogue and information each feels to be important in bringing about changes in political life in Cuba.

CCANE has also been instrumental in supporting the efforts of Cuba-based organizations that engage in non-violent opposition to the government. One of the most public organizations they support is Women for Peace in Cuba. Women for Peace in Cuba is an organization of Cuban women of diverse backgrounds who are relatives of political prisoners in Cuba. The women began their protest of what they saw as unjust incarcerations of dissidents in Cuba by gathering together for mass, dressed in white to symbolize their solidarity with jailed family members. Over time, the group's protest has expanded to include more public displays of peaceful protest, where they request the release of people who have been incarcerated for political reasons.

During an informal interview, Caridad, age 69, described the work the organization has done in Cuba over the last ten years. Caridad is an Afro-Cuban who arrived to the U.S. as a political refugee in 2007. Before coming to Miami, Caridad spent over twenty years fighting against the Castro regime. She has been jailed numerous times

for her political work. She was even separated from her children for over twenty years as a consequence of speaking out as a counterrevolutionary.

During the interview she first described how her life changed after Castro assumed power. According to Caridad, before Castro, life in Cuba was a ‘paradise.’ She described how her father was able to own and operate a small grocery store and she was able to attend private school. Acknowledging her middle-class status, Caridad notes that even most poor children had similar opportunities.

Caridad: I was 17 when Castro got to power. [Before that] our life was good, with certain limitations. We were an underdeveloped country. We were just starting about after about 50 years of independence... from my point of view, Cuba was a paradise because I never had any problems.

So for Caridad, although Cuban society may not have been egalitarian it provided people with enough opportunities to achieve a problem-free life – a life where one’s daily needs could be met. Her account suggests that after Castro came to power, everyday life in Cuba changed. She recalled how Castro began to “govern by force.” For instance, Caridad notes that going to mass became problematic because Castro condemned it.

More broadly, Caridad adds that the regime changed the way people interacted with each other. Before Castro came to power, she explained the most important thing one could do in a community was to be “honest and decent.” It didn’t matter if someone was black or white, or if they were wealthy or poor. After Castro came to power however, the differences that ostensibly separated them socially – economic and racial differences in particular – created palpable divisions between families and neighbors.

Caridad, a member of Women for Peace in Cuba, explained that the power of organization lies in its ability to put a public face on the wrongful incarcerations that

continue to occur in Cuba. The group's first public event came on the anniversary of what she referred to as Black Spring in 2004. One year prior the State Security Police sent seventy-five dissidents to prison. Their detentions occurred over a three day period in 2003. On the anniversary of the incarcerations in 2004 Women for Peace in Cuba planned activities to voice their disapproval of the government. On the last day they planned a public march that was to end at the Cuban National Assembly (the Parliament). Upon arriving at the Assembly the women presented a state official with a letter demanding the release of the seventy-five dissidents who had been incarcerated a year before. Caridad remarked that the most important thing was not the petition itself, but the people on the streets seeing those ladies – Women for Peace in Cuba – walking in the street, going to the National Assembly shouting for the freedom of their relatives.

Esteban also offered his impressions of Women for Peace in Cuba:

Esteban: Because I believe they're doing a great job. When their husbands were in jail they stood very regularly and go to church every Sunday with flowers in their hand – dressed in white. And that created an image of ... of a non-violent movement. They're even winners of the Sakharov award and others because they kept ... And now that most of their husbands are out of the country or out in the street, they remain a powerful message. They send a powerful message. Because now they're doing it for the rest of the people, you know? They [are] doing protest.

Since 2004, the women in the organization hold regular public protest in opposition to the Cuban government. CCANE works directly with Women for Peace in Cuba, mostly by providing the group with resources and logistical support that enable them to continue their activism in Cuba.

Esteban also described another activist initiative CCANE supports in Cuba. The initiative seeks to address what actors in Cuba understood to be bad economic policy.

The grassroots movement challenges the established monetary system that uses two different kinds of currencies: CUCs and CUPs. CUCs refer to the ‘convertible peso’. It is the currency used by tourists and elite members of Cuban society. The CUP is the Cuban peso. The CUP is the currency that workers are paid in but holds less monetary value in Cuba. CUCs are a rough equivalent of a US dollar, while CUPs are worth \$.24 to every U.S. dollar (or CUC). And while CUCs are almost universally accepted everywhere in Cuba, CUPs are not. For instance, if an average Cuban worker intends to patronize a restaurant in Cuba, (s)he must plan to pay in CUC’s. The requirement to pay in CUC’s means converting the monies in their possession, which is not an equitable transaction. The difference in the conversion rates means that the costs for many good and services in Cuba are prohibitive for the average person.⁸ Describing how CCANE supports the grassroots effort that seeks to address this disparity Esteban explained:

Esteban: [We support] any activist or organization that proves themselves to play a role [in bringing about democracy] ... We’re trying to create a culture of non-violence through training. We have sent people inside Cuba for training. And there are others that come out of Cuba and spend a few weeks outside [of Cuba] [by] invitation. And they get trained out of the United States in non-violent programs. They want changes [in Cuba]. They want changes and to create a civil society. And eventually [to have] different parties and have elections. That’s their goal.

⁸ Public dialogues on this issue are ongoing. See <http://voxxi.com/2014/03/06/cuba-dual-currency-system/>
<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/opinion/2014/03/03/opinion-even-all-dolled-up-two-faces-cuba-are-all-too-easy-to-see/>
<http://www.tripadvisor.ca/Travel-g147270-c109329/Cuba:Caribbean:Money.Exchange.html>
<http://thecubaneconomy.com/articles/tag/monetary-system/>

For CCANE, the movement to support emerging movements in Cuba meant bringing about a civil society that provided the protections and benefits of democracy. Despite the fact that they remained ‘in their station’ in American society, the goal was to remedy those conditions that encouraged out-migration by directly intervening in social and political life in Cuba. Referring directly to the movement to alleviate the inequitable monetary system Esteban stated:

Esteban: It’s a program that we sponsor. Because they [the Cuban government] have different currencies in Cuba, you know. They pay the street guy with Cuban pesos – which ain’t worth nothing.

CJ: They have to pay a higher rate [to convert to the other currency]?

Esteban: (Nodding in response) That creates an upper height of standards you know. So we supported a program in Cuba that was very successful in which the people were – let’s say they go to a restaurant and after they get the bill they will pay in pesos. And they say [at the restaurant], “No, no, no, no ... here you have to pay in hard currency.”

CJ: That’s the CUC?

Esteban: (Nodding affirmatively to my question) [continuing his example as though the restaurant customer is responding to the restaurateur’s request] “No, no, no. I get paid in pesos. *That’s* the currency that I get paid.” And that started... The government was actually forced to accept ... uh, to create some restaurants that will take pesos. Because it has nothing to do with politics, got it? It’s something that affects my [referring to the average Cuban] personal life.

Esteban’s comment regarding the ‘upper height of standards’ implies that a two-tiered system exist in Cuba that effectively disadvantages average Cuban citizens. Esteban also suggests that the program is aimed at delivering an impact upon everyday life in Cuba as opposed to its political order. By supporting the movement to address the discrepancy in the country’s monetary system, CCANE can make an impact that affects the lives of Cubans directly. The support CCANE provides to Women for Peace in Cuba is another

example of the ways that the organizational efforts of Cuban exiles in Miami and activists on the island merge.

Conclusion

Organizational action in the ICBA focused upon resolving local crises that prevented Iraqi Christian business owners from participating in Detroit's economy. CCANE's actions were not concerned with addressing experiences of inequality that were unfolding in Miami. Instead, the organization focused upon resolving crises of democracy and oppression that occurred in Cuba.

In the early years of its' founding, CCANE wanted to address what it saw as Cuba's failure to establish a civil society by working with U.S lawmakers. By doing so, it hoped to create conditions that allowed Cubans in the exile community to return to their homeland. This work was occurring at a time when Washington actors understood Cuba as an ally of the Soviet Union and when the political and cultural assumption of permanent migration of Cubans to the United States was reflected in laws and policies.

In order to gain support for its organizational aims, CCANE advanced different understandings about Cuba and its people. The organization pointed to the arrival of the Mariel refugees to explain how poor conditions in Cuba continued to promote involuntary opposed to voluntary immigration. The organization also challenged Cuba's association with the Soviet Union by describing it as a nation that shared the same values for freedom and the same commitment to expanding the free market. The introduction of these alternate storylines created political opportunities to address experiences of inequality in Cuba. During the 1980s and the 1990s, the organization was successful at

working with U.S. lawmakers in ways it felt put more pressure on the Cuban government to adopt democratic laws and policies.

Changing political conditions in the United States coincided with new efforts that involved CCANE collaborating with grassroots activists in Cuba. At that time, instead of explaining experiences of as a failure of democracy, a storyline of shared oppression emerged between activists in Cuba and CCANE. The new storyline encouraged grassroots activists to understand CCANE as fellow Cubans engaged in the same struggle for political freedom, and not as American immigrants detached from their experience.

In chapters two and three I described the forums each organization participates in, and how organizational work provided both groups with a means of mediating experience of inequality. In the following two chapters, I consider the rhetorical strategies the UICC, ICBA and CCANE employ to achieve their organizational aims. I describe how the notions of ethnic authenticity become organizational logic, and how social understandings about each group are affirmed in the identity claims that are made through organizational work.

CHAPTER IV

RESOLVING CHALLENGES TO INCORPORATION THROUGH
ORGANIZATIONAL RHETORIC IN THE UICC AND ICBA

Snap Judgment is a weekly broadcast aired on National Public Radio. Each broadcast, the show's host, Glynn Washington, guides his audience on a journey that provokes consideration of an issue of social importance through storytelling. Throughout the show storytellers from diverse backgrounds captivate listeners, drawing the audience further and further into their lives by artfully conveying their personal experiences. The ways in which the show's contributors, seemingly with little effort at all, weave powerful and sometimes painful life experiences into tellable tales to be shared, intrigues listeners. The stories temporarily transport them into lives that are not their own. On the show, spoken words seek to persuade (or dissuade) the audience, compelling them to understand or have empathy or enthusiasm. For some listeners, the stories may even alter opinions or fundamental understandings of social issues that confront us as a society.

Without fail, Washington opens the show with a story of his own. On a 2012 edition entitled "Toxic," which informed listeners of the ways toxins impacted the lives of others, he began the broadcast by offering a story from his youth.¹ The story was simple, witty and profound at the same time. It was the tale of his first fishing excursion

¹ A link to this broadcast (episode: Toxic – Snap #222) can be found at <http://snapjudgment.org/radio-show>.

with his grandfather. He began the story by recalling how he anticipated the trip, hoping that it would be the kind of outing he'd seen on television or read about in books, despite the fact that the trip was to take place in his hometown of Detroit, on the Detroit River – a less than idyllic site according to Washington. The trip did not disappoint, however. Through evocative imagery and dialogue he recalled his “first catch,” what to a child seemed to be a catfish sure to impress any experienced angler. He described the great sense of accomplishment he had after pulling the fish from the waters. In the same youthful exuberance he recounted how he then suggested to his grandfather that the fish would make a fine meal for them later that day. To his surprise, however, this suggestion was met with the grandfather's strong opposition. “Boy! What you talkin' 'bout?! We ain't eatin' this fish!” The grandfather's sobering explanation continued, “Boy that fish came out the D'troit River. That fish for the catchin', not for the eatin'.” At this point in the story Washington describes how the grandfather unceremoniously unhooked the fish and then to his horror and disappointment, cast it back into the water. He goes on to tell how the excursion ended. He notes how, upon returning to shore, he sees a man barbequing a catfish – the same kind of catfish he had been ordered to cast overboard. In an effort to plead his case, perhaps for the future, Washington drew his grandfather's attention to the man, “See Granddaddy. Look!” The man overhearing the ensuing discussion calmly replied, “Eh, you gonna die of something. Ima die from barbequed catfish.”

The story is important to the show for a couple of reasons. Most generally, it does a good job of investing listeners. It effectively orients them to the topic of discussion in a

humorous and entertaining way. But perhaps more importantly the story is pertinent because of what it contains: commentary on a larger cultural and social narrative on biohazards and their risk to health safety. In other words, the story is relevant (and perhaps humorous) as it relates to larger social processes. The grandfather's reaction to Washington's efforts reveals his location in a cultural discourse. It explains how social actions, like those that increase biohazards in the atmosphere, inform his practices and his ideological points of view.

In chapters four and five, I consider the rhetorical strategies the UICC and CCANE employ in pursuit of their organizational goals. I describe how these strategies allow each group to gain cultural citizenship in American society, and institutional belonging in the forums where organizational work occurs by engaging accepted political and social wisdoms. I argue that the more each organization participates in a series of "emplotted stories" (Somers and Gibson 1994), the more incorporated each becomes in the American mainstream and institutional spaces that have excluded them historically. In chapter four I begin by discussing the organizational work the UICC and ICBA conducted in response to a series of crises that impacted Iraqi Christians living in Detroit beginning in the early 1980s. I describe the rhetorical strategies the organization employed during these times, and how the strategies allowed the organizations to achieve their imperatives.

Crises of Migration and Politics

In September 1980 Iraqi forces, led by the nation's Ba'athist President, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran. The attack was motivated by a number of factors including

guarding against the potential insurrection of the Iraq's Shi'a majority, and assuring control over the Shatt Al-Arab waterway.² It started a war that was ultimately brought to an end by a United Nations-brokered ceasefire in 1988. But the end of the war would come at the cost of over a half million Iraqi and Iranian soldier and civilian lives.

The political, social and economic upheavals brought on by the eight-year long war caused Iraqi Christians living in the Detroit to have concern for local Christians in Iraq. Historically, conflict made religious minority groups in Iraqi society vulnerable to social reprisals, including the possibility of death.³ The unfavorable environment in Iraq motivated Iraqi Christians living in Detroit – including religious and business leaders in the community – to take action. The founding of the UICC in 1981 was evidence of the group's intention to address the needs of their counterparts who remained in their war-torn homeland.

