A Study of Iraqi Immigrants: Has The Shiʿa-Sunni Conflict Been Transferred to Ottawa, Canada?

A H M A D   J A F A R

Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, UK

ABSTRACT: The escalation of the Shiʿa-Sunni conflict in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 generated population dislocations. Significant numbers of Iraqis have fled the country for their own safety. Many Iraqis, representing both Shiʿa and Sunni Muslim groups, relocated to Canada as immigrants. This qualitative action research explores whether the Shiʿa-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Canada – more particularly Ottawa – by these Iraqi immigrants. Based on the perspectives of research participants, it transpires that a manifestation of the Shiʿa-Sunni conflict was found in Ottawa, Canada, where the study was conducted. Although the conflict has been transferred to Ottawa, it is a non-violent, low-level conflict.

KEYWORDS: Shiʿa, Sunni, Iraqi immigrants, Shiʿa-Sunni conflict, Canada

1 Focus and framing

This research project examined the dynamics between the Shiʿa and Sunni branches of Islam amongst Iraqi immigrants in Canada. The Shiʿa-Sunni conflict that animates this dynamic can be traced back to a controversy within Islam concerning the legitimate successor of the Prophet Muhammad, which began immediately following his death, as noted and recorded by researchers of Islamic studies (al-Wardi, 1969, Bahgat, 2005, Husain, 1947, Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Nakash, 1994, Sutherlin, 2007). One group supported ʿAlī, the son in-law of the Prophet and his cousin to lead Muslims. This group came to be known as the Shiʿa. However, the majority opted for Abū Bakr, one of the Prophet's senior companions to

become the first caliph. This group came to be known as the Sunni.

Whilst recognising that Shi'as and Sunnis share the main articles of Islamic beliefs, the majority of Shi'a Muslims do not recognise the authority of elected Muslim leaders, choosing instead to follow a line of Imams who are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and his daughter Fatima (Mallat, 1988). Shi'a Muslims believe that the Imam is sinless by nature and that his authority is infallible (Nakash, 1994). In contrast, Sunni Muslims contend that leadership of the community is not a birthright, but a trust that is earned and may be given or taken away by the people themselves (Nakash, 1994). This variance naturally gives rise to some differences on a variety of matters, such as political succession, authority and law. Even in a more domestic context, legal differences exist on issues such as inheritance and marriage (Nakash, 1994).

Whilst reviewing the literature, two main schools of thought have surfaced regarding the division between Shi'as and Sunnis. The first school of thought asserts that this conflict is the consequence of age-old animosities due to deeply rooted religious differences (Nasr, 2006, Mallat, 1988), whereas the second school of thought asserts that the Shi'a-Sunni conflict is more about politics and access to power and privilege by one group over the other, rather than about theology (Bahgat, 2005, Halm, 2004, Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Makiya, 2006). Regardless of which school of thought is accepted, both demonstrate 'a complex interplay within the historical development of theological, ideological, legal, and social affinities and differences which have come down to the present day' (Mallat, 1988, p. 703). Despite these differences, Iraq enjoyed periods of co-existence between Shi'a and Sunni communities. In particular, since the creation of Iraq as an independent political entity in 1921 and up until the Baath Party assumed power in 1968, the Shi'a-Sunni discourse was characterised as remarkably universalist, 'in which harmony prevails over the discord arising from the assertion of communitarian identity' (Mallat, 1988, p. 705).

1-1 Shi'a-Sunni dynamics in Iraq

Whilst the Sunni sect of Islam is dominant within the Islamic world, the Shi'a sect constitutes the majority of the Iraqi population (Bahgat, 2005). Despite this demographic, Iraq had not been ruled by a Shi'a government until the United States (U.S.) led an international coalition

to topple Saddam Hussein, a secular Sunni leader, in 2003 and pushed for an election (Bahgat, 2005, Nasr, 2006, Noorbaksh, 2008). For the first time in the history of Iraq as an independent political entity, this election placed the majority Shi'as in power (Bahgat, 2005, Nasr, 2006, Noorbaksh, 2008). Following this shift in power, Iraq has seen an increased escalation of violence between the Shi'a and Sunni sects (Bahgat, 2005, Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Sutherlin, 2007). It has been argued that three main elements have contributed to creating the conditions for this escalation: (a) the rise of Shi'ism as a result of the revolution in neighbouring Iran in 1979, (b) the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), and (c) the events of 9/11. (Bahgat, 2005, Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Sutherlin, 2007).

The year of 1979 marked an important milestone in the history of Shi'ism because a powerful Iranian Shi'a leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, rose with an ambition of reclaiming the leadership of the Islamic world (Bahgat, 2005, Takeyh, 2010). Thus, Shi'ism gained momentum for the first time in recent history due to the rise of Iran as a regional Shi'a power (Bahgat, 2005, Takeyh, 2010). This expansion of Shi'ism has been regarded as the impetus for the Iraq-Iran war during the period 1980 to 1988 (Nakash, 1994, Takeyh, 2010). Takeyh (2010) further suggests that the resulting eight years of fighting concluded with neither side being able to claim victory. However, what did result was an increase of tensions between Shi'as and Sunnis. This increase, compounded by an underlying motive of the Iranian revolution of extending Shi'ism throughout the region, emboldened the Shi'a majority in Iraq during the rule of Saddam Hussein between 1979 and 2003 (Bahgat, 2005, Ismael & Ismael, 2010). Furthermore, there was a growing perception by the international community that the regime of Saddam Hussein was a security threat to the international community particularly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This perception, coupled with the events of 9/11, provided a strong motive for the U.S. government to initiate action to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein (Bahgat, 2005). The subsequent success in toppling this regime in 2003 created the opportunity for the majority Shi'as in Iraq to assume power. As a result, the dynamics between the Shi'a and the Sunni changed and resulted in escalating violence (Blanchard, 2009, Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Luomi, 2008). Whilst the tension between the Shi'a and Sunni sects of Islam has existed for centuries, current circumstances have exacerbated the level of tension between them.

