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## Religion, Forced Migration and Schooling: varying influences of religious capital among Iraqi Christian refugee students in Jordan and the USA

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**ABSTRACT** This study is based on focus groups conducted with Christian Iraqi refugee secondary school students in the metropolitan Detroit area, and interviews with staff from volunteer aide agencies, non-governmental organizations, churches, and independent researchers in both Amman, Jordan as well as the Detroit metropolitan area. The article examines varying influences of religious capital among Iraqi Christian students. Examination of the operation of this capital within the context of the two countries' economic and foreign policy interests including their refugee policies exposes macro-level forces that render religious capital to function in countervailing manners. Iraqi Christian students in both Amman and Detroit experience the reverberating affects of an inverse relationship between their religious capital and their ability to live a stable and secure life in Iraq. Moreover, the ability of Iraqi refugees to wield their religious capital to their advantage in schooling is highly mediated by a dominant ideology within Jordan that positions them as 'foreigners', a restricted US refugee policy limiting the numbers allowed in, and a prevailing ideology within the USA that treats migrants from the Arab world as 'suspect' and potential threats to public safety and national security.

### **Introduction**

A comparative article examining Jordan and the United States might seem at first incongruous. The two countries are in very different parts of the world, have differing forms of government, differing cultures, and differing economies. And yet they are very closely connected; Jordan is a close ally and client state of the USA (Sylvan & Majeski, 2003) and with the fall the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the United States is also now Jordan's chief trading partner (Sassoon, 2009). The 2003 Iraq War and the massive flows of Iraqi refugees further connect the two countries, not least because of the large numbers of Iraqis residing in Jordan who wish to resettle in the USA. Religion and education both matter a great deal in this saga, and they are closely connected. Persecution of minority religious groups, most notably Christians, has been one of the major factors driving the refugee flow out of Iraq. Schools serving minority religious communities in Iraq have been destroyed, and minority religion students presently in schools study within atmospheres often insensitive if not hostile to their faith backgrounds (Sassoon, 2009).

This study is based on focus groups conducted with Iraqi Christian refugee secondary school students in the metropolitan Detroit area, and interviews with staff from volunteer aide agencies, non-governmental organizations, churches, and independent researchers in Amman, Jordan, as well as the Detroit metropolitan area. The article draws generally from Bourdieu (1977, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to understand the existence and influence of cultural capital among Iraqi Christians, and particularly from Verter (2003), Portes & Rumbaut (2006), and Erel (2010) to

understand religion as a form of symbolic capital (i.e. religious capital). I find that the educational influence of religion as a symbolic form of capital is veritable, its effectiveness mediated to a high degree by the two countries' foreign policies and economic interests, including their refugee policies. Most striking is the degree to which this larger theater leads religious capital to manifest itself in countervailing tendencies. Despite finding refuge from religious persecution, Iraqi Christian students in both Amman and Detroit continue to experience the reverberating effects of an inverse relationship between their religious capital and their quality of life in Iraq, including consistent school attendance. Moreover, the ability of Iraqi refugees to wield their religious capital to their advantage in schooling is highly mediated by a dominant ideology within Jordan that positions them as 'foreigners', a restricted US refugee policy limiting the numbers allowed in, and a prevailing ideology within the USA that treats migrants from the Arab world as 'suspect' and potential threats to public safety and national security.

### **Methods and Procedures**

The data presented and discussed in this article are the result of two-plus years of conducting interviews, focus groups and formal and informal meetings with Iraqi refugees and the people who work with them. Between the spring of 2008 and the fall of 2010 I made regular trips to the Detroit metropolitan communities of Southfield and Madison Heights (hereafter referred to simply as Detroit), where a large number of Iraqi Christian refugees live (Baker & Shryock, 2009; Shryock & Chih Lin, 2009). Within this time period I also traveled to Amman, Jordan for the month of July in 2008, and then again for the month of July in 2010. There was considerable though not complete overlap with respect to the types of people I interviewed in both Detroit as well as Amman. In Detroit I interviewed four staff members at one prominent voluntary agency (volag) and two staff members at two additional agencies serving refugees. I also spoke with clergy at one of the major Chaldean churches, as well as a member of this church who works in refugee resettlement from Jordan.[1] Finally in Detroit I held four focus groups (with a total of 18 attendees) with Iraqi refugee public secondary school students, many of whom had lived and attended either primary and/or secondary public schools in Amman before resettling in the United States. During my trips to Amman, I interviewed seven leadership staff from seven established NGOs serving Iraqi refugees, as well clergy at a Chaldean church, and a Jordanian researcher and activist. Finally, in Amman in 2008 I was involved in an additional research project sponsored by my university. This project involved interviews and focus groups with Jordanian Ministry of Education officials, community members, teachers, and students about their perceptions of Jordanian citizenship. Because several of the questions we asked mapped so closely to my own research, I am including some of that data here as supplemental. All interviews (including focus groups) in both countries took place in locations that were comfortable and agreed upon by participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of interviewees, and organizational names have been masked.

Following Boyatzis' (1998) use of thematic analysis, data were initially coded inductively to detect broad themes and the general 'story' the study participants were telling, as well as contrasting views about the story that different participants had. Data categorized within these broad themes were then coded a second time using the theoretical framework so as to map the narrative on to relations and exchanges of cultural capital, with religion as a key focus.

### **Religion as Cultural Capital, and its Impact on Schooling**

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) conceptualization of cultural capital aims principally to move beyond a reductionism associated with economic theory in accounting for the social world. For Bourdieu, the universe of exchanges characteristic of the social world cannot be reduced to merely economic or mercantile factors, without accounting for the influence of other powerful forms of capital. Capital remains as 'accumulated labor', but Bourdieu, contrary to Marx, collapses the distinction between the material infrastructure and the symbolic superstructure in claiming that culture may be construed as a form of capital. Hence capital exists also in symbolic forms (Verter, 2003).

