

The Assyrian Diaspora:
Hometown Associations as a Means to
Cultural Preservation and Community Development

Samuel Tamo

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
MA Social Justice & Human Rights

Approved May, 2014 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Natasha Behl, Chair
Dr. Souad Ali
Dr. Miral Maghoub

Arizona State University

May 2014

ABSTRACT

Assyrians face numerous concerns resulting from the status of a stateless people. Overcoming immigrant transitions, difficulties related to diaspora, and the implications of these on Assyrian culture are pressing matters to be addressed in the evolution of the Assyrian nation. In order to develop a strategy to benefit individuals, families and the nation, Hometown Associations, a form of nonprofit organization, may be used to connect, assist, and progress Assyrian communities. This thesis provides background, rationale for, and guidelines to creating Hometown Associations for Assyrian communities. Ultimately, Hometown Associations and other forms of cultural organizations appear to be a viable means toward community solidarity and cultural preservation. However, further research and more diverse subjects are required to assess the generalizeability of the findings discussed.

I have been blessed with an amazing family that has supported and motivated me throughout my academic career. That family, in large part, has also been shaped by the values and history of Assyria. Having identified heavily with Assyrian culture during these first impactful years of my life I am honored to present, as the culmination of my academic career thus far, a response to the current conditions we are facing together as a nation. My father, Joseph Elia Tamo, my mother, Susan Tamo, and my sister Sarah Sobik have guided me to this point and I will forever be grateful for their undeniable contributions. My brother-in-law, Oliver Sobik, has set a critical and disciplined example of scholarly integrity. And, finally, my extended family including aunts, uncles, cousins, teachers and friends have each played a significant role in pushing me forward. This document is devoted to all of these individuals and, of course, to the Assyrian nation.

Acknowledgements

The Assyrians who participated in this study are undoubtedly central in the gathering of information necessary to even produce this study. More than their participatory role, though, I would like to thank all Assyrians for a continued struggle to remain steadfast in our journey towards cultural and national preservation. Put simply, without the support of the Assyrian community, and specifically the Assyrian community within the Phoenix metro-area I would not have been able to complete this work.

I would also like to thank my committee including, Drs. Natasha Behl, Souad Ali, and Miral Maghoub. Each of these enthusiastic, caring, and experienced women provided guidance and support that I could never repay. Their consideration to matters I failed to attend, constructive critique of the work I submitted to them, and genuine mentorship throughout the research process helped me grow as a student, as a researcher, and as empowered, yet stateless, individual.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. PROLOGUE.....	1
II. THE ‘STATE’ OF THE ASSYRIAN NATION: THEORY.....	8
Framework.....	8
Application and Rationale.....	15
Assyrian Diaspora.....	16
Hometown Associations.....	21
III. RESEARCH BY AND FOR ASSYRIANS: METHODOLOGY.....	23
Methodological Literature: Interviews and Focus Groups.....	23
General Process and Points of Interest.....	28
The Dynamic Path of Field Research: My Role, the Research Focus, and Implications Therein.....	32
IV. EMPOWERING ASSYRIANS: WHERE ARE WE AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?: DATA ANALYSIS.....	40
On the Research	40
On the Data.....	41
Focus Group.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Background and Themes.....	44
The Assyrian Church of the East.....	46
Community and Societal Structure.....	50
Youth.....	53
Organization.....	55
Homeland.....	58
Interview.....	60
Introduction.....	60
Analysis.....	61
Important Components of Building a Cultural Organization.....	61

	Page
Goals and Obstacles.....	67
V. REVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH: DISCUSSION.....	70
Critique and Further Research.....	70
Can Hometown Associations be Applied to Assyrian Communities?.....	74
Bibliography.....	76
Appendix.....	80

Prologue

An Overview of the Primary Aspects of Assyrian History

As an Assyrian I have been interested in the history of my people for most of my life. However, I have also come to find that a large part of the general public has little, if any, background in who Assyrians are and where we come from. Ignorance and lack of acknowledgement are undoubtedly factors that have influenced the historical timeline of Assyria. Considering that the nation of Assyria and modern Assyrian communities are central foci of this study, it is important to acquire a basic understanding of Assyrian history and the path that has led to the nation's current circumstances before reviewing this research. In fact, the historical story of Assyria highlights some of the most relevant and impactful events leading towards the need for academic and activist-based research regarding the future of this nation.

The Assyrian people have roamed this earth for millennia and continue to strive for their rightful place in the history of humankind. Emerging from the city-state of Ashur during the third millennium B.C.E., Assyria became host to the world's most prominent military which protected one of the world's most lavishly developed civilizations. During this early period, the city-state of Ashur rose politically through its military prowess and economically through extensive trade centered on copper (Barjamovic, 2011, p. 2). These beginnings have made way for the sustenance of a culture erupting with vitality and tradition until the present day. For obvious reasons, modern-day Assyrians cannot be said to maintain the same lifestyles as their battle-ridden ancestors. However, the soul of the Assyrian nation can easily be seen within the habits and beliefs of its descendants. Following is a brief account of the history that guided the

evolution of a nation over thousands of years. This outline of events will provide the reader with a greater understanding of how Assyrians have been gradually and tragically pushed into diaspora and marginalization.

Once the empire gained a significant amount of power from trade and various political and military moves like building alliances with other empires like Mitanni, Assyria reached its first Golden Age which lasted until the first millennium B.C.E. The catalyst of this flourishing time was King Sargon of Akkad (Parker, 2007, pgs. 361, 371, & 374). He is a well-known ruler amongst historians and celebrated by those who call him ancestor. However, because of his zeal for power, land, and reverence he has also been claimed by Assyrians with his empire having extended through the great Assyrian cities of Ashur and Arbel (BetBasoo, 2013). Supplementing the work of King Sargon, King Shamshi-Adad I produced a major breakthrough for imperial Assyria with his ability to unify Ashur, Nineveh, and Arbel. Ashur was the initial city from which Assyrians rose. It is named after the head deity among the in the pantheon of the ancient Assyrian Empire. Nineveh became one of the most luxuriant, developed, and architecturally-advanced cities the old world had ever known. Arbel was the lead city in economic production and market proliferation. Thus, the unification of these three cities undoubtedly aided the solidification of the Assyrian state at this time and promoted a flourishing future (BetBasoo, 2013).

During this Middle Period the continuation of Assyrian prevalence must be attributed to foreign kings. However, Assyrian rule resurfaced when Ashur-Uballit gained power from Mittanian control around 1365 B.C.E. (Postgate, 1992, p. 248). Tukulti- Ninurta initiated Assyria's Babylonian conquest during his reign around the

brink of the 13th and 12th centuries. From the earliest imperial endeavors to the most productive era of conquest under kings Ashurnazirpal II and King Shalmenesar III in the 9th century, Assyria became the hegemon of Mesopotamia and the largest empire the world had known to date. The land of Ashur stretched through Syria and Armenia across most of the modern day Middle East, including what previously stood as almighty Babylon (Postgate, 1992, pgs. 247-255). Eventually Assyria reached its imperial climax under King Ashurbanipal. He was the last monarch to extend territorial expansion. More significantly, he provided perhaps the most significant contribution to modern knowledge of ancient Mesopotamia through his commission of a library which accumulated 30,000 tablets from the variety of cultures represented in the Assyrian Empire (Fincke, 2003, p. 111). Following this flourishing period, Assyria's capital at Nineveh fell to the combined power of Babylon and the Persian Medes in 612 B.C.E. (Alcock, 2001, p. 612).

For much of the next 600, years Assyrians simply focused on maintaining their families and lifestyles. With no state, they were obligated to work under the regulation of a ruler not their own. For the people of the great empire of Assyria, this was a vastly different world than the one their ancestors took centuries to build. Attempting a resurgence of Assyrian nationality and the acquisition of land proved difficult for Assyrian refugees who were also unfortunately the first of a diaspora that has come to impact millions. Their contemporary Persian rulers prevented the success of their revolution and castrated 400 of the leaders (AINA.org). When military strength failed, the recuperation of the Assyrian people came in correlation with the spread of the story of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostles Thomas, Thaddeus, and Bartholomew traveled to Edessa and established the Assyrian Church of the East. This church represents the convergence

of the Assyrian nation with Christianity. This mission undoubtedly progressed the Assyrian nation in solidarity and preservation. The influence of the Church of the East reached ears from Syria to the far-east states of China, Korea, and Japan. It even surmounted the obstacles of embedded tradition with Mongolian converts and that of the sea by reaching the Philippines (AINA.org).

The Church of the East developed Assyrian nationality and culture during this period possibly more than can be said of any other time. Continuing the decree of Ashurbanipal and his library, Assyrians – motivated by the schools of the Assyrian Church of the East - began translating Greek works of antiquity into Assyrian and expanded Grecian knowledge in science, philosophy and medicine. In fact, the Assyrian translations laid the foundation for the Arabic translations of these significant cascades of knowledge ultimately facilitating the European Renaissance. Recreating the vivacity of the European tradition, the Moors unknowingly returned centuries old concepts and literary pieces to the continent. Perpetuating the new path of progression, Assyrians provided the world with something it had not yet seen: a university (O’Leary, 1949, pgs. 47-55). The School of Nisbis was comprised of three colleges: medicine, philosophy, and theology. Having revived and adapted in a cultural transformation as well as offered the intellectual stimulant of a university, the Assyrians’ revitalized nation would take yet another hard blow at the beginning of the 14th century C.E. (Becker, 2006, pgs. 77-80).

One of the most repressive periods for the Assyrian nation, as well as individual Assyrians around the world, was the demise of the vigorous proliferation of the Church of the East. Timurlane the Mongol proved to be the primary nemesis of the advancements the Church had made until his violent excursions. Due to the lack of growth and

centralization of the church, divisions occurred within the Assyrian nation that have now become so detrimental to the nation's identity. The Syrian Orthodox Church retained its Jacobites while many held steadfast in their adherence to the Church of the East. The Chaldean Church divided the nation even more sharply around 1550 C.E. and three separate communities have taken shape since this time: Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs (Baumer, 2006, pgs. 247-265).

The modern era (beginning with the 20th century) has seen some of the most atrocious events affecting the Assyrian nation. During the World War I Assyrians and Armenians alike felt the pains of a truly gross modern genocide. At the onset of official war between Turkey and Russia, the native Christians in and around Urmiya were set to play a center role in what would come to pass. On January 2nd, 1915, the Christians of this area gathered word that the Russians who previously protected them in the region were now withdrawing and leaving the Assyrians and Armenians void of necessities and in the way of the incensed Kurds and Turks who felt religiously infringed upon by their counterpart Christian community. Every man, woman, and child began a fearsome trek towards the Russian border. Trudging through snow and mud merely to escape the thrash of violently evangelical Muslims was a lesser concern with pregnancies, diseases, and various logistics further hindering the migration (Travis, 2006, pgs. 332-338). At the end of World War I, the Sykes-Picot Agreement allotted Mosul (formerly the Imperial Assyrian capital of Nineveh) to France. Over the next few years this decision was reassessed though never with the representation of the Assyrian community (Anonymous, 2004, pgs. 20-22).

In the mid-1920s, a Frontiers Commission was created for the protection of the

Assyrians. Their return to Turkey, freedom, and compensation for materials lost during World War I were all vital priorities of the League of Nations. Also, it was determined that the Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun would maintain authority over the Assyrian nation. On June 5, 1926, Britain and Turkey settled a treaty regarding the borders of Mosul that allotted the land's oil reserves to Britain and allowed for Britain's continuous denial of Assyrian rights (Malek & Wigram, 1935, p. 90). This Treaty of Angora ignited years of complaints, petitions, and pleas by the Assyrian people to the League of Nations concerning their rights and gross mistreatment by the British. Various political powers cooperated and manipulated the international scene including Britain and Iraq until 1933, when yet another genocide devastated the Assyrian nation. Beginning August 6th, 1933 the Iraqi Army and Kurdish militia massacred an estimated 3000 Assyrians (Travis, 2006, p. 346). Priests were tortured and the bodies mutilated. Girls were raped and women violated and made to march naked before the Arab commanders. Holy books were used as fuel for burning girls. Children were run over by military cars. Pregnant women were bayoneted. Children were flung in the air and pierced on the points of bayonets (Malik, 1934, p. 145). As is illustrated here, this massacre was no mere mass murder but a horrid underlining of the catastrophes that await a nation forsaken and manipulated by the international community.

Since this time, Assyrians have attempted to gain momentum in rebuilding their nation and have gained some reparation for the tragedies that have befallen the community. As of 2007, Iraq continues to host the majority of dispersed Assyrians (Petrosian, 2006, p. 114). Its neighbor, Syria, hosts the second largest amount, although the 700,000 Assyrians in Syria compare little with the 1.5 million in Iraq. Furthermore,

these statistics are largely incredible beyond 2007 due to the immense chaos that has taken place in both countries. Throughout the globe, the various host-states of Assyrians include the United States, Sweden, Lebanon, Germany, Russia, Iran, Jordan, Australia, France, Mexico, Greece, and many more (AINA.org).

Learning of this history and growing in academia has catalyzed an informed and much more sound comprehension of the circumstances and struggle of the Assyrian nation. The research that follows is a direct response to an awareness of the aforementioned tragedies and conditions. A theoretical framework aims to target the roots of the contemporary status of the nation and moves to assist in a plan of action for hindering the loss of a nation. There is much to lose from the death of the Assyrian nation: diversity and historical roots of knowledge and culture are among the greatest. The true motivation for this research and thus the protection of Assyria people is the recognition of the atrocities inevitably facing an unacknowledged, minority, diasporic nation.