1-2 Dislocation as an implication of the Shiʿa-Sunni conflict

The escalation of the Shiʿa-Sunni conflict in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 generated population dislocations. Significant numbers of Iraqis have fled the country for their own safety (Ismael & Ismael, 2010). Many Iraqis, representing both the Shiʿa and Sunni Muslim groups, have relocated to Canada as refugees (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011, para. 4). This action research project aims to explore the dynamics between Shiʿa and Sunni Iraqi immigrants in Canada and considers the question as to whether the Shiʿa-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Canada by these two cultures by Iraqi immigrants. For the purposes of this research study, immigrants were defined as 'persons residing in Canada who were born outside of Canada, excluding temporary foreign workers, Canadian citizens born outside Canada and those with student or working visas' (Statistics Canada, 2010, para. 1).

1-3 Canada as the host country for dislocated populations

Canadian society is constructed of multi-identity communities in a multicultural context where immigrants can practice their faith and retain their own culture. In keeping with its humanitarian tradition and international obligations, Canada welcomes an estimated 250,000 immigrants every year, among them Muslims from Iraq (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Canada accepted approximately 9,000 refugees from Iraq between 2009 and 2011. This number was increased to 20,000 by 2013 and increased further by 2015 (para. 4).

Constitutional protections and multicultural policies adopted in Canada promote equal acceptance of race, religion, and culture of immigrants (Jones, 2000). Notwithstanding these protections and policies, the dominant culture presents a challenge to new immigrants and extends beyond language and communication (Isaacs, 2009, Jones, 2000). Immigrants bring their own values, beliefs, and preferences in lifestyle, 'all of which come together to create a new cultural ecology that is not necessarily consistent with either a way of life before or a way of life resembling that of the host society' (Isaacs, 2009, p. 15). With this in mind, Takim (2007) argues that these immigrants may have little incentive to leave their bitter experiences and prejudices behind

once in the host country. In the case of Iraqi immigrants, given that Shi'as and Sunnis were part of a culture that set the conditions for the escalation of the Shi'a-Sunni conflict in Iraq, this research project set out to explore how experiences and biases formed in their country of origin may manifest themselves in the host country, Canada. Accordingly, this inquiry established a primary question and sub questions to explore, through participatory research methods (Cornwall & Jewkes, 2010), whether the Shi'a-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Ottawa by Iraqi immigrants.

1-4 Research questions

This participatory research focused 'on a process of sequential reflection and action, carried out with and by local people rather than on them' (p. 1667). The research project used qualitative interviews with Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants as well as non-Muslim Canadians, wherein, as the researcher, I 'ask[ed] about, and listen[ed] to, what people themselves tell about their lived world' (Kvale, 2007, p. 2). In addition to understanding how the Shi'a-Sunni conflict may manifest itself in Ottawa, the scope of this project considered other elements that could contribute or allow such a conflict to emerge in the host country, Canada. To fulfil this objective, the following central research question was explored: has the Shi'a-Sunni conflict been transferred to the greater Ottawa region by Iraqi immigrants?

In order to further consider this inquiry, the following sub questions were posed: (a) are there tensions that have been transferred through immigration between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants in the Ottawa national capital region, (b) is there a variance between Iraqi immigrants, both Shi'a and Sunni under 30 years old and older than 30, in terms of their perceptions of a transferred Shi'a-Sunni conflict following immigration, (c) in what circumstances, if any, do Iraqi immigrants in Ottawa self-identify themselves as Shi'a or Sunni, (d) how would Iraqi immigrants, both Shi'a and Sunni, describe their interaction pre-immigration, in Iraq, (e) how would Iraqi immigrants, both Shi'a and Sunni, describe their interaction post immigration to the greater Ottawa region, and (f) what role, if any, does the Canadian culture impact Iraqi immigrants in potential conflicts?

1-5 Significance of the inquiry

Iraqi immigrants arriving in Canada are impacted by the atrocity of the Shi'a-Sunni conflict in their home country. According to Haddad (2011), violence between 2006 and 2007, particularly in Baghdad, grew to its most appalling level; likewise it is beyond debate that the communal violence, whilst a feature of the Iraqi landscape throughout the post-2003 period, became more pronounced between 2006 and 2007. By 2006, streets battles in Iraq between rival Shi'a and Sunni militias, forced expulsions of the sectarian other, the bombing of mosques on both sides of the sectarian divide and the pervasive fear of the sectarian other hardened sectarian identity and fostered a distinctly aggressive sectarianism amongst many Sunnis and Shi'as (Haddad, 2011). Grounded in their world views, beliefs, and cultural norms, Iraqi immigrants, like all immigrants, are also overwhelmed by the experiences of settling into and adapting to their new country. As stated by Qunying (2007), 'making adjustments is a complex process and one may remain uncomfortable and off balance for quite some time' (p. 114). This immigrant experience may well impact how Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants perceive each other in light of the challenges presented by the host culture. In this context, this participatory action research project provided an opportunity for exploration of whether the Shi'a-Sunni conflict in Iraq has been transferred to Ottawa by Iraq immigrants. Furthermore, the findings have the potential to expose underlying elements, including the complexities of the immigrant experience, which could be considered to be either promoting or ameliorating the tension between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants.