Bourdieu posits that capital exists under three fundamental species; economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital is that which most immediately can be convertible into money, while cultural capital and social capital may on certain conditions be convertible into economic capital. Cultural capital itself is further broken down into three basic forms. In its most abstract, it exists in an embodied state as 'long lasting dispositions of body and mind' where it may take the form of knowledge, skills, beliefs, norms and attitudes. It may also take on an objectified state in the form of physical objects such as scientific instruments, books, music, or works of art. Finally, it can exist as an institutional recognition, such as academic credentials or academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Possession of cultural capital is neither universal nor equal. It exists rather as an asset within a symbolic economy characterized by the struggle for domination, and hence serves to advantage some over others. Schooling serves as a fine illustration. Students who have acquired forms of capital most conducive to academic success will necessarily have an edge on their peers. For instance, a child whose parents use sophisticated verbal expressions with her and read to her at home will be advantaged when it comes to participating in school activities such as class discussions, and also when 'consuming' cultural objects such as required books. When the child graduates (say from high school) she will acquire a type of institutionalized capital in the form of a diploma. This institutionalized capital, representing an objective value of embodied capital, is eventually itself converted back into economic capital on the job market.

Bradford Verter offers a model of religious capital that extends Bourdieu's general theory. Verter's (2003) model, dubbed 'spiritual capital', treats religious knowledge, competencies, and preferences as 'positional goods' within a competitive symbolic economy. One may acquire these goods through such inputs as purchased goods and financial contributions (say of and for a church), time and labor (e.g. regularly attending church services or serving on a board), and social capital (e.g. participating in church social networks) (Iannaccone, 1990). For Verter, spiritual capital is often, but not always, inherited from one's family, and formed in the context of socialization into a particular class fraction. Hence, unlike economic capital but quite similar to other forms of symbolic capital, it is not universally recognized, and takes on important subcultural variances (Verter, 2003). This study largely embraces Verter's conception of religious capital. It is additionally informed by Portes & Rumbaut's (2006) assertion that religion accompanies the process of migration, and seeks to ameliorate the traumas of departure and early settlement, protect immigrants against external attacks and discrimination, and 'smooth their acculturation to the new environment' (p. 301). Finally, the model used here is informed by Erel's (2010) assertion that migrants' cultural capital cannot be reduced into 'rucksack approaches' that collapse intra-ethnic differentiations and hierarchies, and must also be understood as shaped by constructions of national economic interests and protectionist professional policies.

#### *Religious Persecution and Forced Migration from Iraq*

Iraq is a dominant Muslim country and Islam is its official religion. The country is comprised largely of Shia (60-65%) and Sunni (32-37%) Muslims (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011). Non-Muslim minorities, including Christians, make up roughly 4-5% of the population. Ethnic Assyrians constitute the vast majority of Christians in the country, 90% of whom are Chaldeans following the Eastern Catholic Church. Other Christian groups in Iraq include Syriacs, who follow the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Armenians, who are also either Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic (Adelman, 2008; Sassoon, 2009). The percentage of Christians within present-day Iraq is a rapidly declining one. Adelman (2008) writes that there were 1.2 million Christians in Iraq at the time of the 2003 American invasion. The overall Christian population may have dropped by as much as 50% since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011), resulting in an estimated 450,000 Christians remaining in Iraq (Sassoon, 2009).

Generally, Christians are targeted by extremist groups in Iraq for beliefs, activities and lifestyles deemed contrary to Islam. Many Christians were also government employees under the Saddam Hussein regime, giving them the reputation, however undeserved, of being the regime's servants (Adelman, 2008). Further, according to Sassoon (2009) many Assyrians have been singled out for retribution for having worked for the United Nations and/or the United States. Following a

January 2006 bombing of four churches and the offices of the Vatican's representative in Baghdad, as well as attacks on two churches in Kirkuk (within which three people were killed), the European Parliament passed a resolution strongly condemning the persecution of Chaldeans, Syriacs and other Christians, and urged Iraq to protect its Christian minorities. The resolution's preamble included reference to Assyrians as victims of targeted violence, such as the destruction of property, 'kidnapping, attacks on churches, harassment, extortion, and torture of persons perceived as not respecting Islam'. The preamble also recognized a rise in attacks on Christian students in Iraqi universities, particularly in Mosul, and the fact that Christians in Mosul were being told to 'move out of the area' (cited in Adelman, 2008, p. 200).

### **Jordan and Reception of Iraqi Refugees**

For decades Jordan has served as a refuge for forced migrants fleeing political conflicts and turmoil in the area. Jordan in fact has the highest ratio of refugees to indigenous population of any country in the world (Chatelard, 2002a; 2002b; Zaiotti, 2006; Collet, 2010a). There has historically been a regular flow of Iraqis across the Jordan-Iraq border for purposes that have included not only asylum, but also trade and commerce. However, since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the number of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan has swelled considerably. Exact numbers are difficult to obtain, owing in part to reluctance among Iraqi refugees to register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (International Crisis Group, 2008; Collet, 2010a). Considering these and other conditions, the UNHCR estimates that there are 450,000-500,000 Iraqi refugees living in Jordan, the vast majority of whom reside in Amman (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2009; 2011).[2]