Part I – Theory **The ‘State’ of the Assyrian Nation**

Framework

Structural Functionalism in conjunction with Critical Race Theory serve to ground the analysis of the impact race can have on a particular group of people; in this case, the diasporic, stateless Assyrian nation. The foundation for understanding the current circumstances and potential path for Assyrians as a result of racial identity derives out of an element that Structural Functionalism and Critical Race Theory (CRT) place a particular emphasis on: the interconnectedness of societal facets. One of the most impactful of these facets concerning the Assyrian nation is racial identity and its significance in the current global system.

To a great degree Structural Functionalism represents a broader notion of the specific emphasis placed on race by CRT. Structural Functionalism highlights that “most societies are integrated to the extent that many, if not all, of their several elements are reciprocally adjusted” (Merton, 1968, p. 95). As mentioned, one of these elements is race. In fact, race can be considered a continually impactful feature of many societies. Critical Race Theory hones in on this socially constructed element and questions the still present negative impact of race at a time when most political states vehemently reject inequality based on race. As a response to the enduring existence of racial discrimination, Critical Race theory suggests, “that racism is ordinary and normal in contemporary society, indeed perhaps integral to social practices and institutions” (Harris, 2012, p. 5). That is to say that the entrenchment of race in society is dependent upon many influential social elements virtually overriding the impact of legal policy.

Regardless of a long-fought struggle to move out of institutionalized and socialized racism, Assyrians are marginalized due to their lack of a state and, consequently, a political entity or autonomous economic base. In an exceedingly globalizing world it is inevitably more and more difficult to make an impact or even be recognized without the capacity to assist established and legally recognized nation-states. As a diasporic nation Assyrians are reminded of their marginalization by numerous governments on multiple continents. The lack of capacity to play a role in the interconnected elements Merton discusses produces racism common for groups like Assyrians with little voice. As a nation it is fundamental for Assyrians to understand the role race plays on their progression and existence. By doing so the nation can begin to play an informed, active role in preserving culture and overcoming the less positive, racial features of the modern societies Assyrians reside.

The presence of institutionalized racism may be attributed to the complex of society as a whole. Structural Functionalism and Critical Race Theory help view the system as a connected line of actions and consequences, one of which is institutionalized racism. Two of the fathers of Structural Functionalism are Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton. These two theorists present much of the theoretical basis for Structural Functionalism while many have analyzed, utilized, and critiqued Structural Functionalism in their work. This paradigm first gained ground in America in the 1950s and early 1960s (Huaco, 1986, p. 35). It's premise on the connectivity of all, or at least, most social elements within a society is a defining platform. This idea is reiterated by nearly all functionalist theorists as "society could not exist" were it not for the interconnectedness and dependence of social relations (Chilcott, 1998, p. 104). It is

imperative to recognize the influence that institutional, standard, and historically based structures have on the daily lives of all individuals within a society. This can be especially true for Assyrians and other immigrants. The inevitable effects of this systemic construction rarely, if ever, allow for permeable and mobile dissonance within the expected racial hierarchies already evident.

When implemented as a practical field approach, Functionalism becomes a “modus operandi” for interpreting social dynamics. It leads to critical inquiry including the more obvious wonders of why and how people interact and, more importantly, “what are the unintended repercussions of their actions on the institutional network?” (Chilcott, 1998, p. 106). However, without a substantial platform on which to organize Assyrians have little effect on the repercussions and interactions related to the Assyrian nation.

Chilcott’s two questions highlight Merton’s manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions refer to “those objective consequences contributing to the adjustment or adaption of the system which are intended and recognized by participants in the system” (Merton, 1968, p. 105). Latent functions are “unintended and generally unrecognized social and psychological consequences” (Merton, 1968, p. 107). Both of these types of functions must be considered by stateless peoples. Without organization, stateless peoples cannot impact or cultivate manifest functions. This reality consequently quiets the voice of diasporic peoples. Ignoring the connectedness of social roles and these facets of society can prove to be problematic and can ultimately lead to a romanticized misconception of society’s function and exchanges (Merton, 1968, p. 107). Instead, identifying latent functions – those that allude to *below the surface* indicators and influences on society – as well as tangible actions that impact the societal structure, or

manifest functions, - may exhibit cause and effect phenomena in society's operations. A proactive mindset in such an identification process can empower groups and individuals allowing the potential for a voice in influential and adjustable features.

Concluding a Functionalist approach to the impact race has on Assyrians, one must consider Parsons' four features of human societies concerning culture and social organization. These include technology, kinship, communication (language), and religion (1964, p. 341-342). All of these greatly apply to the structure and foundation of Assyrian society and culture with kinship, language, and religion highlighting a few of the nation's most valuable staples. From these four features develop organizational complexes that will ultimately move society in whichever direction the actions of its components have urged (Parsons, 1964). Therefore, comprehension of society's functions and features can engage a strategic method of utilizing these features. An informed and active Assyrian nation can eventually create a route towards increasing awareness and, consequently, empowering Assyrian individuals and communities. However, even with applicability and efficiency, Structural Functionalism does have its setbacks. The notions of Functionalism inherently denote the perpetuation of various concepts present in the hegemonic, dominant system through the essentialization of hierarchy and status (Huaco, 1986). It must be noted, however, that the theory's attention to and acknowledgement of this fact allows for a reassessment of those oppressive structural features. As a result, ripples throughout society could encourage a progressively egalitarian mindset.

Supplementing the systemic emphasis in Structural Functionalism, Critical Race Theory "can be understood as the study of 'hegemony': how domination can persist

without coercion” (Harris, 2012, p. 5). Explicitly, Critical Race Theory is Critical Theory applied to the social construct of race. It engages society’s modern notions and consequences of race in a diagnostic fashion uncovering outdated and misconceived racial symbolism and dynamics. For Assyrians, Critical Race Theory can reveal the hegemonic mentality of societal elements like citizenship, nationality, and culture. An educated populace is then more capable of rising out of the margins. Exemplifying the consequence of these margins, critical race theorist Melissa Weiner summarizes a range of scholars reminding us that “around the globe...groups that are not part of the dominant ruling political group experience a range of mechanisms...that highlight their non-belonging” (2012, p. 332). This statement directly speaks to the present status of the Assyrian nation. Complementing Weiner’s view on the tangible effects of racial inequality, Trevino, Harris and Wallace emphasize CRT as emergent due to the “problem of the color line” (2008, p. 7). They highlight the fact that legally or socially defined barriers on race – the color line - must be taken into consideration by academic, social, and legal realms. Although these two studies take on fairly different foci in their respective pieces, they each speak to vital components of the conversation on race in respect to Assyrians and other immigrants. Where Weiner applies CRT to the global world of race, Trevino, et al provide a contextual and derivative framework for CRT’s existence.

When considering race and how this construct influences a nation’s capacity it is essential to realize that CRT has “not been coherently integrated in a way that would...[provide] systematic structure” (Trevino et al, 2008, p. 9). The multiple societal elements described by Weiner such as, *race*, *ethnicity*, and *nationalism* to name but a

few, are all still relative with no standard, absolute platform. This can partly be attributed to the fact that these words and their subsequent concepts are predicated in colonial and postcolonial tradition. These historic contexts narrowly ascribe specific and intransigent systems of race and racial interaction to all cultures and societies they encounter. For example, *citizenship* came out of colonial necessity to maintain exclusivity and consequently “built racism, often based on religious differences” (Weiner, 2012, p. 335).

Assyrians are subject to this inconsideration due to their diasporic and stateless condition. The inclusion of minorities into dominant political states and their categories virtually forces Western, uncritical labels upon them. *Colorblindness*, in respect to its neocolonial roots, more so reflects the subtle perpetuation of racial inequity “promoting whiteness as the ‘normal’ identity to which all others should conform” (Weiner, 2012, p. 337). This subconscious assimilation process plays an active role in the evolution of culture within immigrant individuals and communities. Social influence as well as practical need lead immigrant, minority communities – such as Assyrians - to have little choice but to assimilate into the society and corresponding culture they reside in. For this precise type of concern CRT has developed as a “critical response to the ‘problem of the color line,’” for, “at its core, CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves occupying the margins” (Trevino, et al, 2008, p. 8). Critical race theory looks to genuinely uncover the hierarchical, oppressive, and racial inequalities present in the historical and present frameworks of social interactions.

The goal the paradigm approaches now is what can CRT do to impact the problems it has identified. Trevino, et al emphasize that Critical Race Theory must move to work within and outside of its own standards and constructs of law and politics instead

attempting to invoke change or create a critical approach to racial issues through the dominant, status quo manner of law (2008, p. 8).

A limitation of CRT is that it has not taken a substantial look into ‘colorism’ as a spectral context. More fluid perception of social elements is an inevitable feature in a *critical* discussion of race (Trevino, et al, 2008, p. 9). That is not to say that CRT cannot conceptualize and identify race as a spectrum. A more open view of the concept will be necessary in a continuously globalizing world. Perceiving race as less defined and more fluid will allow CRT to more effectively “identify...phenomena, nuances, differences, and interactions...generat[ing] important cross-national research addressing race, racialization, and racism” (Weiner, 2012, p. 342). Critical Race Theory as a novel, evolving, and acute manner of discovering subtle and obvious race-based inequalities has the potential to reshape social research by identifying institutionalized racial oppression with versatility and authenticity.

As a combination Structural Functionalism and Critical Race Theory outline the roots of the current state of the Assyrian nation. The racial implications faced by Assyrians resulting from society’s web of perception have produced the dispersion of a nation and immigrant communities establishing and growing far from their Mesopotamian homeland. The Assyrian diaspora and the label of immigrant – rather, the lack of *citizenship* for many – demonstrate the racial and minority implications that motivate research with the capacity to empower marginalized groups.

Application and Rationale

Rationale: How Can Assyrians Benefit from a Structural Functionalist and Critical Race Approach in the Modern Era

The identifications *stateless*, *immigrant*, and especially, *diaspora* play a central role in Assyrians' perception of and experience within society's web of elements. In order to understand the comprehensive impact and racially based concerns of the Assyrian nation one cannot overlook the conceptual framework of the nation's contemporary circumstances. Spread and scattered throughout the globe, Assyrians have experienced diaspora for centuries with the loss of a state and government occurring millennia ago. The terms *stateless* and *immigrant* directly relate to the vital concept of diaspora as it implies disconnect, struggle, and often, silence. The theoretical basis for the Assyrian nation's current condition is exhibited by the premises of Structural Functionalism and Critical Race Theory. However, CRT expands the academic goal of explanation and critique entering a realm of intention and, in many respects, activism. Thus, once the dilemmas of diaspora are discussed the concept of a Hometown Association will be introduced as a means to organize communities during diaspora. The simplest application of Hometown Associations (HTAs) to Assyrian communities can, in the least, assist community cohesion, help preserve culture, and create a platform from which the group as a whole can build a voice.

Assyrian Diaspora

A diasporic community is defined commonly as a group of collectively identified people or a nation that has no politically designated territory and is thus spread throughout a region or the world. Assyrians are one of the groups occupying this marginalized role, though there are many stateless peoples throughout the world today. Clifford states that “diasporic forms of longing, memory and (dis)identification are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations” (1994, p. 304).

Emphasizing the effects and tones of diasporic communities, Werbner discusses the enduring and passionate longing for a home, a geographic area previously populated by the stateless nations, or the return to a once long-held, powerful capital (2002, p. 120). Assyrians experience this longing for their imperial capital of Nineveh or modern day Mosul, Iraq. The centrality of ancestral homeland is noted in much literature on the topic of diaspora. In fact, one of the most comprehensive analyses of diaspora, immigration, and homeland is William Safran’s indicator points. As he calls them, “expatriate minority communities” are: 1) scattered from an original location to at least two new bases, 2) the people remain nostalgic of their homeland, 3) fail to develop a sense of identity in congruence with the host country, 4) await a time when returning home to the ancestral land will be possible, 5) remain invested in and loyal to this homeland, and finally, 6) the group’s cohesion leans heavily on a collective sense of longing for their homeland (Safran, 1991, p. 83-84). Yet, there is a paradox concerning this notion of home in that “the locations of diaspora are relatively autonomous of any center [though, the people] continue to recognize the centre and to acknowledge at least some obligations and responsibilities to it” (Werbner, 2002, p. 123). Assyrians have established

communities in Sweden, Australia, and Kazakhstan as well as states like Arkansas, California and Illinois. The predominant motivation for Assyrian emigration is simply an attempt to improve one's life; persecution has often motivated Assyrian emigration.

In seeking refuge from oppression, Assyrian immigrants must navigate through a world that is predominantly divided into political nation-states. One of the most pressing questions regarding Assyrian immigrant communities of the diaspora focuses on their ability to organize. Establishing a home in foreign lands necessitates the development of strong communities. However, this is not a simple mission and immigrant communities often fall short of producing impactful modes of organization due to their marginalization. For instance, although the modern world may recognize native indigenous groups, like Assyrians, it continues failing to acknowledge the presence, contributions, and obstacles of diasporic nations (Clifford, 1994, p. 307). A few obstacles include questions of identity, the construction of notions of home and future and, of course, struggling to navigate their lives through a foreign world in which they, to a great extent, have become ignored.