By drawing attention to the intra-Muslim conflict in Canada, this research was intended to support continuing understanding of the culture of Muslim immigrants, especially those coming from a country torn apart by civil war including Iraqi immigrants, both Shi'a and Sunni. The growth of the Muslim population is part of a larger trend: minority religious groups are becoming a larger slice of the Canadian cultural mosaic (Statistics Canada, 2011). In this context, the significance of this research project stemmed from the relative lack of knowledge with respect to Muslim culture and the intra-Muslim diversity that has been negated by Westerners societies, who treat 'Muslims' as a homogenous category (Nagra, 2011).

This research was also particularly timely in light of immigration patterns from Iraq, which have been characterised by two large waves. In the first wave, a great number of Iraqis left the country during the rule of Saddam Hussein between 1979 and 2003. According to Jamil, Nassar-McMillan and Lambert (2007), 'much of the immigration out of Iraq post-1990 was comprised of Shi'a Muslims fleeing political domination and persecution' (p. 199). As for the second wave, a large number of Iraqis have left in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion that toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. Various ethnic and religious groups, including Sunnis, characterise this second wave as fleeing the political persecution of the current Shi'a majority government (Cole et al., 2005, Kahl, Katulis, & Lynch, 2008, Moaddel, Tessler, & Inglehart, 2008).

1-6 Analysis of the Shi'a-Sunni paradigm in Iraq

In order to provide an explanation and give significance to the discourse underlying the Shi'a-Sunni paradigm, a view into recent Iraqi history is warranted. It has been argued that the co-existence between the Shi'as and the Sunnis was disrupted by the totalitarian nature of the Baath Party (Cole et al., 2005, Mallat, 1988, Noorbaksh, 2008). Hazran (2010), Mallat (1988), and Noorbaksh (2008) explain that because of the totalitarian nature of the Baath Party and their difference in views, particularly in regard to secular versus religious, the Shi'a were excluded, attacked and suppressed (Hazran, 2010, Mallat, 1988, Noorbaksh, 2008, Tomass, 2012). Consequently, when the Baath Party, and its leader, Saddam Hussein, were disposed in 2003, the oppressed majority was able to fully express their outrage and sense of victimhood, resulting in the eruption of full-scale sectarian violence and retribution (Bahgat, 2005, Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Sutherlin, 2007). After 2003, an election placed the majority Shi'as in power for the first time in the history of Iraq as an independent political entity, which also increased the potential for retribution. In particular, the exclusion of the Sunni minority from participating politically in this democratically elected Shi'a majority government, the rise of extremist groups including Al-Qaeda and al-Mahdi Army, the attack on one of the sacred Shi'a shrines - the al-Askari mosque, and foreign interference have contributed to the escalation of sectarian strife.

Overall, the reliance of the Baath Party regime and the current Shi'a majority government, on the support of just one ethnic group puts Iraq

at risk of civil war. As it is, Iraqi society is mainly comprised of Shi'as, Sunnis and Kurds, where Shi'a constitutes around two-thirds of the Iraqi population (Collier, 2007). However, Collier (2007) finds 'there is little link between ethnic diversity and an elevated risk of conflict' (p. 49). Collier argues that it is the Government`s reliance on one ethnic group and the exclusion of others that creates sectarian sensitivities and hostilities among the different groups. This was further supported by Devlin (1991) and Mallat (1988), when they extended the discussion to state that the excluded groups feel alienated, they fear for their future, and therefore they react by protesting which can often turn violent. Applying Collier's analysis, it is easy to 'think of Saddam Hussein, who was a Sunni Muslim whose Baath Party was composed mainly of Sunnis, to the detriment of Iraqis, Shi'as and Kurds' (p. 49) resulted in sectarian sensitivities. In contrast, Özpek (2012) argues that ethnic conflicts are not the product of intergroup differences and/or historical hatred, instead, 'ethnic conflict can be explained by the collective fear of future. This means that when ethnic groups begin to fear for their survival in the future a domestic security dilemma between ethnic groups develops' (p. 129). This has encouraged many Iraqis, both Shi'a and Sunni, to flee Iraq.

2 Nature of Iraqi immigration in Canada

Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis are among the most recent Muslim migrants to Canada, among other countries, in the past two decades (Lewis, 2008). To understand their dynamics better, it is necessary to explore the relevant factors that could contribute to the increasing awareness of their religious identities. In this regard, scholars note that Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants have turned to their faith, traditions and rituals as a coping strategy in the face of the many traumatic events they experienced in Iraq (Bradley, Brown, & Rubach, 2010, Hazran, 2010, Lewis, 2008, Mir, 2013, Rostam & Haverkamp, 2009, Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007, Trautman et al., 2002). It has also been shown that Iraqi Muslim immigrants follow patterns of settling in communities which are founded on similar cultural beliefs (Danzer & Yaman, 2013, Mirza, Senthilkumaran, & Ja'far, 2007, Rostam & Haverkamp, 2009). Walks and Bourne (2006) describe these communities as ethnic enclaves where certain ethnic immigrants integrate geographically and where 'residency appears voluntary and members have the options of leaving' (p. 276).

Not only do Shi'a and Sunni tend to settle in different communities but also religious organisations (mosques and husayniyas) are divided along sectarian lines to a certain degree.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the influence of religious authorities, whether in the form of lectures, seminars, and/or fatwas on Shi'a and Sunni immigrants, cannot be underestimated (Agrama, 2010, Assadi, 2008, Cadge & Elaine, 2006, Takim, 2007). Similarly, foreign influence has taken a different form as globalisation and improved modes of communications have allowed foreign ideas to flow freely, enabling foreign influence accretions to permeate the lives of Shi'a and Sunni immigrants (Abushouk, 2006, Takim, 2007, Weimann, 2011). All of these elements could contribute to increasing the religious identity of Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants and ultimately affect the relationship between them.