Jordan is signatory to neither the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor its 1967 Protocol, the two principal instruments that define the refugee protection regime under international law. Rather, the country has historically allowed migration from and to neighboring Arab states under the larger pretense of Pan-Arabism, although this has not necessarily lead to the granting of citizenship rights, nor asylum, to all Arab migrants (Chatelard, 2002b; Zaiotti, 2006; Collet, 2010a). In April 1998, Jordan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR to assist with refugee flows coming into the country. The MoU establishes the UNHCR's legal basis for involvement in the state with persons of concern and includes the 1951 refugee definition. It addresses adherence to the principle of 'non-refoulement', or non-forcible return to possible persecution (Article 33(1) of the 1951 UN Convention), which the state is obligated to obey under international customary law. According to the UNHCR, the MoU provides the legal basis for the stay of asylum seekers in Jordan, pending refugee determination undertaken by the agency. It allows Convention refugees a maximum of six months stay, during which a 'durable solution' has to be found; namely, integration into the host country, resettlement to a third country, or voluntary repatriation to the country of origin (International Crisis Group, 2008). There exists a strong network of international governmental and non-governmental organizations serving Iraqi refugees in Jordan. From 2007 to 2009, Jordan was the recipient of nearly \$400 million in aide directed toward Iraqis, the lion's share coming from the USA (Seeley, 2010).

There is strong evidence indicating that most Iraqi Christian refugees do not intend to return to Iraq any time in the near future, if at all (Adelman, 2008). As Adelman (2008) writes, Christians have very little to return to, and very little protection from the state once there. For many Iraqi Christians, Jordan is a temporary abode, a place in which they make plans for their next journey. Despite its agreement with the UNHCR, Jordan's own domestic policies result in keeping most Iraqis as a non-integrating underclass. Iraqi refugees are not regarded as 'refugees' by the state, but rather as guests, or 'foreigners'. All refugee and asylum seekers fall under legislation applicable to foreigners. Most notably this involves the 1973 Residence and Foreign Affairs Law No. 24, which grants the Minister of Interior the authority to determine on a case-by-case basis who may be deported (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009; Collet, 2010a). Under this law, Iraqis must obtain residency permits, which they can then regularly extend for a fee. Residency permits do not allow Iraqis to legally work in the state. Iraqis are also barred from receiving any state public assistance, and their access to basic healthcare is largely limited to UN and NGO programs

(International Catholic Migration Commission, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2008; Collet, 2010a).

With respect to maintaining religious culture and practices, Jordan is generally a safe haven for Iraqi Christians in comparison to the environments they have fled. Observers note that while many Iraqi Christians in Amman cluster around churches serving Iraqi as well as Jordanian Christians, they also live in mixed-religious communities. The sectarian divisions so palpable and so violently enforced in Iraq appear to be downplayed within the diaspora in Amman (Hamblin & Al-Sarraf, 2010). Jordanian public perception of Iraqis does not revolve around religious difference *per se*, at least with respect to Christians, but rather around competition for scarce resources. Here Chatelard (2010) maintains that Iraqis have been cast by local media as well as government officials as 'predators' who have been the primary force for driving up the prices of goods and properties in the state. The fact that most Iraqis cannot legitimately participate in the workforce appears to have not radically changed this perception. As it is, Iraqis in Jordan maintain a low profile, fearing government harassment and possible deportation. Many if not most remain waiting in the wings.

### USA and Reception of Iraqi Refugees

While not party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the United States is signatory to the 1967 Protocol, which expanded the scope of the Convention refugee definition to include refugees from all regions of the world (Hathaway, 1991).[3] The Refugee Act of 1980 forms the present legal basis of refugee admissions to the United States, and employs the Convention refugee definition. According to the US Department of State (USDS), the Refugee Act 'embodies the American tradition of granting refuge to diverse groups suffering or fearing persecution' (US Department of State, 2001, p. 637). A 'well founded fear' of being persecuted for reasons of religion has historically constituted a significant rationale for the admission of refugees to the United States. The USDS writes in their 2005 International Religious Freedom Report that in the past ten years the US Refugee Admissions Program has been adjusting its focus toward more diverse refugee groups requiring protection for 'a variety of reasons, including religious beliefs' (US Department of State, 2005). The report's section on the Near East and North Africa details religious persecution being carried out against Christians within Iraq.

Iraqi refugees residing in Jordan who wish to resettle in the United States must first register with a UNHCR office.[4] This office makes determinations on a case-by-case basis about whether resettlement in a third country, be it the USA or another, constitutes the best solution. Should the office make a determination for US resettlement, it then works with the Department of Homeland Security and Resettlement support centers in processing the case. Upon arriving in the United States refugees are placed with a private volunteer agency (volag) that has signed a cooperative agreement with the State Department. These volunteer agencies generally have affiliates throughout the USA. They retain responsibility for assuring that most services are provided during the first 90 days of after a refugee's arrival. The services include making arrangements for food, housing, clothing, employment, counseling, medical care and other necessary services. Refugees in the United States are also eligible for cash assistance and medical assistance for their first eight months in the country, and for social services, employment assistance, and English language training for up to five years after their arrival (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011a).