The actions of diasporic communities are quite widespread in spite of their underestimation and ill recognition in the modern global system. The creation of coalitions between diasporic communities has proven to assist groups through resource management and access though also causes hierarchical and egoistic conflict regarding the rights, privileges, and history of each respective community (Clifford, 1994, p. 315). However, thanks to the need arising as a result of the specific circumstances and consequent evolution in mentality of diasporic communities, women have been able to build transnational diasporic organizations (Werbner, 2002, 127). Thus, there are

benefits that may potentially culminate due to the reality of diaspora. A specific case within the Assyrian nation highlighting potential benefits involves language and national solidarity. Throughout her study, Erica McClure reveals how language and identity relate to diasporic lifestyles and effects. For Assyrians, she says, regarding their diaspora “it is their mother tongue that most clearly distinguishes them” (McClure, 2001, p. 109). With this relative exclusivity ‘folk linguistics’ reaffirms Assyrians’ heritage and ascendancy from ancient Assyria (McClure, 2001, p. 110). The language has, in fact, become a “symbol of ethnic identity and a tool in community maintenance” (McClure, 2001, p.114). One of the adaptive traits or consequences of diaspora related to language is ‘codeswitching’ which incorporates two or more languages into conversation, written or oral. Since there is no Assyrian state, there is no location where Assyrian is the official language. Aside from traditional villages and within the household Assyrians are frequently required to speak a different language than Neo-Aramaic (Assyrian) when interacting in society. However, bilingual speakers often utilize various Assyrian words and phrases when speaking with others in their community to self-proclaim their legitimacy as an Assyrian (McClure, 2001, p. 115). Thus, diasporas absolutely change the priorities and possibilities for the communities affected. From new alliances and the allowance of previously unheard-of notions (women’s groups) to the significance of language, diasporas challenge a nation to reassess its historical roots and how to best sustain them in the modern world.

These challenges have stimulated the rise of Assyrianism. Assyrian nationalism, referred to as ‘Assyrianism’ is proliferated by various political organizations such as the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Assyrian Universal Alliance (Bohac, 2010, p.

70). As a culturally-based catalyzer, Assyrianism has actually produced practical and tangible influence and benefits for Assyrians. Assyrianism facilitated the reemergence of the Syriac Orthodox Christians with the Church of the East, “stressing their bonds of language, history, and culture” (Murre-van den Berg, 2011, p. 3). Assyrianism necessitates a pride in the various traditional and unique cultural practices and values present in Assyrian society. Just as the Church of the East serves as an organizing body, Assyrianism serves as an organizing ideology that promotes Assyrian nationalism and progression. Unfortunately, the concept itself retains a branch of its roots in the fact that Assyrians have no country through which to channel their nationalistic tones and intentions. Moreover, individuals and families cannot reach out to an ideology, like Assyrianism, for community support. Of course, Assyrianism can birth organized bodies though these bodies lack the official degree necessary to make an impact in the modern world.

The predicament of the Assyrian nation due to its diaspora can be understood in the simple fact that Ashuryia (*aush-ur-ay-ah*), or “people of Assyria,” are classified as an unrepresented nation and people by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. An “unrecognized indigenous group,” Assyrians total around 3.3 million worldwide (UNPO, 2008, p. 1). In addition to the impassioned desire of Assyrians to regain their ancestral homeland, attempts by external forces to assimilate, re-label, and neglect the nation have further pushed Assyrians to speak for autonomy and a secular, just, and inclusive Iraqi government. Iraq is a well-known, concentrated center for Assyrians serving as a potential example for the circumstances faced by stateless peoples residing in various modern political states. Many Assyrians would like to return to their ancestral

homeland, which consists of parts of modern-day Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and even Egypt (UNPO, 2008, p. 2).

Unfortunately the extent of the diaspora and the lack of recognition by the developed world inhibit the potential for a homecoming movement. Since 1918 of the modern era Assyrians have been more widely dispersed almost entirely due to conflict and political matters of external forces. Thus, Assyrians are virtually forced out of Mesopotamia requiring Assyrians to develop strong immigrant communities in foreign lands. Residing in foreign lands though can present troublesome issues for immigrants like Assyrians. Some of the concerns, as articulated by Assyrian representation, include “denominationalism and fragmentation,” “Arabization,” and mass emigration and assimilation into Western society (Betbasoo, 2013). Those who have managed to reside in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran encounter daily barriers to their cultural preservation. Various obstacles are launched at Assyrian pride though none as institutional as the Iraqi government’s former requirement for Assyrians to identify as Arab or Kurdish in order to receive government benefits. Christian practices of Assyrians are targeted by extremist groups and further marginalize the nation. In general, Assyrians in their own ancestral homeland are “subjected to violations of their human rights and international humanitarian law with discrimination, displacement and arbitrary executions among the main abuses (UNPO, 2008, p. 3).

Clearly, society’s intermingled elements have cultivated a global political system and social environment that does not behoove stateless peoples like Assyrians. In order to preserve their national identity and culture Assyrians must act. Organizing as a body defies the diasporic nature of the Assyrian state and encourages awareness that can

eventually lead to an alteration of the current social value system placed on immigrants. Capitalizing on the tendency of Assyrians to commune, Hometown Associations present a progressive plan towards cohesion and preservation.

Hometown Associations

From an empire that had overtaken the modern world by 612 B.C.E. through current misfortunes, Assyrians have strived, struggled, and persisted in maintaining their culture and nationality (Betbasoo, 2013). However, it is significant to consider modern methods that may operate more efficiently. How can organization for stateless peoples be constructed and how can it operate? Who can Assyrian individuals and families appeal to for assistance and support? Hometown Associations, or cultural organizations (terms used synonymously in this study), are a particularly interesting point to begin with as indigenous, diasporic, and immigrant groups have already applied their uses.

Hometown Associations are usually formed for and “by migrants living in the same community and sharing a common nationality” (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009, p. 57). The medium of an HTA is becoming more widely utilized to “transfer money and resources back to [...] home countries” (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009, p. 57). Groups form HTAs in order to proliferate political culture and family links as well as to improve material circumstances and levels of integration (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009, p. 58). They can also simply be cultural organizations aimed at supporting a local, immigrant population. Immigrants often feel compelled to join HTAs not only for the material benefit of their family and friends back home but also for the community and identity affirmation that comes with the work required. This desire is what has facilitated HTAs

becoming more than a symbolic organization and heading towards more active, impactful, and operational organizations (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009, p. 59).

In order to analyze and understand whether an HTA is advantageous and effective method for community cohesion and cultural sustenance in the Assyrian nation, one should consider ownership, correspondence, sustainability, and replicability. According to Orozco and Garcia-Zanello it is imperative for community members to have a sense of ownership of the organization hopefully ensuring the appropriate prioritization of projects and agenda. Also, the projects and organization itself should endure and be able to be more generally implemented to help other communities (2009, p. 61). An increasingly popular mode of immigrant community cohesion, HTAs are still growing in potential for impact. At the moment Hometown Associations do not, however, solve the systemic issues connected to inequality nor do they always manage to create sustainable development (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009, p. 60). Although there are some setbacks and limitations to what HTAs can truly accomplish, their potential and allowance for collaboration catalyzes community building and integrated progression, which are inevitable features of the globalizing environment we are in for nation-states and stateless people alike (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009, p. 71). Communities, especially ill-recognized communities like Assyrians, must learn to work towards common goals and, consequently, may learn how to overcome the tribulations they have been allotted by building community and, through community efforts, ensure cultural preservation.

Part II – Methodology Research By and For Assyrians

Methodological Literature: Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to the previously discussed rationale for attention to this topic it is critical to note that I am an Assyrian-American and have studied these theories in relation to my nation's condition. My interest results from experiencing one perspective of the Assyrian diaspora and having discussed many others. I chose to employ Critical Race Theory in an action-oriented mode, to present a basic discussion of current challenges Assyrians face. Motivated by the Functionalist interconnections of society I proposed Hometown Associations as a viable option for overcoming oppressive societal features and aim to determine the thoughts of some Assyrians on HTA potential in our communities. In fact, ensuring genuine data and analysis for such intimate and impactful topics requires attention to Assyrian voices. Therefore, an activism brand of Critical Race Theory prompted a dual-approach of an interview and a focus group present a slice of the conversation widely discussed within the homes of Assyrians around the world.

As “one of the main methods of data collection used in qualitative research,” in-depth interviews present an opportunity to gain insightful experience into the viability, obstacles, and processes of establishing an HTA (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003, p. 138). The conversational tone of these interviews provides fluidity and a natural feel that can lead to genuine and reliable information. Merging structure and flexibility, in depth interviews aim to be interactive. Furthermore, a broad range of subjects and the probability of new information to be shared denote some of the interview method's better qualities (Legard, et. al, 2003, pgs. 141-142). Legard's paper discusses nearly every

significant aspect of the interview process from setting up the interview and choosing participants to the roles of the researcher and the participants. Linking these aspects builds the ultimate “purpose of the research interview [which is] is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters” (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick, 2008, p. 292). Although the medical field of Burnard, et al is quite different from social research, the group has produced a generally applicable understanding of qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups. Developing the interview prior to its occurrence and through to the final stages is an evolutionary process the researcher must be cognizant of (Burnard, et. al, 2008, p. 292; Legard, et. al, 2003). Steps such as ‘question formulation,’ ‘practical considerations,’ and context of the interview allude to the array of tasks present when attempting to produce a successful interviewing experience (Legard, et. al, 2003). Essentially, in depth interviews are characterized by a personal approach, an informative process, and attention to specifics and context relevant to the research. Providing multiple opinions on the applicability of HTAs in Assyrian communities is a significant part of the research body and my main goal regarding the focus group. However, to enhance the conversation I utilized an individual, in-depth interview in determining how well a cultural organization has assisted the Assyrian community in Phoenix, Arizona. A requisite for the narrator of the interview was their affiliation with an Assyrian cultural organization in Phoenix.

As mentioned, I wanted to supplement the details of HTA establishment that can be acquired through an in-depth, individual interview with a focus group. Focus groups present a fantastic opportunity for trying to uncover how Assyrians feel HTAs could help

preserve their culture and cultivate community solidarity and support. A Participatory Action Research¹(PAR) mentality encourages focus groups to include the community, represented by focus group participants, in articulating the problem and corresponding with one another on potential solutions (Babbie, 2013. P. 312; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 348). The importance of a dialogue with the Assyrian community in Phoenix essentially molded the strategy of my methodological approach. The empowering aptitude of Participatory Action Research allowed Chiu and Knight to “[make] explicit the intercultural setting within which [they] operated, and designed [their] research” (1999, p. 101). Their research discusses how various roles within the process have various degrees and contexts of influence on the research itself. The funder is immediately noted as playing a significant role of influence regardless of the researchers’ intentions and desires. “The funder has the power to set the agenda and define the ‘problem’ at the outset” (Chui & Knight, 1999, p. 101). Although, my research did not face the challenges of operating a funder’s wishes, another inevitably influential role in any qualitative method is the researcher or interviewer. Morgan explains that the three basic components of focus groups as a research method include: 1) the purpose of data collection, 2) the data is gathered from a group interview setting and the interactions therein, and 3) the researcher’s active role as the facilitator of the context, setting, and questions (1996, p. 130). The “role of the moderator” and the “impact of the group itself” on the data are actually sometimes noted as weaknesses of focus groups

¹ Participatory Action Research is a paradigm rooted in “advocacy of empowerment and emancipation” (Cohen, et al, 2011, p. 348). This study employs this attitude through interactive methodology and direct attention to the opinions of community members on how to improve the conditions of Assyrians within Phoenix and potentially throughout the diaspora.

(Morgan, 1996, p. 139). This is because “controlling the dynamic within the group is a major challenge” (Babbie, 2013, p. 321). It is important to balance facilitation of the discourse with a tempered passivity allowing the dynamics to cultivate naturally. As the researcher, I was obligated to incorporate and heed this warning into my approach, not only with the research, but with the direct interaction between research participants and myself. A similar concern, though specific to work with minority groups, is the misinterpretation or ethnocentrism of bi-/multi-lingual moderators or translators. Participants may begin to feel “constrained,” “reluctant,” and “prosaic” (Chiu & Knight, 1999, p. 105). Without genuine and creative understanding of the participants’ stories and opinions it becomes easy to lose the ultimate benefit of focus groups in gathering dynamic, relative, and unique data materials. If, however, the process is carried out properly focus groups can provide a comparative understanding of participants’ experiences (Morgan, 1996, p. 139; Babbie, 2013, p. 320). For this reason I chose to conduct the interviews in English so as to avoid misinterpretation. Although I can speak Assyrian in conversation I did not feel my fluency would support the degree of academic integrity necessary during analysis.²

Contrary to individual interviews, focus groups, especially with an ethnic or cultural basis, situate participants in an environment of peers that most likely all have thoughts on the matters being discussed. Consequently, an interactive and vigorous

² It is important to note here that I faced the ultimatum of conducting the interviews in English or Assyrian with a heavy weight. As McClure discussed, Assyrians are prideful of the Assyrian language and research on Assyrians by an Assyrian seems to be natural setting for dialogue in *lashan’it soorit* – the Assyrian language. However, my personal relationship with my mother tongue – or, *lashan’it yimi* – is a direct example of the impact diaspora can have. The opportunity to be fully immersed in an entire community of Assyrians consistently speaking Assyrian did not arrive for 18 years of my life.

dialogue is promoted. Of course, none of this can be interpreted or utilized if the importance of “linguistic and cultural skills” is not observed (Chiu & Knight, 1999, p. 102). Focus groups ultimately allow for a comparative understanding of participants’ experiences further highlighting the necessity of accurate interpretation (Morgan, 1996, p. 139). Yet again, the importance for a complete interpretation of the participants’ responses is stressed by the literature reaffirming my decision to conduct the focus group – as well as the interview – in my first language, English.

In fact, focus groups and in-depth interviews each have the potential to provide a plethora of information from their respective sources. The complementary benefits of each are intended to ensure the acquisition of vital, useful, and creative information. I learned during the process of carrying out this dual-approach qualitative method that field research can be extremely dynamic, complicated, and reflexive.