During the earliest years of the UICC's founding, the main goal was to assist Christians living in Iraq who were displaced or otherwise made vulnerable by the Iran-Iraq War. The organization provided them with safe passage to American society – or Detroit more specifically. The UICC aimed to provide Iraqi Christians living in Detroit

² The Shatt Al-Arab waterway maintains importance in Iraq because it is the nation's only thoroughfare to the sea. Iraq claims the waterway on one side. Iran claims the waterway on the other. The degree of contestation of the waterway is even reflected in its naming. Iraqis call the waterway Shatt Al-Arab. Iranians call the waterway Arvand Roud.

³ For instance, after the Gulf War ended in 1991, *The New York Times* reported that large numbers of Christians in Iraq wished to immigrate to other countries, including the United States. The article describes how Christians are characterized as “disloyal” to Iraq. The article reports that many [non-Christian] Iraqis accuse Christians of identifying with American-led coalition forces. In this environment discrimination against local Christians increased.

with valuable assistance coordinating family-based migration. Instead of negotiating United States and Iraqi immigration policy on their own, the organization provided families with a centralized and formal means of completing visa applications that were filed on behalf of family members living in Iraq. Increasing instability in Iraq that was brought on by subsequent wars – including the Invasion of Kuwait (1990-1991) and Operation Desert Storm (1991) – encouraged more organizational action through the 1990s.

However, the work the organization conducted through the 1990s paled in comparison to the challenges it and Detroit's Iraqi Christian community would face in 2003 when the War in Iraq (i.e., the War on Terror) began. The war caused unprecedented disruptions to everyday life for all Iraqis in Iraq. But the presence of American coalition forces, along with the toppling of the Hussein regime, seemed to impact Iraqi Christians living in Iraq in particularly unfavorable ways.⁴ The absence of a national government helped to create an environment that aggravated tensions between Sunnis and Shi'as living in Iraq. Sectarian and nation-state instability also introduced more opportunities for violence to be perpetuated against minority groups, who were made to be scapegoats in campaigns that wanted to bring about an Islamic state. Between 2003 and 2009 attacks against Christians in Iraq increased in number and scope. The

⁴ An archival review of several newspapers, such as the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *Christian Science Monitor* found over sixty articles detailing disproportionate rates of discrimination and violence leveled at local Christians in Iraq between 2002 and 2012.

relentlessness of the attacks against Christians led many to the conclusion that the only real option they had was to leave Iraq.

The exodus of Christians out of Iraq was a rallying call for the UICC back in Detroit. While advocating on the behalf of Christians wishing to leave Iraq was nothing new to the organization, the War in Iraq marked a shift in organizational efforts in two important ways. First of all, the increasing number of Christians wishing to leave Iraq challenged the organization's established practice of specifically aiding in family-based immigration. While this type of advocacy remained an instrumental aspect of the organization's work, the new circumstances in Iraq also required giving support to a broader contingency of the local Christian population in Iraq. The crisis also meant that the organization would serve less as a liaison between applicants, sponsors and immigration officials, and more as an advocate-at-large that sought to rectify human rights violations in Iraq.

Authenticity as Organizational Logic

The increasing need for immigration assistance and advocacy was occurring at a pivotal time in American society. The events of September 11th helped to create an environment of suspicion toward people of Middle Eastern background. After the attacks, people perceived as Middle Eastern were being associated with anti-Americanism and in the worst of cases, terrorism.

This cultural understanding of Middle Easterners was evidenced in immigration policy. Soon after September 11th the possibility of immigration from some countries in the Middle East was halted or only allowed to occur on a limited basis and under narrow

specifications.⁵ At the same time the exodus of local Christians from Iraq was occurring at an unprecedented rate. The circumstances of the group's departure from Iraq often meant seeking refuge in countries of first transit such as Syria, which ostensibly offered refugees a chance to negotiate the immigration process under more favorable conditions than in Iraq. Thus, after September 11th, the UICC's work occurred in a culturally and politically contested environment in the U.S., and under less than ideal circumstances in countries outside of Iraq.

The experiences local Christians had in Iraq after September 11th informed organizational action in the UICC. At that time, the organization's primary objective was to resettle Iraqi Christian refugees in Detroit. To counter recent challenges to Middle Eastern immigration, the organization took the position that the refugee crisis was one experience in a longer series of experiences that distinguished Iraqi Christians from other groups in Iraq and the United States. To meet the goal of resettling displaced local Christians in Detroit, the UICC incorporated three aspects of the group's history in Iraq into organizational rhetoric: its indigenous ties to the country; its foundational association to Christianity; and social differentiation of local Christians that resulted from living in a predominately Muslim society.

Indigenous Ties to Iraq

Because their presence Iraq dates back to as many as six thousand years ago to civilizations that preceded the formation of Iraqi nation-state, Iraqi Christians in the

⁵ See the Department of Homeland Security Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2004, Nonimmigrant Admissions tables at <http://www.dhs.gov/yearbook-immigration-statistics-2004-1>

UICC regard themselves as the “indigenous people of Iraq.”⁶ Indeed historians and archaeologists suggest that in the area that now constitutes northern Iraq, the ancestors of today’s Iraqi Christians created advanced societies that valued science, math and industry.⁷ For instance at the height of its greatness, the ancient city of Nineveh, regarded as the ancestral city for Iraqi Christians, boasted a population of 100,000 people and extraordinary castles and palaces. Even the city’s downfall, brought on by a battle with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, allows Iraqi Christians to lay claim to some of the ancient world’s most remarkable accomplishments, including the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, early irrigation systems and astrology. This history is reflected in an interview with Lucas, a past director of the UICC:

Lucas: ... In the homeland itself ... in the ancestral land, [we] are the descendants of the first civilization in Mesopotamia – in the land of Mesopotamia (the land of Mesopotamia is the land between the two rivers)... [Our] ancestry goes back to about three to four thousand years before Christ. [Then we] were very, very active in science, in the trade business, merchandising, commerce issues and other stuff. And these are the guys who came up with The Hanging Gardens – which is considered one of the Seven Wonders [of] the [ancient] World.

Aaron, a sales consultant at the ICBA, conveyed a similar history to me during an interview.

Aaron: Well, we are considered Middle Eastern of course. [But] if you look at the history, we were around before anybody was around... We were part of the Cradle of Civilization, you know. Astronomy, math, all those laws – those are all derived

⁶ For instance, in the organization it was common for Iraqi Christians to compare their history to the plight of Native Americans in American society. Just as Native Americans suffered unjustifiable losses due to European encroachment, Iraqi Christians understood themselves to have suffered at the hands of groups that subsequently entered Iraq.

⁷ For an expanded discussion of the history of Christians in Iraq, please see A. Leo Oppenheim’s (1964) *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead City*; Jane McIntosh’s (2005) *Ancient Mesopotamia: New Perspectives*; and Georges Roux (1964) *Ancient Iraq*.

from Babylon. Babylon is the [Iraqi Christian ancestors]. You can read about the Babylonian kings and stuff like that. Hammurabi, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth - that's where that came from. That's from Babylon.

Continuing to describe the history of Christians in Iraq more contemporarily, Aaron explains:

Aaron: Well the [Iraqi Christian ancestors] were conquered by the Persians, OK ... Cyrus the Great was his name. He's the king who conquered [them]. And there [were] other invasions. You know, there's constant invasions, invasions, invasion ... and then eventually um ... Iraq ... you know was invaded by the Ottomans. And they came in, and the Muslim conquest spread over. And then, I wanna say England came over and took over Iraq and modernized it. And they put a king in there. Not theirs, but an Arabic king. And you know, the [Iraqi Christians] were always there, but they were scattered around – mainly in the north. Babylon was in the south, but [Iraqi Christians] migrated to the north a little bit. So you have other people coming from other countries, migrating in our villages and becoming [Iraqi Christian] of sorts.

The group's association with ancient Mesopotamia is also chronicled on the ICBA's website:

[Iraqi Christians] are the indigenous people of Iraq who speak a form of Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus Christ. Many also speak Arabic and English. [Iraqi Christians] are Eastern Rite Catholic, led by the Patriarch of Babylon and affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church but maintain their own separate Bishops and Dioceses. ... The origins of the [Iraqi Christian] people of today are the descendants of the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations and the Aramean legacy of Mesopotamia. The contributions of Mesopotamia to the civilized world are well-documented. ... After the fall of Persia to the Arabs, and Byzantium to the Turks, Islamic domination overtook the [Iraqi Christian] people and subjected them to periodic waves of persecutions and a new status as second-class citizens, although the new conquerors also discovered early on the invaluable service the Christian ChaldoAssyrians rendered to society as artisans, physicians, merchants, scholars and tax collectors... (UICC website)

History of Iraq that considers Mesopotamian civilizations stand in contrast to other accounts that emphasize the country's role in the Arab World and its commitment to Islam. That Aaron, Lucas and others in the UICC and ICBA trace their ancestry to some

of the earliest known civilizations in the world, locates their collective experiences in dialogues on “the West” and progress. Invoking storylines that differ from more recent conceptions of Iraq may disassociate Iraqi Christians from ways of life that presumably contrast with Western beliefs and practices.

Foundational Association to Christianity

While alternate versions of Iraqi Christian history exist, there is organizational consensus that Iraqi Christians are intricately associated with the very beginnings of Christianity.⁸ According to actors in the UICC and the ICBA, the group’s association with Christianity extends to the days when the apostles of Jesus Christ proselytized to non-Christians. According to ethnic history, which continues to be passed on within the community through formal and informal oral history projects, it was the disciple Thomas who brought the group’s ancestors into Christianity from paganism. Aaron provided background on the group’s introduction to Christianity.

Aaron: Our faith is one of one of the things that we hold true, you know. St. Thomas was our patron saint. St. Thomas the apostle – you know – Doubting Thomas, they call him. St. Thomas, he came to Babylon. And he had students who he taught, and those are our patron saints.

According to organizational actors, the group’s early association to Christianity is also affirmed in some well-known stories in the Bible. For instance, Iraqi Christians I encountered discussed the group’s association to Abraham, a biblical character whose

⁸ Chaldean history as reported by St. Chaldean suggests that the group’s belief in God predates the arrival of Christ, while scholars like Attwater (1947) and Sengstock (1982) suggest that the group were pagans prior to being converted to Christianity by either the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Thomas during one of their missionary journeys.

story is chronicled in the book of Genesis, and to Lazarus, another biblical character whose story is chronicled in the book of John. Iraqi Christians, who are strict Eastern Rite Catholics, also claim a direct association between themselves and the biblical story of Jonah and the Whale. Also, while all Catholics (and some other Christian groups) observe Lent, Iraqi Christians additionally observe the Fast of Ba'utha. The Fast of Ba'utha is a devotional that is observed three weeks prior to the beginning of the Lenten season and is meant as a time of repentance. The fast is one example of how the identity of the group is intricately sewn within the tradition of Christianity. The devotion reflects upon the story of Jonah, whom Iraqi Christians understand to be one of their ancestors, and his refusal to 'prophesy' to the people of Nineveh. The devotion therefore takes into account the role they believe their ancestors play in revealing what is considered to be the redemptive power of God.⁹

The group's foundational association to Christianity is also revealed in their native language. They, like Jesus Christ, speak the Aramaic language. While some Iraqi Christians, especially those born in the United States, do not speak the language (or perhaps do not speak it fluently), the way in which the language defines the group's ethnic history plays an important role in the community and in the organization more specifically. During an interview with me, Farah described the importance the language

⁹ According to the Book of Jonah, because Jonah disobeys God by choosing not to go to Nineveh he is cast into the sea only to be saved by being swallowed by a large whale sent by God. It is after this event that Jonah repents and carries out the will of God and goes to Nineveh to prophesize. The Fast of Ba'utha is a time where Iraqi Christians seek repentance for their own failings by fasting for three days (the same number of days Jonah spends in the belly of the whale).

has in the community. Farah, age 40, has been working for the ICBA for two years in the charitable division. She is largely responsible for providing case management services to clients who are receiving mental health services through the Chaldean Council on Health and Wellness (CCHW). Farah arrived to the U.S. from Baghdad ten years ago. Prior to emigrating, she completed college in Iraq and worked for several years as a banker.

Farah: ... always my parents stressed that we are a civilization of 7000 years old. You have to be proud of yourself. [Recounting the words of her parents] You should speak the language that Jesus Christ spoke. I always speak the language, even over the phone... My colleagues used to [say] when they hear the language (most of them didn't know what this language is) ... so they waited until I finished the call to ask me, "What you are speak[ing]? What language is that?" And I tell them, it's Aramaic and it's over 7000 years old. They say, "Can you read and write it?" It's amazing! So at that time I just open up and talk about our history..."

Farah's comments suggest that the historical connection the group maintains to the Aramaic language is a point of pride and a distinguishing feature that separates them from other Iraqis and even other Christians. The language's intimate association with Christianity and Jesus Christ locate the group in a longer narrative of faith that defines the belief system of millions around the world. The language is also a tangible and objective link to people who are understood to have shaped the historical trajectory of Christianity. Thus, it is not just that language serves as a uniting socio-cultural element for this group of people, but it is a symbolic tie to a past that continues to be evoked today – even among those outside the group. The ways that Biblical history overlaps with Iraqi Christian history accomplishes important identity-work for the group. Associating their linguistic and religious traditions to the earliest days of Christianity reinforces the idea that Iraqi Christians are a distinct ethnic group.