The above policies and practices must be viewed within the context of US involvement in Iraq, and actual Iraqi refugee resettlement figures since 2003. Doing so presents a somber picture. A United States House of Representatives hearing on the Iraq War held on March 11 2008 focused on the US obligation to assist the then 4.5 million Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Adelman (2008) notes that Democrats insisted that the USA had a duty to provide aid for the refugees' survival in Jordan and Syria and 'even allow a few into the USA since the proximate cause of "this human tragedy" is the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath' (p. 181). Regrettably, the USA has moved slowly in meeting this obligation. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, in 2003 295 Iraqi refugees were admitted to the United States. This number dropped *down* to 65 the following year. In 2005 the number increased to 186, and made a very marginal increase to 189 in 2006. Only after 2007 did the number break one thousand (1605). In 2008 the

number jumped to 12,755 and reached 18,709 in 2009. Between 2010 and September 2011, an additional 21,482 Iraqis were resettled in the USA (US Department of State, 2011; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011b). Detroit is a major recipient of Iraqi refugees, and has hosted an influx of approximately 25,000 Chaldo-Assyrians over the past three years (Sterling & Karadsheh, 2010). Commenting on the mood in Washington around the time of the 2008 hearing, Adelman (2008) writes that Democrats wanted more aid provided, while Republicans wanted the refugees to return. Neither party, states Adelman, 'recognized the desire, need or responsibility of the USA to resettle large numbers of Iraqi refugees' as large numbers of minorities were thought unlikely to be able to return home given the ethnic and religious cleansing rampant in Iraq (p. 182).

### **Drawings and Discussion: the veritable nature of religious capital**

#### *Religious Capital and Schooling in Amman*

The functioning of Iraqi Christians' religious capital in Amman acts in countervailing fashions. Missed schooling in Iraq due to religious persecution continues to exert negative effects in Jordan, and yet Jordan by and large represents an environment where Iraqi Christians are free from the forms of religious persecution they had experienced in their home country. While Iraqi Christians might hold a slight advantage over Iraqi Shi'ites with respect to the acceptance and understanding of their religion in state schools, the actual value of their religious capital is rather diminished when it comes to the Jordanian curriculum, which both explicitly and implicitly advances an Islamic worldview. Non-Iraqi teachers and students in Jordan's schools display a pattern of subsuming all Iraqis, Christian and Muslims, under a more general category of 'foreigner', which diminishes recognition of Iraqis' particular forms of religious capital. Iraqi Christians may nonetheless wield this capital to their advantage with respect to resettlement prospects. Concomitantly, resettlement expectations cause them also to keep their children out of school.

Data from this project support the idea that religious identity is a key signifier within present-day Iraq, and that this signifier has had profound effects on schooling for Iraqi Christians within the country. Schools that Christians attend in Iraq have been destroyed. As well, targeted killings and kidnappings have severely impacted school continuity for Christian and many other Iraqi youth. Mansour, a male student now in the 10th grade, had been kidnapped while in Iraq. Here, with the help of his peers Adnon, a male in the 9th grade, and Grace (10th grade), he describes his ordeal:

*Mansour:* The Muslim people – I don't know how to say this ... The Muslim people stole me.

*Interviewer:* Oh?

*Mansour:* Yeah, and my dad paid \$10,000 to them to get me back to my home; you understand?

*Interviewer:* Yes, I do.

*Mansour:* They stole [kidnapped] me.

*Grace:* Because if his Dad don't pay, they are going to kill him.

*Mansour:* Yeah, they are going to kill me.

*Grace:* And taking his [parents'] children and his house.

*Interviewer:* Right. That is what happened in Iraq?

*Mansour:* Yeah. Right. That is what the Muslim people do to the Christian people.

*Adnon:* They are the terrorists ... When they took him they wanted money because they wanted money to buy guns.

Rena, an Iraqi mental-health worker based in Detroit reports most of her clients telling her that their children had missed five to eight years of schooling in Iraq because 'they were locked inside the homes in Iraq because of the war and the suicide bombing and stuff.'

What Mansour and Rena's statements demonstrate is an inverse relationship between religious capital, and their ability to live a stable life within Iraq. As will be demonstrated, for Iraqi Christians this same cultural capital which later manifests as a 'positional good' within both Jordanian and particularly US society functions negatively with respect to educational investment in Iraq. In sum, schooling in present-day Iraq makes it particularly difficult for Christians, unlike their Muslim peers, to convert their cultural capital into institutional and eventually economic capital.

Missed schooling in Iraq due to religious persecution has had negative consequences for Iraqi Christian students attending schools in Jordan. Most notably, Iraqi students find themselves lagging behind in comparison to their Jordanian peers. Naoki, a long-time NGO worker based in Amman who has spent years working in Iraq as well as Jordan, asserts that the situation Iraqis now face in Jordan is a bit ironic, as historically Iraq's education system was 'much more advanced than the education system in Jordan'. Further, prior to a decree issued by King Abdullah II in July 2007, most Iraqi refugees were unable to attend public schools. Hence, Iraqis who came into the country prior to July 2007 and who had already experienced gaps in their schooling, continued to remain out of school during that period. In addition, the Ministry of Education in Jordan bars children who have missed three or more years of schooling from re-entering formal education in the country (Zehr, 2008).

The interviews suggest that the religious identity of Iraqis has rather mixed effects with respect to schooling in Jordan. Islam is the official religion in Jordan, and interviews with Jordanian Ministry of Education officials strongly support that the formal curriculum and general school culture within Jordan's state schools advances an Islamic worldview.[5] The presence of Iraqi refugees has not significantly altered the official curriculum, and in fact the overall anti-integrationist stance on the part of the state makes it very unlikely that the schools will alter their present course. Sabah, a Jordanian researcher and activist states the following:

In regards to curriculum, it is the Jordanian curriculum. This is the problem. We have another problem, we tried to ask [the Ministry of Education] about their curriculum because we have kids who are coming from Baghdad who have a different curriculum. Okay, you have to know something. Iraqis here, they are guests, they are here temporarily. Don't expect them to integrate into the society. There is no way, like to change the curriculum. Curriculums is for Jordanians, and those residents who have residency who live in this country.

