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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.
This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story.

“In letting go of the burden of silence — you open a door. Or maybe you close a door. Either way it’s a place from which you never return.”

– Noura to Rafa’a in Noura

About This Guide

DIG DEEPER
If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact Resident Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org.
Synopsis

Having fled their native Iraq years ago, Noura, her husband Tareq and their son Yazen live in New York City as newly minted U.S. citizens. Their passports now carry their Americanized names — Nora, Tim and Alex — but Noura is uncomfortable with the change. She’s restless on Christmas Eve yet looking forward to a modest gathering of family and friends for Christmas dinner. She finally gets to meet Maryam, an Iraqi orphan she’s sponsored, who is visiting during a break from her graduate studies at Stanford. Rounding out the guest list is Noura’s childhood friend Rafa’a.

When Maryam arrives ahead of schedule to drop off gifts, Noura is dismayed to discover that Maryam is pregnant — and unapologetic. Maryam planned the pregnancy and wants the baby because she’s never had a family of her own. Noura is shocked at Maryam’s brazenness and worries how Tareq will react. On Christmas, Noura must face past secrets, figure out how, or if, to move forward when she’s caught between two countries and determine what sacrifice is necessary to make movement possible.

SETTING

CHARACTERS
Noura, an architect originally from Mosul, Iraq. Now an immigrant living in New York City.
Tareq, her husband, originally from Baghdad. A former surgeon in Iraq. Now an emergency room hospitalist in New York City.
Rafa’a, Noura’s childhood neighbor from Mosul and a close family friend. An OB-GYN.
Yazen, Noura and Tareq’s very American son.
Maryam, a graduate student in physics studying at Stanford. Also originally from Mosul.
Identity is the hottest topic in American theater these days, just as immigration is the hottest topic in American politics. But Heather Raffo’s “Noura,” a drama about a family of Iraqi Catholics who have fled to America to escape the “medieval madmen” (as one character calls them) who now rule their native land, is nothing like the issue-driven, stridently politicized plays about these subjects with which our stages are currently clogged. While “Noura” is palpably political, it preaches no sermons, nor will it send you home inspired to do anything in particular. Instead, Ms. Raffo has given us a human drama, the searing story of five people who find themselves caught between the pulverizing grindstones of politics and religion. If it’s propaganda you seek, go elsewhere — but should you do so, you’ll miss one of the finest new plays I’ve ever reviewed in this space. ...

As is hinted by the title, “Noura” is, like Lucas Hnath’s “A Doll’s House, Part 2,” a variation on Ibsen’s 1879 tale of the feminist liberation of Nora Helmer. Noura is no less desperate to free herself from the dead hand of the past, crushed as she is by “the weight of being erased. Of not belonging anymore. Anywhere.” But ... Ms. Raffo has given us a free-standing, fully independent work of art, one which acknowledges that there can be no easy answers for Noura, much less her family, as she seeks to negotiate the thin ice of American life while simultaneously mourning the loss of the “dying identity” with which she admits to being “obsessed.” Hers is the exile’s fate, to be neither one thing nor the other, and part of the dark beauty of “Noura” is that it shows us what she stands to lose by setting sail on the sea of freedom.

Terry Teachout, "‘Noura’: The Weight of Being Erased," The Wall Street Journal, December 21, 2018
The name is no accident. “Noura” is in part a response to “A Doll’s House,” the Ibsen classic in which Nora Helmer shocked the world by leaving her husband — and her children — in a flight of self-discovery. Still, this is no homage or sequel. Ms. Raffo isn’t as interested in the plot that led Nora to slam the famous door on Torvald as in what she lost in the process. No wonder Noura is obsessed with doors, both as an architect and a refugee: After allowing you exit they shut you out. …

This is a loving, productive family, adjusting well to snow and subways (both the transportation and the sandwich shop). Whether called Tareq or Tim, Noura’s husband is no Torvald; he has a modern disposition and seems comfortable catering to his wife. Alex, despite his jones for Minecraft, is not so Americanized as to sass his parents too harshly or renounce the pleasures of cuddling.

The story is barely Ibsen, though you recognize Ibsen’s Nora as Raffo’s title character sneaks a cigarette. For Nora, the stolen pleasure was macaroons, but Noura’s husband, Tareq, isn’t nearly the forbidding puppet master of the Ibsen drama. …

The easygoing dialogue provides a nice window into middle-class immigrant lives too seldom seen on U.S. stages. Noura’s Iraqi roots are deep, so she and Tareq have sponsored Maryam, a college-age woman fleeing the Islamic State. …

The finish is torrential, and the portrait of a woman torn between cultures and family members is nearly searing. … But “Noura,” too, has tragic dimension, and even with its New York City setting, its evocation of a shattered Iraq is haunting.


The Brooklyn playwright based her 90-minute drama … on the classic Norwegian drama “A Doll’s House.” Yet while the lead characters and several plot elements were clearly inspired by Henrik Ibsen’s 1879 play, the inspiration proves an uneven fit.

In “A Doll’s House,” the lead character Nora is unfairly caged by the strict societal mores expected of 19th-century women. But the title character in “Noura” is trapped in the prison of her own mind. …

Raffo, whose father grew up in Iraq, worked for three years with Arab-American women in New York to develop the 2018 play. That lends great detail and color to the memories, job challenges, traditions and daily lives of the five fictional characters in “Noura,” who are Christian and Muslim immigrants from Mosul and Baghdad.

Pam Kragen, “‘Noura’ has tough act of balancing past, present,” The San Diego Union-Tribune, September 29, 2019

Nelson Pressley, “‘Noura’ is the best premiere of the Women’s Voices Theater Festival,” The Washington Post, February 14, 2018
About Heather Raffo

Heather Raffo is the solo performer and writer of the off-Broadway hit *9 Parts of Desire*, which details the lives of nine Iraqi women. For *9 Parts*, Raffo garnered many awards, including a Lucille Lortel Award and the prestigious Susan Smith Blackburn and Marian Seldes-Garson Kanin playwriting awards, as well as Helen Hayes, Outer Critics Circle and Drama League nominations for outstanding performance.

Raffo first performed *9 Parts of Desire* in 2003 at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh; it later moved to the Bush Theatre in London’s off-West End where critics hailed it as one of the five best plays in London in late 2003. The show ran for nine months off-Broadway at the Manhattan Ensemble Theater, has been performed all over the U.S., including at the Guthrie in March 2008, and has had numerous international productions and translations. Raffo created the libretto for *Fallujah*, an opera about the Iraq War, with music by Tobin Stokes. The opera details the life of a U.S. Marine who served in Fallujah in 2004 and relates the haunting experiences of identity and belonging for veterans and their families as well as Iraqis.