Social Differentiation of Christians in Iraq (Experiences of Religious Persecution)

While not all of the Christian population of Iraq is Catholic, the preponderance of the Christian population is.¹⁰ Since the early part of the twentieth century, the group's ties to the Catholic Church have been reinforced by a number of social processes including the building of Catholic schools and churches, and Western political processes that established governmental protectorates, especially after WWI.¹¹ According to the Iraqi Christians in the UICC and ICBA, these relationships created a two-tier social system that segregated local Christians from the Muslim majority, especially in work and

¹⁰ Andrea Pacini (1998) estimates the number of Christians in the Middle East at 8 to 11 million people. She identifies eight Middle Eastern Christian groups: Assyrians, Armenians, Melkites, Maronites, Syrian Orthodox, Chaldean, Syrian Catholics, and Copts. According to Pacini, Assyrians constitute the largest group across the diaspora. The population of Christians in Iraq prior to the most recent refugee crisis is estimated between 500,000 and 1 million (Pacini 1998; Bailey and Bailey 2003). Chaldean Catholics make up more than two-thirds of all Christians in Iraq. Small populations of Syriac Catholics, Armenians and Melkites also reside in Iraq.

¹¹ For instance Betty Bailey and J. Martin Bailey (2003) suggest that social differences between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East are due in part to the political relationships Christian populations maintained under imperial rule historically. In the seventh century the protective but submissive status of *dhimmi* was afforded under Islamic rule. The group's second-class status was maintained through the Crusades. The authors additionally note that it was the insinuation of Western Christianity that encouraged Muslims to begin associating local Christians with Western hostilities. While Christians maintained a subjugated status under the millet system introduced under the Ottoman Empire, emerging European commercial relationships in the Middle East sought protection for trading clients who were often Christian. The authors write that, "Different governments 'protected' different churches, which frequently tied Middle Eastern churches to European political centers and feuds (p. 140)." They additionally argue that while Christians have historically maintained a relatively comfortable economic status and are permitted to practice their religion in Iraqi society, the state's political system, which is dominated by Muslims, largely prohibits Christian participation. These factors, along with local Christian's association with the Catholic Church, introduce social differences between Christians and Muslims in Iraq and other places in the Middle East.

education. From their point of view, it also made them vulnerable to reprisals in times of political upheaval.

For instance, UICC and ICBA actors described how practicing Christianity or identifying as Christian under the Saddam Hussein regime was susceptible to political vacillations in the country. While Hussein's secular government tended to provide Christians with a measure of protection, it also restricted what they were able to do in Iraqi society. Reflecting on her own experiences growing up in Baghdad, Bethany, an administrator for the UICC described how being Christian could at once pose no real problem, while at the same time impose significant social and economic limitations.

Bethany: None of my neighbors ever made me feel that I wasn't one of them – none of them. I mean when ... it came time for their prayer they went and prayed. And every Sunday when they saw us dressing up and leaving to church you know ... [saying what they would say] “God Bless.” All that stuff. They knew more about my religion and I knew more about their religion. Nobody ever said a word to me. Or said why do you have a cross hanging in your family room or why are you wearing a cross? Or why do you have a Christmas tree or Christmas lights outside?

At the same time, Bethany also suggests that a glass ceiling is very much a part of the lived experiences of Christians in Iraq.

Bethany: If you worked for the government, you just didn't move up... [at work]

CJ: It's like a glass ceiling?

Bethany: Exactly. So back home, it was just ... (offering an analogy from American society) If you have a business, would you hire someone from your own people or somebody from a different race? It's just [that] you would trust them more. Well, what's the difference?

For Bethany, the fact that Christians in Iraq did not advance in the same way that other groups did is not a substantial point of debate. Her argument may sound counterintuitive

in American society. But her opinion was juxtaposed against different forms of discrimination and hardship that occurred in Iraq, including periods of religious persecution of Christians.

According to the UICC, Christians have been a vulnerable population in Iraq since the emergence of Islam. Then, Christians and other religious minorities were forced to convert by the power of the sword. In fact, several employees at the UICC have family members who were victims of religious persecution. For instance, Aaron described how state authorities hung his grandfather in a public square in the Christian village where he lived in Iraq, while his son (Aaron's father) was made to watch. Aaron explained that his grandfather, a small businessman, had not broken any laws. His hanging was meant as a show of force – reinforcing the subordinate position Christians held in Iraqi society.

Farah conveyed similar experiences that suggested everyday living could be interrupted at any time during times of social upheaval. She described how her family moved to Kuwait in the 1980s when she was a young woman in order to pursue opportunities there. Describing her life in Kuwait before and after the war the country entered with Iraq in 1990 Farah explained:

Farah: 'Twas nice [in Kuwait]. I mean our life was good and nice. But we had to leave it because of the war. And we left.

CJ: And that was the only reason?

Farah: Mhm.[In] 1990, we left. Oh, it was devastating [saying this with great emotion] because [it was] the only country we knew. We used to go to Baghdad for a visit, only during the summer. We escaped [from Kuwait] actually. We just escaped. We left everything over there.

CJ: Everything you owned?

Farah: Everything. We left an apartment – nice apartment. We left everything. And we just took our clothes and um ... and we left.

Farah's family was uprooted again in Baghdad during the first Gulf War later in 1990.

Commenting on how the war changed her family, Farah stated, "I've seen two wars. And I've seen devastating circumstances in Kuwait. Everything is gone. My work. My workplace – no more. Our money is gone."

According to Farah and other people in the UICC, the segregated work experiences and even the traumatic experiences Christian groups experienced in Iraq differentiate them from other Iraqis. The comments from Bethany, Aaron and Farah suggest that Iraqi Christians have a different history and collective experience in Iraq than other groups. The accounts organizational actors offer suggests that while Christians in Iraq are a 'part' of Iraqi society they are not truly 'of' it. On many levels, their way of life in Iraq is different from that of Muslims and other non-Christian groups. Christians are a group that is partly defined by their overall position in society and their tenuous acceptance by the members of majority groups.

The UICC maintained that the war in Iraq has had staggering effects on the local Christians in Iraq. Just as the events of September 11th brought out laden prejudices in the U.S., the War in Iraq was an impetus for extremists to commit atrocious acts against Christians in Iraq. The organization contended that for almost ten years, Christians living in Iraq were subject to religious persecution, including violent acts against women, children and the elderly.

By 2006 the number of Iraqi Christians taking asylum in countries that neighbor Iraq had grown into the thousands. While leaving Iraq had brought a degree of protection

that was absent in their homeland, the livelihoods of displaced Christians were compromised by their citizenship status. In neighboring countries refugees were provided the right to work and live, but they were not given other rights of citizenship, despite the fact that for many the period of asylum had persisted for several years.

In the UICC, the displacement of local Christians that was occurring during the war in Iraq was another episode in a longer history that distinguished them from other groups in the Middle East. In two separate interviews, Lucas and Mr. Samuels, a founding member and current executive board member of the UICC, explained how the refugee crisis continued to reinforce differences between Christians in Iraq and other groups.

Mr. Samuels, age 80, was regarded as one of the most respected members of the Iraqi Christian community by staffers at the UICC. Over the course of my interview with him, his calm demeanor was sometimes interrupted by a kind of Mid-Western brashness that seemed to acknowledge his membership in a city that valued its reputation for hard work, while also recognizing his personal struggle to ‘make it’ as an entrepreneur in Detroit during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. He described his background as a ‘second-generation, American-born-Iraqi Christian’, whose father had also supported his family through entrepreneurship. Over the course the interview, Mr. Samuels informed me that he had owned a number of successful grocery stores, which he eventually sold. After selling the stores he went on to build another successful business that distributed dairy and produce to most – if not all – of the Iraqi Christian-owned stores in the Detroit area.

At one point in our interview he described how the Iraqi Christian refugees, many of whom remained trapped in countries of first transit, were

Mr. Samuels: And so they were stuck in Jordan and Syria and Turkey and all those places. And of course in those countries you can't get any schooling. You can't get any welfare ...

CJ: No citizenship, right?

Mr. Samuels: Exactly. And they [are] being penalized for overstaying their visas. In Turkey you couldn't leave there until you paid this penalty, which was in the tens of thousands of dollars...

Mr. Samuels's comments suggest that the experiences associated with the refugee crisis continue to create different experiences for Christians and other groups in the Middle East. Since the crisis, local Christians from Iraq shared the experience of exile and the denial of rights to citizenship in the countries where they sought protection. For Mr. Samuels the forced migration Christians endured after the war in Iraq started was additional evidence that verified differences between them and other groups. The idea that this most recent war reinforced important differences between Christians and other groups was echoed in an interview with Lucas.

Lucas: These three wars produced a lot of casualties among both sides. And also they produced a lot of people who are persecuted ... [or who] become targets for persecution. Because you know in the war people get to be hurt and hurt badly. And the people who get hurt the most are the weak among the weakest. These people are the minorities. OK? ... So our role at the [UICC] is to help these people. This is how we started our project here. I myself have been working with the refugees for the last thirty-one or thirty-two years. ... But in the last six or seven years the problem got very much intensified. So we start planning... We became very innovative and making many, many type of pilot studies and projects in order to support them and help these refugees, because the numbers are to increase.

When the UICC began its campaign to bring displaced Christians to Detroit, the idea that they were different from other Middle Eastern groups figured prominently in its strategies. The organization maintained that applications for immigration to the U.S. from Christians should be approved, despite the fact that immigration from the Middle East was being scrutinized. It also sought support from organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) based on the fact that Christians in Iraq were susceptible to forced migration from their homeland and other Middle Eastern groups were not.

The group's tenuous status in countries of first transit only increased the UICC's resolve to bring Iraqi Christian refugees to the United States. In the organization, efforts to bring about this outcome often meant providing U.S. lawmakers, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and organizations like the UNHCR, who was responsible for processing the immigration applications of displaced Iraqi Christians, with information that demonstrated the urgency of their plight.

The UICC informed all parties of the inhumane suffering Iraqi Christians had endured while in Iraq. They also conveyed the idea to American lawmakers and immigration authorities that their recent exodus from their home country – which had netted a host of new trials and adverse circumstances – was a decision of last resort.

Indigenusness and Christianity as Rhetorical Strategies in the UICC

To support their position that displaced Christians should be allowed to resettle in Detroit, the UICC argued that although different groups have lived in Iraq historically, current conditions were most directly impacting local Christians. It maintained that

political and social changes in Iraq were hastening the disappearance of the country's Christian population, a group that lived in Iraq thousands of years before the arrival of Islam. The UICC contended that an exodus process that started in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War was now occurring more rapidly without any real hope of stemming the tide of outmigration.

According to the UICC these dire circumstances called for the development of innovative programming on their part. New programming focused upon the four 'R's: Research, Relief, Resettlement and Re-Empowerment. Research focused upon collecting and providing lawmakers with empirical evidence on the growing refugee population. Resettlement and relief focused upon providing refugees with a pathway to citizenship in American society. Re-Empowerment called for addressing the physical and emotional injuries associated with the refugee experience.

The research component of the organization's initiative was largely carried out in work it conducted with Senator Carl Levin's office and the office of Congressman Gary Peters of Michigan's 14th Congressional District. By 2010 both lawmakers were receiving updates of the number of Iraqi Christians whose immigration statuses remained in limbo somewhere in one of the countries that neighbored Iraq.

The relationships the group established with the lawmakers brought about progress toward organizational goals in 2007 when Congress passed the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act. The law, which was championed by Senators Ted Kennedy, Carl Levin and five other U.S. senators, intended in part to provide "special immigration" status for Christians from Iraq who sought asylum. Specifically, the law meant to benefit, "Iraqis

who have worked in critical positions in direct support of the United States Government in Iraq, [those who] have been killed or injured in reprisals for their support of the American effort [and] Many more Iraqis associated with the United States have fled Iraq in fear of being killed or injured”. While the law acknowledged that,

Although the United States cannot resettle all of Iraq’s refugees in the United States, the United States has a fundamental obligation to help the vast number of Iraqis displaced in Iraq and throughout the region by the war and the associated chaos, especially those who have supported America's efforts in Iraq. It is essential for the United States to develop a comprehensive and effective approach to support host governments and to meet the needs of Iraq’s refugees and internally displaced persons, especially those who are associated with the United States.¹²

In essence, the law was the U.S. government’s response to what appeared to be a humanitarian tragedy. The passage of the act required that those Iraqis who were considered socially vulnerable – including groups who faced religious persecution, like Iraqi Christians – be provided with assistance that supported resettlement in the United States.

The passage of the law provided the UICC with renewed initiative to continue the work it took on with the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies like the UNHCR. It used the opportunity to introduce programming that could bring about favorable immigration decisions. This effort took on special importance after learning that refugee petitions to immigration agencies were being denied based upon immigration criteria that predated the implementation of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act. For example, the organization learned that the Department of Homeland Security was still denying

¹² Parameters as defined by Public Law 110-181, Div A, Title XII, Subtitle C

applications it received based upon the petitioner's country of origin. Statistics which indicated high denial rates were passed along from the UICC to their congressional liaisons with the hope of resolving outstanding applications and avoiding similar issues with pending or newly opened cases.

Advocating on behalf of cases that failed to acknowledge the parameters of the new law often involved informing immigration decision-makers about the persecution refugees experienced. Conveying the experiences of denied applicants meant describing instances including the rape of children and women, the murder of spouses or parents, and the arson of Christian-owned businesses. The rhetoric of persecution the organization invoked meant to convey the idea that applicants who were not approved remained at risk in their homeland.

The Relief and Resettlement components of the organization's work involved negotiating with agencies like the DHS and UNHCR, who were responsible for approving immigration applications. For workers in the UICC, the recent episodes of persecution, including the arson of Christian churches, businesses, and the murders of Christian people, were all matters that met the UNHCR's mandate to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees and fostering the resettlement of stateless people.

The UICC had empirical evidence to verify that applications of Iraqi Christian refugees continued to be denied despite changes in American policy. The high rate of denials signaled to the organization that differences between Christians and other Middle Easterners were not being acknowledged. The organization set out to address the high

denial rate by focusing upon how the current environment in Iraq did not allow for religious freedom.