2-1 Culture and conflict theory

From the perspective of culture and conflict theory, an exploration of the cultural differences of the Shi'a and the Sunni that are considered to be a source of tension between them, is warranted to understand their relationships in Canada. Culture, constituting beliefs, norms, and behaviours, is a prerequisite to conflict because it is a major force in human dynamics (Avruch, 2000, Bradley et al., 2010, Fazzi, 2001, Jones, 2000, LeBaron, 2003, Marzouk, 2012, Najjar, 2005, Song, 2005). Al-Wardi, (1969), Bradley et al. (2010), Nakash (1994), and Takim (2007), articulates that whilst there are persistent cultural differences between the Shi'a and Sunni, the most divisive cultural issue is the Shi'a's remembrance of the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. In this battle, Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, his family and companions were killed by a Sunni caliph (leader) in Karbala in what is now Iraq. The remembrance is marked by a set of rituals associated with Shi'a Islam, which takes place in Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. As noted by Schuble (as cited in Takim, 2007), 'The remembrance of the battle of Karbala as a significant historical and religious event is crucial to the way in which Shi'a Muslims maintain their unique identity' (p. 465). Whilst acknowledging that some Sunnis participate in Ashura rituals, however, the majority of them tend to perceive aspects of these rituals as provocative because it dwells on unpleasant history, as it is annually

evoke memories of the killing of the grandson of the Prophet by a Sunni caliph (al-Wardi, 1969, Nakash, 1994, Mallat, 1988). In addition to dwelling on unpleasant history, some of the rituals involve cursing some of well-regarded Sunni figures (al-Wardi, 1969, Nakash, 1994). It must be noted, these same rituals are practiced by Shi'a Muslim immigrants in Canada (Takim, 2007).

In terms of the influence of the Canadian culture on the Shi'a-Sunni dynamics, as a multicultural nation, Canada has embraced Muslim immigrants from many other nations (Jones, 2000, Lægaard, 2008, Lewis, 2008). However, integration into the Canadian community imposes unique challenges for immigrants, particularly Muslims, given the cultural differences between them and the dominant culture of Canadian society (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010, Jamil et al., 2007, Jones, 2000, Lægaard, 2008, Lewis, 2008, Malik, 2009). Despite some of the stress and strain faced by immigrants as articulated by Lewis (2008) and Rostam and Haverkamp (2009), scholars indicate that there is little evidence that Canada is facing deep new divisions (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010, Hogben, 2007, Jones, 2000). Banting and Kymlicka (2010) note that a 'recent survey of Muslims in Canada found that, although they tend to see themselves as Muslims first and Canadians second, they are overwhelmingly proud of Canada as their new country' (p. 56).

2-2 Identity-based conflict

In this literature review, identity-based conflict theories were used to provide an understanding of the Shi'a and Sunni dynamics in Canada. Whilst attempting to understand both Shi'as' and Sunnis' perceptions, it is important to consider that self-identity and social identity are a crucial part of every individual. Fisher (1993) and Kriesberg (2003) recognise that developing a sense of self-identity is essential. Fisher and Kriesberg further note that individuals need to attain and maintain a positive social identity, which they do by first engaging in the social categorisation of groups and secondly, by making favourable social comparisons of their own group in relation to other groups. Following on from this view, Shi'a and Sunni identities can be explained based on the concept of ethnocentrism, which captures how identity groups tend to be ethnically centred, to accept those who are alike and denigrate, discriminate against, and reject those who are unalike (Fisher, 2006). Tomass (2012) expands

on this concept and proposes that 'the bonding that occurred within the religious groups . . . is an affirmation of relations that an individual has inherited. Inherited identities render these groups as closed identity-sharing groups, wherein membership is granted by mere chance' (p. 709).

For Fisher (2006), Kriesberg (2003), and Tomass (2012), as much as self-identity is an important part of every individual, collective identity is also inherent in social life. The challenge in this case, as Kriesberg notes, is that when or how these identities (individual and collective) contribute to conflicts will depend greatly on the attributes of the identity held. In this context, what animates Shi'a collective identity is how it has been oppressed throughout history and due to how their view on the question of the Prophet Muhammad's succession was violently put down (Hazran, 2010, Tomass, 2012). Furthermore, Tomass also noted that Sunnis see the Shi'a position on the issue of succession as blasphemous and therefore consider themselves to be the defenders of true Islam. In this context, the literature revealed that identity issues are important in understanding the perceptions of both Shi'a and Sunni communities.

Similar to the outlined discussion on the importance of identity issues in understanding a group's perception, scholars also recognise the importance of identity issues for immigrants (Abdulahad et al., 2009, Constant et al., 2009, Karim, 2009, Lewis, 2008). Abdulahad et al. (2009) note that ethnic identity rather than the ethnicity of immigrants defines their social and psychological behaviour in the host country. Constant et al. (2009) note that ethnic identity is 'developed, displayed, manipulated, or ignored in accordance with the demands of a particular situation' (p. 275). For Abdulahad et al. and Constant et al., ethnic identity can change, adapt, and evolve after arrival, whilst ethnicity remains a permanent characteristic of the country of origin. They therefore concluded that ethnic identity becomes particularly meaningful and relevant when the struggle between pre-and-post migration cultures begins. Lewis (2008) has a similar view in regards to the struggle between pre-and-post migration cultures, noting that identity in this case is defined as being 'a tension between being in one place physically, the place where one lives and works . . . and thinking regularly about another place far away' (p. 144).