General Process and Points of Interest

The focus group and interview took place during the Spring of 2014 in Glendale and Peoria, AZ. I employed the methods discussed previously via insider access to the Phoenix-metro area Assyrian community.³ Acquiring and organizing thoughts from members of the Phoenix Assyrian community was a fairly complex task in respect to logistics but it was also imperative to the completion of this research. Through contacts with St. Peter's Assyrian Church of the East in addition to an Assyrian cultural organization in Phoenix I planned to find plausible times, spaces, and respondents that would form a focus group and determine the in-depth interview participant.

During the focus group session – consisting of immediate family members and friends of the Assyrian cultural organization I have mentioned - I presented topics and questions concerning the future of Assyrians as well as the contemporary state of the Assyrian nation and the Phoenix community. This emphasis gave me insight into how a small group of Assyrians' perceive their social identity and role. Assyrians fill a critical, yet often ignored role as actors in society's web of elements. The respondents' main considerations indicated their self-perception and national-perception. Such identity claims ultimately benefit a Critical Race Theory platform by granting individuals within one immigrant community a medium through which to progress their lives and their nation. Exploring methods of increasing social capacity, such as self-identifying nationality, I also posed to each and all focus group members how we might attempt to structure an organization that could assist Assyrian communities with cohesion and the Assyrian nation with cultural preservation.

³ My role in the research partially prompted a the segment covering various influential features that were a part of the research process.

I did not focus on questions concerning a longing for and desire to return to our Mesopotamian homeland (even though it is a prime feature of diasporic literature) because it would be impractical. Assyrians have emigrated from native states throughout the Middle East because the governments and societies of these states are not conducive to Assyrian cultural preservation or progression in politics or economics. Their immigration has led to developed areas where they are able to benefit their own advancement and support their families more securely. Although Assyrians, including myself, passionately yearn for a homeland I decided the most directly impactful approach regarding the nation's current circumstances was to concentrate on building HTAs in new areas of settlement. Excluding the topic of ancestral homeland from the literature, however, would entail failing to discuss a crucial aspect of diaspora. Even though my inquiry does not stress homeland as a concept, though, its significance is still evident in the focus group.

As the focus group approached I knew there were a multitude of matters I needed to consider. Once the individuals were found and consented to participating in the study I planned the time and location for the group to take place. In accordance with the methodological literature of carrying out a focus group it was my duty to inform the participants that all conversation would be recorded. I also prepared to take notes on focus group members' gestures, emphases, and intonation for interpretation and analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 504). Attempting to cultivate the respectful discourse that can result from focus groups I knew I needed to emphasize to focus group participants to keep their passions geared towards benefitting the conversation, and most of all, to remember the objective of the focus group is ultimately to help the solidarity of the Assyrian nation

(Babbie, 2013, pgs. 326-328). A highlight of the literature I reviewed was the fact that research integrity depends greatly on the ethical standard with which I interact with participants throughout the process (Babbie, 2013, p. 62).

Reviewing the steps of the methodology itself stressed the search for themes, popular diction and specific structural traits and conceptual concerns when analyzing the focus group discussion (Bryman, 2012, p. 504). Also, based on confidentiality concerns I decided that when the recordings have been drained of as much necessary information as possible they would be destroyed. I then determined that Axial coding would be the best option to utilize in organizing the various points and opinions brought up during the focus group. This method “aims to identify the core concepts in the study” (Babbie, 2013, p. 398). These core concepts identify societal elements affecting Assyrians today and indicate the value of a Critical Race Theory perspective in advancing research from academia to tangibly impactful mode by empowering marginalized people. Finally, the data was compiled to prioritize contemporary problems and goals for the Assyrian community and to help pinpoint structural elements for establishing cultural organizations that are important to Assyrians.

An in-depth interview supplemented the focus group material by providing the experiential knowledge of an HTA administrator and organizer. The interview focused on obstacles, goals, and processes associated with the aforementioned Assyrian cultural organization in Phoenix. The cultural organization itself is a means towards influence and an example of Merton’s previously discussed term, *manifest function*. By intentionally striving to preserve Assyrian culture and provide organized support for the Phoenix Assyrian community the organization’s potential for developing a collective

Assyrian voice for the community directly exemplifies the importance of collective identity in social progression. In fact, this organization's goal is to support the Assyrian community in the local area and to provide services for the individuals that are members of that community. Thus, the rationale for selecting this organization for my research lay in its exemplary goals that other diasporic Assyrian communities strive towards.

Moreover, demonstrating the strategic effect Trevino, et al describe as a component of Critical Race Theory, attention to a cultural organization – especially one with such clear and relevant aspirations – allowed the examination of the impact an organization can have by working within the medium of the status quo “power in numbers” approach yet outside of the popular culture of the United States (by proliferating Assyrian culture) With the complementary method of an in-depth interview, not only is an experienced, relevant voice added to the conversation but also this particular perspective is one that contributes a necessary, tangible familiarity with organization establishment and Assyrian community cohesion.

Thus, this research utilized a dual approach in gathering information on the necessity and applicability of Hometown Associations in Assyrian immigrant communities. The qualitative data gathered in the field enhanced the study by empowering some community members while providing the community at large with Assyrian perspectives on the impactful topics covered. Through an interactive and engaged process these research methods present the current circumstances of the Phoenix Assyrian community with a focus on how to mold community solidarity and preserve culture for Assyrians in the Valley.

The Dynamic Path of Field Research: My Role, the Research Focus and Implications Therein

The elements of my nationality as an Assyrian-American and membership in a cultural organization in Phoenix were essential in the acquisition of access and trust. However, these facts also prompted the need for critical reflexivity. Due to the fact that my role with the participants - of both the focus group and the interview - stretches beyond the research I needed to “take care that [my] initial discussions [did] not compromise or limit later aspects of [the] research” (Babbie, 2013, p. 315). Although navigating my positionality and relationships with the participants was sometimes challenging, these exact features made deciding to use a purposive sample simple. I knew many interested and involved members of the Assyrian community in Phoenix through the Assyrian cultural organization and through St. Peter’s Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East. Because of this I chose to play an active role in gathering research participants.

In fact, through my connections and due to the context of the research (a focus group concentrating on Assyrians and HTAs) I decided to self-select participants (Morgan, 1998). This sampling method provided the individuals necessary though limited the potential diversity of perspectives involved. Two major concerns arose when choosing specific participants for a focus group. Self-selected samples are not random preventing generalizability (Babbie, 2013, p. 320). However, by selecting participants I was able to ensure each individual could contribute relevant input to the conversation. Secondly, simply because I had the luxury of choosing participants, the entire community was not totally accessible to me. I had to have some sort of connection to potential participants and they would have to be willing to take part in the focus group.

Playing such a central role did not necessitate bias but instead catalyzed my “sensitivity to the methodological literature” and to my “social identity” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 63). Obviously, my positionality was a defining factor in determining where and how to gather the research data (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, pgs. 60-64). Though, I was avidly educated about and mentored through this process. Between my unique role, the availability of participants, and the need to emphasize the advantages and disadvantages of both, the data acquisition of the research was an intrinsic, complex, and formidable path. Fortunately, the process of the interview and focus group also provided a broad range of direct and observable implications about the Assyrian nation and HTA applicability.

Reiterating the concentration of the individual, in-depth interview I chose to focus on the process of establishing and cultivating an immigrant community cultural organization, specifically, an Assyrian-based organization in the Phoenix metro-area. The interview data presents obstacles faced in setting up a cultural organization, the lengthy process involved, and the impact made by one organization. In order to maintain agreements of confidentiality with research participants I cannot share which organization I am a member of and which is discussed here. It is important to note, though, that the individual speaking here has been involved with the organization since its birth and throughout its growth.

The night of the interview was the first of a series of necessary adjustments over the course of gathering data. The interviewee was actually prepared to facilitate greetings between potential focus group participants and myself. Unfortunately, the lack of eligible and willing participants in attendance at St. Peter’s Assyrian Church of the East on that

night prompted a change of plans. It was decided, since all the materials necessary were present, to go ahead and complete the in-depth interview. I chose to wait for the focus group to take place in the time following the aforementioned Assyrian cultural organization's monthly meeting which was scheduled to take place in two days. Although I was discontent having not completed the focus group as planned, I was satisfied with the opportunity to at least complete the interview.

The interview participant, Jackson, a 25-year old male who has spent all but his childhood in Phoenix, was in the middle transitioning from one graduate program to another during the time of the interview. A purposive selection method was used in deciding upon his involvement (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 107; Babbie, 2013, pgs. 190-191; Bryman, 2012, p. 416). His education and contextual focus contributed to the information provided. Furthermore, I developed a friendship with the interview participant throughout the year and a half prior to the interview. We met through a cultural service provided by the organization being discussed. More importantly, Jackson's experience with the organization as well as the trust and rapport built between us made him a great candidate for this segment of the research. He also displays a proactive passion for Assyrianism. Assyrianism, as conventionally referred to by Assyrians and the organization's members, is generally comprised of the culture, history, and continuance of the Assyrian nation. Thus, my decision to interview Jackson was guided by the "theoretical framework and concepts" of the research as well as his unique position as an informed organization executive (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, pgs. 60-64).

The interview lasted one-half hour and was conducted in English. I asked questions about the development of the organization Jackson is involved in, obstacles

faced when initially setting up members and meeting places, and of course, his opinion on the effectiveness of such an organization⁴. A mid-20s, educated and socioeconomically well-off individual, Jackson was prepared well to provide insight and evidence. Though his background molds his particular perspective, the insight provided is informed and critical.

In order to determine the start dates and other details regarding the background of the organization many of my initial questions were specific. However, once a foundation was established we delved into an open-ended discussion about the nature of the organization, its programs, potential, and effectiveness thus far. My understanding of Hometown Associations and interest in their potential to benefit Assyrian communities, and consequently the nation, undoubtedly shaped my questioning. Moreover, the specific theme of this interview inherently concentrates the data and responses gathered. These features exhibit the intentional nature of the research and the researcher. Although a completely open dialogue could provide accounts by immigrant Assyrians on more topics and potential routes to progressing the nation, I chose to limit this study to the notion of Hometown Associations since they are already being employed by immigrant communities facing the same sort of dilemmas Assyrians are now encountering (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009). Furthermore, narrowing the research simply made it viable under these circumstances. I knew I wanted to acquire the input of multiple individuals and often, “there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particularly tight[ly] defined topic” in focus groups (Bryman, 2012, p. 712). In consideration of this selective, intentional approach the significance of the open-ended, flexible discourse that took place

⁴ The interview guide may be found in the Appendix

as the interview progressed cannot be understated. This line of questioning allowed me to collect data on organizational structure, inevitable and likely obstacles to building a cultural organization, and key advice for communities potentially establishing cultural organizations. As we wrapped up the night Jackson and I discussed the fact that the upcoming meeting will ensure the presence of research participants.

In the following days I transcribed the interview. After the transcription was completed I analyzed and axially coded the document through a “regrouping of the data” in order to use general themes to “[look] for more analytic concepts” (Babbie, 2013, p. 398). While coding the interview I found the two major themes that characterize the Jackson’s narration are: 1) important components to building a cultural organization and 2) goals of and obstacles faced by Jackson’s organization. Although the details of the conversation vary greatly I found that these two themes also cover two defining phases of the organization: conception and growth. Many of the important components noted by Jackson are features that truly shaped his organization’s ability to gain momentum and acquire the practical elements necessary for organizational foundation. Furthermore, the goals and obstacles he discussed are defining the path of the organization moving forward. Although his experience is based in one community and one organization, I believe Jackson’s advice and insight can well be applied to other Assyrian communities. Additionally, by utilizing the themes of important structural components and goals/obstacles, his advice is accessible and applicable for other Assyrian communities to build on and learn from. Having completed the in-depth interview portion of the study I still needed qualitative evidence backing the support and interest of Assyrians for the application of HTAs.

Prepared with consent forms and discussion guide questions I attended the organization's monthly meeting, as I often do, at the offices of a previous board member and founder. The points of discussion prompted significant and timely discourse pushing the usual less than two hour meeting to a little over three hours. Out of respect for the potential participants I decided the focus group should be postponed to a more suitable opportunity. Most individuals would have been unwillingly encouraged to stay which would undermine the integrity of the research. With time bearing down, and my morale somewhat diminished, I planned to meet with six individuals on the upcoming Wednesday.

Arriving at the rendezvous point with a few minutes to spare I was concerned to see only one participant had arrived. He and I waited patiently for about 20 minutes for the arrival of the rest of the focus group. Eventually a phone call shed light on the fact that many of the potential participants were gathered at the house of a colleague associated with the organization. With permission from the host we drove to his home and the focus group commenced.

Initially, I stated the rationale and introduction for the research and the tone of the discussion was set. Each individual would have the opportunity to respond to any question asked though it was decided by the group that an orderly manner of responding would benefit the conversation. I was fortunate to have a group that naturally adhered to the more effective and conducive elements of a focus group environment (Bryman, 2012, pgs. 513-514). One of my first objectives was to formulate an understanding of who the focus group consisted of. The participants were all male and ranged from 22-35 years old. Although I emphasized the need for diversity when searching for potential

participants, the priority was an eligible group that was able and willing. However, the participants involved simply do not represent the diversity of Assyrians necessary to fully apply the data gathered to a summation of Assyrian attitudes and experience.

Generalizability is a difficult goal to reach under such specific circumstances and the lack of a sufficient variety of narrators has a significant impact on the study's capacity for broad application (Babbie, 2013, p. 193). Gender and age are the two major underrepresented demographics. Aside from age and gender, though, some demographics did provide diversity. Socioeconomic background and occupation represented a relatively wide array of experience. From an undergraduate student to an insurance IT programmer the variation in daily experience, general mindset, and contextual interests was somewhat diverse. Degree of community involvement, place of origin, and story of immigration were also diverse characteristics within the group.