Lucas explains how organizational efforts around the religious persecution that was occurring in Iraq were put into place:

Lucas: Now at that time the U.S. was unable to admit Iraqis refugees because of the September event – you know the painful events. So we had to do the advocacy. So that’s where I started doing my advocacy for refugee issues ... In last six or seven years as I [worked] with the United States government – both Houses – the Senate and Congress – and also the White House. We managed to get their attention. I kept knocking on the doors, kept pounding on the doors, kept screaming until we got heard.”

Later Lucas described how advocacy occurs with one vital organization that determines refugee admittance, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program:

Lucas: Every year the president of the United States declares that there should be 80,000 refugees from all over the world admitted to the United States. ...Based on the presidential declaration they [Iraqi Christian refugees] qualify for that. So they come to the United States as refugees.”

Lucas’s comments suggest that Iraqi Christians occupy a specific space in ongoing dialogues on immigration. The space shields them from being associated with other groups that likely experience a less receptive environment when it comes to petitions for immigration. John O’Reilly, the director of a free immigration clinic held at the UICC each week, verifies this conclusion. The clinic is affiliated with Blessed Mary College, the local Jesuit College, where O’Reilly is a law professor. The clinic’s main goal is to assist clients seeking assistance with either immigration or those who desire assistance with attaining citizenship after a period of asylum. During an interview, O’Reilly recognized how the group is less susceptible to “profiling” than other immigrant groups in Detroit.

John: [If you are Mexican) you don't wanna call attention to yourself. You don't know who the person is across the desk from you when you go to ask for benefits ...Are they gonna you know call ICE or whatever? ...This community is less susceptible to being profiled.

That Iraqi Christians *can* call attention to themselves in forums where decisions about immigration are made is notable to O'Reilly. Their status as refugees distances from some other immigrating groups from the Middle East and Mexican immigrants, whose campaigns for membership in the U.S. have been vigorously contested. Their status as Christian refugees conveys the idea that they are 'supposed' to be here, whereas others ostensibly are not. Their presence in the U.S. is made socially acceptable in a way that eludes some other groups.

Social Differentiation as a Rhetorical Strategy in the ICBA

The UICC's intention to bring refugees to the United States coincided with other work the ICBA was conducting on behalf of Iraqi Christian business owners in Detroit. In 2003 the ICBA was founded to quell tensions between Iraqi Christian entrepreneurs, other Detroiters, and corporate and political stakeholders who maintained interests in the city's local economy. The attempts some black Detroiters and national supermarket franchises made to disrupt the veritable monopoly Iraqi Christian grocers maintained for years in the city prompted a series of responses from the ICBA (see chapter two).

But the ICBA's work was not limited to resolving issues that threatened their businesses. The organization also worked to meet the needs of newly arrived refugees. Assuring the substantive inclusion of new arrivals was important to the ICBA after 2007 when almost all new arrivals came to the Iraqi Christian community in Detroit as involuntary emigrants. As the financial arm of the affiliated network of Iraqi Christian

organizations in Detroit, the ICBA was responsible for providing funds and resources for resettled refugees. The fact that many refugees arrived after suffering traumas or lacking essential skills to assist them in adapting to American society introduced a new imperative for the ICBA. The organization's charitable events and membership dues helped support the Iraqi Christian community's efforts to integrate new arrivals into American life in Detroit.

The organization's efforts to address the needs of the refugee population involved a great deal of fundraising. It also meant developing innovative programming that addressed the emergent needs of the refugees. The ICBA, the UICC, and its affiliated partner, the Iraqi Christian Council on Health and Wellness (ICCHW) believed it was essential to create a means to address the negative effects of persecution many refugees suffered prior to their arrival in the U.S. One of the ways they sought to do this was by building local coalitions that provided them with the ability to meet the needs of the refugees. One of the local partnerships they struck was with actors in Detroit's Jewish community. Sarah, a leader in Detroit's Jewish community, also serves on the ICBA's Board of Directors. In fact, in 2012 she was the only woman and one of only two people who were not Iraqi Christian to serve on the board.

Sarah has been involved in a number of Jewish organizations in Detroit for over twenty years. She was once a teacher, but she currently works in the healthcare industry. During an interview, she mentioned how she and a delegation of Jewish leaders accompanied members of the Iraqi Christian community to the airport when the first refugees arrived from Iraq in 2007. Sarah described the event as a time to reflect on the

shared understanding that “temporal limitations” may hamper each group’s ability to stay in a particular place (e.g. the Middle East). The forced migration that Christians in Iraq were experiencing motivated the Jewish community in Detroit to forge a relationship with the Iraqi Christians in the UICC and the ICBA. Sarah described how the Jewish community’s relationship with Iraqi Christians aided them in meeting the challenges related to the refugee population.

Sarah: When they were looking at ... the very beginning part of how to ... lobby and how to even meet some of the needs, or to get refugees to come to America. The Jewish community was instrumental to helping to set up the whole mechanism.

CJ: ... So they called you and said, “What’s the best way? ...

Sarah: Yes, and I introduced them to our institutions – our Jewish family service, who got them hooked up with ...the national immigration advocacy program, just multitudes of things... so that to this day many of their programs and projects are basically modeled after the Jewish community... They now have ... Project Jonah [which is modeled after a Jewish program]. And our Hebrew Free Loan ... they have a very similar project now. Even the arrangement of their [organizations] is similar to our Jewish foundation and our Jewish Federation and how it’s set up.”

Alima, the director of the ICCHW, which provides social services to newly arrived Iraqi Christians, describes the nature of the partnership the group shares with the Jewish community in Detroit:

Alima: Out of this office we're going to be launching an Iraqi Christian loan fund [program] shortly. And that's to help people get transportation, to be able to purchase a vehicle. And that's modeled after the Hebrew Free Loan in the Jewish community ... [and] Project Jonah is modeled after Project Hasid in the Jewish community. So you know ... because they had a period of time where they had a large refugee population and you know ... they've been here longer, they're more established and ... so we just ... we learned a lot from them...

The partnership the ICBA developed with Detroit’s Jewish acknowledges how specific historical and social processes impacted both groups. Alima’s comments suggest that

social interactions with members of the Jewish community in Detroit, which were instigated by shared experiences of persecution and exile, promoted the exchange of information that could assist the Iraqi Christian refugee population.

Conclusion

Organizational work that responded to the refugee crisis in Iraq began at a time when the presence of Middle Eastern people in the United States was being contested. The tragic events of 9/11 contributed to an ongoing narrative on Americanism. As a consequence of the attacks, being Middle Eastern was increasingly associated with anti-Americanism.

According to Margaret Somers (1992, 1994) and other scholars (Crites 1986; Polletta 2006; Steinmetz 1995, Steinberg 1995) who acknowledge the ontological importance of narrative, stories guide action. People use stories to make sense of the world. Somers (1992) maintains that narratives are important to social actors because they allow us to define who we are. Underscoring the great significance that narratives have for sense-making and identity-work she writes,

But identity, like the self, is neither a priori nor fixed. Ontological narratives make identity and the self something that one *becomes* [emphasis in the original] ... Narrative embeds identities in time, and spatial relationships; ontological narratives structure activities, consciousness, and beliefs... (1992: 603)

For Somers, the stories that people tell are embedded within larger cultural matrixes.

While some stories gain cultural approval, others do not (Steinberg 1995). Stories are not

random. Instead they are consistent or harmonious with stories emanating within cultural environments.¹³

Similarly, not all events maintain the same prominence or relevance within narratives. What is omitted or becomes understood as main events has the effect of passing normative judgment about the way things are and the way things ought to be (see Steinmetz p. 498). Lexical distinctions allow people to “develop stories as we go along, adding chapters as unanticipated events and new directions enter our lives (Steinberg 1995; Somers 1992; Somers and Gibson 1994). The experiences that figure into stories are those that are consistent with established plots, the accounts of how things happen or the ongoing themes that allow people to construct a significant network or configuration of relationships. The past that is recollected is done with the intention of it playing a role in the future (Crites 1986).

After September 11th, narratives on Americanism were developing in ways that excluded “Middle Easterners,” as an undifferentiated group. In order to achieve their aim of resettlement in Detroit, the UICC used rhetorical strategies that encouraged the cultural citizenship of Iraqi Christians in American society. Organizational rhetoric explained how Christian’s long history in Iraq differentiated them from other Iraqis. Specifically, rhetoric described Iraq and the people who occupied the country prior to the arrival of Islam and the rise of the modern Iraqi state. This aspect of Iraq’s history focused upon Iraqi Christians, as a specific group of people who had occupied the

¹³ Steinberg (1995) wrote, “We create our own stories, [but] we do so within the context of our cultural mores. We are under continual, although usually subtle, pressure to create only those stories which are socio-culturally acceptable (p. 547).”

country during defining eras that impacted the formation of the West. Rhetoric explained the group's association with Babylonia and the emergence of western civilization, prior to the emergence of Islam. It explained Islam as a recent development, as a nation, place and culture of Iraq. Rhetoric drew upon history and experiences that distinguished them from other Middle Easterners—but mainly, from other Iraqis.

The UICC presented an alternate version of Iraqi history that embedded Iraqi Christians in a narrative on “the West” that had cultural acceptance in a way that narratives on the “Arab World” did not. The rhetorical strategies the UICC employed involved familiar plots and storylines. It conveyed experiences that invoked commonalities and shared histories. The UICCs work served as a way of bridging the social distance between the American mainstream and a subgroup of Middle Easterners that were initially evaluated as part of an undifferentiated collective.

In order to meet the goal of bringing Iraqi Christian refugees to Detroit, organizational rhetoric also focused upon the group's practice of Christianity (e.g., Catholicism) and recent experiences of religious persecution in Iraq. By doing so, the UICC set Iraqi Christian refugees apart from others in the Arab World who sought to immigrate to the United States.

Instead of using geopolitical identity to bring a group of Middle Easterners to the United States, the UICC used a religious identity (e.g., Christian). Rhetoric that emphasized Iraqi Christians therefore did not reflect or engage questions of power. It signaled to agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security and the USCIS that we are like you, in ways that other Arab and Middle Easterners are not.

At that time the UICC was particularly interested in achieving a specific end: to bring more refugees to the United States. This set of political experiences of repression, cultural experiences and notions of indigenouness that are similar to western histories. Religious rhetoric therefore configured the United States as Christian nation as opposed to a pluralist, or non-Christian nation that has religious freedoms. As a Christian nation, American society becomes a natural home for Iraqi Christians.

Ongoing political and social vacillations in Iraq that were consequential to the war in Iraq created untenable circumstances for Christians living there. Not unlike earlier times of instability, Christians were made vulnerable to a host of social reprisals in Iraqi society. Actors in the UICC conveyed their status as religious Other in Iraq by describing how their experiences living there were based upon a two-tiered social system that privileged members of the majority group (e.g. Muslims). They also conveyed how changing circumstances in Iraq introduced another shared experience that was defined by exodus – an experience that Muslims living in Iraq at that time were not susceptible to. Shared experiences and new aspects of the group's history in Iraq that included forced migration were conveyed in institutional forums where aid was provided to persecuted groups and groups that had been involuntarily displaced from their homelands.

The work the UICC conducted around immigration and resettlement was also charged with the task of addressing institutional concerns in organizations like the UNHCR. The organization's work with the UNHCR involved explaining how the collective experiences of Christians in Iraq now were similar to other groups whose histories included involuntary exodus. The changing circumstances in Iraq created a

growing population of Christian refugees whose forced migration to states like Syria and Jordan required political reconciliation.

This was a shared experience that also defined the histories of many other groups the UNHCR had served. The shared experience of exodus Iraqi Christians now had with other groups expanded the inclusive boundaries that defined the UNHCR. Displaced Christians from Iraq now shared a distinct experience that Iraqis previously did not have. The deteriorating circumstances in Iraq meant that the collective history of Iraqi Christians not only included the experience of persecution but also forced migration and involuntary resettlement. It also reveals an important negotiation of institutional space that called for introducing new understandings of Iraqi Christians.

Similarly, for Iraqi Christians the incorporation of the experience of forced migration transformed institutional boundaries in a way that allowed organizational actors to build important relationships with powerful stakeholders back in the US. In Detroit, the shared experience of exile foregrounded important work the UICC and ICBA conducted with the Jewish community. Agencies like the UNHRC were key institutions through which the UICC worked to institutionalize their claims to refugee status. This status of “refugee” or persecuted religious minority disassociated them from other Iraqis, while linking them to other groups, including Jewish people in Detroit. Gaining institutional belonging in inter-organizational spaces in Detroit allowed the ICBA to acquire information and resources on providing free health care, low-interest loans for refugees.

Organizational work shows how the call to become part of the United States also requires a certain flattening and expanding of histories that call attention, nonetheless, to parts of the contested narratives of who “we” are in American society. The work the UICC conducts suggests that histories and collective experience(s) form a critical nexus that allows for ethnic authenticity in American society. In the case of the Iraqi Christians, identity claims that differentiate them from other Middle Eastern groups. Yet, ethnic authenticity is also verified in the relationships they have with other ethnic groups, in which they don’t simply distinguish, but liken themselves to others. Especially, and perhaps surprisingly, with groups such as Jewish Americans that are often understood to be more isolationist, despite their long history of social justice and social services that they provide to other groups. Iraqi Christians liken themselves to Jewish Americans in Detroit not based on shared “culture” but on shared political histories.

In his consideration of democratized societies, Karl Mannheim defines de-distantiation as a process that reduces the distance that separates elite groups from non-elite groups in a particular society. Evaluating this idea within the context of the UICC’s petition for special immigration status for Christian refugees, organizational work can be understood as a form of de-distantiation that effectively reduces the distance between the American mainstream and Iraqi Christians. Organizational work is a way of changing who is included inside the American mainstream. It also informs how the American collective understands historical events that impact its constituency.