Sabah makes clear here the relationship between Jordan's overall policies and stance regarding Iraqi refugees, and the schooling made available to them. For many of the students I spoke with, Jordan seemed to be a place of transition rather than a permanent abode. However, others who work closely with the children expressed that some Iraqi Christian parents as well as their children were concerned about the religious programming within Jordan's public schools. Father Thomas Denha, who ministers a Chaldean church in Amman, reports that many Iraqi Christians feel excluded from the public schools' emphasis on the Koran, and Iraqi families come to him looking for more Christian-based education, which his church provides.

What the foregoing indicates is that the value of Iraqi Christians' religious capital is rather diminished when it comes to fully consuming the official (and non-official) curriculum in Jordan's public schools. Certainly they do not bring the religious capital that their Muslim peers possess, and hence are deficient in particular dispositions, knowledges, and competencies that might help them advance in school. A Bourdieuan analysis would necessarily examine the availability of religious capital across social classes within Jordanian society. However, presented here is a population of students entirely locked out of the game. Similar to schooling in Iraq, the disconnection between Iraqi Christians' religious capital and the official curriculum undoubtedly affects their conversion of this capital into institutional and economic forms, wherein they are likely at a competitive disadvantage in comparison to their Jordanian Muslim peers.

While Iraqi Christians' ability to maximize their religious knowledge, competencies and preferences within Jordan's schools is diminished, the data indicate that Jordanian teachers make Iraqi Christian students less conscious of their religious identity per se than of their overall identity as refugees, or as 'guests'. This is not to say that Christian students are not asked to self-identify as such. Sabah for instance states that it is routine within public schools for teachers to ask the religious identity of their students. However, what emerged more strongly within the study were occurrences of singling out Iraqi students in Jordan for being Iraqi. For instance, Mary and Hanna, both now in the 12th grade, had this to report about their experiences with Jordanian teachers:

*Interviewer:* Now the problems that you had with the teachers, were they just limited to being able to understand them, or were there other issues?

*Mary:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Like what?

*Mary:* Like you're Iraqi and why you came here? You made – the Iraqis made the prices up in Jordan and stuff like that, you know.

*Interviewer:* Yeah ...

*Mary:* Because they think we have a lot of money, the Iraqis.

*Interviewer:* Is that something they would say in front of the other students?

*Hanna and Mary:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Continuously, or just once in a while?

*Hanna:* Continuously. When they like to do [it], [then] they do it ...

*Mary:* Yeah.

*Hanna:* ... they don't care, the teachers, you know, [about] the other teachers or about the students themselves.

*Interviewer:* They didn't seem to care about how that made you feel with respect to the other students, like how the other students may look at you?

*Hanna:* Never.

In a later exchange regarding the level of support the students felt they had received from Jordanian teachers, Joseph (12th grade), stated the following; 'Like they say 'you're Iraqi, I could kick you out of this country.' Joseph also reported having experienced some harassment from his Jordanian as well as Palestinian classmates at school ('They always make fight with me'). Again this was not necessarily because of his Christian identity, but rather due to his identity as an Iraqi refugee.

Iraqi Christians' interactions with teachers and peers featured above highlight in this case their status as refugees overall. The students' statements make evident the degree to which government-controlled information flows regarding Iraqis (who they are, what they represent) might be influencing the views of the general public. Chatelard (2010) characterizes such information flows as a part of a hegemonizing state-driven rhetoric (p. 32) that shuts out competing perceptions of Iraqis' presence in Jordan (as represented, for instance, by Iraqis themselves).

With respect to possible religious discrimination occurring within the public schools, the respondents indicated that Iraqi Shi'ites have had more cause for concern than the Christians. Jordan is a Sunni dominant country, and Shia Islam has been viewed with suspicion by the public, fueled to no small degree by the kingdom's warning of a 'Shi'ite Crescent' emerging in postwar Iraq, concentrated particularly in the south (Sassoon, 2009; Chatelard, 2010).[6] The religious capital of Shi'ite Iraqis manifesting as a negative asset within Jordan's schools slightly privileges Iraqi Christians by comparison. What the interviews tell more strongly however is that religion matters in the schools, and that the religious identity of students still functions as a key marker of identity, even when subsumed within larger discourses regarding status within society. Iraqi Christians and Iraqi Shi'ites are both 'guests', however, between the two, Shi'ites are even more suspect because of their religion. Describing the importance of religion within Jordanian society, Adil, a program manager at an Amman-based NGO states that upon meeting someone new Jordanians are apt to first ask of that person's religion, prior even to their nationality.

The value of Iraqi Christians' religious capital reveals itself perhaps most prominently with respect to resettlement prospects and processes. Sassoon (2009) writes that a key difference between Muslim and non-Muslim Iraqis in Jordan is that the latter have been more successful in the resettlement process. There exists a strong network of churches and Christian organizations in Amman that help facilitate Iraqi refugee resettlement, and Iraqi Christians are at an advantage to access and make use of this system. Here they may utilize to their advantage their positional goods, acquired through such inputs as attending church services and participating in church social networks. There are further external factors that complement these forces. Sassoon (2009) for instance asserts that the rise of Islamic extremism in Iraq has significantly reduced the chances for the return of Iraqi minority religious groups. Secondly, many non-Muslim minorities have relatives living in Europe, Australia, and North America, making their chances to secure visas somewhat easier (Sassoon, 2009). Finally, some countries such as Germany have expressed a preference for resettling Iraqi Christian refugees (Melander, 2008), although technically asylum cannot be used in this way within international law.