*Noura* is Raffo’s most recent play, having its origins in a series of workshops she led for Epic Theatre Ensemble. Working with three communities of Arab American women in New York, Raffo helped the participants craft narratives about their personal journeys. When she introduced them to Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, they found Nora Helmer’s story resonated with their own. *Noura* premiered at Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C., in 2018.

As an actor, Raffo has been seen at the New York Theatre Workshop, The Public Theater, Epic Theatre Ensemble, Skirball Cultural Center, Fulton Opera House, The Acting Company and The Old Globe as well as in the feature film *Vino Veritas*.

Raffo has had residencies at Vassar College and in the Department of Performing Arts at Georgetown University. She has taught and performed at dozens of universities and arts centers both in the U.S. and internationally, engaging students about the politics and arts of Iraq and about her own experience as an Iraqi American playwright and actor.

Raffo received her B.A. in English from the University of Michigan and her M.F.A. in Acting Performance from the University of San Diego. She also studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. Originally from Michigan, Raffo currently lives in New York. Her father is from Iraq and her mother is American.

Sourced and edited from www.heatherraffo.com
I worked with these young women over a three-year period, and ultimately, I realized I’d been sitting on my own aggravation in relation to the play [A Doll’s House]. I was as tired of watching Nora Helmer be the beacon of feminist thought as I was watching Torvald stand in for a husband. The women I know don’t run around acting smaller than they are, sneaking chocolates and barely parenting their children. Yet women all around me, in strong marriages, with truly great husbands, were drowning. A different conflict between individualism and community was playing out before my eyes, not just as an Arab American but also as modern wife and mother. ...

I am an artist, a mother, a wife and an American woman with Middle Eastern heritage. This play came out of the shifting awareness that unfolds when any one of a person’s many identities demands growth. As we strive to grow, sometimes one aspect of ourselves calls out above others. This play is not unrelated to the ever-present questions I hear talked about in my Brooklyn parenting circles: Can women be fully realized in all of their roles? Can they belong equally in each? Or is it inevitable that having a career, being a wife, a mother, a daughter, perhaps to aging parents — that one of these roles will become unsustainable? In the demand of playing roles for so many others, it is inevitable that we question who we really are ourselves?

Heather Raffo, “Playwright’s Perspective: Noura,” www.heatherraffo.com

Where this play came out of for me, is that I’m middle-aged and a mother with two kids. I was watching twenty-year-olds navigating A Doll’s House, and hardly any of them were addressing the motherhood issues; and all I could see in A Doll’s House were the motherhood issues. ...

In our discussions about A Doll’s House, we talked about things in the script that made us mad. Like “I hate it when she does this”; “Why is their relationship like this?” ... You know how you get riled up by things? One of the things I was constantly riled up by was, “Where are the kids?” In our process, nobody was attempting an adaptation; nobody even worried about the end product actually relating to the Ibsen. It was purely an exercise in perceiving the play that would light a fire in us and get us to talk about the things we really needed to talk about. So mine was very much the relationship between mothering and marriage, modern marriage. ...

Each person has a different threshold. Some people immigrate and really identify with the place they’re at, and they talk about it. ... And then there are people that are in a constant war with themselves about what they miss and why. That is something I was really working with in the play. Some characters like the husband were okay. He was happy to be here. The wife couldn’t grasp it. That was true of the workshops I led. Each woman in the workshop would have a completely different relationship to where they identify.

Heather Raffo, quoted in “Heather Raffo on Noura” by Heather Denyer, Arab Stages, Fall 2016
After the Door Slams: An Interview With Heather Raffo

By Johanna Buch
Writer and Publications Editor

The moment I asked playwright Heather Raffo my first question, snowflakes began falling gently outside, as if on cue. “Look at the snow being perfect!” she exclaimed. “It’s my play! It’s Noura!” In the script’s opening lines, Noura recalls a snowfall on a cold day in Mosul, her former home and a city that still has her heart. Raffo knows this feeling well as the daughter of an Iraqi immigrant, and she explores it with tenacity and depth in her latest play, Noura. We covered rich ground during our chat, but two things stood out: her passion for storytelling and her insatiable quest for truth.

JOHANNA BUCH: Here I am interviewing you, yet you are a seasoned interviewer! Your work, including Noura, is often born from years of research. Why are conversations a gateway into your writing?

HEATHER RAFFO: I never assume that I know what I think I know. Embedding myself in a community through deep conversation helps me uncover what is true and not just write what I might do in a given situation. As an actor, that’s where my muscle lies. When I’m preparing for a role, I study people and pick up on things. I do the same thing in my writing. It’s studied. It’s researched.

JB: Once you have a giant pile of notes, what comes next? How do you transform a multitude of conversations, people and stories into a single play?

HR: It can be overwhelming to have all that information sitting in your brain, but it eventually works its way out. Before I wrote Noura, I had been working with a group of Arab American women in Queens, New York, for four years without intending to write anything. When I realized how much of my own story intersected with theirs — motherhood, marriage, Mosul, feeling uprooted — I sat down to write, and the play flew out of me.
JB: How did the women feel about you sharing their stories through Noura? Was there an openness or did you receive pushback?

HR: There was more pushback with 9 Parts of Desire, which was written and produced during a time when Middle Eastern people weren’t on stages, there wasn’t an Iraqi female protagonist in the English language and what I was saying was hugely taboo. But I’m always careful to composite stories and hide exposing details in my work. Here’s what I’ve learned over the years: Once people see what theater can do and how audiences respond, they want to talk to you. Any resistance or fear or secrets they may have held before are replaced by an urgent desire to tell their stories.

JB: How did you wind up reading Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House during your workshops in Queens?

HR: When Ron Russell, the founder of Epic Theatre Ensemble, suggested the idea to me, I realized that Americans love stories about the door slam. They’re incredibly satisfying. But they don’t like stories that explore what happens after the door slam. The women in my workshops were in their 20s, and they had fled or lived through atrocities that made A Doll’s House look trivial in comparison. Each of them had emigrated from their former country to America, and all they wanted to talk about was, “Then what?” That’s why the play was so interesting to me. It’s great because I get to see the play from a distance. The rehearsal process is faster when I act what I’ve written, but things slow down in tech or previews because I can’t sit in the house and see what needs to be done. I enjoy watching different productions and considering them from the outside. Seeing how the play lands with different communities and listening to the zeitgeist of their conversations is fascinating.

JB: I hear you have some connections with the cast. Tell me what it’s like having familiar faces in the play.