That the UICC was able to work along with Congress toward the approval of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act in 2007 is evidence of the way organizational work

democratizes space. The immigration petition the organization instigated on behalf of the Christian refugee population in Iraq was waged in a time when Middle Eastern identities were increasingly susceptible in American society. That the organization successfully demonstrated how their Middle Eastern background did not preclude them from having a Christian identity increased the likelihood of gaining special immigration status. That the organization was able to achieve this goal effectively expanded the nation's inclusionary boundaries as they are defined by religion, or Christianity more specifically.

The way in which actors in the UICC and ICBA maintained connectedness to local Christians in Iraq negates assumptions of assimilation that are a part of many analyses of American ethnicity (see Alba and Nee 2003; Gordon 1964; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holiday 2008; see also Waters 1990). Focusing strictly upon the kind of integration ethnic groups experience in the American context, assimilationists suggest that as incorporation into the mainstream becomes more apparent, ethnic distinction becomes less salient or disappears entirely. However, the work that is conducted in the ICBA suggests that it is not what groups cease to be as a result of incorporating into American society, it is what groups continue to be despite their participation in American life. Organizational work suggests that salience of ethnic identity is not only be a function of incorporation into the mainstream, but also the association groups maintain to ongoing historical projects that impact them as a collective and events that inform collective responses.

CHAPTER V
RESOLVING CHALLENGES TO INCORPORATION
THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL RHETORIC IN CCANE

Like the UICC, CCANE used rhetoric to meet its imperatives. Between the 1980s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, CCANE modified its rhetorical strategies and organizational actions. Changes in strategy coincided with vacillations in the United States political environment, and changing circumstances in places outside the U.S., including Cuba and countries in the former Soviet Union.

While freedom and democracy were consistently used as rhetorical tropes in CCANE, how freedom – as a social ideal, and democracy – as a way of life, were conceived of in organizational discourse changed. Over time rhetoric acknowledged different aspects of Cuban exile’s collective experience. In the earliest years of the organization’s founding, rhetoric focused upon achieving a “free and democratic” Cuba by enabling participation in the democratic system that historically defined the North American continent. However, by the late 1990s, two other conceptions of freedom and democracy were being put forth in rhetoric and action. The focus of one of the modified discourses drew upon Cuba’s history of political oppression and how it shared this experience with other nations – especially those who were once part of the Soviet Union.

As opposed to advancing organizational rhetoric encouraging Cuba's participation *in* an established political and economic system, rhetoric and action emphasized achieving freedom *from* the political oppression that also defined other countries. The second strategy coincided with another new organizational effort that drew upon Cuba's independence imaginary. In the latter strategy, organizational rhetoric took into account the island nation's enduring experiences of political interference from other countries, including the United States, and how those relationships precluded Cubans from realizing their destiny as a nation. In this sense, freedom was conceptualized as a long-standing goal of the Cuban people that could be attained by channeling their inherent abilities.

Cuban Outmigration to the U.S. in Historical Perspective

Historically, Cuban out-migration to the U.S. was facilitated by war and unfavorable political climates on the island (Portes and Grosfuguel 1994; Portes and Stepick 1993). Exiles first began arriving to American society – Miami, Key West, Dayton and Tampa, most specifically – in the late 1800s during the War of Independence. During the Spanish-American War, Cubans and Americans worked together to wage war against Spain. From that point forward, Cuban military leaders like Jose Marti' and others used the cities that were emerging in Florida's swamp lands and other minimally occupied areas as strategic safe havens where they could plan responses that challenged Cuban's government.

Cyclic migration is a defining aspect of the experiences of Cubans living in the United States (Portes and Stepick 1993). Recurring political turmoil in Cuba also put into motion a migration pattern that was defined by temporary sojourns in the United States

and a return to the island when conditions changed. For instance, high rates of out-migration followed by commiserate rates of return to Cuba occurred after the elections of General Gerardo Machado in the 1920s, Batista in the 1950s and finally Castro in the early part of the 1960s. In those times, the island's political instability and unpopular system of government seemed to cultivate a culture of exodus, at least within elite society. In order to protect their middle and upper-class statuses, periodic exoduses to the United States were necessary. Wealth and stability in Cuba was only to be produced in the brief intermissions between one political leader and the ascension of another. Portes and Stepick (1993) write that,

Cuban political militants remained nearly invisible in Miami at least until the early 1960s; ... When the Cuban middle class did start to exit the island, it went to a social environment made utterly familiar by years of prior travel... Unlike later refugees from other communist regimes – Vietnamese, Cambodians, Ethiopians – Cuba's exiles did not really move to a foreign land. Southern Florida was known territory (pp. 100-101).

Portes and Stepick indicate that the cycle of exodus and return was enabled by political turmoil in Cuba, and the Cuban elite's practice of vacationing in South Florida. Their analysis suggests that the historical processes that encouraged out-migration to American society established a pattern that made return to the homeland a likely outcome (see Portes and Grosfoguel 1994).

Resolving Crises of Cuban Outmigration through Organizational Work

Although the resolution of the earliest political conflicts in Cuba provided the opportunity for exiles to return, the revolution that put Fidel Castro in power in 1959 disrupted a predictable pattern of exodus-and-return. In Miami's exile community, the

arrival of the Marieletos refugees in 1980 was evidence that returning to Cuba was not possible unless political change occurred.

The Mariel crisis was a catalyst for the founding of CCANE. For the organization's founders, the unprecedented event was evidence that major changes needed to occur in Cuba. In 1981 when the organization was founded it had two objectives. First, the organization wanted to respond to the immediate political and social crises the Mariel Boatlift inspired stateside. Secondly, organizational actors wanted to create circumstances that allowed for the return of an exile community, who were in Miami.

CCANE's founding coincided with pivotal changes in American politics. Perhaps most importantly, in 1981 the unpopular Carter Administration was brought to an unceremonious end. During the 1980 campaign, Reagan and the Republican Party's ideological commitment to economic and social conservatism managed to bring new groups to the party's fold, including working-class whites, fundamentalist Christians and Cuban Americans, who embraced Reagan's anti-communism stance (Edsall and Edsall 1991; Phillips 1969).

Generous political contributions from Cuban Americans signaled the emergence of a strong Republican constituency in South Florida (see Garcia 1996; Grenier, Perez, Chun and Gladwin 2007; Mohl 1988; Moreno 1996, 1997). Over the course of Reagan's first term in office the political relationship between Cuban American constituents and the Republican Party continued to grow. By his second term in office, Florida and other southern states were majorly comprised of large voting blocs of Evangelicals and rural

whites that unequivocally supported Reagan's social conservatism and his political and economic visions. Cuban Americans were chief among the state's conservative demographic who were decidedly Republican.

Authenticity as Organizational Logic in CCANE

The arrival of the Marieletos convinced actors in CCANE that the circumstances that drove them to the United States remained a part of the lived experiences of Cubans who remained on the island. CCANE believed that like the exiles of the 1960s and 70s, the Marieletos came to the United States because they were unable to live in a society that lacked essential freedoms. In the eyes of organizational actors, the exodus from the island that began in the 1960s continued into the 1980s because political change failed to occur.

In order to fulfill the expectation of return to Cuba, organizational rhetoric took into account two aspects of Cuban ethnic history that promoted outmigration to the U.S.: the absence of freedom and democracy and the existence of a politically oppressive system of government.

The Absence of Freedom and Democracy

CCANE actors asserted that violations of basic freedoms defined the lives of people in Cuba since 1959 when Castro came to power. In their opinion, Castro's totalitarian regime prevented Cubans from realizing a true democracy. For instance, during an interview with me Armando stated:

Armando: People talk about changes. And a lot of people say [in response]: How can you talk about change in Cuba if the same person is running it? *The same person* ... So it is not just something that happened to me at that time. It's still

happening – in different variation – but it’s still happening. People are still being repressed for talking about human rights in Cuba.

Armando’s comments suggest that despite political rhetoric put forth by the Castro regime that forces contrary conclusions, Cubans remain an oppressed people. The idea that Cuban society was and remains undemocratic was shared by Esteban, a member of CCANE’s Board of Directors. Esteban described life in Cuba after the revolution as “asphyxiating”. Not long after Castro’s ascent to power, he came to the United States under a visa sponsored by an uncle who was already living in South Florida. He arrived in Miami with his mother and younger brother. He explained that his father was not allowed to leave Cuba with them, despite having the proper documentation.

Esteban, like many of the actors in CCANE, openly discussed his allegiance to the United States since coming from Cuba. Noting what is possible in a free society, he described how after years of military service in the U.S. Army, he established a successful shipbuilding business in Miami. Describing life in Cuba after the revolution Esteban stated:

Esteban: My family actually sympathized with the struggle that was going on to overthrow Batista, you know? But after the revolution took over, in the first three to four months we realized that that was not what the whole thing was about, you know?

CJ: He had [Fidel Castro] mislead people?

Esteban: Exactly! It was supposed to have elections within a year, a few months, you know? That was the purpose of the revolution – to bring freedom ... because Batista gave a coup d’état in 1952. OK? Uh ... he [Batista] presided by decrees – decree of this, decree of that. And that was a disaster. And Castro was supposed to have elections, create parties and all that, you know ... that weren’t established already. And because of the historical period [referring to the Cold War between

the U.S. and the Soviet Union], he took a good opportunity to bring the Communist, Socialist ... That was perfect timing ... So he took that as a hell of a way to stay in power for 54 years, as it is now.

Esteban's comments indicate that the Cuban government's failure to establish vital social institutions and democratic policies lead to his family's unplanned exodus to the United States. He also implies that the oppressive nature of Cuban politics that became evident in Castro's early years were influenced by outside political factors that continue to preclude Cuban people from having essential freedoms today.

The Existence of a Politically Oppressive System of Government

I came in on October 3rd of 1961. I was 14 years old [before arriving to the U.S.]. My life in Cuba – I was getting ready for my 15th birthday. I was going to a small private school. And the school was closed at that time because they were changing the teaching ... you know how they were going to be teaching schools from there on. <Because of the revolution?> Castro. Right... Of course my parents were panicking. But they didn't say anything to us. We were very sheltered as to what they're thoughts were [because] I was going to a communist school – it had turned as a communist school. And they just didn't want to give any information to us ... because we could say [something in school] ... that would be used against them – you know, if they would ask me.
– Sofia, Cuban American immigrant

I got here [in the United States] in January of 2004. I was 16. I had just turned 16 three days after. <Under what conditions were you allowed to leave?> They do this raffle. I think it was a 1998 raffle. My dad was the one who was signed for it. So he's allowed to come with his wife and his kids. I guess that my parents ... My mom always wanted to leave because of all the hardships. She had to work very hard. Everything was a lot of hassle. They had this view that living in the U.S. was easier on them... and they really wanted to give us a better future. I guess really they thought that in Cuba there was not really a lot of future. If you work and you really don't make enough money you have to live by the charity of the family that you have here [in the United States].
– Julieta, Cuban American immigrant

The vignettes included above suggest that certain conditions in Cuba have endured since the earliest days of Castro's ascent to power. Although over fifty years

separate Sofia and Julieta's immigration to the United States, their comments suggest they view Cuba's system of government similarly. The two women's comments suggest that the oppressiveness of Cuba's government predicted mundane choices a person makes and the others that hold greater significance in the lives of Cubans. They suggest that Cuba's government was and continues to be restrictive and perhaps punitive.

It was the oppressiveness of the Cuban government that ultimately caused Sofia's parents to send her to the United States via the Pedro [Peter] Pan program. The same oppressiveness encouraged Julieta's father's participation in a state-sponsored raffle that approved immigration to the United States. In CCANE, stories like Julieta and Sofia's were evidence that Cuban political life continued to prohibit Cuban's from building a civil society.

At the end of the 1990s, these ongoing experiences of political oppression motivated the organization's participation in forums focused on alleviating human rights violations in Cuba and other politically oppressed nations. At that time, the organization also began to use the information and resources they gained in human rights forums to assist grassroots activists in Cuba who wanted to bring about political changes there. Similarly, CCANE used their participation in human rights forums as an opportunity to share the experiences of Cuban activists with other groups who were facing similar challenges.

Freedom and Democracy as Rhetorical Organizational Strategy: Freedom to Participate in the Democratic Americas

In CCANE, the idea returning to Cuba is an expectation. The prospect of return was evaluated through a political lens. If adverse political circumstances lead to the

exodus of thousands of Cubans, then the resolution of unfavorable political circumstances would enable return. The political relationships Cubans established during the Reagan Administration meant moving conversations on matters of great concern to Cuban exiles from their kitchen tables to more public forums.

In the 1980s, CCANE worked to achieve this objective through aggressive lobbying in Washington, D.C. During these years, the organization adopted involved publishing books that described the Cuban government as they knew it. One of the early publications sought support from U.S. lawmakers by drawing upon the social ideals of freedom and democracy:

Cuban Americans understand perhaps better than many of their fellow citizens that freedom is not just the heritage of the people of the United States. It is the birthright of the people of this hemisphere. We in the Americas are descended from hearty souls – pioneers, men and women with the courage to leave the familiar, and start fresh in this, the New World. We are, by and large, people who share the same fundamental values of God, family, work, freedom, democracy and justice...Our struggles for independence and the fervor for liberty unleashed by these noble endeavors bind the people of the New World together. In the annals of human freedom, names like Bolivar and Marti rank equally with Jefferson and Washington. These were individuals of courage and dignity, and they left for us a legacy, a treasure beyond all imagination. But today, a new colonialism threatens the Americas. Insurgents armed and directed by a faraway power, seek to impose a philosophy that is alien to everything which we believe and goes against our birthright. It's a philosophy that holds truth and liberty in contempt and is a self-declared enemy of the worship of God. Whenever put into practice, it has brought repression and human deprivation. There is no clearer example of this than Cuba. (p. 27)

The excerpted passage suggests that freedom is a defining feature not only of American society, but *all* those societies that are part of North America. It invokes a common history of 'New World' accomplishments that resulted from the thrift and mental fortitude of like-minded American *and* Cuban leaders. The passage additionally implies

that the Cuban peoples' failure to fully participate in what had been developed was attributable to the country's unfortunate involvement with other nations [e.g., the Soviet Union] who hold contradictory values and beliefs to North Americans. In essence, the inherent potential Cuba possessed was made defunct because of the introduction of a system of government that was largely incompatible with the [North] American values of liberty, democracy and freedom.