One of the unfortunate outcomes of resettlement expectations is missed schooling. Many Iraqi parents either withdraw their children from schooling in Jordan or do not enroll them at all out of expectations that they will soon be resettling to a new country. This phenomenon presents

an interesting dynamic with respect to the value of religious capital; its function as a positive asset with respect to resettlement prospects doubles over negatively with respect to school enrollment and continuity. This elasticity of religious capital, for better or worse, underscores Erel's (2010) assertion that migrants exercise agency by creating new forms of 'migration-specific' capital. Working from Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), Erel further stresses that the migrant's overall capital (the composite of cultural, economic, and social capital) is mediated by their 'position taking', and how they strategize to employ their capital. In this sense what we might be seeing within the Iraqi Christian community in Jordan is the investment of capital toward a life dreamt but not yet lived.

#### *Religious Capital and Schooling in Detroit*

Similar to Amman, Iraqi Christians' religious capital continues to work in contradictory fashions in Detroit. Missed schooling in Iraq as well as Jordan exerts negative effects in US schools. Yet the USA, even more so than Jordan, represents an environment where Iraqi Christians can enjoy freedom from religious persecution. In fact, the religious capital of Iraqi Christians functions to advantage them in the USA in ways that are impossible in Jordan. The empowerment Iraqi Christians enjoy in the USA allows them to more directly confront their former oppressors; however, it remains a rather private experience. There still exists a national anxiety that views newcomers from the Arab world as threats to public safety and national security. As with Iraqis in Jordan, this diminishes recognition of Iraqis' particular forms of religious capital.

Iraqi Christian students in Detroit continue to experience the effects of the religious persecution they experienced within Iraq, and the consequences this had for their schooling in Jordan. In short, their disruptions in schooling in Iraq and then Jordan are at the root of many challenges they face in US schools. These challenges span a number of areas; however, the most notable include lost documents and records necessary for school enrollment, large gaps in English language training, parental lack of experience and familiarity regarding involvement in their children's schooling, and serious psychological issues associated with witnessing the atrocities of war.

Laura, a program coordinator at a volag in Detroit states that lost health records can be a significant issue when it comes to enrolling children in schools. Likewise, families often have incomplete school records or transcripts. These conditions are only compounded by varying degrees of English on the part of both youth and their parents. For instance, students interviewed were unanimous in stating that language has been the biggest 'cultural shock' for them in coming to the United States, and that learning English has been one of their biggest challenges with respect to integration. A lack of English skills also constitutes one of the chief barriers to parental involvement. However, it is not the only one. Rena, the Detroit-based mental-health worker notes for instance that the experience of conflict in Iraq has sometimes had tremendously disrupting effects on family dynamics and power structures, with women often suddenly forced into roles foreign to their cultural backgrounds. Rena reports that in Iraq teachers are 'the boss', and parents can expect them to provide forms of discipline that may be even unlawful in the United States ('they can hit, they can do whatever they want with your kid'). Parents, and mothers in particular, thus find themselves at a loss as to how to fulfill the types of expectations exerted upon them by the schools. Rena speaks also about the issue of psychological problems Iraqi school children are experiencing, many of which she asserts can be directly linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The majority of those adults interviewed in Detroit in fact indicated mental-health issues as being a significant problem within the Iraqi diaspora. In sum, if Iraqis are experiencing school difficulties in Jordan because of resettlement expectations, they are experiencing school difficulties in the United States because of the realities of resettlement.

While in Jordan the religious capital of Iraqi Christians has rather mixed effects with respect to schooling, it functions to quietly advantage them in the United States. The United States of course does not have an official state religion, and the First Amendment Establishment and Free Speech clauses form the legal basis for church-state separation (Cambron-McCabe et al, 2008). Nonetheless, there is a dominant culture in the United States, and this culture is highly influenced by Christianity (Blumenfeld, 2006). One of the primary functions of schools in the USA, as in other societies, is that of cultural reproduction, and while they may not explicitly advance a Christian

worldview, it is very difficult if not impossible to disentangle school organization and formal as well as informal curriculum from Christian influence (Blumenfeld, 2006). Hence, Iraqi Christians do not have to fear being singled out within US schools for their religious status (to the degree that they are recognized as Christians by their teachers and peers, and general public). Iraqi Christians can also benefit from a weekly school calendar that allows them to attend church on Sundays, and a holiday schedule that recognizes Christian holidays (Blumenfeld, 2006), and they can share these events with other members of the Christian majority culture.

Given the above, it is not surprising that students interviewed did not voice any challenges to their religious identities within US schools. Their religious capital in US schools now recedes largely into the background and is perhaps taken for granted, and Iraqi Christian students are not called to be conscious of it in the ways that minority religion students often can be (Blumenfeld, 2006; Collet, 2010b). The value of their religious capital in schools becomes clearer to them when they compare their experiences with their Iraqi Muslim peers. One of the most interesting and rather shocking things that student interviewees reported was their knowledge of Iraqi Muslims 'who wish they were Christian'. This is captured in the exchange below:

*Interviewer:* Do you experience any difficulties with any of the other immigrant students because you are Christian?

*Grace:* No. The Muslim students they always tell me, 'gosh we want to be Christian.'

*Interviewer:* The Muslim students are telling you that they want to be Christian?

*Grace:* Yeah. We have one student, he's always wanting something from the Christians.

*Adnon:* Me, too.

*Interviewer:* Is that right? Why do you think that is happening?

*Grace:* Like maybe they thought they are in a county just for the Christian, and they want to be like us.

*Interviewer:* But do you think the school is telling them to do that?

*Grace:* No.

The above indicates that Iraqi Christians' religious capital takes on a currency within US schools that would seem impossible in public schools in Jordan, particularly in this case with respect to its social aspects. The religious demographics of Detroit work to Iraqi Christians' advantage in this respect. Shryock & Chih Lin (2009) find that approximately 95% of Arabs living in the Middle East are Muslim, whereas those living in greater Detroit are majority Christian. In addition, they find that the general non-Arab population in the Detroit area is 81% Christian and only 2% Muslim. Howell & Jamal (2009) in turn state that within Arab Detroit, Muslims and Christians tend not to live in the same neighborhoods.