In regards to Muslim immigrants, scholars note that religious identity is crucial and has remained the predominant component of their social identity after migration. It has been argued that the multicultural policies in Canada that promote religious freedom, count

as a factor for the persistence of Muslims' religious identity (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010, Jones, 2000, Lægaard, 2008). Other scholars argue that acts of discrimination against Muslims could result in Muslim immigrants underscoring or emphasising their religious identity (Lewis, 2008, Riley, 2009, Rostam & Haverkamp, 2009, Tastsoglou & Petrinioti, 2011). Scholars' efforts to understand the prominence of religion as a marker of identity among Muslims was clearly articulated by Tomass (2012), when he states that 'the secularized Westerner has a great difficulty in understanding a culture in which not a nationality, not a citizenship, not descent, but religion, or more precisely membership in a religious community, is the ultimate determinant of identity' (p. 709). In this context, it is important to note that, although Tomass acknowledges that the membership in a religious community, implicitly referring to Shi'a and Sunni, is the ultimate determinant of identity, no evidence was found in the literature on how Shi'a and Sunni identities for Muslim immigrants are developed, displayed, manipulated, or ignored. Thus, this research project intended to shed some light on how these identities and the cultural struggles for both Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants would manifest themselves in Ottawa, in light of foreign influences and multicultural polices adapted in Canada.

3 Research methodology

This inquiry project was based on four qualitative research methods: (a) individual interviews, (b) a focus group interview, (c) key informant interviews, and (d) content analysis. These methods were conducted in two stages, with four different groups residing in Ottawa: (a) Shi'a Iraqi immigrants, (b) Sunni Iraqi immigrants, (c) Canadian-born non-Muslims, and (d) key informants. The qualitative methodologies were used 'to understand peoples' perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a particular situation' (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 139). In the following section, an overview of the research participant recruitment will be presented followed by a discussion of the research methodology.

3-1 The research participant recruitment

Twenty-one participants from four different groups residing within the Ottawa national capital region were recruited: (a) seven Shi'a Iraqi immigrants (Group 1), (b) six Sunni Iraqi immigrants (Group 2), (c) six

Canadian-born non-Muslims (Group 3), and (d) two key informants (Group 4). Whilst the nature of this research project was focused on Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants (Groups 1 and 2), a third group that represented Canadian-born non-Muslim individuals was required in order to reflect the opinion of a larger segment of the Ottawa population on the issue of the Shi'a-Sunni dynamics. In terms of the fourth group, key informants identified as experts in their field were chosen to obtain their perspectives on issues related to the Shi'a-Sunni conflict and Iraqi immigrants' settling experiences in Ottawa.

3-1-1 Shi'a Iraqi immigrants (Group 1)

Prospective participants were identified through a consultation with a cleric associated with Al- Mahdi Centre (AMC), a Shi'a religious organisation located in Ottawa. The AMC has over 150 active members from the Shi'a community at large and these members participate in a variety of the organisation's services and events. This cleric's advice was sought to select individuals who truly represented the Iraqi Shi'a community. In addition, given the difficulties of identifying Shi'a Iraqi immigrants, Cohen and Arieli's (2011) used the? Snowballing Sampling Methodology—a method used to locate, access, and involve people from specific populations in cases where the researcher anticipates difficulties in creating a representative sample of the research population, was also used to recruit participants.

The criteria used for this group were age (i.e., under 30 years old and older than 30), gender, and varying educational levels and backgrounds, including foreign and Canadian credentials. In total, seven Shi'a Iraqi immigrants with various educational backgrounds were recruited for individual interviews: two females above the age of 30 and one under 30 years of age and three males above the age of 30 and one under 30 years of age.

3-1-2 Sunni Iraqi immigrants (Group 2)

Participants for the Sunni Iraqi group were invited using a process of self-selection (Olsen, 2008) by posting a request for participants at the Ottawa Muslim Association (OMA). The OMA has over 300 active members from the Sunni community, and these members participate

in a variety of the organisation's services and events. However, it has been suggested that in most instances, self-selection will lead to biased data (Olsen, 2008), as the respondents who choose to participate do not best represent the entire target population. Thus, in addition to posting request for participants, a cleric associated with OMA was contacted for advice to select individuals who truly represented the Iraqi Sunni community. In addition to posting the request for participants and identifying potential participants, based on this cleric's advice, Cohen and Arieli's (2011) Snowballing Sampling Methodology was also used to recruit participants.

The criteria used for this group were age (i.e., under 30 years old and older than 30), gender, and varying educational levels and backgrounds, including foreign and Canadian credentials. In total, six Sunni Iraqi immigrants with various educational backgrounds were recruited for individual interviews: one female above the age of 30, three males above the age of 30, and two males under 30 years of age.

All the 13 interviews with Shiʿa and Sunni Iraqi immigrants (Groups 1 and 2), were conducted in Arabic, then translated from Arabic to English and transcribed. For these interviews, individuals were drawn from a potential population of 450 Shiʿa and Sunni Iraqi immigrants (300 individuals in the OMA, 150 individuals in the AMC) and from a special stakeholder group who are authoritative representatives of the three groups mentioned above.

3-1-3 Canadian-born non-Muslims (Group 3)

As for the third group, Canadian-born non-Muslims, participants were invited by posting a request for participants at the University of Ottawa campus. In addition to posting a request for participants, I was asked to introduce my research to a class of Political Science students at the university. During my introduction, I encouraged students to invite their friends to participate on the basis that they would satisfy the criteria of being Canadian-born non-Muslim individuals. In total, six individuals who represented the diverse nature of the Canadian society were selected.

3-1-4 Key informants (Group 4)

A reputed Iraqi immigrant who was recommended by several participants and who represented Sunni Iraqi immigrants (Group 2) was selected to

be a key informant. This individual had been selected for his knowledge regarding the Shi'a-Sunni conflict. To represent the Canadian-born non-Muslims (Group 3), a professor at the University of Ottawa who is an expert in the field of refugees and cultural issues was selected to be a key informant representing this group. No key informant representing the Shi'a Iraqi immigrants was interviewed despite several individuals being approached.