HR: Fajer Kaisi, who plays Tareq, was in The Old Globe production of Noura last fall and some of the initial workshops. As a fellow Iraqi American actor, I can artistically confide in Fajer in the most profound of ways. I also worked with Gamze Ceylan, who plays Noura, when I was leading the workshops in Queens. The women had written scenes in response to A Doll’s House, and Gamze was our lead actor, so she was already inside the process of Noura. She loved these women and they loved her. It was powerful for everyone.

JB: You’ve played the role of Noura in several productions. How does it feel watching another actor embody her?

HR: Individualism isn’t common in Middle Eastern cultures, so if you’re a visionary like Noura and your capabilities are suppressed, it’s extremely painful. When you visit a building like the Guthrie, you realize that architecture moves in a certain way. If they hadn’t done this or that, things would look and move differently. Noura’s brain is wired to think like that. Every. Day. She can’t stop. The late Zaha Hadid, an Iraqi
who is arguably the greatest architect in the world, was my constant touchstone for Noura. Zaha didn’t have kids or over-worry about Iraq. To attain her dreams, she had to be a rugged individualist with a Western mindset and focus on nothing but her career. If you are like Noura — worried about your country, community, kids and family — how do you carry those worries while also being a visionary and implementing your vision?

JB: The East-West contrast between individualism and community seems to be the crux of the play. Why set this conflict within a family?

HR: That’s where I feel the most pressure personally. My career had to take a big hit in order to have kids. I was willing to do it, but I often wondered why it had to be that way. I have great husband, so it wasn’t about that. It’s just the way things are structured. My dad came to the U.S. in the 1960s, and he was the only one of nine brothers and sisters to leave Iraq. He said he was just going for college, but then he met my mom, married her and stayed. And he is so happy, as though America is exactly where he needed to be. Yet none of his siblings wanted any part of that. Everyone has a different threshold for when — or if — they’re going to leave a place, community or situation, whether it’s by choice or when circumstances are dire. In Noura, that threshold plays out differently for each character.

JB: At first rehearsal, Artistic Director Joseph Haj commented that many Americans have a limited view of the Arab world. How might Noura expand or redefine these perceptions?

HR: I think Noura redefines who we’re comfortable thinking of as refugees. The play shows a family of progressive intellectuals with a mother who is a visionary architect. A family like this makes people very uncomfortable, even though you’d think the opposite. The national narrative around migrants and refugees is polarized into either victim or enemy. So portraying a family that doesn’t sit in either camp is challenging for everybody.

JB: Your illumination of the refugee narrative has resonated with audiences and critics alike, as evidenced by Noura winning the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play. Congrats!

HR: Believe it or not, I got the news when I was at home doing dishes. [laughs] It felt like such a gift in that moment!

JB: I’d love to see a photo of you holding the award with soapy dishwashing gloves.

HR: Yes, let’s make that happen!

JB: In all seriousness, why do you think Noura hits so close to home?

HR: I think belonging is something every human being considers. It’s always vibrating within us, and I think we will forever long for belonging and question what it looks like. The idea that Iraq is a bellwether for America is very unsettling, but Noura poses that. Across all communities, there is a woven fabric of thousands of years of history that is more than the sum of any past wars or discriminations. But that fabric is being torn apart in a manmade, purposeful way. Consider the Iraqi family in Noura: There’s nothing but love on that stage, but by the end of the play, everyone might walk out. If this is happening in a loving family, what is going on with us? We can’t undo the past, but we can examine why things are the way they are and try to build toward a better future.

JB: One of my graduate professors said that the best endings have both a sense of closure and a sense of beginning. Will audiences experience this after seeing Noura?

HR: If there is an ending, it’s that life as Noura knew it has ended. All her secrets are out in the open and that’s good. If there is a beginning, it’s that Noura is asking the same question the women in Queens were asking: “Then what?” She knows the answer will require some kind of sacrifice. She clearly loves her friends and family, but she’s intrigued by what she might find if she walks away. Either way, it’s Noura’s move.
### The Long Sweep of History: A Selected Timeline of the Land That Is Now Iraq

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3500–3000 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Height of Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia. Sumerians produce cuneiform, the earliest known form of written language, develop agricultural techniques like irrigation and live communally in towns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2340 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Sargon I establishes the Akkadian dynasty. The Akkadians are a Semitic people, and Sargon becomes Mesopotamia's first emperor as he begins blending Semitic and Sumerian civilizations. The Akkadian dynasty falls in 2190 to a neighboring tribe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1792 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Hammurabi, an Amorite, establishes the kingdom of Babylonia, with a capital in Babylon, 55 miles south of modern-day Baghdad. Hammurabi creates one of the world's first legal systems, The Code of Hammurabi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1595 B.C.E.</td>
<td>The Hittites invade Babylon and destroy the first Babylonian dynasty. The Kassites later take up residence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1500 B.C.E.</td>
<td>The Kassites sign a treaty with the Assyrians to define their borders. From this point, lower Mesopotamia is considered Babylonia, while Upper Mesopotamia is known as Assyria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1365–1208 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Assyria launches numerous military campaigns to conquer the region. Babylonia finally falls to Tiglath-Pileser I of Assyria in 1115 B.C.E.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1078 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Aramean tribes invade from Syria, defeat Assyria and divide Babylonia into smaller states.</td>
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<tr>
<td>731 B.C.E.</td>
<td>After conquering Babylon, Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III names himself king of Babylonia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>689 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Babylon revolts against Assyria; the Assyrians divert the Euphrates River so it covers the site of the city.</td>
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Take and read out from the lapis lazuli tablet how Gilgamesh went through every hardship. Supreme over other kings, lordly in appearance, he is the hero, born of Uruk, the goring wild bull. He walks out in front, the leader, and walks at the rear, trusted by his companions. Mighty net, protector of his people, raging flood-wave who destroys even walls of stone! Offspring of Lugabbanda, Gilgamesh is strong to perfection, son of the august cow, Rimat-Ninsun; Gilgamesh is awesome to perfection. – *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, dating to approximately 2000 B.C., about the Sumerian king who ruled circa 2700 B.C.