As the value of religious capital rises amongst Iraqi Christians in the USA, perhaps not surprisingly so also does their degree of voiced aversion against Muslims; Iraqi, as well as others. If, within the Amman diaspora, the religious divisions so violently enforced in Iraq appear to be downplayed (and repressed), they are being revived within Detroit. Iraqi Christians may now be feeling the security of identifying, at least in one way, with the majority culture as well as being a very strong and tightly knit immigrant religious community (Howell & Jamal, 2009). That is not to say that Iraqi Christians and Muslims do not get along once resettled in the United States. They do, and I found plenty of mixing within the populations I interviewed. However, the interviews also included accounts showing rather strong aversion directed toward Muslims based on religiously motivated violence and oppression experienced in Iraq. Rena describes the feelings of one Iraqi family (her clients) who had been the victims of religiously targeted violence before fleeing Iraq:

*Rena:* I have [a] family, the mom was telling me the other day she just found out there was a Muslim refugee family in front of, like across of, her apartment.

*Interviewer:* Yes.

*Rena:* And she said the other day – she always knew she lived there but she never had any contact.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Rena:* Because her husband was killed by the Muslim militia. Excuse me.

*Interviewer:* Right.

*Rena:* They build this, even the kids, the eleven-year-old, the thirty-year-old son, the nineteen-

and the twenty-three [year-old], they build like this anger that they cannot be around Muslims.

*Interviewer:* Yes.

*Rena:* So when they saw her the twelve-year-old came out and he came to his mom and he was like, 'A Muslim lady is outside, I do not want to go.' He had a lot of anger. They are trying to repress those memories. Now they are associating these people, the Muslim people with the veil, 'They killed my dad. I lost my dad.'

*Interviewer:* Sure.

*Rena:* And he cannot distinguish that she was not the lady. She said, I never had an issue, but now I have issues with these people, I cannot be around them.

Rena's story indicates that (at least some) Iraqi Christian youth are generalizing all Muslims as those responsible for violence targeted against them in Iraq. This of course is not uncommon in wartime environments. The fear and antagonism among Iraqi Christians toward Muslims has not only personal but also policy targets. When asked what he would do if he were made US president, Mansour, the young man who had been held hostage while in Iraq, stated, 'I'm not going to let any Muslim into this country!'

Mansour is able to make this claim based to a large degree on his own religious capital. It would be contradictory for an Iraqi Muslim in America to make this statement. However, while the religious capital of Iraqi Christians may enjoy greater currency in the United States, it is not always enough to counter perceptions of them directed from the mainstream. In the exchange below, Hanna and Mary answer questions about the degree to which they feel accepted in America:

*Interviewer:* Do you feel accepted in America?

*Hanna:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* How do you know you feel accepted? What tells you that you feel accepted?

*Mary:* Some people I feel like [are] treating me good.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Mary:* But I think some of them don't because of 9/11, they think we are terrorists.

*Interviewer:* So it is mixed?

*Mary:* Uhm-um.

*Interviewer:* Some people treat you well?

*Hanna and Mary:* Some don't.

*Interviewer:* Some don't?

*Hanna:* No.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever been accused of that kind of thing by somebody?

*Hanna:* No.

*Interviewer:* How do you know about it then?

*Hanna:* Everyone talks about it.

Despite their membership within the religious majority, Mary and Hanna have still felt singled out for being members of a (perceived) 'enemy'. There are thus limitations regarding the power of religious capital within this context. The US War on Terror has resulted in a state of fear that threatens to blind the public to important inter-community differences within the Iraqi diaspora. Shryock & Chih Lin for instance write:

After September 11, 2001 ... Arab Detroit was suddenly a focus of national anxiety. It was highly visible, even overexposed, but its residents could not always control how they were depicted in national and international media. Being seen did not mean being understood. (Shryock & Chih Lin, 2009, p. 36)

If in Jordan the public has been led to view Iraqis as 'predators' who are altering the economy for the worse, in the USA they are perceived to have been subsumed within a larger population of would-be Arab terrorists who are threatening public safety and national security. Howell & Jamal (2009) write that due to its history and its well organized political culture, Arab Detroit was able to effectively work with local and national government as well as local media to offset their becoming the epicenter of a 9/11 public backlash. Iraqis in Amman have not been as effective in countering the public backlash occurring against them there. Yet as resilient as Arab Detroit proved itself in the

aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Detroit is but one location on the map of a much larger national narrative.

Student interviewees were in fact equally if not more vocal about a second type of social hostility within the schools. Whereas students spoke of hostility directed toward them by both Jordanians as well as Palestinians because of their identities as foreigners while in Jordan, they spoke of hostility directed toward them by their fellow Iraqis in the USA. Here the issue is not necessary a matter of being a 'temporary foreigner', as being a new permanent arrival. Within Iraqi as well as other immigrant communities, 'boater' is a pejorative term to denote newcomers who do not conform to particular social norms (Sarroub, 2005). In this study, interviewees indicated that 'boater' was used to distinguish new arrivals (Christians as well as Muslims) from those who were either born in the United States, or who came when they were quite young (less than five years old) and who have had time to at least partially assimilate into the dominant culture. Interestingly, the term has also found its way into vocabulary used by teachers. While the majority of students interviewed had fairly good reports about their teachers in US schools (particularly those teachers who were also immigrants or who expressed sensitivity to the needs of newcomers), Mansour reported one teacher at his school as saying that she 'didn't want the Iraqi people, because they are boaters'.