It is important to note that all 21 participants were informed about the nature of this research study and asked to sign a consent form prior to conducting interviews and focus group. Participants were further advised that data would only be represented in aggregated form and that no participant names would be associated with any direct quotations included in this research study.

3-2 Research methodology

A total of 15 individual interviews and one focus group interview were conducted: 13 individual interviews with Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants (Group 1 and 2), two individual interviews with key informants (Group 3), and one focus group with six Canadian-born non-Muslims (Group 4). The approach to data collection occurred in two stages: (a) individual and focus group and (b) key informant interviews.

3-2-1 First stage of data collection

In the first stage of interviews, 13 individual interviews with Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants (nine participants older than 30 years of age and four participants under 30), and one focus group, comprised of six Canadian-born non-Muslim individuals, were conducted. The aim of the first stage of interviews was to collect data by asking questions that would elicit information regarding the interaction between Shi'as and Sunnis. Following the completion of all recorded interviews and the focus group interview, I transcribed them and began analysing the transcribed texts by using Creswell's 'data analysis spiral' (as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 153), as a methodology of data analysis. This analysis revealed a number of main themes in the data, which allowed for identification of several different concepts and categories. Following this stage, two key informants were presented with the main emergent themes from the first stage of data collection, for clarification and validation.

3-2-2 Second stage of data collection

In the second stage, two interviews were conducted with two key informants, as opposed to the non-expert participants used in the first stage. The aim of conducting key informant interviews was to answer and clarify ambiguous issues raised in the first stage of data collection, and to seek feedback in terms of the identified or emerging issues. As defined by Parsons (2008), key informant interviews are 'in-depth interviews of a select non-random group of experts who are most knowledgeable of the organisation or issue' (p. 2). Based on the considerations and feedback provided by key informants, a final round of data analysis was conducted by incorporating a content analysis that involved exploring themes, examining relationships between them, and comparing them with pre-existing literature. Content analysis is a qualitative research technique 'that provide[s] knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study' (Downe-Wamboldt, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

4 Action research results and findings

In order to explore the dynamics between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants in Canada, Mayer's (2000) definition of conflict was employed. Mayer (2000) suggests that 'conflict may be viewed as occurring along cognitive (perception), emotional (feeling), and behavioural (action) dimensions' (p. 6). In response to this inquiry project's primary question of whether the Shi'a-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Ottawa by Iraq immigrants, it can be concluded, based on Mayer's views, that conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants does exist. However, this does not imply a similarity in magnitude and/or severity between the conflict in Iraq and the one that has manifested in Ottawa, given the different circumstances in both places. Nonetheless, the Shi'a-Sunni conflict exists at a low level and can be examined based on the three dimensions provided by Mayer: (a) cognitive, (b) emotional, and (c) behavioural (p. 6).

Mayer (2000) notes that 'conflict is a belief or understanding that one's own needs, interests, wants, or values are incompatible with someone else's' (p. 7). In this context, the inquiry findings found that Shi'a and Sunni, whether in Iraq or in Canada, held incompatible religious views, practices, and beliefs. Mayer also observes that conflict 'involves emotional reaction to a situation or interaction that signals disagreement of some kind. The emotion felt might be fear, sadness,

bitterness, anger, or hopelessness, or an amalgam of these' (p. 7). The emotional reactions suggested by Mayer were evident in perspectives and views provided by Shiʻa and Sunni Iraqi immigrants. Many Shiʻa and Sunni immigrants reported that they had lost a family member, or they themselves or their family members had been arrested and tortured, which were acts promulgated by the other. Mayer also states that conflict 'consists of the actions that we take to express our feelings, articulate our perceptions and get our needs met' (p. 7). The inquiry findings have shown that the action taken by both Shiʻa and Sunni immigrants to express their anger and frustration was to avoid the other.

5 Discussion, recommendations and conclusions

Findings from this research study indicate that a degree of ethnic conflict exists between Shiʻa and Sunni Iraqi immigrants living in Ottawa. These findings are in line with findings discussed in the related literature showing that immigrants' culture does not dissipate upon the arrival to a host country, but rather that cultures interact and evolve (Constant et al., 2009, Hogben, 2007, Song, 2005, Jussawalla, 2001).

Many scholars have noted and documented the severity of the escalation of the Shiʻa-Sunni conflict in Iraq after the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 (Ismael & Ismael, 2010, Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007, Sutherlin, 2007). As noted by Kalyvas and Kocher (2007), 'Thousands have been killed in bombings or have been abducted and executed by rival sectarian militias. This violence has also caused substantial population movement' (p. 187). It is critical to point out that all of these atrocities have impacted Iraqis, both Shiʻa and Sunni, whether in Iraq or abroad. As a reaction to these violent events, Shiʻa and Sunni participants commented that segregation between the two groups occurred in Iraq and continues in Canada. Whilst describing the Shiʻa-Sunni relations in Iraq, several participants commented that the neighbourhoods of Baghdad, mixed prior to 2003, have now been transformed into ethnically divided areas with obvious concrete walls separating them. With respect to the Shiʻa-Sunni relationship in Canada, nine of the 13 Shiʻa and Sunni participants have also reported their tendency to avoid interacting with the 'other' in Ottawa.

In order to further explore the Shiʻa-Sunni relations, key informants were asked the question: 'How might you characterise the interaction between Shiʻa and Sunni Iraq immigrants and refugees in Ottawa?'