The Hammurabi Code is only a stage in the juridical tradition of Mesopotamia, but it is a particularly significant one. In the Babylonia of the great kings, under the aegis of a prosperous and powerful state, literature, art, and economic and social organization flourish as never before; and, as never before, the Sumerian heritage and the Semitic contribution achieve a harmonious synthesis. For this reason, the times of Hammurabi constitute the acme of Babylonian and Assyrian civilization; and the great king, warrior and diplomat, builder of temples and digger of canals, personifies this civilization better than any other. – Sabatino Moscati, “A Modern Hammurabi,” *Makers of the Western Tradition: Portraits from History*, edited by J. Kelley Sowards
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>626 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Aramaean Nabopolassar rebels against failing Assyrian rule and declares himself king of a new Babylonian state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>605 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar II succeeds his father Nabopolassar and conquers Judah, beginning the Babylonian captivity of the Jews described in the Bible. His palace contained the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>539 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Persian emperor Cyrus conquers Babylon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>331 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Alexander the Great defeats Darius III of Persia in a battle for Mesopotamia. Alexander dies in Babylon in 323 B.C., leaving his empire to be divided among his generals. Seleucus I receives Babylonia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>305–64 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Seleucid dynasty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>209 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Antiochus III of the Seleucids attacks Parthia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>144 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Babylon falls to the Parthian empire, which places its capital in Ctesiphon, south of modern Baghdad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>116 C.E.</td>
<td>Rome defeats Parthia and makes Mesopotamia one of its provinces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ca.200 C.E.</td>
<td>Christian churches are established in Mesopotamia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td>The new Persian empire of the Sassanids takes over in Mesopotamia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>570</td>
<td>The Prophet of Islam, Mohammed, is born in Mecca. He dies in 632. His successor, known as the first caliph of Islam, is Abu Bakr.</td>
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<tr>
<td>642</td>
<td>Arabs defeat the Persians in Mesopotamia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>661</td>
<td>Caliph Ali, Mohammed’s nephew, is murdered. He is revered as the first leader of the Shi’a sect of Islam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>754</td>
<td>Abbasid Caliph Mansur begins reorganizing his Muslim empire. He moves the capital to Baghdad in 762.</td>
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<td>786</td>
<td>The most famous Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid, comes to power. He is a prominent figure in Thousand and One Nights.</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>836–892</td>
<td>The seat of the Abbasid government is temporarily moved to Samarra in north central Iraq.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1258</td>
<td>The Mongols under the leadership of Genghis Khan’s grandson sack and loot Baghdad and end the Abbasid caliphate. The Mongols ruled a united empire including Iraq, Iran and much of Turkey until 1335.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1347–1350</td>
<td>The Black Plague hits the Middle East.</td>
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<td>1401</td>
<td>The central Asian military leader Timur conquers Baghdad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1501</td>
<td>The Shi’a Safavid Empire from Iran defeats the Timurid state.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1514</td>
<td>The Turkish Ottoman Empire wages war against the Safavids. Iraq is the battleground and eventually the spoils for the Ottoman sultan. Iraq remains under Ottoman rule until World War I.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>The first British outpost is established in Basra, followed by a second consulate in 1798 in Baghdad. The British use the Euphrates to transport mail from India to England.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>A German company obtains a contract to build a railroad from Istanbul to Basra.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Britain invades southern Iraq after declaring war on the Ottoman Empire in World War I.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Beginning of a genocide of Aramaic-speaking Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac people in Turkey, Iran and Iraq by the Ottoman Empire simultaneous to the Armenian genocide. Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire are almost destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Armistice ends World War I. Iraq is carved out of the former Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra and mandated to the British by the League of Nations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Iraq revolts against the British occupying forces.</td>
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During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the lands that were to become the territories of the modern state of Iraq were gradually incorporated into the Ottoman Empire as three provinces, based on the town of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. The term al-'Iraq (meaning the shore of a great river along its length, as well as the grazing land surrounding it) had been used since at least the eighth century by Arab geographers to refer the great alluvial plain of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, a region known in Europe as Mesopotamia. It was here that the Ottoman sultans were extending their own domains during these years and trying to check the ambitions of the Safavid shahs of Persia. Imperial and doctrinal rivalries between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shi’i Safavids touched the histories of the people of these frontier lands, requiring strategies of accommodation or evasion from their leaders and affecting them in a variety of ways. The political world that resulted was a complex and fragmented one.


The Turkish Empire should be apportioned among the principal races that inhabit it, which, by tradition, history, and their known fitness for self-government, are entitled to recognition among the Great Powers who, in the course of centuries, have fixed for themselves by common consent spheres of influence. To wit:...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>42,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basra</td>
<td>54,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hejaz</td>
<td>97,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zor, or Mesopotamia</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moussoul, south of Little Zab</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>808,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The right of England in the territories assigned to her is well recognized and, therefore, no additional comment thereon is necessary.

– “How Turkish Empire Should Be Made Over After the War,” by a student of Turkish affairs, *The New York Times*, January 24, 1915
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Britain imports and installs King Faisal I of Syria as ruler in Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Oil production reaches commercial levels in Kirkuk in northern Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>The British mandate ends. Although the British retain control of the Iraq Petroleum Company and loom large in the political background, Iraq is officially an independent nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Prime Minister Rashid Ali leads Iraq’s anti-British forces in war against the European power, but World War II stalls his quest for allies. Britain prevails and occupies Iraq for the duration of World War II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948–1949</td>
<td>Arab-Israeli War, in which Israel fights with military forces from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Armistice agreements between Israel and each of the Arab states sets the frontier, and Israel secures its independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt creates the United Arab Republic and a coup d’etat led by the pan-Arab Baath party overthrows Prime Minister Nuri Said in Iraq. The new ruler, Abdul Karim Qasim, soon abandons his pan-Arab ideals to embrace Iraq First thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Qasim is overthrown by Abdus-Salam Arif, who dies in a helicopter crash in 1966. He’s succeeded by his brother Abdur-Rahman Arif. Both Arifs try to balance pan-Arab sympathies with the Baathists’ growing preference for Iraq First. The former Arif forms the Republican Guard and tries to end the civil war with the Kurds in the north. The latter Arif is forced to give up on possible Kurdish independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>The Arif regime is overthrown in a bloodless coup by the Baathists. Hassan al-Bakr takes power, with Saddam Hussein waiting in the background.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In this new order, Saddam Husain played initially a minor, indeed almost a hidden, role. At the forefront of power was a man of evident power and prestige. ... Saddam professed to be only his acolyte. ... Coming from a poor, rural background, he had little formal education. But driven from early adulthood to excel, he was a voracious reader; with little taste for the “overview,” he delighted in detail; and with a phenomenal memory, he was also a tireless organizer. ... Through his efforts, even before he pushed General Bakr aside in 1979, the initially tiny Baath would grow into a mass political party, larger, proportional to the population, than Hitler’s Nazis, Mussolini’s Fascists, or Stalin’s Communists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Saddam Hussein assumes leadership of Iraq with the resignation of Hassan al-Bakr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–1988</td>
<td>Iran-Iraq War. Iran’s Ayatollah encourages Iraq’s Shi’as to rebel and shells Iraqi cities. Iraq gains Arab support and wants to recapture territory previously ceded to Iran. But the most important cause of the war is likely that Iraq is a secular nation-state and Iran a fundamentalist religious state. Between 1982 and 1987, the Reagan administration in the U.S. provides money, weapons and intelligence to Iraq while also selling missiles to Iran. Neither Iraq nor Iran wins the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Iraq invades Kuwait, claiming that the smaller nation’s high oil production is flooding the market and preventing Iraq from rebuilding its economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>The United Nations calls for the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. After Iraq does not comply, the U.S. and allies invade. The resulting Persian Gulf War lasts only a few months. Coalition forces quickly over power the Iraqi army but fail to capture Saddam Hussein. At the encouragement of the U.S., Shi’a and Kurdish forces revolt against Hussein’s government, but the U.S. fails to support them and both revolts are bloodily suppressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–1998</td>
<td>Following the war, an embargo is placed on Iraq by the U.N., banning all imports and exports and bringing the Iraqi people to near starvation. The regime change hoped for by the U.S. does not occur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

President Saddam Hussein of Iraq announced in a speech published today that his country had invaded Iran’s northwestern province of Kurdistan. ...