The boater phenomenon reveals additional insights into the context-dependent use and worth of cultural capital for Iraqis. The interviewees described boater confrontations between peers as struggles over what constitutes a 'real Iraqi' or how to 'be' Iraqi. To work from Erel's (2010) notion of position taking, the interviewees have held on to their Iraqi identity, and describe their accusers as falsely trying to look and act 'cool.' Traditional forms of cultural capital are here strategically used by the students as a way of maintaining their ethnic identity. As in Jordan's schools, Iraqi Christians' religious capital in these cases again appears to be subsumed within a larger identity of 'being Iraqi'; however, at the national stage the category of Iraqi itself takes a meaning different than the one in national circulation in Jordan.

### **Conclusion: religious capital and theatres of power in comparative context**

A full appreciation of the comparative findings discussed must incorporate the larger constructions of national foreign policy and economic interests, including refugee policies, occurring within the two nation states. Examination of these larger sets of power relations exposes macro-level influences that affect the way religious capital functions in both the context-dependent as well as countervailing manners discussed. To begin, the fact that Iraqi Christian students in Detroit continue to experience the effects of an inverse relationship between their religious capital and their quality of life in Iraq, and the consequences this has had for schooling in Jordan, exposes the degree to which they remain casualties of the US invasion of Iraq. Jordan's refugee policies in turn retain Iraqis as a non-integrating underclass and as such serve to aggravate those issues that a more integration-friendly orientation might begin to resolve (for instance, more assertive attempts to help Iraqis catch up in their education).

Those Iraqi Christians whose resettlement to the United States is facilitated by religious networks in Amman see their religious capital functioning as a positive asset. However, this is still a privilege and not a given. 2.5% of the total number of Iraqi refugees in the world have resettled to the United States (Sassoon, 2009; US Department of State, 2011). Hence the ability of Iraqis to wield their religious capital to their advantage is still highly mediated by a thus far overall restrictive US refugee policy, which in the recent past has in part been a product of fears over an admission of failure in Iraq (Sassoon, 2009). Relative Iraqi Christian privilege with respect to resettlement does not negate other capital deficits they have incurred; it does not make the reverberating effects of the war and their missed schooling disappear. Hence religious capital continues to manifest countervailing tendencies, even for those in the US diaspora.

Thirdly, the empowerment that Iraqi Christians in the USA have experienced with respect to their religious capital has enabled them to more openly voice their aversion to their former oppressors. Here they may find support in a dominant ideology that sees Arabs as well as other Muslims as 'a problem' (Howell & Jamal, 2009). Iraqi Christians cannot enjoy the support of such an ideology on the Jordanian side. In fact, it is quite the opposite, as the prevailing dominant

ideology in Jordan communicates nearly the reverse. So Iraqi Christians there remain quiet and low key. Freedom of expression is a defining virtue of the liberal democratic state (Kymlicka, 1995). Yet, as Kymlicka (1995) would likely assert, a dominant ideology that positions minority groups as a problem in the sense noted above runs contrary to the cultivation of multiculturalism and multicultural citizenship.

As it is, the religious capital of Iraqi Christians it is not always strong enough to counter prevalent perceptions of them. This again reveals the degree to which a larger struggle for ideological domination produces countervailing tendencies; Iraqi Christians may now be able openly to express aversion to their former oppressors, however the national public culture does not know the difference. Iraqi Christians may still fall victim to being perceived as the 'bad' Arabs, a categorization that is itself problematic.

Finally, episodes of hostility directed toward Iraqi Christians by both their peers and teachers in Jordan as well as US schools shows that religious identity may be subsumed within the larger identity of 'being Iraqi'. This category is deeply informed by prevailing notions of citizenship, and of who is entitled to own it. This is particularly apparent in the case of Jordan, where Iraqi students are labeled not as refugees but rather as foreigners. In Jordan, foreign aid continues to flow to assist the state in dealing with the refugees, and so the country has a vested interest in making their Iraqi refugee numbers known to the international community. Yet Iraqis are severely restricted from integrating into Jordanian society; they cannot legally work, and (most) are effectively shut out from gaining citizenship. This greatly diminishes the value of their cultural capital toward any real or effective conversions within the Jordanian economy. The state has little reason to invest in them in terms of human capital, at least with respect to its own economy. In the USA, inasmuch as they are granted permanent residency status and thus a path toward citizenship, schooling Iraqi refugees promises human capital returns. However, newcomers from the Arab world continue to be nationally viewed as a suspect class. We do not yet know how this will fully play itself out with respect to converting their cultural, and specifically religious capital into institutional and economic forms. However, so long as there remains anxiety as well as ignorance about the identity of Iraqis, they may stand to lose as much as they stand to win.

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### Notes

- [1] Most interviewees were also themselves Iraqi Christian refugees.
- [2] Iraqi refugees in Jordan do not live in isolated 'refugee camps'. Rather, they have settled in urban areas scattered among the local population.
- [3] The 1951 Convention's mandate reads that a refugee includes any person who, 'as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it' (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2010, p. 14).
- [4] According to the US Department of State (USDS), Iraqis with US affiliations have the option of applying directly to the US Refugee Admissions Program without the need for a referral from the UNHCR (US Department of State, 2011).
- [5] Ministry of Education officials assert that Christians can opt out of taking Islamic education courses. However, Islam and teachings of the Koran pervade the entire school curriculum and culture, and the teaching of Islamic values is not restricted to Islamic education courses alone.
- [6] Human Rights Watch (HRW), the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), and the International Crisis Group (ICG) have all reported Shia Iraqi being singled out and in some cases

turned away at the border (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009; International Crisis Group, 2008; Sassoon, 2009).

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