Both key informants commented that separation and the tendency in avoiding the other is what characterised the Shi'a-Sunni relations in Ottawa. One key informant recognised that a similar dynamic occurred between Christian and Muslim Lebanese immigrants when they arrived in Ottawa during the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s. This key informant explained that 'Christian and Muslim Lebanese immigrants avoided each other when they first arrived to Canada', implicitly suggesting that such a separation was considered a phase which would eventually fade away. The other key informant reported that:

> The level of tension between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants in Ottawa is at a very low level for two reasons: (1) Iraqi immigrants both Shi'a and Sunni have enough concerns and challenges associated with settling in their new country, Canada, and (2) Canada has strict laws to keep Canadians safe and policies that would not tolerate any violent behaviour from any individual and/ or groups.

With respect to whether the tensions between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis have been transferred through immigration to Canada, and the Ottawa national capital region, the data collected from interviewing the Sunni group suggested that the rituals of Ashura, practised by Shi'a immigrants, could be one source of such tension. This inquiry revealed that Sunnis are concerned about these rituals and commented that the tension between them heightens during the undertaking of these annual rituals. Four of six Sunni participants reported that while they have no issue with Shi'a practicing Ashura, each one of them remained concerned. As stated by one Sunni participant, 'Tension increases during Ashura. During some of these rituals, some highly regarded Muslim figures from the Sunni perspective are denounced, in particular, one of the wives of the Prophet'. Another Sunni participant reported, 'I do not mind Ashura, but the Shi'as are overdoing it, and that causes tension. We feel excluded'.

A further aspect of the study indicated that the existence of radicals among Muslim immigrants could also count as a source of tension between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants, as participants in both groups reported that they tend to avoid interacting with such characters. Whilst the Canadian-Born non-Muslims focus group participants seemed to hold positive views of Muslim immigrants, five of six participants raised their

concerns about Muslims with radical views and held less tolerant views about radical elements among Muslim immigrants. It is noteworthy that the term radicals used in this context referred to Muslims who seemed, from the focus group participants' views, to not fit within Canadian society. One participant commented:

> I have no issues with Muslim women wearing a hijab, but I have an issue with women who wear a niqab [a dress that generally cover women from head to toe]. Generally speaking, when I talk to someone, I like to see their face, so by that sense, I am not comfortable with the notion of niqab.

Another participant approached what she/he represented as a radical issue from a perception of safety: 'Canada is a peaceful country. We have our differences, but we talk and discuss issues here, so we expect from Muslim immigrants to follow our model in terms of solving their issues'. Another participant agreed and commented that 'my perception about radicals is that they reject certain ways of Western society'.

As to whether there is a variance amongst Iraqi immigrants, in terms of their perceptions of a transferred Shi'a-Sunni conflict through immigration, both Shi'a and Sunni participants in the study aged under and over 30 years old (four participants and nine participants respectively), demonstrated that this is indeed the case. In particular, significant variation was expressed in the dramatic change in Shi'a-Sunni relations before and after 2003, and the interaction between Shi'a and Sunni immigrants in Ottawa. According to data analysis of this study, only two out of four participants under 30 years of age acknowledged that dramatic change occurred to Shi'a-Sunni relations in Iraq after 2003, in comparison to all nine participants who were older than 30 years of age. Similarly, only one out of four participants who were under 30 years of age avoided interaction with the 'other', in comparison to eight out of nine participants who were older than 30 years of age. In addition, the findings of this inquiry suggested that participants older than 30 years of age were more attached to issues related to the Shi'a-Sunni conflict, in comparison to participants under 30 years of age. One key informant explained these differences as generational:

> Parents . . . have one foot in the old country and their children . . . are far more assimilated because they far more engaged with the Canadian

culture mostly because they were educated here in Canada. Thus, most young Muslims I would say pay less attention to the issue between the Shi'a and the Sunni.

Bearing this in mind, the two key informants noted that only a very small percentage of young Muslims possess rigid views about religious issues. The same finding was noted by scholars discussing the issue of radicalisation among young Muslims (Lindekilde, 2012, Wong & Simon, 2009).

A further aspect of the study was revealed when participants were asked, 'Under what circumstances, if any, do Iraqi immigrants in Ottawa self-identify themselves as Shi'a or Sunni?' The data shows that Shi'a and Sunni participants refrained from self-identifying themselves as Shi'a or Sunni to other people. However, several participants commented that Iraqi immigrants can recognise whether someone is a Shi'a or Sunni, within the Iraqi community in Ottawa. One participant commented that 'I do not say I am a Shi'a to other people unless someone that I know specifically asked this question, but Iraqis know that I am a Shi'a probably from my name'. In support of this finding, 12 out of 13 Shi'a and Sunni participants in this study reported that they identified themselves as Iraqi and/or Muslim, depending on individual circumstances within the Canadian context. When Shi'a and Sunni participants emphasised their Muslim identity, it was in the context of religious practices; otherwise, they would identify themselves as Iraqis. One key informant explained that 'the primary identity for immigrants is usually one of two things: national or religious. It is usually a national identity, but if it is a religious identity, then it does not go beyond being a Muslim'. Within the context of Canadian perceptions of the differences between Shi'a and Sunni, the six focus group participants were asked the question, 'Are you aware of any distinctions between Shi'a and Sunnis,' only two out of six participants recognised some differences between Shi'a and Sunni. One reported that a colleague at work explained what Shi'a means.

When Iraqi immigrants, both Shi'a and Sunni, were asked to describe their interaction in Iraq pre-immigration, they described Shi'a-Sunni relations as normal before 2003, and antagonistic after the uprooting of the regime of Saddam Hussein by the U.S. and its allies. Many Shi'a and Sunni participants vividly described, in their own terms, the violent nature of the escalation of the Shi'a-Sunni conflict and how they were impacted by it. One Shi'a participant described the relationship with

Sunnis before 2003 as 'very normal. There were no differences; we were friends and families. However things changed after 2003, we do not have the same relationships with them as before'. A Sunni participant commented that 'before leaving Iraq in the 1990s, there was no such thing as Shi'a and Sunni. Now people are divided into groups: you are either Sunni or Shi'a'.