To discover these details I began by asking about how each participant arrived in the Phoenix area and challenges each may have faced.⁵ It was also important to discover each participant's notion of self-identity and how that relates to their Assyrianism in the community of Phoenix. Each participant commented on the current state of the Assyrian nation as well as the evolution of the Assyrian communities they have been a part of. In order to comprehensively understand each individual's point of view on the application of Hometown Associations to Assyrian communities I asked about Assyrianism, societal structure, as well as the future of the community, Assyrian youth, and the nation itself. All of these relate heavily to organizational capacity and motivation for community building.

⁵ The Focus Group Discussion Guide can be found in the Appendix

Following the focus group I transcribed the hour and ten minutes of data. The analysis of the focus group examines the prominent themes of the discussion. Coding the focus group resulted in more distinct and segmented themes than the interview. In contrast to the mere two elemental categories found in Jackson's narration: religion, youth, community and organization are all mentioned frequently by participants. Their frequency as well as each participant's personal connection with these themes highlights their significance and inclusion in analysis.

With both items transcribed, a coding scheme developed and the creation of appropriate pseudonyms for each participant I critically analyzed each set of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 49; Bryman, 2012, p. 667). The following analyses reflect attention to the application of HTAs to Assyrian communities. Through a glimpse at Assyrians' perspectives and the practicality of HTA establishment and application I am able to present a basic exploration of one potential route towards preserving the Assyrian nation and its culture.

Part III – Data Analysis
Empowering Assyrians: Where We Are and Where Do We Go From Here?

On the Research

My intentional approach to this research obviously shaped the methodology, query, and execution of the study. In addition to their limitations, though, my insider role, methodology and foci also produce a necessarily contextually based argument. The method is “socially oriented,” my insider role provides “credibility that comes from direct personal experience,” and the “narrative inquiry” guiding the discussion of the focus group all proliferate an intimate, tangible, and authentic drive regarding the ultimate purpose of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, pgs. 149, 79, & 153).

I anticipated that the materials presented in the interview and focus group would complement one another. Based on my own experience and conversations with Assyrians throughout my life I have observed a growing concern with the endurance of our nation and culture. Through the aide of academic mentors I was guided towards the notion of Hometown Associations and almost immediately I realized their potential in addressing this concern. I hypothesized the narrative of focus group members would speak to the lack of consolidated and guided efforts of progressing the nation. Additionally, through my time with the Phoenix-based Assyrian cultural organization I expected the main attention to be placed on how a community already has and is working to continue addressing the progress necessary in cohesion and preservation.

The interconnectedness of the research segments is a vital step in proliferating validity in my argument for HTAs as a means to Assyrian community solidarity. Without personal, informative data from both references I could not present critical

evidence to support the potential for the application of HTAs within Assyrian communities. Moreover, without narrative from focus group members stating their call for cultural organizations and practical experience from Jackson on the establishment of an HTA within an Assyrian community the argument would simply be informal and speculative.

On the Data

I find it crucial to reiterate the limitations of the following data. The focus group participants were all male and barely spanned more than a decade in age difference (22-35 years old). Although this group does not accurately identify the more progressive mentality I have personally witnessed growing in the cultural community, it does speak to the fact that empowerment and voice is still more accessible to Assyrian males than females. I approached various females for the study though most were unable to contribute as a result of time commitments to family and work. In contrast, the lack of elders in the study truly surprised me. While building connections with potential participants elders served a central role in introducing me to interested Assyrians. However, when the time came for the focus group to take place various circumstances presented a group virtually dominated by youth.

In addition to the lack of diversity in narrators the context of the data is also based in one Assyrian community as well as in one Assyrian cultural organization. While this is true, I attest that Phoenix is a premier sample city as the Assyrian community is large and established though still growing in population and organization. Also, it hosts multiple cultural organizations cited by Jackson. I believe the importance of this fact

cannot be understated. The founders of the cultural organization I am a part of have consistently cited their motivation for establishing their own organization as deriving from direct experience and observation on the shortcomings other organizations in the area. I do not mean to say that this organization has done a better job simply because the founding members initiated their own goals and ideas due to the lack of congruence with other groups. Obviously, the organization is still based on particular individuals' notions of what is best. However, I believe the innate nature of trial and error eventually cultivates progression and produces advantages, in this context, concerning the capacity of a cultural organization in operations and serving the Assyrian community. Having emphasized significant points regarding the research process and context, as well as the implications thereof, I present the materials gathered from the invaluable sources who contributed to this study.

Focus Group

Introduction

The Assyrian nation has evolved in diaspora for centuries and is facing an immense crossroads moving forward. Without land to live on or a governmental body to organize and represent the people it is challenging to attend to the progress of the people and the community. In fact, without these elements, is organization a viable option? Can Assyrians develop strong communities as immigrants in foreign lands? Who are individuals and families able to reach out to if no governing body exists?

For generations the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East has acted as that organizing body creating a space within the societal structure for gathering as well as preserving a vastly significant part of Assyrian culture (Baumer, 2006). However, in an increasingly complex and secular global agenda, the Assyrian nation is ill equipped to maintain united communities, its historical traditions, or to build a platform for an effort to support Assyrians politically and economically. In contrast to appreciation and acceptance of diversity the present-day ‘color line’ that builds barriers for Assyrians and immigrant groups fails to recognize the value of distinguished, enduring nations and cultures. As an Assyrian-American, I have considered these apprehensions and put forth the notion of Hometown Associations (HTAs) as a potential application for reversing this trend. In order to discover whether Assyrians are receptive to the idea it is imperative to gather qualitative data from multiple Assyrians on the matter. Thus, the focus group is utilized in an attempt to delve into common priorities, concerns, and theoretical as well as applicable solutions for the lack of cohesive organization evident in the nation. Throughout the process of developing a focus group –

from formulating a discussion guide through genuine attention to the participants' input – countless lessons are learned about Assyrian opinion on the nation as well as the application of Hometown Associations.

Understanding nation's concerns about its future can be a complicated and delicate process, even for members of the community itself. Initially, a foundational trust must provide a platform for conversation. Here, the researcher benefits from the dual role of insider-outsider (Gair, 2012, pgs. 137-138). As an Assyrian-American I have been able to not only gain access to the community, but also attain the trust of some who are willing to provide their opinions and insight.

Background and Themes

Six Assyrian males were gathered at the apartment of an Assyrian youth, who we will call Younan, willing to offer his home and his words to assist in the research. Younan and the other five participants reside in the Phoenix metro-area, vary in occupational background, and maintain various degrees of community involvement. Without these sources of experience, emotion, and opinion from within the community one may only speculate in determining the perspectives that exist regarding particular subjects. Research suggests gaining the most from the focus group requires preparation, genuine attention to the words of community representatives, and motivation stemming from a serious desire to better the community in cooperation (Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Marshall & Osman, 2010). Moreover, focus groups present an effective method for acquiring a wider range of views and greater opportunity for the confirmation of community priorities (Byrman, 2012; Babbie, 2013). When researching the content and

context of the current state of the Assyrian nation focus groups offer the aforementioned benefits along with empowering members of an established, accessible, and growing Assyrian community. Thus, as Phoenix, Arizona hosts an Assyrian populace of around 10,000 and growing, the community presents a sound pool for a sample of Assyrian perspectives. Although only a minute fraction of this Assyrian community and, thus, the nation itself had the opportunity to contribute their thoughts, the progress of documented opinions and potential solutions is a vital step in a ladder that a scattered and largely unrecognized nation is fighting to climb.

Attention to individual stories lit the way to understanding the magnitude of each participant's viewpoint. From their arrival in the Valley (Greater Phoenix) to the types of obstacles they faced in adapting and growing as members of an immigrant community the personal anecdotes of each participant contribute to the understanding of the different paths that have been traveled thus far. Once the discourse fell into a naturally open and informative gathering a few themes highlighted the spectrum of specific points regarding major topics discussed by the focus group participants. The significance of the Church of the East, community and societal structure, the youth of the nation, and organizing capacity became quite clear. These topics are cornerstones of the conversation involving the application of Hometown Associations to Assyrian communities and community solidarity.

An insider role facilitated the content of the focus group but an attempt to balance this role with the importance of research neutrality steered the design of the discussion guide allowing each individual the capacity to respond with individual experience and undistorted opinions (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 79; Gair, 2012). I knew the topics

necessary to bring to the table though the group provided unique and detailed information on the relevance of these topics to HTAs. It became clear that the Church's current, central role in the societal structure of Assyrian communities as well as the importance of the nation's youth in the future are substantial facets of at least some Assyrians' mindset. The essential interconnectedness of the youth and the Church with the state of Assyrian community and its organizing capacity became evident during the participants' discourse as well. It was found that, fundamentally, HTAs can be a useful tool for community solidarity and Assyrian nationalism though an array of obstacles like access to social resources and highlights such as the importance of Assyrian ancestral homeland must be considered in corroboration with the potential application of HTAs for Assyrians. The following discussion outlines the participants' ideas and concerns surrounding the vital elements of HTA application.

The Assyrian Church of the East

Maintaining some of the most orthodox Christian traditions remaining, the Assyrian Church of the East is at the peak of centralized organization for communities in the Assyrian nation. It is essentially the last substantial, organized entity operated by and for Assyrians (Baumer, 2006). According to members of the focus group, many of whom have spent time in multiple Assyrian communities, the Church – acting as a pillar of societal structure - continuously draws community members to its fellowship, cultural tradition, and connection to one of the last points of pride still present in the Assyrian nation. When discussing overcoming obstacles often inherent to immigrants of any background, multiple group members asserted the effectiveness of the Church as an opportunity to establish friendships and networks. As a marginalized group Assyrians

rely on the Church of the East for support and the satisfaction of cultural tradition. Access to resources that can improve Assyrians' networks and capacity for support are mostly absent in the modern geo-political system. Though, the Church works through programs like Sunday School and the Church Youth Group to supply the community with social and material resources relevant to their heritage. "We [Assyrian immigrant youth] built most of our friends from church," declared Sargon, a 25 year old graduate student and heavily involved community member.

In order to progress towards a united, or at least connected, community though, the youth must have more than one avenue of entry and exposure to our fellow, local Assyrians. This totem is exemplified by a common notion, put forth by Ashor, the oldest participant at 35 years, and an international immigrant who currently works in computer programming for a national insurance company. His experience dictates that a trend in Assyrian societal structure is that "generally with Assyrians the first thing that's established is the church and you'll see everyone start living around the church." Thus, the church is consistently considered a practical, vital, and primary facet of community connectedness and support. However, I contend that the Church cannot always be expected to uphold every Assyrian community and support each individual's needs. This opinion is corroborated by, Akkad, an undergraduate student who has lived in Phoenix since infancy. He cited his bilateral experience between Phoenix and Toronto. The church's proximity to the majority of the Assyrian community in Phoenix allows it to play the central role it does. However, in Toronto, where Akkad has family, many Assyrians live further from the Assyrian Church resulting in a less tight-knit community. This simple detail distinguishes the participants' experiences with their community from

that of their counterparts in Toronto. The consequences of the differentiation in church location within each city denote one potential shortcoming for Assyrian communities relying too heavily on the Church. Although it can be limited, the foundational vitality provided by the church is brought into perspective by its attention to basic, yet necessary facets of community building such as a meeting place.

Exemplifying the diaspora, Akad's family's separation is commonplace within Assyrian families. His unique perspective on the importance of the Church of the East for Assyrian communities demonstrates the paradox discussed by Werbner that "the locations of diaspora are relatively autonomous of any center" (Werbner 2002, p. 123). The outcomes of each city's church location do speak to the varied cultural reach and societal structure evident in Assyrian communities. Regardless of the differences though, the inherent existence of the Church of the East demonstrates Safran's point that stateless peoples "fail to develop a sense of identity in congruence with the host country" (1991, p. 83). The Assyrian Church of the East is a unique cultural facet to the Assyrian nation and is definitely not native to Toronto or Phoenix. Of course, Assyrians inevitably assimilate to some degree though the persistent presence of the Church speaks to Assyrianism, Assyrian societal structure, and Assyrian identity in foreign lands.

In fact, acting as more than a meeting place, the church also acts as a vessel in the proliferation of Assyrianism. Its inherent value as an established center-point for the community, and thus the culture of that community, is evident in its gathering capacity. In my own experience with the Phoenix Assyrian community I have observed weekly gatherings in addition to mass and post-mass fellowship thanks to St. Peter's Assyrian Church of the East. As a result of that capacity for assembly participants cited the

church's versatility in cultural preservation and Assyrian solidarity. These are vital to Assyrian nationalism, the stability of societal structure, and the future of the nation and culture. For example, individuals at the church educate the youth about the nation's enduring and recent historical narrative. Thus, the church becomes not only an outlet for Assyrians to discuss the tragic stories passed down and experienced first-hand but for the upcoming generations of youth to learn of their heritage and the significance of their nationality. Although the Church's facilitation of nationalism has been overwhelmingly significant these are precisely the sorts of responsibilities an HTA can address (Orozco & Rouse, 2013, pgs. 280-285). This is not to suggest that the church would relinquish its role in historical and cultural preservation but rather be supplemented by a secular, unattached organization that can focus primarily on these matters.

It is crucial that an organization, such as an HTA, is able to enhance the Church's divided attention on such matters. In fact, reservations about the church's role as the nation moves forward were noted as well. Sargon noted limitations on the church's capacity considering "its obligations to the diocese." This is not necessarily a detrimental feature though it provides that the church leadership must view community concerns through a diocesan lens. Furthermore, ideological institutions generally run based on tradition that may prevent evolution and change (Thompson, 1990, p. 41). Based on the dialogue of the focus group openness and adaption, however, are traits I feel will be helpful as the future of the nation develops.