In Teheran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini said today that Mr. Hussein had reached “a state of madness” in his quest for a war victory over Iran and “will go to hell soon.”

President Hussein said the Kurdistan invasion was intended to put more military pressure on Iran to negotiate on Iraq’s terms. He rejected any mediation that involved an Iraqi pullback in Khuzistan, Kurdistan or Iran’s western highlands before an “unequivocal Iranian recognition of full, active Iraqi sovereignty over Shatt al Arab.”


We were disappointed that Saddam’s defeat did not break his hold on power, as many of our Arab allies had predicted and we had come to expect. The abortive uprising of the Shi’ites in the south and the Kurds in the north did not spread to the Sunni population in central Iraq, and the Iraqi military remained loyal. Critics claim that we encouraged the separatist Shi’ites and Kurds to rebel and then reneged on a promise to aid them if they did so. President Bush repeatedly declared that the fate of Saddam Hussein was up to the Iraqi people. Occasionally he indicated that removal of Saddam would be welcome, but for very practical reasons there was never a promise to aid an uprising. While we hoped that a popular revolt or coup would topple Saddam, neither the United States nor the countries of the region wished to see the breakup of the Iraqi state.

### 2002
In his State of the Union address in January, President George W. Bush draws a connection between the terrorists in Afghanistan and growing terrorism elsewhere. He names an “axis of evil” comprised of the regimes in North Korea, Iran and Iraq.

### 2003
The U.S. and coalition forces begin an invasion of Iraq, ostensibly because of suspicions Hussein was developing weapons of mass destruction and could provide these weapons to terrorists. Major fighting is over by May, though guerrilla warfare continues. Saddam Hussein is captured in December.

### 2004
The Coalition Provision Authority governs Iraq. Iraqi and U.S. military forces continue to battle insurgent fighters, including Al-Qaeda in Iraq and followers of the Shi’a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

### 2005
January 30: Iraq holds a national election to send representatives to the new national assembly and begin work on a constitution. Jalal Talabani is elected president in April.

### 2006
Nuri al-Maliki becomes head of a new Arab-Kurdish coalition government with Talabani remaining president. Saddam Hussein is tried, found guilty and executed. Al-Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist groups form the Islamic State in Iraq, known as ISI.

### 2008
Five years after the invasion, Iraq is still a war zone. Progress has been made in some areas, but various factions struggle for control. Attacks against Christians in Mosul send thousands fleeing.

### 2009
U.S. troops turn over security responsibilities to Iraqi forces. Per the agreement, the final U.S. troops leave Iraq in 2011.

### 2010
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi becomes the leader of ISI. He expands the terrorist group’s operations into Syria when its civil war begins in 2011.

### 2011
The protests of the Arab Spring reach Iraq.

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We know Saddam Hussein pursued weapons of mass murder even when inspectors were in his country. Are we to assume that he stopped when they left? The history, the logic, and the facts lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein’s regime is a grave and gathering danger. To suggest otherwise is to hope against the evidence. To assume this regime’s good faith is to bet the lives of millions and the peace of the world in a reckless gamble. And this is a risk we must not take.

– George W. Bush, in an address to the U.N. General Assembly on September 12, 2002

All American troops were legally obligated to leave by the end of the month, but President Obama, in announcing in October the end of military operations here, promised that everyone would be home for the holidays.

Still, the United States will continue to play a role in Iraq. The largest American Embassy in the world is located here, and in the wake of the military departure, it is doubling in size — to roughly 16,000 people, most of them contractors. ...

History’s final judgment on the war, which claimed nearly 4,500 American lives and cost almost $1 trillion, may not be determined for decades.

But as the last troop convoy crossed over, it marked neither victory, nor defeat, but a kind of stalemate — one in which the optimists say violence has been reduced to level that will allow the country to continue on its lurching path toward stability and democracy, and in which the pessimists say the American presence has been a Band-Aid on a festering wound.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>ISI becomes the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS, and declares Islamic law in territories under its control. The divided government under al-Maliki is unable to control sectarian tensions and violence increases. ISIS makes inroads in western Iraq and becomes a serious threat to Iraq’s government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>ISIS captures Mosul with relative ease, sending some 120,000 Christians (and other minority populations) fleeing from the area into Kurdistan and beyond. A new government is formed under Haider al-Abadi. The U.S. begins to send troops back to Iraq to aid the fight against ISIS. Kurdistan Regional Government forces in the north are able to halt and then push out ISIS from Kurdish areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Iraqi government and coalition forces push ISIS out of Mosul and most of Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>The Christian population in Iraq is estimated to be about 250,000, down from 1.5 million in 2003. ISIS loses most of its territory, and al-Baghdadi kills himself as U.S. forces attempt to capture him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mosul was captured by rebels from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS — a group that evolved from Al-Qaeda’s Iraq affiliate. The capture of a major industrial and oil center and the main city in northern Iraq marked a major coup for a group that only months ago was operating in the country’s vast desert hinterlands.

It was the latest evidence of the disorganization that has beset Iraqi security forces since the U.S. military withdrawal from the country in December 2011. It also underlined the determination of ISIS to establish an Islamic emirate encompassing the Iraqi-Syrian frontier, to weaken the already fragile Iraqi state and to expand the theater of the three-year-old civil war in neighboring Syria.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

What’s What: A Selected Glossary of Terms in Noura

PEOPLE

Dalai Lama
The head of the Yellow Hat order of Tibetan Buddhism, reincarnated in 14 persons since the first Lama in the 15th century. The current Dalai Lama (born in 1935) was the spiritual and earthly ruler of Tibet until 1959 when he was forced into exile by occupying Chinese forces. He received the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership of the ongoing nonviolent campaign to regain Tibet from Chinese rule.

Gandhi
Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) was a lawyer, politician, activist and writer from India. He led the Indian national movement against British rule in India and was noted for his use of nonviolent resistance to achieve political and social goals.