As it relates to the goals of the organization, the publication highlighted the failure of the Cuban government to establish vital social institutions and laws that were capable of bringing about the civil society the nation's forefathers intended. The message was that Cuba deserved to take its rightful place among democratic societies in North America. Achieving this objective required replacing the existing system of government with one that was more compatible with democracy, as it had been realized in the United States and elsewhere on the North American continent.

Freedom and Democracy as Rhetorical Strategy: Freedom from Government Oppression

During the 1980s CCANE primarily worked with U.S. lawmakers in Washington. Organizational actors felt that by conducting political work they could encourage the emergence of a democratic society in Cuba. However, in the late 1990s CCANE's organizational strategy changed. At that time, the organization began working in human rights forums that were developing in countries of the former Soviet Union.

This change in strategy coincided with changes in the political climate in the United States, which were brought on in part by the end of the Cold War and declining political allegiance to Reagan's economic vision for the country. Then, the United States

seemed less concerned about what was going on in Cuba, or its' potential to advance Western political ideologies or free market endeavors. One focus of lawmakers at that time was on the issue of Latin American immigration. Specifically, congressional work intended to resolve apparent breaches in U.S. immigration policy that were stirring dialogues on illegal immigration.

The fall of the Soviet Union and new political policies on Latin America seemed to impact the kinds of support U.S. lawmakers were willing to give CCANE. While the dialogues on immigration were mostly focused on the contested citizenship statuses of Mexican immigrants, laws and policies also reflected changes in the nation's political will to help other Latin groups, including Cubans. During the Clinton Administration Clinton, a three-decades-old policy that gave favorable treatment to Cubans seeking political asylum in the United States was terminated. In its place the nation introduced the wet-foot-dry-foot policy, which granted citizenship to Cuban emigrants and other Caribbean groups only when they had effectively placed one foot on dry United States territory. Immigrants that attempted to gain entry to the United States but failed to reach dry soil were detained and subsequently sent back to their respective homelands. Policies like the wet-foot-dry-foot policy suggest that instead of supporting policy and programs that enabled Cubans to return to their ancestral homeland, more political commitment was placed upon keeping other Latin groups from coming to the United States.

Despite the shift in American politics, CCANE actors continued to work on their goal of establishing civil institutions and a democratic government. They believed that accomplishing their goal would create circumstances that allowed Cuban exiles in Miami

and other places to return to their homeland. During an interview with me Esteban explained how he understood the organization's strategic approach during this time of transition.

Esteban: We came to a conclusion that not necessarily being lobbyists and supporting politicians would bring the changes in Cuba. We came to a conclusion that ([parenthetically] *we still ... hold that conclusion*) changes have to come from *within* Cuba, you know? The people in Cuba have to bring their own changes and they have to do it in a way that is satisfactory to them. All we have to do here is support them. And that's what we are doing. ... We could not depend on a third country to free a country. It has to come ... you have to keep it between Cubans. And not depend on a power. I love this country because I've been here most of my life and I have done whatever is requested of me from the United States. [In the] future we need to bring Cubans together, you know? And the United States of course ... countries do not many times have *friends*, they have *interests*. States have interests. And sometimes the interests of one country [don't] blend with the requirements of another, you know? I don't know if I explain myself...

Alfonso framed the change in strategy within the context of the Elian Gonzalez case that occurred in 2000.

Alfonso: There came a realization that uh ... there came the realization that the message ... that somehow with all the ... as effective as ... as powerful as we thought we were ... we couldn't get people in the United States or in Washington to understand something as simple as the fact that this kid was being used by Fidel Castro as a propaganda tool. And that in returning him back to Cuba, we were going to subject him again to the same ... the same penalties that we all had avoided by coming to the United States. All the reasons for our community in just leaving Cuba –we were just denying these to this little guy there. That his mother died tried ... just to save him from that situation. And now we were returning him. And we couldn't get the American people to understand that. And we said, "God there has got to be something wrong. We are missing something", you know?

According to Armando this change in strategy also meant building different kinds of coalitions with U.S. lawmakers other than those that were established when the organization first started. To the extent that the organization used its political ties with

U.S. political actors, it was to garner support for efforts at political change that were unfolding in Cuba.

Armando: Now we use the [Cuban] political influence and political power to make the United States give more assistance to the dissidents in Cuba and also they provide us with resources so we can have the dissident movement in Cuba. But yes, the focus is now on Cuba. And this is the general idea out in the Cuban community [in Miami] right now. I think the last poll of the Miami Herald showed that more than 67% of the Cuban community – of Cubans living in Miami – Believe that change to be promoted inside Cuba. That the future leaders of Cuba are inside Cuba now... [The] idea [of] convincing the United States and so the United States [would] take action. It was the general idea at the beginning [when CCANE was founded]. And there are still some people who believe that. And by fortune they are the minority. Sometimes we have a meeting and somebody says, “No. If we convince the U.S. government to ...” But then immediately a lot of people say, “Oh come on. We have been 20 years trying to do that. And we have Republicans, Democrats and any kind of government in the United States... And that ain’t going to happen.” So we have to do it ourselves. That’s very important. First is the recognition of the capacity of the Cuban people. That there is a power and we need to help them to build that power. The number one goal is to have the Charter of Human Rights – United Nations Human Rights – be respected by the government. That’s what they are striving for. To have freedom of speech, freedom of eh ... press... all freedoms, you know?

Armando’s comments suggest that the political environment – whether presided over by Republicans or Democrats – will only enable so much progress toward CCANE’s organizational goals. For Armando, the new strategy reflected a growing consensus among Miami Cubans that political change in Cuba should be an internally driven process.

To gain support for their efforts in Cuba, CCANE began participating in human rights forums that were emerging in countries of the former Soviet Union. The forums were comprised of various actors from new nations in Eastern Europe, who felt politically disempowered and susceptible to the effects of nativist cultures and nationalist movements that were underway in their respective countries. While nation-state

dialogues – including those between the United States and Russia – typically focused upon global implications of divergent political aims, Eastern Europeans who were participating in human rights forums intended to address the social ramifications of oppressive government systems.

The link to communism Cuban people shared with the groups who were entering these forums created an opportunity for another kind of organizational action in CCANE. According to Armando CCANE's involvement in these forums began as an academic venture. Shortly thereafter they began to participate in the forums as a member. In these forums, CCANE was provided with resources and information that feasibly could help Cubans in Cuba bring about political change.

During an interview with me Armando explained how CCANE came to be involved in forums on human rights after participating in a conference in Poland in 2000.

Armando: The first time I went [to Poland] I went with [names a CCANE program]. They have an event there. And they wanted to talk about Cuba. It was an academic event at Warsaw University. But then I went there and then I start talking to these people. And then I went to Gdansk where ... Solidarity Labor Union was born. And I was there and I think it was sort of an emotional and inspirational trip. Because I was there and I said, "My God. These people were here. Demonstrating here." So I realized we needed to do something else. We needed to go to the next level... I think it was 2000 [when he was in Poland] ... And I say I started the human rights in Cuba in 1988. It had been 13 years doing this. And we need to do something else. It's not enough. And then I start reading about non-violent struggle. I met with people from Serbia, [names a person], these guys and I say, OK. This is a tool. This is a technique. And I saw a principle that we need to follow. I always say that when I was in Cuba, I was dreaming about change in Cuba. But then when I get this knowledge I start being a worker for change in Cuba. I think that's the main condition that we are trying to promote now in Cuba. Make people knowledgeable about this technique, how it can be used. We need to adapt to your own specific circumstances? Yeah but, this is the technique. The main thing that we do now. Of course we collect announcements. We prepare reports and we present these reports to international organizations. But also we empower people so they can promote change from inside Cuba.

Armando's comments suggest that CCANE felt that by participating in human rights forums it could support the goal of alleviating what the organization understood to be a totalitarian government in Cuba. The comments also show a shift in organizational rhetoric. Instead of explaining how political participation could bring democracy and freedom to Cuba, the organization was now describing to other groups from countries in the former Soviet Union how they shared experiences of political oppression. His comments suggest that instead of prioritizing relationships with U.S. lawmakers that ostensibly would bring *to* Cuba the chance for participation in free and democratic systems of government and economics, CCANE was now focused upon eliminating the experience of political oppression *from* the island.

Freedom and Democracy as Organizational Rhetoric: Pursuing the Cuban Independence Imaginary

CCANE's participation in human rights forums was based upon what they believed to be a shared experience of political oppression. Cubans, just as some Eastern European nations, remained susceptible to oppressive governmental regimes. CCANE felt that by working in these forums it could bring equality and greater freedoms to Cuba and other nation-states with long histories of political disenfranchisement, especially those that were associated with communist regimes like Cuba's.

While Emilio acknowledges how changes in the American political climate created an environment that encouraged CCANE to change its strategies, he additionally suggests that changes in the Cuban context at that time also contributed to the decisions the organization was making:

Emilio: Yeah I think that ... [CCANE] has historically adapted itself the appropriate strategies with the times. I think there was a time when there was the need for a lot of activism in Washington ... um ... to push legislation, to --- focus on U.S. foreign policy. But as Cuba opened up [after the fall of the Soviet Union]...it started a special period. And the Cuban government's ability to clamp down and minimize contact with the island was diminished. There was a lot more exchange and a lot more information coming out of the island. And because of the reduced ability of the regime to imprison everybody or keep them invisible, we were able to learn a lot more about them and then be able to institute direct contact and direct programs to work with them. I think that the [organization] realized it could support Cuba by not just pushing for U.S. foreign policy and measures that were designed to isolate and weaken the regime, but I think increasingly realized the equally important and vital strategic significance of supporting voices of people within Cuba, incipient civil society within Cuba – that just needed support, and needed international recognition. And I think that was the genesis of that – to the point where now more than ever [CCANE] is very, very, actively involved in working with people on the island. And in sharing those contacts with other groups and organizations that are seeking contact as well.

So according to Emilio, the decline of Soviet support in Cuba created new opportunities for social activism in Cuba. He suggests that the fall of the Soviet Union left Cuba with fewer avenues for receiving resources. The reduction in support consequently limited what the government could accomplish on its own. The reduced power of the state introduced more opportunity for freedom of expression in Cuban society. It also created new opportunities for CCANE to be involved more directly in Cuban society. By working in human rights forums CCANE could receive and share information that could help all parties bring about fair systems of governments. By the end of the 1990s, the organization began working with grassroots activists in Cuba.

Organizational rhetoric that was directed toward activists focused upon the idea that CCANE understood their experiences. Organizational actors asserted that the experiences of activists were much like their own experiences in Cuba. They also

suggested to activists that achieving freedom was a project that Cubans needed to pursue in their own right. In his consideration of the support CCANE gives to activists Armando offered the following example:

If you are going to play baseball, you need a good glove and you need a good bat. You need to know how to swing. You cannot just stand there with the bat, or you are not going to hit the ball. If you are a pitcher you are not going to throw a strike. And this [activism in Cuba] is the same thing. You need to know the technique. And you need to know the rules of the game. So this is what we are doing. Giving people the rules of the game. [We say] these are the techniques. And also we are going to give you the tools. We are going to give you telephones, laptops... We are going to give you anything that you can use to connect to each other. So you can improve. So this is basically what we do. We work providing information, knowledge and also we provide empowerment and the tools to connect to each other.

Underscoring the importance of achieving the goal of a democratic Cuba on Cuban people's own terms Esteban stated,

Esteban: We cannot be fighting to bring freedom in one party or another. We like Republicans. We like Democrats. But we have to be Cubans first. And help the people inside Cuba. And that's what we've been doing for the last 7 years... 6 or 7 years, at least, you know?

CJ: So what is it that you're doing different now?

Esteban: Different? We help the Cubans inside the island. And let them decide which way they want to work. We don't tell them what to do... [Then speaking about the resources CCANE provides Esteban continues] We help them with the transportation. And we have sent many, many, many, many cell phones and computers ...

CJ: For communication with [CCANE]?

Esteban: Exactly, exactly. Not only for communication with us but for communication inside the island. That's a very important thing. And we send them video cameras, uh ... computers – so they can create an accessible way to the World Internet, you know? ... They want changes. They want changes and to create a civil society. And eventually [have] different parties and have elections. That's their goal.

Thus, by engaging directly with Cubans on the island the organization hoped to introduce the possibility of democratic self-governance.

Armando also explained that CCANE's attention to human rights issues was not a new endeavor. From the time the organization was founded it tried to increase awareness of the government's apparent unwillingness to abide by the country's existing constitution, which afforded rights that were not being recognized. The organization's involvement in human rights forums ratcheted up this aspect of their work. He explained that new strategies replaced existing ones that involved "simply giving information" to activists on the island. Over time, the organization also wanted to provide activists with viable strategies and resources to organize against the Cuban government. They intended to increase their support of grassroots efforts in Cuba that sought social and political change.

Armando: Well you know I'll say that that [human rights] work has evolved throughout the years. When I was in Cuba human rights activism was, I don't know: make people aware of what the universal declaration of human rights were... But we didn't have an exact idea about how to promote these rights. It was all information and making a stand. We were just saying, "We are here. We are not afraid and we know that we have these rights." But we had no practical idea about how to promote change in Cuba. When I got out of Cuba and I came to the United States and I start working at [CCANE] – first at the radio station. And we did the same thing. We collect the announcements from Cuba. We broadcast to the people in Cuba because we were working on big idea that the more information that we give to the Cuban people eventually they were going to face the government. And ... that's not the case. It's not only because you give information. You have to give practical information, targeted information, information that makes them useful in promoting human rights – or that makes them empowered to fight in a non-violent way. When I went to Poland for the first time, it was an eye opening experience for me. And I see ... I saw what they had done there. I met with [names a Polish organization]. I talked to a lot of people there. And I say, well you know, this is it. OK. We need to tell people about human rights. But we also need to empower people so they can fight. And they need practical tools.