Although not all participants directly mentioned the desire for a centralized organization lacking religious affiliation (i.e. an HTA), it is a documented concern for some members of the Assyrian nation. With all its potential, significance, and influence

the church currently finds itself as a pillar in Assyrian communities. Highlighting that fact, a general consensus within the focus group addressed its influence on youth awareness, its significance in providing community solidarity, and its potential in preserving Assyrian culture for the future. These are undoubtedly critical qualities that have sustained the nation for decades. However, group opinion also exhibited that due to the sheer magnitude and diversity of responsibilities it is not practical to rely on the church alone.

Community & Societal Structure

Speaking to the Assyrian community in Phoenix, specifically, Sargon mentioned the establishment of the church as a catalyzing factor in the growth of the community during the early 90s. Prior to the establishment of a parish only a small mission serviced the religious needs of the Assyrian community in Greater Phoenix. During this time, as Sargon recalls, the “community was very intermingled.” The size of the community is one of the fundamental factors in analyzing stability, cohesion, and impact.⁶ Although experience with this community in particular was limited, the evidence offered suggests as the community grew in number the societal structure of the community naturally grew in complexity. Sargon suggested the establishment of more churches, and churches of other denominations at that, lead to a break in the intimacy previously apparent between Assyrians in Phoenix. Thus, just as the initial mission’s growth into a parish contributed to the growth of the community so too did the progression of such growth end up diversifying a relatively united base of Assyrians. This trend also demonstrates the Church’s vulnerability as sole actor in community cohesion. “Once the community got

⁶ Size was mentioned by three participants a total of eight times during the discussion.

larger and larger ...these relationship ties became more strained because people were starting to get pulled to their own interests,” Sargon emphasized. This direct assertion highlights the ability of the church and community to function more efficiently and cooperatively when it was smaller.

In fact, two examples related to size were cited as prominent features of community solidarity and progression. In both cases, London, U.K. and Houston, Texas, the establishment of a social club occurred either before or along with the establishment of a church. The concept of these social clubs, according to Sargon and Ashor, is simply a primary form of Hometown Association. Unfortunately, the train of progress in London and Houston was the reciprocal path of that in Phoenix. In both cases participants were positive when discussing the benefits for Assyrians of a social club lacking a religious affiliation. The community benefits, according to some focus group members, begin with the fact that the primary purpose of this type of club is to service any and all needs of the community rather than a predetermined and biased agenda. Sargon alleged that without an independent organization a community lacks a “community organization that services...the social needs of the community” and “the cultural needs of the community.” These are the precise sorts of objectives of a community HTA (Orozco & Rouse, 2013, pgs. 280-285). Moreover, I believe the contemporary centralized role of the church can benefit from supplemental agencies working in the interests of the community where the church cannot reach.

The obstacles cited by the focus group members through personal anecdotes concerning community generally related to immigration-based concerns. The lack of connections and friends, culture shock, and specifics like access to language were all

noted as struggles that walk in hand with immigration and belonging to an Assyrian immigrant community. These particular members of the Assyrian nation in only this one community had at least some structural resource – the Church - to alleviate such struggles. However, as a researcher, one of my ongoing concerns for Assyrians is how to ensure assistance is provided to as many Assyrians as can be reached. Understanding the magnitude of such a goal, I cannot claim to present an ultimate solution here. Instead, I aim to encourage Assyrians to take a more proactive role in overcoming the obstacles they face.

It was also found that not all responsibility should be placed on organized bodies whether an HTA or the Church. A prominent criticism during the focus group was that Assyrians, as members of the community, often do not contribute as much as they could. A community as a whole is itself, of course, only the summation of its individual parts, or community members. If those who are able to do not invest in their neighbor how then is the community as a whole to support new, incoming community members? “We’re just lazy and we will be the first to say ‘Yes, I’ll help you.’ But [we’re] not really doing anything in the long run.” This frank assertion by Akkad on the general tone of individual community members denotes a lack of motivation, genuine care, and commitment to the betterment of Assyrian society. These are necessary elements in attempting to establish and maintain an HTA (Orozco & Rouse, 2013; Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009). Younan reminded the group that this attitude, though still unhelpful, often derives out of rational grounds and structural traits of society such as commitment to occupation and family. Thus, the attention of the group members regarding community centered on size, growth and evolution as well as the necessity of a common,

connected core. I propose that community-building capacity will suffer with a lack of organization in the community as a whole and lack of responsibility within individual community members. Without devoted individuals willing to establish a community organization, the development of a Hometown Association becomes exceedingly difficult consequently preventing strong communal ties, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Youth

Much of the conversation involving the betterment of the nation through the establishment of efficient organization in communities highlights the role of the youth. A majority of the focus group members considered themselves youth.⁷ All of the participants mentioned the Church Youth Group as a means for interaction in the community and to facilitate engaging with the Assyrian nation. Access to the youth group came to various participants at the ages of six to eight. Aside from friends at school, the church youth group was noted as one of the only settings for potential connections with other community members; and perhaps the only setting for connecting with other Assyrian youth. Considering the influence of the church it makes sense that the church youth group is a vital part of the experience of the youth in this community. However, this fact also denotes the lack of diversity in opportunities for Assyrian youth trying to connect with their culture and community. Yet again, the need to supplement a relatively singular route of community cohesion is evident. An HTA could provide a beneficial option though participants believe its effectiveness depends on more than its

⁷ The Focus Group defined youth as an individual between the ages of 7-28

inherent existence; considerations of the youth's character, activity, and interests are imperatively relevant.

The opinion of the youth by focus group participants was blunt: youth could do better. Whether comparing the opportunities of contemporary youth to that of past generations or asserting and accepting a "lazy" attitude among youth community members, the focus group participants provided clear critique of the upcoming generation of Assyrians. Akkad affirmed that there are "some strong individuals that love who they are and love their Assyrian culture" though his tone emphasized those who "in a moments notice, they're ready to give it all up." Ashor, who came to Phoenix later in life than any other participant, observed upon arrival a lack of pride in Assyrian heritage from the youth. This observation is reiterated by Ephraim and Wilson, voices specifically from that generation. Ephraim and Wilson are both 25-year old males who have lived in and established connections in Phoenix for quite some time. Their friends and networks are largely due to time spent in the area rather than catalyzed by a community-based organization like an HTA.

Aware of these obstacles the participants provided various degrees of speculation about the future of the youth and thus, the community here in Phoenix. Although some were positive and "have faith in the future, for the future youth to do something," some found more shame in what they've seen. In fact, Ashor directly cited anger as an engaged emotion regarding a lack of application for many Assyrian youth. He contrasts his journey of struggle and success to that of many Assyrian youth who are provided resources and access though fail to take advantage of the "better life" their parents have attempted to make for them. Lack of pride and lack of understanding were cited as

intertwined causes for youth disinterest in Assyrianism. Although all identified as Assyrian, and had throughout their lives, sometimes youth “didn’t really know what it all meant.” These concerns as well as access to motivators and potential, impassioned mentors like Ashor could well be addressed by an HTA providing cultural and social gatherings and opportunities (Orozco & Rouse, 2013, 281).

Conversely and fortunately, recognizing a positive change over his few years residing in Arizona Ashor has “seen kids in the Church actually grow in Assyrian pride.” When given the opportunity youth have shown that they will participate and grow in their culture. Ephraim brought up dances that used to bring the community together. In contrast to a party, these dances facilitated the learning of Assyrian line dancing (*khigga*). “We’d teach Assyrian dances to the youth”, asserted Ephraim, “and the youth would just start...they would rage with this feeling inside.” Thus, under particular circumstances Assyrian youth in the Valley area have exhibited an enthusiasm in their nation’s culture. Pride in the Assyrian nation and heritage is frequently mentioned as a contemporary concern and point of emphasis for the future. Moreover, the opportunities that have engaged the youth in the past, such as *khigga* classes, are the sort of activities that can be organized and promoted by HTAs (Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009).

Organization

The participants of the focus group were aware that the focus of this research is encapsulated by efforts to further community cohesion. Their attention to organization as an effort as well as a means to cohesion, that is, organization (in the form of an HTA) as an embodiment of Assyrianism, was emphatically and frequently noted throughout the discussion. Residing in Phoenix and being heavily involved in the Assyrian community

here, Sargon, observed a shift in how the local organizations evolved with the growth of the community. Citing, in particular, the Assyrian Aide Society, the Assyrian Democratic Movement, and Mar Zaia Assyrian Organization, he asserted the initial contributions of these organizations were multifold. Listening to Sargon I realized that early in the community's growth spurt (during the 1990s and early 2000s) these organizations, acted as HTAs by raising and providing access to funds, hosting parties and gatherings, as well as maintaining a notion of community structure. He also recognized though, that as more churches were built and the community populace grew, these groups began not wanting to associate with one another or assist one another. "Even though they intermingled...there was no consolidated effort to establish a neutral organization," Sargon stressed. With segregation present between these organizations we may consider the solidarity of the predominant Assyrian Church, the Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East.

As mentioned, the Assyrian Church of the East was the first official, organized entity for Assyrians in Phoenix. However, "they [church staff and officials] were very limited in activity," said Sargon. St. Peter's did seem to make way for some community involvement though. An exhibition of Assyrian dancing at the Chandler Cultural Club, was supported by the church, though Sargon felt "[there was] nothing ultimately with the goal of establishing a permanent community organization."

The limitations of the Church acting as the central pillar for Assyrian community and cultural organization are based in the Church's obligations to the greater Assyrian Church of the East and the local diocese. Historically, "with regards to anything social or cultural generally speaking [in Phoenix], you go through the Church" which inherently

negates the opportunity for totally unbiased reign over whatever function, event, or idea one may present. “But now there are other organizations that have come to cater to the cultural needs” of the community, according to Ashor. Responding to both of these topics for concern Ephraim suggests “one really big organization where Assyrians can do what they feel like doing for the culture.” He clarified that the organization he referred to would not be religiously affiliated. Thus, the need for and support of the establishment of an HTA is clear.

The aforementioned issues give cause for a more comprehensive and efficient application of community organizing for Assyrians. Suggestions regarding needs and objectives of Assyrian HTAs in Phoenix were presented by focus group participants. Sargon, in consideration of the future of the community, mentioned an element “that’s really lacking in Phoenix is that there are no community organizations working towards building a relationship with the local city government, building relationships with the immigrant community, providing social services, providing cultural events...that bring money back into the community.” Akkad recognized the need for the organizations that do exist to “keep focused on moving forward.” He went on to argue that many organizations are “content with where they are” and that’s why “a lot of them are just hosting parties.” The projects and organization itself should endure and be able to be more generally implemented to help other communities (Orozco & Zanello, 2009, p. 61). By only hosting parties an organization cannot proliferate much positive recognition for the Assyrian community, nor can it improve the academic and professional connections for Assyrians within the greater community. Instead, Hometown Associations specialize in proliferating community empowerment, awareness, and cultural preservation directly

responding to the elements lacking in Phoenix currently (Orozco & Rouse, 2013, pgs. 280-283; Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009). Furthermore, although HTAs may provide recreational gatherings, a consensus within the focus group was that these are not their ultimate priority. More constructive criticism highlights the lack of influence or attention given to youth. Younan alleged that youth lack the motivation to stay involved in the Assyrian cultural scene because obstinate elders push them out. Describing the authoritative concerns of Assyrian organizational administrations in the area Sargon notes “dictatorial” and “patriarchal” mentalities as negative elements present in many contemporary organizations. This mentality is antithetical to the positive progression of HTAs. According to Orozco and Zanello, it is important for community members to have a sense of ownership of the organization (2009).

Generally the group maintained a confidence about the potential for community organizations to benefit this immigrant population. However, many already established groups have exhibited a nature of inadaptability and contention. It is clear then, in respect to the Phoenix community, HTAs may be necessary and can account for many features not present in the community though ultimately they must be attentive to egalitarian values instead of traditional and parochial constructs if they expect to be successful.

Homeland

Having learned of the importance placed on an ancestral homeland by literature on the subject I must discuss the lack of emphasis on this vital concept within the focus group. Two defining factors account for such a massive exclusion. Primarily, as mentioned, my line of questioning was not focused on ancestral homeland as the purpose

of this study is the application of HTAs in immigrant Assyrian communities. The dispersion of Assyrians and our families is evident in the conversation with the geographic range mentioned consisting of London, Toronto, Phoenix, and Arkansas. However, perhaps the more hidden, yet critical reason for this exclusion is the makeup of the group. Most of the group members declared to have emigrated from Iraq (considered Assyrians ancestral homeland) at a very young age or even not been born there. All of the focus group members except Ashor spent the vast majority of their lives in developed, host countries. The participants' context and framework as youth and lack of experience in the homeland largely shapes their inattention to the subject so heavily stressed by Safran. Basically, the contexts of both the research and the participants' background experience place Homeland in a peripheral role. However, I cannot lay enough emphasis on the fact that homeland is a key concept applied to the overall conversation of diasporic nations (Safran, 1991; Werbner, 2002).

Interview

Introduction

Establishing and maintaining a Hometown Association is a challenging task. Paperwork on applications and constitutional framework, community relations to gain awareness, and building a solid membership are just a few of the tasks vital to new organizations. Thus, experienced insight greatly behooves groups attempting to establish a cultural organization in their communities. Jackson, a devoted student of Assyrian culture, language, and history and executive board member of a Phoenix Assyrian cultural organization, provides this fundamental, experienced advice to communities considering the establishment of a similar type of organization. Jackson exhibits a heightened interest in his Assyrian heritage with skills in the language and historical knowledge of the nation well beyond many of his fellow Assyrians. Jackson's schooling and upbringing are significant catalysts for his contributions to the organization's development that consequently enhance his ability to share quality, applicable information with the study. Ultimately, the interview provides his knowledge and vision with a gateway to the public and specifically to growing Assyrian communities.