Gypsy Kings
A band that blends flamenco, Western pop and Latin rhythms. The band was founded in the south of France in the late 1970s by cousins Nicolas Reyes and Tonino Baliardo (among others), who still front the band today. The duo draws on their Spanish Romani heritage — their families fled Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

ISIS
Short for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (aka ISIL, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), this Sunni insurgent group operates from eastern Syria and Western Iraq and evolved out of the Iraq War that started in 2003. Al-Qaeda in Iraq joined with other extremist groups in 2006 to become the Islamic State of Iraq (aka ISI), and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became its leader in 2010. During the Syrian Civil War in 2011, ISI expanded its operations into Syria and in 2013 became ISIL. In the areas under its control, ISIS declared Islamic law, engaged in brutal treatment of adversaries and recruited radicalized followers. It expanded its territory, taking Mosul in June 2014 with relatively little resistance. Then it declared a caliphate with al-Baghdadi as the caliph (the chief ruler considered a successor to Muhammad).

Among the many horrible crimes and inhumanities the group perpetrated, it also destroyed Shi’a and Christian places of worship and other places it considered idolatrous, including the Mosque of the Prophet Jonah in Mosul as well as artifacts and ruins of previous civilizations. Kurdish militias and an international coalition worked to stop ISIS’ gains in 2015, and by the end of that year and early January 2016, Iraqi government forces regained the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah. Iraqi forces recaptured Mosul by July 2017. Al-Baghdadi killed himself when U.S. forces attempted to capture him in Syria in October 2019.

In Arabic, ISIS is known as Da’esh. The term is a transliteration of an Arabic acronym into the English words that make up the acronyms ISIS or ISIL.

Krishnamurti
Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) was a spiritual leader and philosopher from India. When he was a teenager, the president of the Theosophical Society declared him the “World Teacher” that would bring about global enlightenment. In 1929, he renounced that claim and all organized religions and ideologies, but he continued to lecture and pursue spiritual
freedom. He published around 40 books.

Saddam
Saddam Hussein (1937–2006), president of Iraq from 1979 to 2003, leader of the Ba’ath Party and a ruthless tyrant. Because Hussein mostly ruled as a nonsectarian leader, women made strides in career and other opportunities for a while. When it served his interests, especially after the Gulf War, he cracked down on such freedoms.

PLACES

Babylon
The ancient capital city of Babylonia in southern Mesopotamia during the second to first millennia B.C.E. and then of the Chaldean Empire in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. The ruins of Babylon are approximately 55 miles south of Baghdad, Iraq. Chaldea bordered the Persian Gulf, Arabian Desert and Euphrates River.

Baghdad
The largest city and capital of Iraq, located in Baghdad province in the center of the country and on the banks of the Tigris River. The city was founded in the eighth century by an Abbasid caliph and quickly became an important commercial city and home for scholars, artists and poets. As the capital of modern Iraq, the city has been at the center of political events, making it a frequent military target and subject to bombings and destruction.

The Bronx
A borough of New York City north of Manhattan.

Dubai
An emirate that forms part of the United Arab Emirates on the southeast coast of the Persian Gulf. It is south of Iran, east of Qatar and Saudi Arabia and north of Oman. Dubai is also the name of the city that is the emirate’s main port and commercial center.

Erbil
A city in Erbil province east of Mosul in northern Iraq and one of the world’s oldest continually settled towns. As the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, it is the center of Kurdish political and cultural activities. When ISIS made concerted attacks on Christians in the Nineveh Plains in August 2014, thousands of Christians fled north. Kurdish authorities moved many of these displaced Christians into a half-built mall in Erbil before refugee camps were established.

Mosul
The capital city of Nineveh province in northwestern Iraq, located on the Tigris River approximately 250 miles north of Baghdad. Mosul is the third-largest city in Iraq (after Baghdad and Basra); its eastern side is situated on the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh, which was the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

St. George’s Convent
The Monastery of St. George (Mar Gurguis), which is one of the oldest churches in Mosul. It was desecrated by ISIS in August 2014.

ARE
The Architect Registration Examination is a step toward getting an architecture license in the U.S. It measures knowledge and skills in practices that can affect the integrity, soundness and health impacts of buildings. The exam involves several parts and at least 20 hours of testing.

THINGS

Aramaic
A Semitic language originally spoken by the Aramaeans in the ancient Middle East as early as the 11th century B.C.E. By the sixth century B.C.E., it was the common language for trade (lingua franca) in the Middle East. Among the ancient Jews, Aramaic was the language of commoners while Hebrew was the language of religion, government and the upper class. Jesus and his disciples are thought to have spoken Aramaic.

By the seventh century C.E., Arabic supplanted Aramaic. Dialects of Aramaic are still spoken in villages in Syria and among some Christians in the Middle East.

biryani
Biryani is a rice dish that originated in Arab countries, migrated to India and then migrated back again. It can include chicken, lamb, fish or vegetables plus nuts, raisins, potatoes, eggs, onion and other ingredients.
Borderlands
A series of video games in which up to four players can play cooperatively. The game covers many genres, but generally it’s a role-playing, first-person shooter game. The first Borderlands was introduced in 2009.

claecha
A traditional holiday cookie made from flour, butter, oil, salt, yeast, cardamom, fennel and nigella seeds with a walnut or date filling.

DOD
The Department of Defense, a cabinet-level department that oversees national security and the armed forces, advises the U.S. president and spends about $716 billion a year. It is America’s largest employer, with 2.15 million service members and 730,000 civilian employees.

dolma
A stuffed vegetable dish in which a mixture of meat, rice, lemon juice, garlic, onion and tomato sauce is placed in eggplant, zucchini or grape leaves before being boiled in a tomato sauce-water mixture.

Eid
Arabic for “feast.” The two festive days in the Muslim calendar are Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, which marks the end of the hajj.

fast
Abstaining from or restricting the amount of food consumed in order to tame the body for spiritual purposes. The Chaldean Catholic Church observes fasts for Lent, such as the Fast of Nineveh, a three-day fast celebrated three weeks before Lent, on the day before major feasts like the Feast of Assumption and Feast of Christmas.

frankincense
A resin from a tree found in parts of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, India and Pakistan. The oil is used in perfumes and incense and was considered medicinal in ancient times. It is one of three gifts given to baby Jesus by the Magi (along with gold and myrrh).