Rhetoric also reaffirmed the expectation of returning to Cuba. Referring to Castro as an “accident of history” at one point in an interview with me, Emilio, one of the organization’s attorneys, explained how he understood the pattern of outmigration that defined Cubans as a collective:

Emilio: ...I realized that – that between my two countries – because I always felt like I was Cuban and I was American... I felt that America didn’t need me as much as Cuba needed me. America is the greatest country in the world. Its power – it’s an economic, military and cultural powerhouse. And I felt that there were still unfinished things in Cuba that needed my talents and my abilities, as an advocate. And having observed the loss of my parents and the hard times they had ... They didn’t come here because they wanted to, they came here because they had to. And I felt that I wanted to try to correct and contribute to um ... the loss of freedom that occurred in Cuba ... to correct the historical mistake that had occurred in 1959. And I felt that I had the obligation to participate in the process to correct it – to redeem Cuba for the future. Um ... and being a student of history and having long wished to be alive in Colonial times – to work alongside Thomas Jefferson, and Ben Franklin and George Washington – I realized that Cuba’s political and historical process was such that I could very well be able to tell people that I was there when Cuba became a democratic republic... I was there when Cuba was founded. So it’s a way to ... to live in history and to participate to a positive change in Cuba – as an active participate and observer.

That Emilio would like to ‘correct’ the political and social circumstances that lead to the exodus of his and other families many years ago suggests that completing the cycle of outmigration that is defined by exodus *and* return can play a role in assuring Cuba’s future prosperity. For Emilio, the prospect of return also signals a new democratic beginning for a country whose development has been unfairly arrested by his appraisal. Returning to Cuba not only rectifies the history of a country that was beseeched by political controversy, it also provides the important opportunity to start a new one that is defined by the same democratic ideals that were embraced by American society’s forefathers.

Describing CCANE's role and the role he envisions for himself in Cuba should democratic change be introduced in a way that allows exiles to return, Armando stated:

CJ: What role does [CCANE] play at that point – once freedom is achieved?

Armando: That's when the real work is going to start. We are going to use [the] political power [Cubans have here in the US] in order to get a system for [the Cuban] government – some central government. ...Also we need to train people in other things. You know how to create civic institutions, how to work in a democratic environment. The [CCANE] has a program for that. It has been there for more than 20 years. It's called The Liberty Project. It's people who are professionals here [in the U.S.] and they are receiving training about Cuban history, Cuban conditions, Cuban government conditions – so they are prepared. When that happens, they can go to Cuba. And then they start working with communities and they can teach those communities about how to organize themselves – how to civic organize themselves.

Referring to how the change in Cuba's system of government might impact him directly,

Armando stated:

Armando: I see myself that I'm not going to be complete if I don't fulfill this mission. It's going to be very hard for me to extract from the events once that happens in Cuba. It's going to be very difficult for me to say, "No. I'm going to stay here."

Like Emilio, the notion of return for Armando is inextricably tied to the introduction of a democratic system of governance in Cuba. Also, Armando indicates that the intention to close to the current cycle of exodus and return is apparent in the organization's efforts to train people to work alongside Cubans in Cuba to bring about a better society. Returning to Cuba is a part of a shared experience of outmigration that exiles and political dissidents of the revolution have yet to fulfill. Completing the cycle of outmigration means introducing opportunities that have eluded *all* Cubans – exiles and those who remain on the island.

The relationships CCANE was able to build with activists on the island provided organizational actors with the opportunity to pursue the achievement of an independence imaginary that had eluded a nation and all those who called it home.

Conclusion

To achieve its organizational aims, CCANE employed rhetoric that reflected cultural narratives on Americanism, and freedom and democracy. Like the Iraqi Christians in Detroit, CCANE's rhetoric provided Cuban exiles with cultural citizenship that promoted incorporation into the American mainstream and institutional belonging in international forums.

In the early years of its founding, CCANE participated in emplotted stories on freedom and democracy that were constructed in response to changes in the nation's political-economic system and an anti-communist environment.

In this context, "North America", not "America" became the relevant target of incorporation in the organization's work with Washington lawmakers. Making inroads toward their organizational aim was based upon the contention that Cuba and the U.S shared an interest in "North America," as a political project that was defined by the social ideals of freedom and democracy. Values that defined American society, including economic liberty, freedom of movement, free speech and the development of civil institutions, also defined Cuban society. CCANE additionally maintained that a tragic mistake of history kept Cuba from participating in the presiding environment that valued economic liberalism.

Cuban exiles in CCANE did not use religious rhetoric. Instead, rhetoric on the west was defined by the social ideals of democracy and freedom, and Cuba's ability to participate in a shared vision that included western economic liberalism.

As was the case with the UICC, CCANE's work suggests a flattening and expanding of histories that contribute to conceptions of "we", as national collective. Both the UICC in Detroit and CCANE used rhetoric that located them in emplotted stories on "the west." Christianity allowed Iraqi Christians to resettle in a different geolocation in "the west" – specifically, the Christian west, with which they share a long history and affinity.

Organizational work provided both groups with the opportunity to explain how their histories are the same as the US and "the west" or "North America." This sameness lent support to organizational efforts. In both cases, interventions—Muslim, Communist, truncate or derail or turn the histories of Iraqi Christians and Cubans in a different directions. Organizational rhetoric demonstrated how one of the reasons that Cubans are also "American" is that they are North American, with the same history. Similarly, rhetoric in the UICC demonstrated how Christians are also part of the "west" and the U.S. In both cases, the notion of American is expanded in one way or another. In the first case, the US must be seen as part of "north America," a presumed continent wide experience and experiment (which of course leaves out Native Americans and first nations, and slavery and etc.). In the latter case, organizational rhetoric supports the idea that America is also part of "the west" and in particular, of the Christian west. Here, too, the histories of Jews, of Hindus, Muslims, and non-religious people are minimized, along

with the heterogeneity of the “Middle East,” a recent political formulation that succeeded other heterogeneous configurations, such as Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, and others.

Changing political conditions in the United States led to CCANE’s gradual retreat from political arenas in Washington and increasing participation in international spaces outside the U.S. Then organizational rhetoric that drew upon Cuba’s history of oppression and the need to address violations of human rights reflected narratives that were emerging in nations of the former Soviet Union. Organizational efforts were less concerned about supporting incorporation into mainstream American politics and more concerned with becoming incorporated in international forums. Experiences of oppression that were created as a consequence of Castro’s ascent to power afforded CCANE membership in a wholly distinct space where organizational aims could be pursued.

Critical changes that were occurring in Cuba after 1991 supported new kinds of incorporation in Cuba. At that time, organizational rhetoric focused upon achieving an independence imaginary that was informed by the shared experience of military co-optation and other political interferences that defined Cuba historically. CCANE’s re-introduction to Cuba through organizational work provided another opportunity to reconcile the nation’s long-standing pattern of migration to the United States that was defined by exodus and return.

CONCLUSION

THERE'S A PLACE FOR US:

CONSTRUCTING THE AMERICAN ETHNICITY MYTHSCAPE THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL ACTION

Constructing the American Ethnicity Mythscape

In the Broadway musical *West Side Story*, the lyrics of the song, “Somewhere” offer hope to the play’s star-crossed lovers, whose fate seems to be at the hands of everything around them. Since the play’s debut in 1957, the song has been adapted by popular artists including Barbra Streisand and Phil Collins. After the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Supremes incorporated a dramatic monologue into the song that attempted to respond to the racial unrest that was unfolding in the country,

Yes, there's a place for each of us,
Where love is like a passion, burning like a fire,
Let our efforts be as determined as that of Dr. Martin Luther King,
Who had a dream that all God's children, black men, white men, Jews, Gentiles,
Protestants, and Catholics,
Could join hands and sing ...

The lyrics the Supremes incorporated speak to King’s goal of living in a place where people feel as though they belong. The work that is done in the UICC and CCANE suggests that people continue to seek out such a place.

My data and analysis encourage the use of an ecological model for studying American ethnicity. This ecological approach evaluates the content of identity claims ethnic groups make in light of ongoing geopolitical changes that impact them, and the cultural imprint those events have on the American mainstream.

American Ethnicity and Geopolitical Change

My findings suggest that these sites provide ethnic actors a platform for responding to experiences of inequality. Although immigrant political projects are not new to American life (see Glazer and Moynihan 1963; Hattam 2007), the environment in which these campaigns occur has changed. Historically, ethnic and racial projects were instigated in response to experiences of inequality that were apparent in American life. Ethnic actors sought remedies to unequal conditions by engaging the American collective in their pursuits.¹

Ethnic political projects are happening at a time when different kinds of immigrants (e.g., transnationals, refugees, political dissidents) are arriving to American society, and when a global order informs the relationships the United States has with nations immigrants come from. Ethnic actors also negotiate their experiences in an environment that values multiculturalism (see Embrick and Rice 2011) and enables border-crossing politics (Landolt 2008). In this environment, ethnic-specific organizations allow ethnic actors to negotiate inter-national political projects while engaging the American collective in their efforts. For instance, CCANE worked along with U.S. lawmakers to help resolve what it understood as political oppression in Cuba.

¹ For instance, civil rights activists engaged American society in its efforts through public dialogues, the media, and organizational action.

Similarly, the UICC worked with non-co-ethnic actors, including politicians and federal agencies, to assist in addressing the involuntary migration of local Christians from Iraq that began in 2003. But my data also suggests that these sites allow ethnic actors to carry out border-crossing political projects without engaging people who are part of American society. For instance, work CCANE performed demonstrates how ethnic-specific organizations based in the United States work to resolve unequal experiences in home countries by building transnational institutional ties.

More generally, organizational work enabled political projects of ethnics who wish to stay in the United States and those who wish to leave. In the UICC and its affiliates, organizational work was done to configure a new home in the United States. That commitment is revealed in the work Iraqi Christian entrepreneurs conducted in Detroit between 2001 and 2009, and in the work the UICC performed on behalf of displaced local Christians in Iraq. Yet in the case of the Cuban exiles, every aspect of organizational work – whether engaged work with the American collective, or work that occurred in collaboration with transnational institutions – intended to rectify unequal experiences in Cuba that allowed for the return of the Cuban diaspora.

What actors in CCANE regarded as experiences of political oppression and the religious persecution of local Christians in Iraq that motivated actors in the UICC guided organizational work. But these issues also informed conceptions of identity with the Cubans in CCANE and the Iraqi Christians in the UICC. In both cases, events occurring outside the U.S. determined how each group evaluated who they were in American society. These events also guided how they participated in American society. My findings

suggest that the identity claims that were made in each organization were predicated upon factors external to social processes and events happening in the United States. That identity claims that Cubans and Iraqi Christians made reflected their position on and in geopolitical projects suggests that an alternate kind of identity-work is occurring in the U.S. within ethnic groups than what other analyses highlight. My findings suggest that identity claim-making is not only a consequence of intergroup dynamics that are determined and mediated in the American social context. They also reflect outside forces that exclusively impact certain groups. That is, Iraqi Christians are not only Iraqi Christian in relation to blacks in Detroit. Iraqi Christians base claims of ethnic (and racial) difference upon specific histories and experiences that define them as a collective.

Contemporary immigrants are maintaining ties to homelands in ways that earlier immigrants to American society did not (Orum 2002 in Kurien 2007). More and more, immigrants are creating and participating in “transnational social fields” between their countries of origin and countries of destination.² For instance, in their discussion of contemporary immigration in New York City, Robert Smith (2001) and his colleagues consider how the city itself acts as a site where transnational politics and transnational life becomes apparent. Other analyses have effectively described how transnational migrants maintain familial, economic and cultural ties in the United States and their home-countries (Foner 2001; Smith 2006). Patterson (2006) considers transnationalism as

² The concept of ‘transnational social fields’ was put forth by Linda Basch and her colleagues in 1992. While Smith et al note that the early conceptualizations of transnationalism that Basch and others put forth have since been critiqued, Basch’s assertion that transnationals are people “who may live anywhere in the world and still not live outside the [home] state” remains an essential element.

a strategy to advance a nation's collective positioning within existing global hierarchies that differentiate between core and periphery countries. He argues that if ties to homelands are maintained then the potential for development within homelands *and* receiving countries increases. For Patterson, effective ties between nations also enable the collective social and economic advancement of ethnic groups who simultaneously inhabit more than one receiving country.

The multiculturalism ethic enables home-country connections to continue while simultaneously validating the cultural assumption that American society is composed of different ethnic groups (Kurien 2007). The environment also provides an opportunity for ethnic groups who maintain political or economic ties to home-countries to gain access to the American political system and to impact U.S. foreign policy through campaigns that encourage U.S. intervention or public acknowledgement (Shain 1999).

The histories and experiences that inform identity claims both groups make through organizations are partly defined by ongoing geopolitical projects they are (directly or indirectly) impacted by. As an available resource in the nation's multicultural environment, ethnic-specific organizations may provide a means of responding to these events in ways that secure groups from detrimental social, political and economic outcomes.

Cultural Imprint of Geopolitical Change

Nicole Marwell (2004) argues that organizations provide the opportunity to organize like-minded people and then parlay those enrolled into constituencies that influence the wider political environment. I find that the UICC and CCANE also serve as

“free spaces” that provide ethnic actors with opportunities to assert and verify claims of ethnic authenticity in social interactions that occur between ethnic and non-co-ethnic actors. Organizational work allowed the Iraqi Christians and Cuban exiles I encountered to challenge storylines that the dominant culture accepts and put forth in the public sphere. For instance, between 2001 and 2009 in Detroit, Iraqi Christian business owners experienced three crises that jeopardized their position in the city’s local economy. The first crisis occurred after the events of September 11th when hostilities against Middle Eastern Americans were on the rise. The second instance occurred when the city of Detroit began sponsoring raids on Iraqi Christian-owned grocery and party stores. The final challenge occurred when the state of Michigan, the city of Detroit, and its corporate partners agreed to bring franchised supermarkets to inner-city Detroit. During these times the ICBA provided Iraqi Christians a way to respond to storylines that portrayed Iraqi Christians as undifferentiated Middle Easterners, whites (as a consequence of their suburban residence), and non-Detroiters (as a consequence of business ownership).