He is a first generation immigrant in his mid-20s who has utilized educational opportunities and his family's attention to cultural roots as facilitators for his background in Assyriology. More than that, however, Jackson's dedication to and enthusiasm for the organization, and Assyrianism in general, has driven and is continuing to drive the organization's capacity to provide services for the community. The aim of the interview was to acquire and share his testament to a few tangible features that are beneficial to cultural organization establishment and momentum.

Analysis

Over the course of the interview Jackson's responses relate to two main elements: 1) important components involved with establishing and maintaining a cultural organization and 2) goals and obstacles faced in his organization's experience. Jackson's statements can be taken and utilized by other Assyrian communities though they must be considered within their context. The advice he puts forth and the challenges he discusses are based out of his experience with the Assyrian community in Phoenix. However, the experience he has acquired, though based in one organization's growth, should be considered when developing strategies for other Assyrian communities. It is important to remember that Assyrians throughout the diaspora face similar challenges as connection to culture and community cohesion are becoming less palpable. Therefore, I propose the reception, evolution, and application of many of Jackson's statements to Assyrian communities throughout the diaspora.

Important Components of Building a Cultural Organization

The interview revealed a few features involved in building a cultural organization that must be addressed in the primitive stages of organizational development, that is, its conception. A dedicated group of individuals with "similar goals and interests" initiates the process by organizing, establishing goals, and cultivating an organizational identity. Jackson cited two vital features of building an organization's identity: devising a mission and developing a founding document like a constitution. He asserted that both of these items ensure the organization knows its purpose and does not strain to "delve into other areas and projects that will conflict with other [organizational goals]." Jackson declared

the mission of his organization is to “promote and preserve Assyrian culture within the Assyrian community and even outside of the Assyrian community.” Specifically, he cited hosting athletic events, hosting cultural events, [and] hosting educational events as the means of promoting and preserving Assyrian culture. Regarding the organization's constitution, Jackson mentioned a multiple step, integrative and adaptive process that enduring over a year. In fact, I recently took part in the vote to implement the most updated form of the constitution that clarifies previously ambiguous doctrine. The organization's identity and capacity largely stems from these foundational items. Also, this mission and these goals are directly in line with that of an HTA (Orozco & Rouse, 2013; Orozco & Garcia-Zanello, 2009) and exhibit how an HTA can be applied to an Assyrian community.

For communities that desire to establish firmer ties between individuals and with their national heritage a cultural organization primarily needs dedication, hands-on work, and structure. According to Jackson if a group of individuals ventures to carry out the goals of cultural preservation and community cohesion their plan of action effectively begins with foundational elements like a constitution and mission, though, they will quickly jump into more complex tasks in order to propel momentum.

One of these more complex tasks is acquiring 501c3 status, which is an official nonprofit status. This is the organization’s primary goal at the moment according to Jackson. With charitable status the organization can cease relying so heavily on “membership dues and donations from members and nonmembers.” Grants and other funding are valuable potentials requiring 501c3 status, a fact that motivates the organization to rapidly gain approval as a charitable organization (Orozco & Rouse,

2013, p. 280). In order to apply the organization has implemented a multi-fold process. Initially, a committee was created to oversee the filing of the application. Jackson echoes Matthews' analysis of the perpetuation of transnationally identified Carribeans attesting that it is helpful to have an individual with preferred skills and/or knowledge (2014, p. 113). For example, a "graduating law student in Phoenix...began the work on it[the application]...[and] submitted the application. From my own time with the organization I have witnessed an emphasis on decorum, legal pillars, and Robert's Rules (Robert, 2011).⁸ The conscious, collective choice of the organization to implement these values motivated the commission of valuable, relevant knowledge from an organization member. I have found the evolution of and focus on the constitution assists the organization's operational capacity. Meetings are carried out smoothly, everyone is provided an opportunity to contribute, and all anticipated meeting topics are usually brought to the table.

Another step that can be assisted by members is the Form 1023 User Fee required when filing for tax-exemption status. The fee is around \$400 ("Application for Recognition of Exemption," www.irs.gov). Our organization was fortunate to have the application fee fronted by a founding member. However, not all groups may be granted such a generous gift and other methods of fundraising may be necessary. I suggest a collective effort by organization members to either split the cost and donate the funds or determine an appropriate route for raising the money. By raising the funds as a group the organization members build relationships through group effort and directly invest in the organization as a collective. Once all the materials are prepared the application should be

⁸ Robert's Rules are a comprehensive set of rules of order and parliamentary procedures.

submitted as soon as possible. Jackson stressed the “waiting game” of the process indicating a timely process. After further discussion with Jackson it became clear to me that the best route is the balance between swiftness and attention to detail. The application should get in as soon as the organization is capable if nonprofit status is a serious goal. However, it must only be submitted once it is efficiently and accurately filed. For Jackson 501c3 status is undoubtedly the primary goal for the organization in its current state.

Some components of growth, however, deal more directly with the immediate capacity and reach of the organization. Jackson recognizes a draw to his organization that he does not observe often in other Assyrian cultural organizations. Consistency with meetings, events, and time commitments in general allow individuals a greater ability to participate in the organization. He feels that members who cannot depend on consistent meetings and often must adjust their schedules due to a disorganized association are less likely to stay committed or active. Consistent, efficient meetings encourage individuals as they can attend meetings on schedule and make an impact while not having to go out of their way to simply participate in a cultural organization. Thus, sound practices like consistency can breed other noted features of a growing organization such as a stable active member base. Jackson mentions the desire for active members rather than individuals that simply pay the annual membership fee and do not attend meetings or participate. “We want people to become members because they feel they can contribute directly to the organization and to the decision making of the organization,” Jackson asserted. Active membership provides the potential for progress as opposed to an

organization with no labor-force to increase awareness or develop programs for the community to benefit from (Orozco & Rouse, 2013, p. 282).

When I asked Jackson about the pride of the organization his response indicated the benefits of a grassroots, family feel. The “strong kinship” Jackson has felt with his group produces the open, comfortable environment allowing the organization to encourage new members “to come and contribute right away.” This intimate tone of the organization is also promoted by the exclusion of religious or political affiliation. Jackson describes how the organization strives to help individuals develop as informed, contributing citizens on an individual level though the group as a whole remains neutral in respect to impassioned and diverse fields such as religion and politics. As a cultural preservation organization any religious or political affiliation would inherently conflict with the organization’s main goal. Supporting the community in national heritage can mean guidance and support but through meetings and discourse the organization as a whole decided that political or religious affiliation puts the potential for charitable status at risk preventing the organization from servicing the cultural needs of the community. In contrast to the discouragement of involvement in such sensitive areas Jackson provided his take on the pillars for community organizations. He notes three pillars for “any good organization that is trying to keep a local community together and trying to provide services for the community.” Education, culture, and fellowship drive an influential and beneficial community organization according to Jackson’s experience. By educational he referred to the inclusion of “some well-educated members of the community [and] professional members of the community that have connections to community colleges and universities” and who bring their area of expertise to the

organization's skill set. This notion is exemplified by the resourcefulness exhibited in drafting and editing the organization's constitution. As mentioned, an organization member and law student played the primary role in the cultivation and evolution of the document. Additionally, an HTA, or cultural organization, can provide educational services such as financial aid filing assistance as well as history and language lessons for Assyrians. Providing venues and designing events that the community can learn and gain from helps to fulfill the cultural element necessary. "Whether it be Assyrian dancing, music, [or] history" Jackson believes it is important for the community to continue cultural practices. Through cultural events and other services provided by the organization, fellowship is offered. HTA emphasis on cultural support is a prominent feature cited by Orozco and Garcia-Zanello and can contribute to community development or fundraising (2009, p. 12). Specific to the Phoenix Assyrian community, athletics and arts are the two fields Jackson finds as viable options in extending community outreach and providing social opportunities. He cites the organization's basketball league which had over 100 members last year. Assyrians, as a diasporic nation face complications in education, culture, and fellowship with Assyrian communities growing in size though lacking the organization necessary to facilitate a fully serviced and satisfied community. From an initial group of founders to building healthy relationships of all types between organization members Jackson presented information that can assist in a strategic plan of action in the conception of an Assyrian Hometown Association. Moving forward, the goals and obstacles of Jackson's organization help in defining strategy and determining points of interest.

Goals and Obstacles

The significance placed on the impact 501c3 status could have is clear. I am sure of this having observed and recorded the fact during the interview and within the organization's current vision. Though, in addition to gaining 501c3 status Jackson asserts the organization's more enduring and direct goal is continuous engagement with the community. His positivity about consistent activity within Assyrians in Phoenix drives me to believe such a target would dually benefit the organization. Firstly, engaging the community with devotion and intention fulfills the organization's purpose of promoting Assyrianism in the community. Secondly, events, meetings, and other functions support the progress of the organization through awareness and networking. Jackson did note other objectives of the organization as well. He was particularly interested in serving the spectrum of Assyrian community members in order to facilitate their growth as "good, civic citizens." He suggests promoting individual involvement in community affairs as a means of enhancing the potential of individual Assyrians and ultimately the nation. In fact, one of the ideal goals emulated by the Phoenix organization, Jackson said, is the discouragement of the seclusion of the community. Instead, the organization looks to "be open" and "at the same time...preserve [Assyrian culture]." The origin of these goals is a passion for Assyrian roots and a concern for the future of the nation. Though, I claim some of the influence of these goals derives out of obstacles faced by the organization. The following are likely challenges Assyrian cultural organizations will face.

The most common challenge Jackson cited during the interview is the skepticism by the senior generation, especially those who have emigrated directly from the ancestral homeland. According to Jackson, the "Middle Eastern mentality" can be "very weary and

suspicious of really anything” especially “any type of organization of individuals.” Skepticism or suspicion is mentioned nine times over the half hour emphasizing its weight in Jackson’s considerations. He recognizes, “one common thing with Assyrians is they see a lot of groups come and go pretty easily.” Based on Jackson’s thoughts, dealing with and perhaps countering the cynicism aimed at the organization’s credibility simply requires patience and intensive work to firmly establish financial and infrastructural stability as well as a solid membership core. Jackson highlights a consistent, accessible meeting place as well as stable funding as tangible elements in proliferating a credible reputation for the organization. Building a solid membership core directly relates to the objective of consistent community engagement. Furthermore, the acquisition of official nonprofit status carries a connotation of the stability and notoriety that can counter community skepticism. It is imperative for cultural organizations to gain the respect and support of the community but I propose what’s more difficult, yet more impactful, is gaining the trust of the community.

If trust is established, getting more individuals involved – another obstacle noted by Jackson’s experience – will prove much easier. Community skepticism naturally prevents positive awareness and building membership. Even if membership can be grown, based on my interview with Jackson I believe an active member base will only mature once a community trusts it can invest not only an annual fee but consistent time and effort to an organization’s mission. Over the process of his organization’s growth, Jackson has come to understand he and his fellow members are servicing the needs of at least two distinct groups, the domestically born individuals and the immigrants. Although the cultural needs derive out of the same tradition, each group, due to their experience,

will have different needs. He finds the organization's capacity to serve both groups is vital. However, I believe the navigation of that course must be based on a case-by-case basis. Each community will have unique details and functional capacity causing the need to analyze each community's particular circumstances. This task falls to the individuals interested in building an HTA. The case of the Assyrian community in Phoenix is shared in this research to provide the public with an overview of a growing Assyrian community and one of the organization's working to serve that community.

Part IV – Discussion Review and Suggestions of the Research

Critique and Further Research

The limitations of this study are rooted in a nearly homogenous sample of participants all originating from the same Assyrian community. Not only is the research restricted by its focus in Phoenix but it also lacks the opinions of valuable community members such as women, children and elders. I do believe the information gathered can be valuable and applicable to other Assyrian communities. Though, without these voices an overwhelmingly significant slice of the Phoenix Assyrian community is missing. The fact that these voices are not included was never the intention of the research. However, I have still, in my attempt to benefit Assyrians, reproduced a greater attention to the voices of male community members than that of women. Moreover, my sources are limited in age and thus mindset, values, and interests. The unintentional and undesirable exclusion from the study of women and seniors or individuals younger than 18 speaks volumes regarding major aspects of the research focus. Assyrian society is undeniably engrained by patriarchal values and structure; modern communities have distinguished relevance placed on various age demographics; and, overall Assyrians are currently in a transitional period of social and democratic growth. In order to more fully grasp the state of the nation of Assyria and understand the role cultural organizations can play there are multiple features that could be improved in similar studies.

Primarily, the variety of the sample must be extended. Only a portion of a segment of the Assyrian nation has been granted a voice by this research. In truly uncovering Assyrian attitudes on the matter of HTA applicability and Assyrian national

preservation research must be more proactive in acquiring the thoughts of all sorts of Assyrians from a given community. Although I made an effort to recruit women for the study I was not able to acquire their input. A few factors may have played a part in this limitation. Aside from logistical inhibitions there are cultural concerns to consider regarding the absence of women from the study. As a male – even though I am Assyrian – there is an immediate difference in how I am viewed. Many women may have not felt comfortable sharing their thoughts with me or perhaps the context of research largely guided by a male perspective was not an opportunity they wished to participate in. Of course, the only important factor regardless of why is the inherent fact that these inhibitions could still exist. Having been raised in an Assyrian family within the United States I never experienced how my counterparts in our homeland were socialized. I am not claiming to absolutely understand the reasons why particular individuals were not able to participate in the research. I am only noting that these are genuine concerns that must be considered due to various facets of our nation’s current state. For instance, within the Assyrian community there are certain conceptualizations of gender that likely impacted the perception of the Assyrian women I approached. However, it is evident that the evolution of experiences within the nation is changing. Many women were welcoming, interested, and even enthusiastic about the research. Unfortunately, their commitment to their families, the onset of sickness, and other unforeseeable circumstances prevented their participation in the study. These factors can arise in any research project with any variety of circumstances. What must be emphasized here as a limitation is that my role as a male researcher certainly had an impact on the research process, structure, and outcome.