Halliburton
An American company that provides engineering, construction and oil-field services, founded in 1919 and headquartered in Houston and Dubai. When the U.S. invaded oil-rich Iraq, a subsidiary of Halliburton received big contracts from the Department of Defense for reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan.

kibbi
A dish made of bulgur (cereal), minced onions, ground meat and spices. Kibbi may be rolled into balls, flattened into discs or cooked like a meatloaf in a pan.

kubba
A Levant dumpling made from grain (bulgur/potato dough or long grain white rice) and stuffed with ground meat, spices and onion. They are shaped into balls or flattened patties and then boiled, fried, baked or served raw. Variations of the dish are often named for their city of origin or serving style.

Minecraft
A video game released in 2011 that offers several different modes of creating and interacting with a 3D world. Creepers, the well-known icons of Minecraft, are stealthy green mobs that approach players and explode, killing unsuspecting players.

Mouslawi marble
An alabaster gypsum stone found around Mosul, often called Mosul marble. Its use in many buildings gives the city its distinctive appearance. Mosul marble is very good for relief carving.

pacha
Boiled sheep’s head, a traditional dish found in Iraq and parts of Egypt, often served with bread and pickled vegetables. It’s cooked in a broth that uses the sheep’s stomach and feet.

samoon
An Iraqi yeast bread that is rolled into balls, flattened in the middle, brushed with egg or yogurt and sprinkled with sesame seeds.

Telegram
A cloud-based messenger and voice IP service/software that allows messages and data to be heavily encrypted and self-destruct via a timer.
IRAQ’S CHRISTIANS FLOCK TO LEBANON

Its procession of frond-waving believers, the singing and chanting, and the proud parents snapping photos of their princess-garbed daughters made the Palm Sunday celebration in the Beirut suburb of al-Fanar look like any of the hundreds occurring all over Lebanon. But after the service, the conversations among parishioners revealed the special nature of this community. Many of them spoke Arabic with heavy Iraqi accents — al-Fanar has become a magnet for Christian refugees from Iraq.

Andrew Lee Butters, TIME, April 2, 2007

IRAQ: ISIS ABDUCTING, KILLING, EXPPELLING MINORITIES

(Duhok) — The Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) is killing, kidnapping, and threatening religious and ethnic minorities in and around the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. Since capturing Mosul on June 10, 2014, the armed Sunni extremist group has seized at least 200 Turkmen, Shabaks, and Yazidis, killing at least 11 of them, and ordered all Christians to convert to Islam, pay “tribute” money, or leave Mosul by July 19.

Human Rights Watch, July 19, 2014

THE SECRET EYE INSIDE MOSUL

Shortly after the Islamic State swept into Iraq, in June, 2014, a clandestine blog called Mosul Eye appeared on the Internet. It provided details about life under the caliphate — initially offering hourly reports regarding roads around Mosul that were safe to travel, and then, in the following weeks, reporting on the dawning anxiety about the heavily armed ISIS fighters, the power blackouts, the rising prices, the chaos in local markets, the panic of food shortages, and the occupiers’ utter brutality. Over the next year, Mosul Eye expanded into a Facebook page and a Twitter account. The posts were determinedly stoic — melancholic and inspiring at once.

Robin Wright, The New Yorker, October 27, 2016
IRAQI CHRISTIANS FLEE MOSUL IN THE WAKE OF ATTACKS

(Baghdad) — A church in the northern city of Mosul was bombed Tuesday as Christians continued to leave the city to escape recent violence that has been directed at them.


MALE GYNAECOLOGISTS ATTACKED BY EXTREMISTS

(Baghdad) — Male gynaecologists are being targeted by Islamic extremists in Iraq as they are accused of invading the privacy of women. Women’s NGOs have raised concerns as there are few women gynaecologists in the country and their male counterparts are scared to continue working.

The New Humanitarian, November 13, 2007

IRAQ: ISIS DESTROY CONVENT IN MOSUL

Yesterday, jihadi militants of the Islamic State, who control the city of Mosul, used explosives to severely damage the convent of the Chaldean Sisters of the Sacred Heart — one of 45 Christian institutions they have captured since June. Previously they were living in the building.

Independent Catholic News, November 25, 2014

SUNNI MILITANTS DRIVE IRAQI ARMY FROM BIG CITY

(Baghdad) — Sunni militants spilling over the border from Syria on Tuesday seized control of the northern city of Mosul, Iraq’s second largest, in the most stunning success yet in the rapidly widening insurgency that threatens to drag the region into war.

Noura and Tareq are Chaldean Catholics and members of an Eastern Rite church in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. The Chaldean Catholic Church traces its origin to the Church of the East, an ancient Christian church founded in Mesopotamia by followers of the disciple Thomas. The first converts were people who spoke a dialect of Aramaic, and the church continues rites in Aramaic today. In 1839, the Pope established the Patriarchate of Babylon of the Chaldeans, essentially bringing the Chaldean church permanently in communion with Rome.

The largest population of Chaldean Catholics outside of the Middle East is in Michigan. Below are excerpts from a 2002 flyer created by Michigan’s City of Sterling Heights Community Relations Department about its Chaldean American population.

**DESCENDANTS OF THE ANCIENT BABYLONIANS AND ASSYRIANS**

The Chaldeans have come to America for job opportunities and a better life.
- as a religious and cultural minority in Iraq
- most followed family members to U.S., joining them in established businesses, later forming their own

Immigration began in the early 1900s due to harsh treatment by the Ottoman Turkish rulers.
- first known immigrant: Zia Attallah (1889) came to Philadelphia, worked in hotel. Later, returned to Iraq, where he opened his own hotel.
- the first Chaldeans came from villages in Iraq
- most Chaldeans immigrated to Detroit; by 1923 there were about 10 Chaldean adults in Detroit
- 1960–70s produced largest wave of Chaldean immigrants as U.S. immigration laws became less strict
- these later immigrants came mostly from Baghdad and Basra. Many were highly educated, establishing professional businesses in this country.

Chaldeans in America number over 75,000.
- 60,000 in Detroit area
- 15,000 in San Diego and other California cities
- 2,000 in Chicago

Chaldeans in Michigan (approx. 80,000)
- came to Detroit.
- initially from Windsor, Ontario and from Mexico, where immigration laws were less strict; later they came directly from the Old Country
- for automobile industry employment
- to join their families in businesses
- many stayed in the City of Detroit to serve neighborhoods in the grocery/produce business


**LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

Chaldean language is the major dialect of Aramaic.
- the same language used in ancient Babylon
- Chaldeans born in Iraq also know the Arabic language; some might use, along with their mother tongue (Chaldean), the Arabic language in their dealings
- 95 percent speak Chaldean language in their homes, 58 percent speak Arabic language and 9 percent speak English.