Similarly, Cuban exiles in CCANE challenged conceptualizations that portrayed the group as voluntary immigrants who were intent upon remaining in the United States permanently. The organization also countered other storylines that associated Cuba with anti-American beliefs and values. In social interactions with non-co-ethnic actors, CCANE maintained that despite Cuba’s association with communism, the country and its people possessed the same values for economic growth, and the same potential for participation in an expanding free market, as did the United States and American citizens.

The extent to which organizational goals are deemed legitimate is contingent upon their alignment to rationalized social structures that organizations themselves are dependent upon, be it the state or other institutions that play a dominant role in social life (Moore 1996; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In her discussion of work scientists conducted in organizations beginning in the 1950s, Moore argues that organizations, “must engage in a process of negotiating what actions constitute responsibility, what products are useful, who is legitimately able to judge the utility of science and the relative responsibility of scientists, and in whose interests they do and ought to work (p. 1598).” My analysis suggest that the contents of the identity claims ethnic actors make in organizational spaces play a role in the process of legitimating claims to the American social context itself, as well as the resources that are available to people who live here. My findings show that organizations may impact the allocation of resources, or determine partnerships that can otherwise support the missions of organizations. I argue that these sites also allow ethnics to institutionalize identity claims in ways that bring resources or support for their efforts. During the refugee crisis in Iraq, the UICC assured that a group of Iraqis was afforded refugee status in organizations like the UNHCR when the status was not made available to other [non-Christian] Iraqis. In the United States, it also worked with lawmakers and federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security and USCIS, to implement laws and policies that responded to the experience of displacement Christians in Iraq were challenged with, and the process of resettlement that occurred thereafter.

The influx of refugees encouraged the ICBA to seek funding that supported their resettlement in Detroit. The ICBA responded to the needs of the refugee community by developing programs that brought resources to the new arrivals.

When resettlement efforts started they also built important collaborations with non-co-ethnic actors in the city. They also were able to bring their voice to state and national lawmakers and immigration agencies. Likewise in the case of the Cuban exiles organizational work resulted in their integration into American politics, human rights forums, and grassroots activist efforts unfolding in Cuba. Identity claims that described Cubans as a politically oppressed people were institutionalized in similar ways through CCANE's participation in human rights forums in Eastern Europe.

The identity claims that groups make are formalized in both organizations in rhetoric. In the Cuban and Iraqi Christian case, adopted narratives helped explain how each group should be evaluated as a distinct collective in American society. Coutu (1993) argues that narratives provide groups a means to preserve "virtue" when the larger and dominant culture of which they are a part assigns marginal values to them. He writes that, "The continuation of virtue among [marginal] groups helps them to preserve self-esteem. It also assists group members to explain the dominant assumptions of their society in terms of power relations rather than the shortcomings and inferiority of their groups (p.61)." Similarly, I find that organizations that serve ethnics provide a means of advancing storylines that combat images the dominant culture introduces. Organizations allow ethnic actors to create discursive space to challenge prevailing social conceptualizations. As a result of their participation in these spaces, new social

understandings may emerge that transform or nullify potentially harmful or marginalizing storylines that are part of the dominant culture. Organizations provide a means of reconciling differences between public representations ethnic actors put forth and social understandings the dominant culture introduces. The identity-work ethnics perform in these sites also allows them to reject placement in generic social categories they feel do not recognize histories and shared experiences that distinguish them from other groups (e.g., Arab-Muslims, European immigrants) the dominant culture associates them with.

The narratives also held currency in the environment in which they were shared. Narratives were aligned with cultural assumptions and social wisdoms emanating in American society including thoughts on communism and the divergent interests and values that distinguished the Middle East from American society. Organizations are influenced by normative pressures placed upon them by entities like the state (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Zucker 1987). Organizations also provide collectives with the opportunity to differentiate themselves from some, while at the same time demonstrate likeness to some others. Once formed, organizations can direct the attention of the public toward certain factors and divert attention away from others. The context in which organizational work occurs impacts the success organizations experience (Moore 1996). My findings indicate that as the context changes, the ability to make identity claims that support the interests of both organizations diminishes. This is especially the case with the Cubans in CCANE, whose claim-making and organizational agenda was heavily predicated upon events and conditions between the U.S. and Cuba which are now relegated to the historical background.

These negotiations create opportunities that allow ethnic groups to reject generic social conceptualizations in favor of authentic conceptualizations. That ethnic authenticity is a negotiated outcome that takes into account identity claims and public appraisals may contribute to ongoing dialogues that evaluate the relative positions ethnic and racial groups occupy through structural paradigms (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2004, 2006; Feagin 2006; Guglielmo 2003; Haney-Lopez 2006; Lipsitz 1995; Roediger 1991) and those that understand American ethnicity as a form of self-knowledge (Bashi Treitler 2007, 2013; Valdez 2011). That authenticity may be understood as a negotiated outcome may explain how some groups avoid relegation to racialized categories. It may also explain how claims of ethnic difference are ultimately recognized by outgroups.

As available social mechanism that have the potential to impact the kinds of resources collectives receive, organizations like the UICC and CCANE also provide the opportunity to better understand how “honorary” status is achieved in American society. Recent analyses point to an emerging racial hierarchy where the racial privilege-subordination continuum is sustained in partial consequence to “buffer” racial groups that alleviate racial tension. While these studies point to economic and educational outcomes to support their theoretical contentions, they do so without identifying specific mechanisms that confer intermediate statuses to certain groups, or encourage movement from one rung on the racial ladder to another. My findings help explain how organizations may protect the relative position of each group in local and national contexts.

My analysis illustrates the contingency of honorary status. My analysis suggests that honorary status may not be an ‘achieved’ status, but rather a status that is contingent or mutable depending upon the social and political context in which negotiations for resources (or social acknowledgement) occur. Petitions for incorporation may also be impacted by socio-political machinations that can at least temporarily jeopardize the level of acceptance groups have in the mainstream. By describing the contingency of cultural citizenship and the impact these negotiations have for honorary racial groups, my findings may lend support to other analyses that differentiate between experiencing racism and discrimination and being affected by racialized processes (Song 2004, p. 866). This is especially apparent in the case of the Iraqi Christians in Detroit.

The Content of Ethnic Identity Claims

I argue that the cultural imprint of ongoing geopolitical events that impact collectives living in the United States affect the security of honorary status identities. More specifically, I find that cultural citizenship in ongoing conceptualizations of American-ness can interrupt ongoing ethnic projects that bring about social and economic uplift.

My findings suggest that Iraqi Christians in the UICC and Cubans in CCANE gain cultural citizenship by making identity claims that reflect “emplotted stories” (Somers and Gibson 1994) that are embedded in larger cultural matrices.

In the UICC, three identity claims were integrated into organizational logic. These claims reflected Iraqi Christians’ participation in cultural narratives on Christianity and “the west.” The first claim explained how Iraqi Christians were the indigenous people of

Iraq. It focused upon Iraqi Christians as a group of Iraqis that was different from others based upon a history in the country that predated the arrival of Islam and the emergence of the Iraqi nation-state, as a member of the Arab World. A second claim by the UICC used the groups association with Christianity (e.g., Catholicism) to differentiate Iraqi Christians from other Iraqis. A third identity claim explained how the group's position as a "second-class" minority in Iraq created social differences between them and other Iraqi groups and thus made them susceptible to persecution.

The identity-claims the UICC made on behalf of Iraqi Christians occurred at a time when 'us' and 'them' dynamics separating Americans from Middle Easterners (or Arabs) were heightened. The war in Iraq had a devastating impact on local Christians in Iraq. Destabilization of the country and its political system increased the number of attacks against Christians and other vulnerable groups. As a consequence, thousands of Christians were forced to leave their homeland. The UICC sought to address the refugee crisis by bringing displaced Iraqi Christians to the United States. New restrictions on Middle Eastern immigration that were put into place after the events of September 11th challenged its efforts.

The claims the organization made at that time located Iraqi Christians in unfolding narratives on American-ness as it was being defined in relation to Arab-ness. The claims also located the group inside narratives on Christianity and "the west" in ways that differentiated [Christian] Americans from Arab Muslims, and configured the United States as a place distinct from countries in the Arab World.

In response to the immigration challenges the organization faced, rhetoric described how Iraqi Christians shared the same values and beliefs as most Americans and therefore differed them from Middle Easterners associated with Islam. Iraqi Christians in the UICC employed rhetoric that engaged familiar plots and storylines related to Christianity and “the west.” Rhetoric that described Iraqi Christians as the indigenous people of Iraq and as a group that had foundational ties to Christianity invoked shared histories with people in western nations like the United States. In a context where Middle Eastern incorporation was contested, this rhetoric reduced the social distance between the American mainstream and a subgroup of Arabs who wished to leave Iraq.

In CCANE, one identity claim focused on the group’s membership in the North American collective. Organizational actors explained how their status as North Americans made them keepers of democracy and freedom – just as were other North Americans, including people in the United States. This claim provided organizational actors with a means of locating Cuban exiles in conceptualizations of American-ness that were defined by a shared commitment to democracy and freedom, and the free market.

Another identity claim provided Cuban exiles entry into dialogues on the absence of democracy and freedom. The identity claim the organization made in this regard explained how Cubans were a politically oppressed people. Claims of political oppression were offered at a time plots and storylines on freedom were engaged in institutional forums on human rights. The claims CCANE put forth likened the experiences of Cubans to groups who were participating in these forums.

In both organizations identity claims were reflected in stories that were shared with outgroups. Tilly (2002) argues that stories play an important role in the social construction of identity because they “impute a kind of coherence and self-propulsion ... to ‘peoples’ and ‘communities (p.8).’ According to Tilly, stories emerge from social interaction and they are modified (and constrained) in social interchanges that occur between groups. Stories provide actors with “accounts of where they came from, and imputations of shared attributes to the entities on each side of the line (p.11).”

This kind of identity-work is apparent in both organizations. The claims ethnic actors make show how the “enactment of uniformity (Tilly 2002:8)” occurs at the boundary that differentiates one group from another. In terms of identity-work, the rhetoric both organizations employed also describes how ethnic actors locate their collective experiences in external events that inform dialogues on American-ness.

In his discussion of national identity, Duncan Bell (2003) distinguishes between collective memory and collective remembrance. According to Bell, collective memory “contains shared understandings and conceptualizations or representations of past events generally considered to be vital in the forging of group identity.” Whereas collective memory is based upon historical representation, collective remembrance, Bell argues, is an “inter-subjective phenomenon” that is reliant upon direct experience and then the sharing of direct experiences in social interactions.

For Bell distinguishing between the two competing forms of identity formation is important in that it makes clear the political significance of collective memory. As a “governing myth” collective memory subverts subaltern myths that may offer competing

understandings of a national past. Bell maintains that the “national mythscape” serves as a discursive realm where “myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly.”

Bell argues that mythscapes are contested discursive terrains. The negotiations that ensue – whether around stipulations of the law or cultural understandings that evolve as a consequence of [perceived] history – are opportunities to introduce competing understandings of historical events and opportunities to reconcile how they will be incorporated into the nation’s collective memory. The work that occurs in the organizations I studied provides ethnic actors opportunities to participate in discursive fields where questions about national identity and belonging are asked and answered. Thus, the identity claims ethnic actors make in these sites not only distinguish them from other groups, they also justify belonging in larger collectives.

My findings suggest that the identity claims that Iraqi Christians and Cubans make – the way they tell stories about who they are in American society in organizational spaces – are contingent upon and reflective of ongoing geopolitical events. I additionally maintain that each groups’ ability to make the claims they make effectively is impacted by a cultural climate that is made and remade over time in the United States as a consequence of global (and national) events that impact the nation and/or the people who live here. The stories that rule our lives are constructed (Lyotard 1979; see also Czarniawska 1997). Advancing a constructivist perspective of organizational identity, Czarniawska argues that,

... [W]e have to see conversations as dramatized stories, in which the participants are actors, authors, directors, and producers. In other words, *conversations in*

particular, and human action in general, are enacted narratives [emphasis in the original]... the common way of understanding human action is by placing it in a narrative, that is, a narrative of an individual history, which in turn must be placed in a narrative of social history or in a history of the narrative... What is more, other people or institutions sometimes concoct narratives for us, without including us in any conversation ... They decide our jobs, where we should live, our identities. But even as puppets in a power game, we are still coauthors of history, that other enacted dramatic narrative in which we are also actors. (p.13-14)

Czarniawska argues that it is identity should be treated as a continuous process of narration where the repertoire of legitimate stories is found in a process of constant formulation, editing, and refusing of certain elements. I find that organizations provide ethnic actors with a necessary audience – a public venue – to advance particular social conceptions about who they are as a collective. The conceptualization that is carried forward affirms ethnic distinction.

My data also suggest that cultural citizenship can be interrupted when the American context changes. While organizations may provide ethnic actors with the opportunity to answer the questions, “Who are we in American society?” and “How do we belong here?”, the reception they receive is contingent. The efforts of groups who file petitions for cultural citizenship can be detracted by ongoing geopolitical events that impact [mainstream] Americans *and* those who are seeking access to the [cultural] mainstream. This finding suggests that the collective position a group occupies in American society may not be the only (or most robust) predictor of substantive incorporation. My analysis highlights different kinds of incorporation projects and underscores their significance for groups presumed to hold honorary status.

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