With respect to post-immigration relations, both Shi'a and Sunni reported that whilst they have no issues with the other, they tend to avoid interacting with them. The data indicated that focus group participants were unaware of the diverse nature of Muslim immigrants and had no awareness of tension between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants in Canada.

As described by one key informant, a natural and intentional separation occurs between immigrant groups arriving from a civil war environment. The intentional tendency of avoidance, as recognised by a key informant, is primarily related to elements of suspicion and paranoia between the two groups, based on the violent events that erupted after 2003. Whilst the natural aspect of separation is due to immigrants' inclination to rely on their own group for support, one key informant described these ethnic enclaves as 'arrival cities where newcomers settle for a while and then leave when they feel a bit comfortable with their new environment . . . another patch of immigrants would arrive as a part of the nature of immigrants flow'.

Finally, when asked what role, if any, Canadian culture plays in potential conflicts between Iraqi immigrants, the inquiry revealed that its multiculturalism has a positive impact on the relationship between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants; Shi'a and Sunni participants reported that they were satisfied living in Canada. The main sources of this satisfaction, as this inquiry revealed, derived from the concept of freedom to practice religion as part of the host country's multicultural policies. In addition, Canadian-born non-Muslims' positive perceptions of them enhanced this satisfaction. As noted by one key informant, the doctrine of inclusion is seemingly working in Canada.

Overall, in response to this inquiry's primary question of whether the Shi'a-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Ottawa by Iraq immigrants, and based on participants' views and perspectives, it can be concluded that a conflict between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants does exist. In the first place, Shi'a and Sunni participants recognised their tendency to

avoid interacting with the other in Ottawa. Secondly, Shi'a and Sunni participants described the Shi'a-Sunni relations as normal before 2003. These participants also recognised a dramatic change in Shi'a-Sunni relations occurring after the U.S. toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

This inquiry has also revealed that the rituals of Ashura practised in Canada by Shi'a Iraqi immigrants, as well as radical individuals within the Shi'a and Sunni immigrants' communities, could count as sources of tension between Shi'a and Sunni, and ones that have been transferred through immigration. In addition, it has emerged that Iraqi immigrants under 30 years of age tend to be disconnected from issues related to the Shi'a-Sunni conflict, unlike the Muslim immigrants that are older than 30 years of age. Based on Shi'a and Sunni participants' perspectives, it was also found that Shi'a and Sunni do not see themselves as such, but rather as Iraqis and or Muslims.

5-1 Recommendations for future studies

A number of findings in this study warrant further consideration including the impact of Ashura rituals on the relationships between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants. However, there is limited data available regarding the practice of these rituals by Shi'a Iraqi immigrants in Canada in particular with respect to the number of Shi'a immigrants who commemorate Ashura, and how these rituals are financed and practised. Given the potential for these rituals to create tension between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants in Canada, further studies in this field are warranted. It is important to note that not only Shi'a Iraqi immigrants practice these rituals, but also many other Shi'a immigrant groups from other nationalities (Takim, 2007).

The Shi'a-Sunni conflict is not only a concern for Iraqi immigrants, but also for many other nations such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Lebanon. Although this study was limited to the conflict in Iraq and its possible impact in Ottawa, it is reasonable to assume, based on the results of this study, that this conflict could be transferred to another country. Thus, further studies about the nature of interaction between Shi'a and Sunni immigrant groups from other countries would be beneficial.

This inquiry also indicated that radical elements within Muslim immigrant groups are an issue and both Shi'a and Sunni participants raised their concerns on this matter. In addition, Canadian-born non-

Muslim individuals in this study, as well as both of the key informants, raised their own concerns about radicals amongst Muslim immigrants. Although this research study has not concluded that such radicalisation exists in Ottawa, the fact that participants raised this fear suggests there may be some veracity to the claims made. Further studies to examine whether radical elements exist, or whether such radicalisation has occurred, are needed. If studies confirm the fears expressed in this research study, further research would be required into what factors may contribute to the radicalisation of Muslim immigrants in Canada.

5-2 Conclusion

Canada's immigrant population links the country ever more widely with the rest of the world and its events. One of these events is the Shi'a-Sunni conflict that is taking place in Syria, Bahrain, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. In response to this inquiry's primary question of whether the Shi'a-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Ottawa by Iraqi immigrants, this study has shown that this conflict does exist in Ottawa. However, this does not imply a similarity in magnitude and/or severity between the conflict in Iraq and the one that has manifested in Ottawa, given the different circumstances in both places.

    Although the conflict has been transferred to Ottawa, it is of a non-violent, low-level nature. This study has shown that Shi'a and Sunni Iraq Muslim immigrants under 30 years of age seemed to be disconnected from issues related to the Shi'a-Sunni conflict. This presents a significant opportunity to ensure that manifestation of the Shi'a-Sunni conflict in Canada be extinguished over time. This study has also identified three elements that seemingly have a positive effect on the relationship between Shi'a and Sunni Iraq immigrants. These three elements are related to the Canadian culture and the multicultural policies adopted in Canada: (a) the acceptance of the other, (b) religion is a private matter, and (c) the state's strict policies.

    At present, Canadian values seem secure enough and under no severe threat from elements related to the Shi'a-Sunni conflict but this security must not be jeopardised by radical Shi'a and Sunni elements within Muslim immigrant populations in Canada. Thus, Shi'a and Sunni Iraqi immigrants living in Canada must understand that radical views are not accepted nor tolerated, despite the notion of multiculturalism policies adopted in Canada that promote religious freedom.

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