Cultural characteristics:
- individual to sacrifice for the group
- very generous, most hospitable
- cheerful, expressive
- extended families; care for all members; close family ties
- extremely hardworking
- kindness to strangers, readily forming close friendships
- marriages are lifelong commitments; divorces rare
- dating restricted for girls until marriageable age
- religious; high moral values
- respect for elders, traditions, customs

**FAMOUS CHALDEANS**

Chaldeans who contributed to civilization:
- Hammurabi: 18th century B.C. king; wrote advanced code of social and business laws, “The Code of Hammurabi”
- Nebuchadnezzar; King of the “Brilliant Dynasty”
- according to ancient tradition, the magi who visited the child Jesus after his birth were from among the Chaldeans
DAISUKE KAWACHI: Tell me about being the cultural consultant for Noura. What is your role in the rehearsal room?

SHAYMAA HASAN: They ask me about everything related to my Iraqi culture, so things like how we cook and serve food or what we put in tea to change the flavor. As an immigrant myself, I get asked how it feels to live in a different country with a different culture.

DK: What does it mean for you to be an immigrant here, living in a different culture?

SH: I told the cast about when I was homesick; one day I stopped breathing for no reason. I felt sadness. I missed my family. I left a lot of things in my country, but the most important thing I left is my family. I went for a walk outside and cried.

DK: My father is from Japan, and he performs certain rituals when he feels homesick. Are there things you do or foods you eat when you’re feeling homesick?

SH: You see I’m drinking this Iraqi tea that I brought from home, and that helps. Let me show you some pictures on my phone. If you look at the cushions, they are Iraqi. Here is a corner in my house where all the things are Iraqi and it feels like home. No matter where you are, in your heart there is always a corner that is for your country.

DK: Not everyone who sees Noura will be familiar with Iraqi and Iraqi American culture. Why is it important to make this production as culturally specific as possible?

SH: Because Iraqi culture is a unique culture. Yes, we are considered Arab, but Iraqi culture is different. For example, if I want to talk about food, because a big part of the play is food, we have so many specific foods. We’re famous for dolma [stuffed vegetables], kubba mosul [meat pies] and samak masgouf [slow-cooked fish]. Samak takes a while, but it’s so delicious. Also, this play is about events that happened in Iraq, so everybody needs to share our culture.

DK: A major part of the play is about what each character brought with them and left behind. What did you and your family bring and leave behind?

SH: I brought some of my books, things that are close to my heart and the necessities. What I left behind? I left my family. Friends. Neighbors, my neighborhood. And all the good memories.
DK: How has being part of the Noura creative team impacted you?

SH: The first day, when I saw the set, I cried. And when they talked about my culture, I cried. It’s so very hard because when I came to the U.S. in 2013, I had never left my country, and now I cannot leave the U.S. I miss my family so much. I have nephews. And they have grown up and they have children now! I miss everything over there. It’s so hard to talk about your memories and your country. But I like this play. I’m very excited to see it. I’m telling every Iraqi I know that they have to come see it.

DK: I rarely see stories about me, my family or my culture. Do you have similar experiences?

SH: This story is very real. I know this story! I’ve seen an Arabian show like this but never here in the U.S. This is the first time I’m seeing this story. Especially with the teenagers!

DK: One of the things that excites me most about this play is how people from different generations and their worldviews are put in conversation with each other. What have those conversations been like for you and your multigenerational family since coming here?

SH: My mother tells me all the time, “Shaymaa, don’t wear too much makeup. Shaymaa, don’t do that.” And I say, “Mama, the times have changed!” To this day, she tells me, “In our culture, this is unacceptable,” and I say, “Yeah, OK, Mom.” Because I don’t want to make her mad. I talk to my nieces and nephews, but never like my mother. You can’t say “Don’t do that” these days. I’ll tell them a story, indirectly, and they’ll say I am old-minded, but I am making them think. And they choose for themselves. You have to give them advice.

DK: Can you tell me more about the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project and your involvement with them?

SH: IARP was founded in 2007. They’re a nonprofit that creates bridges of communication, understanding and support between Iraqis and Americans. We do this through different programs like People to People, Humanitarian Projects for Peace, providing relief and support for rebuilding projects in Iraq, potlucks and more. I’ve been involved as a participant in the People to People program and a volunteer for events like the Ramadan Iftar Dinner. And now I’m here working at the Guthrie!

DK: How did you first connect with IARP?

SH: Last year, I was in a wedding and a medical interpreter acquaintance asked me to get involved with IARP. He had talked with [Executive Director] Jessy [Belt Saem Eldahr] about me, so I met with her and started volunteering. It’s very interesting work. For me, it’s important to participate in their community events. It’s important to build these bridges between cultures.

DK: Is there anything else you want audiences to know?

SH: I love this play. And I want people to know that there is a part where Noura talks about how ISIS is Islam. I want people to know that they are not Islam. They are like animals; no, you can’t even say that. They aren’t even human. My country, my people, we love Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sunnis, Shites — we love everybody. But in the media, you see a different story. We love Christian people; they are like our family. Islam is not a religion of crime. We love people.
For Further Reading and Understanding

**THE PLAY**


**BOOKS ABOUT IRAQI HISTORY**


**FILMS**

*Fight for Mosul*
Filmed across the entire nine-month campaign to defeat ISIS in Mosul, this documentary features combat footage of an Iraqi Special Forces unit that bore the brunt of the fighting.
60 minutes, PBS, 2017.

*Iraq Uncovered*
“Frontline” examines the forces vying for control in the places where ISIS has been pushed out.
60 minutes, PBS, 2017.

*My Country, My Country*
Documentary about Iraqis living under U.S. occupation, focusing on Dr. Riyadh, an Iraqi medical doctor, father and Sunni political candidate who is a critic of the occupation but a passionate supporter of democracy in Iraq.
90 minutes, Zeitgeist Films, 2006.

*On Her Shoulders*
About Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad, a Yazidi human rights activist, who was captured by ISIS and held captive in Mosul. She gave testimony before the U.N. Security Council and currently lives in Germany.
94 minutes, Oscilloscope Laboratories, 2019.

*The Prophecies of Iraq*
As ancient prophets foretold, Babylon fell in 539 B.C. They may also have predicted the modern Gulf Wars and the downfall of Saddam Hussein.
40 minutes, History Channel, 2007.

*Voices of Iraq*
Filmed and directed by Iraqis from all walks of life, all over the country. Producers condensed more than 400 hours of footage into a look at life in a war zone.
80 minutes, Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2006.

**WEB RESOURCES**

*TIME*: “The Next War for Iraq: A revealing look inside the country’s fight with ISIS — and itself”
[www.time.com/isis-mosul](http://www.time.com/isis-mosul)

Ivor Prickett’s "The Battle for Mosul": 10 photos of Mosul during and post-ISIS occupation


Heather Raffo’s website
[www.heatherraffo.com](http://www.heatherraffo.com)