I would feel unfair if I did not speak to the progression apparent in the nation as exhibited by the organization studied here. Women are vital and heavily involved in the organization's growth and success so far. So, although this research was not able to display the transitional period evident within the nation – and, at least, the Phoenix Assyrian community - there is a tangible movement towards a greater inclusion of women in leadership roles and influential positions. In fact, the organization recently hosted elections naming their first female Vice President. This is a vital stepping-stone in the inclusion of the female voice within the society as a whole. I am dissatisfied with the degree of diversity included in my research though I am hopeful for further research as higher standards of inclusion and democracy are embedding themselves in our nation's outlook.

In addition to the lack of gender diversity in the study there is the factor of age homogeneity. Most focus group members identified as youth highlighting a need to reassess notions like senior skepticism in reference to organizational growth and credibility. In my search for focus group candidates many senior members of the community were graciously helpful and supportive. Unfortunately, their assistance often led me to other candidates and not their own involvement. I can't speak to why none of the senior individuals I spoke with asserted their interest in participating in the study.

However, it would be wise here to consider my role not only as an insider but also as an outsider. My insider role was facilitated by the fact that I have been blessed with opportunities to learn my language and have been heavily exposed to Assyrian culture since birth. My outsider role, on the other hand is immediately evident to any Assyrian, especially those raised in the homeland who have immigrated to the developed world I

was raised in. Without an pure grasp on our language, an obvious nervousness when approaching fluent dialogue with other Assyrians and with the added factor that my mother is from the United States I am not shocked or upset that some Assyrians may see me as an outsider. This may have consciously or subconsciously shaped others' perspectives of me. Even if this element of positionality was a non-factor, the voices of senior citizens are missing and their absence from the work consequently indicates their absence from the information shared.

Individuals under 18 are also not cited in the research. Due to IRB restrictions I was not able to request or allow minors to participate in the study. Although their views are undeniably important for upcoming generations and the continued growth of the nation (and cultural organizations) they are still considered a vulnerable class. Their inclusion in the research was simply not an obstacle I could overcome for this particular study. I know there are many community members in each of these categories who could have provided invaluable information and insight. I would include in my own continuing research as well as encourage other research to ensure the inclusion of a greater variety in age for research participants.

One of the reasons for the lack of diversity in the sample is the sample size. Due to time restrictions and logistics I only managed to incorporate one focus group of six respondents into the study. With more focus groups and more participants the pool of information obviously grows. There is a complex of missing responses that could be gathered as opposed to the limited sources and dynamics that provided this research its qualitative data.

The individual interview on the other hand did well to find relevant, valuable information from a relevant, valuable figure. Of course, more interviews with more founding members of the Assyrian organization discussed (or any cultural organization) could provide a different perspective and highlight different points involved in the establishment of a local, immigrant cultural organization. A more varied interview guide, a follow-up interview on specific notes by the participant, and even a focus group with founding members could all enhance the information gathered on the establishment of cultural organizations. In fact, there is no reason to limit the subject interest of the interview (the process of establishing a cultural organization) to Assyrian organizations. Given that much of this information references only the growth, obstacles, and successes of cultural organizations other minority groups who have worked to move in a similar direction can be great allies in this step forward. Overall, the study does provide great information that can be viewed, critiqued, and applied in various settings. However, it is immensely limited. These two assertions highlight one significant point for me; that is the fact that there is so much more insight and experience as well as suggestions that can come from even the most minor of improvements and additions in a similar study.

Can Hometown Associations be Applied to Assyrian Communities?

As a result of this research and the valuable contributions of the participants I feel confident that Assyrian communities can benefit from cultural organizations or Hometown Associations. Although this conclusion cannot be applied generally, the evidence presented exhibits that at least some Assyrians' desire an organization that can improve community solidarity. Furthermore, the application of and process of growth with a cultural organization in the Phoenix area has proven sometimes a struggle and

often complex. Ultimately, though, its impact and potential are evident. I believe by establishing HTAs and organizing Assyrian communities, the nation as a whole will undoubtedly gain ground in respect to recognition, access to resources, and security within the existing system.

References

- AINA. Assyrian International News Agency www.aina.org
- Anonymous. (2004) The Christians in the Crossfire. *Kurdish Life*, 20-22. Retrieved from <http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/216350009?accountid=4485>
- Alcock, S. E. (Ed.). (2001). *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (Vol. 122). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Babbie, E. R. (2013). *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Barjamovic, G. (2011). *A Historical Geography of Anatolia in the Old Assyrian Colony Period* (Vol. 38). Museum Tusculanum Press.
- Baumer, C. (2006). *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Becker, A. H. (2006). *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- BetBasoo, P. (2013). *A Brief history of Assyrians*. Retrieved from <http://www.aina.org/brief.html>
- Boháč, A. (2010). Assyrian Ethnic Identity in a Globalizing World. *Beyond Globalisation: Exploring the Limits of Globalisation in the Regional Context*, 66-72.
- Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burnard, P., Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Analysing and Presenting Qualitative Data. *British Dental Journal*, 204(8), 429-432.
- Chilcott, J. (1998). Structural Functionalism as a Heuristic Device. *American Anthropological Association*, 29(1), 103-111.
- Chiu, L., & Knight, D. (1999). How Useful are Focus Groups for Obtaining the Views of Minority Groups? In Rosaline S Barbour, & J. Kitlinger (Eds.), *Developing Focus Group Research*. (pp. 113-126). London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd..
- Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302-338.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Fincke, J. C. (2003). The Babylonian Texts of Nineveh: Report of the British Museum's "Ashurbanipal Library Project." *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 111-149.
- Gair, S. (2012). Feeling Their Stories Contemplating Empathy, Insider/Outsider Positionings, and Enriching Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 22(1), 134-143.
- Harris, A. P. (2012). Critical Race Theory. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier.
- Huaco, G. (1986). Ideology and General Theory: The Case of Sociological Functionalism. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28(1), 34-54.
- Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2003). In-depth Interviews. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Research Students and Researchers* (pp. 138 –169). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Liverani, M. (2001). The Fall of the Assyrian Empire: Ancient and Modern Interpretations. *Empires*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 374-391.
- Malek, Y., & Wigram, W. A. (1935). *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians*. Warren Point, New Jersey: The Assyrian National Federation & The Assyrian National League of America.
- Matthews, L. K. (2014). *English-Speaking Caribbean Immigrants: Transnational Identities*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2010). *Designing Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- McClure, E. (2001). Language and Identity in the Assyrian Diaspora. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 31(1), 107-120.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Morgan, D. (1996). Focus Groups. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22 (1), 129-152.
- Murre-van den Berg, H. (2011). Syriac Orthodox Church. *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- O'leary, D. (1949). *How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs*. Great Britain: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

- Orozco, M., & Garcia-Zanello, E. (2009). Hometown Associations: Transnationalism, Philanthropy, and Development. *THE BROWN JOURNAL OF WORLD AFFAIRS*, 15(2), 57-73.
- Orozco, M. & Rouse, R. (2013). "Migrant Hometown Associations and Opportunities for Development": *The Community Development Reader*. Ed. James DeFilippis and Susan Saegert. New York: Routledge.
- Parker, B. J. (2011) The Construction and Performance of Kingship in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 67, 357–386.
- Parsons, T. (1964). Evolutionary Universals in Society. *American Sociological Association*, 29(3), 339-357.
- Petrosian, V. (2006). Assyrians in Iraq. *Iran & the Caucasus*, 10(1), 113-147.
- Postgate, J. N. (1992) The Land of Assur and the Yoke of Assur, *World Archaeology*, 23(3), 247-263.
- Robert, H. M., & Corbin, S. (2011). *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo.
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. *Diaspora*, 1(1), 83-99.
- Thompson, J. B. (1990) *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Travis, H. (2006). 'Native Christians Massacred': The Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians During World War I. *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 1(3), 327-372.
- Trevino, A. J., Harris, M., & Wallace, D. (2008). What's So Critical About Critical Race Theory? *Contemporary Justice Review*, 11(1), 7-10.
- UNPO. (2008). Assyria. *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Weiner, M. (2012). Towards a Critical Global Race Theory. *Sociology Compass*, 6(4), 332-350.
- Werbner, P. (2002). The Place Which is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalism. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(1), 119-133.

APPENDIX I

PERTINENT MATERIAL DURING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Discussion Guide for Focus Groups:

When and how did you arrive in phoenix?

Who was with you, if anyone?

How soon were you able to meet people?

What were the first obstacles you faced when arriving to Phoenix?

What can you say about perhaps why these issues came about?

When did Assyrians begin to have a solid and interactive community here in the valley?

Were there leaders? Who were they?

How did the community operate in general? Priorities? Events? Troubles?

Where did you emigrate?

Did you meet Assyrians from other areas of the diaspora?

Were their problems or successes any different?

What have you seen in the youth of the Assyrian Phoenix community?

Is there national pride?

What are the interests of the youth according to older generations?

Could this be inaccurate?

Why do you think Phoenix has become a hub for Assyrians?

Political reasons? Familial relations? Geography?

Has Phoenix responded to the growth of the Assyrian population here?

How can Assyrians look to improve their reputation and capacity in Phoenix?

What sort of structure have you seen in Assyrian communities from (back home), other places you've lived, here in Phoenix?

Are any of these problematic?

Are any of these effective?

What would you say would improve these structures and organizational operatives?

What wisdom do you have for Assyrian youth and Assyrian organizations?

Where do you see our nation heading? Why? How?

Where would you like our nation to head? How? Why?

Discussion Guide for Interviews:

Tell me about your organization. History? Current state? Highlights?
What is the mission? What are future goals?

Explain some of the obstacles you faced when first setting up the HTA. What did they derive from? How did you deal with them?

How about obstacles since then? More common problems...
How difficult to overcome and how much of an impact are they?

What are the most efficient aspects of your HTA?
Why do you think this has become the case?

How significant is nationality with members of the HTA and for the HTA itself?
Describe various features and foci of the pride developed in the organization and in the communities?

Are HTAs an effective method of community cohesion?
Can they be flexible and still as impactful?

Are there any structural elements you would highly suggest?
Are there any paradigms you would strongly discourage?

The Assyrian Diaspora: Hometown Associations as a Means to Community Engagement

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Natasha Behl in the Social Justice & Human Rights program in New College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to help understand how Hometown Associations may be used to help Assyrian communities facing the effects of diaspora.

As a researcher I am inviting your participation in an in-depth interview, which will involve a session of two hours maximum during which we will discuss the various obstacles and solutions uncovered as you assisted in the development of the Assyrian American Cultural Organization of Arizona. As an Assyrian-American myself I am interested in supporting my community and providing the Assyrian nation with potential means towards success in the modern age. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

This study will ultimately benefit the Assyrian nation as a whole. Through analysis and application of the thoughts you share Assyrian communities will be more equipped to develop organizations that may increase cultural preservation, economic stability, and political empowerment. As individual members of the Assyrian nation you will benefit indirectly through the progression and solidarity this research may provide.

Your responses will be confidential. The results of this study will be used in a thesis for the completion of Masters of Arts in Social Justice & Human Rights at Arizona State University. The transcriptions required for the research will not include your names. Rather, a pseudonym will be used for your participation in the study.

I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Recordings will only be accessed by the focus group narrator/researcher and will be terminated immediately following transcription that will take place no longer than two weeks following the focus group completion.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: Samuel Tamo at (501) 554-2739; stamo@asu.edu or Dr. Natasha Behl at Natasha.Behl@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to be part of the study.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

The Assyrian Diaspora: Hometown Associations as a Means to Community Engagement

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Natasha Behl in the Social Justice & Human Rights program in New College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to help understand how Hometown Associations may be used to help Assyrian communities facing the effects of diaspora.

As a researcher I am inviting your participation in a focus group, which will involve a session of two and one half hours maximum during which a topic-based discussion will be conducted between you and five peers covering potential benefits of such an organization and how a Hometown Association may be integrated within Assyrian communities. I will facilitate this discussion with a guide as narrator. As an Assyrian-American myself I am interested in supporting my community and providing the Assyrian nation with potential means towards success in the modern age. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

This study will ultimately benefit the Assyrian nation as a whole. Through analysis and application of the thoughts you share Assyrian communities will be more equipped to develop organizations that may increase cultural preservation, economic stability, and political empowerment. As individual members of the Assyrian nation you will benefit indirectly through the progression and solidarity this research may provide. It is possible, however, that your thoughts and opinions will be unwelcome by other focus group members. Though a respectful environment of constructive and informative discussion will be maintained at all times.

Your responses will be confidential. The results of this study will be used in a thesis for the completion of Masters of Arts in Social Justice & Human Rights at Arizona State University. The transcriptions required for the research will not include your names. Rather, pseudonyms will be used for all participants. Complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for participants as the setting of a focus group requires the other participants to be present during the discussion.

I would like to audio record this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Recordings will only be accessed by the focus group narrator/researcher and will be terminated immediately following transcription which will take place no longer than two weeks following the focus group completion.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: Samuel Tamo at (501) 554-2739; stamo@asu.edu or Dr. Natasha Behl at Natasha.Behl@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to be part of the study.

Name:

Signature:

Date: