

# Iraqi and Syrian Refugees in Connecticut: Perceptions of Integration

by

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## *Abstract*

This thesis explores the experience of resettlement and seeks to understand integration from the perspective of refugees themselves. Refugees' own narratives are prioritized in an investigation of the concept of integration. I follow an inductive approach to avoid imposing pre-existing definitions of understanding and instead utilize a model that allows the participants to determine the direction of our conversations. I then seek to identify patterns and emergent themes to bring to light possible facilitators or inhibitors of achieving a successful life in the US. I also seek to address one of the main limitations in refugee literature which is the lumping of all refugees into one category by providing a comparison between two nationalities of refugees. My results show that Iraqi and Syrian participants differ significantly in their engagement with their own ethnic communities. I propose that greater attention should be given to discrepancies in experiences for more targeted policy interventions at the local level.

## *Acknowledgment*

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I am who I am today because of Palestine.

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### ***Keywords: Translation of Worldviews***

The Syrian and Iraqi refugees I interviewed used certain concepts again and again. The words they used express concepts of loss, identity and belonging in ways that don't exist in Western cultures. I have attempted to explain these concepts below, however their specific meaning is nearly impossible to translate in way that can be understood from a Western worldview that takes individuality, independence and mobility as positive signifiers of growth and maturity. It is important to keep in mind the meaning that is lost in translation. Understanding these key concepts is integral to a full understanding of the content of the interviews that form the basis of this thesis, and yet, the translation of worldviews is exceptionally difficult.

#### غريب~ الانعزال~ تعويد~ استقرار~ الغريبة

##### غريب

~Gh-ar-eeb~

- Connotes the strangeness of someone ( a stranger) or something
- May express a distance from who you are. Explains being out of your community, which may result in a loss in identity

##### الغريبة

~Al-Gu-r-beh~

- A noun, extracted from the Arabic root word meaning “leave/migrate/gone/move” referring to a place or situation that is “not home”
- Describes alienation from being in a strange place, and points to a struggle to belong
- Indicates being in a state of foreignness and a loss of the sense of belonging

## الانعزال

~Al-In-A'i-zal~

- The isolation that occurs at the intersection between loneliness and solitude.
- Hints at detachment from individual/collective “self” (the community in which belonging is found)
- Could point to seclusion and existing on the fringes of society

## تعويد

~T-A'-w-eed~

- An adjustment period signaling the change of an existing norm
- The loss of one's “normal” or “expected” life
- Coming to terms with getting used to something new and different (and perhaps distasteful and unwanted)

## استقرار

~I-stik-rar~

- Settling in a place; being settled in a specific place in a final way
- May imply a coming to terms with loss, finding of independence and achievement of stability



## ***1. Introduction***

### *1.1. Motivation*

In my work with refugees, I have seen people's extraordinary ability to adapt to new and difficult situations. Not only are refugees healing from past trauma but many appear to be thriving in their new environments. I have learned that while it is important to recognize the external factors that make refugee populations more vulnerable, for example to mental health problems, it is equally as important to acknowledge that most refugees do not develop disorders that affect their functionality, despite being exposed to trauma (Schweitzer & Greenslade & Kagee, 2006). Putting refugees' resilience and ability to cope at the center of every investigation of risk factors allows the researcher to step back and leave room for the refugees' own agency and self-determination.

From listening to refugees' own narratives, I became interested in understanding the role that "community" plays in refugees' experience, and more specifically, how the different communities a refugee is a part of can help act as centers of support and sites of healing. Given the importance assigned to "integration" in host government policy and refugee resettlement practices, I wanted to learn how Iraqi and Syrian refugees themselves think of integration. This requires putting refugee perceptions at the center of the research. I have tried to do this in a variety of ways that include an inductive approach to analysis, reliance on interviews and constant consultation with the refugee community throughout every step of the work.

Understanding Iraqi and Syrian perceptions of integration can help host societies comprehend their needs and adjust their strategies accordingly. Specifically, this study has large implications for policy improvements at the local level, where deeper understanding of the refugee

communities can be used to create targeted policy interventions as well as generate appropriate community support.

### *1.2. Community as a Site of Healing*

Understanding community as a context of healing means understanding that while community health and wellbeing may be the collateral damage of war or natural disasters, communities may also act as centers for recovery and healing. Multiple definitions of community have been suggested based on varying contexts and population groups (Hawe, 1994). However, two commonly recognized aspects of community are geographical co-location and the sharing of collective norms that create a feeling of togetherness. The experience of community often stems from shared history, goals and culture that lead to similar ways of living and understandings of life (Farwell & Cole, 2001). Hence, community can act as a site of healing by operating as a space where common history allows for expressions of grief, anger, joy and hope in everyday settings. War disrupts the social order by targeting the institutions and value systems that support individuals and families. It also, however, creates a trauma that lends itself to a novel type of collective bonding which provides the chance to establish new mutual social support, rebuilding and healing (Farwell & Cole, 2001).

A refugee is a community member who has experienced the trauma of being forced to leave their home, in addition to the precipitating causes of war, natural disaster, discrimination, poverty, and climate effects, among others. A refugee who is forced into a new context—whether it be a refugee camp, a temporary residence or a country of resettlement—may become disengaged from the collective nature of their trauma, hence losing the systems of support that were based on shared backgrounds, experiences, culture and history. This is especially true in a

host country where refugee integration into the host community is considered a policy objective, regardless of the aspirations of refugees themselves.

### *1.3. Levels of Community and Integration*

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2011) defines a host community as “the country of asylum and the local, regional and national governmental, social and economic structures within which refugees live”. Despite the fact that a host community may lack the cultural and experiential knowledge of the refugee, it still has the capacity to become a new context of healing. This system of support in a host community will look different from the one refugees are used to, given the fact that it does not rely on collective norms. This new type of community support as a mechanism for healing is one of the issues I consider in this thesis.

Understanding what integration looks like can help us explore opportunities for healing in the new context of host communities. It should first be acknowledged that integration has many different meanings, and that these meanings are highly contested and generally individualized; the definitions are context-specific (Ager & Alastair, 2008). As we consider the challenges of integration, we must simultaneously realize the multitudes of communities that exist. As Kirkwood & Mckinlay & Mcvittie (2014) ask, “integration into what?” for there are a multitude of levels of entry. “Levels” in this sense include the degree of physical mixing with the local American community in the refugee’s neighborhood of residence; relationships among members of like-ethnic communities; social connections in the workplace or participation in the school system. Integration may be considered as extending to American society more broadly and even refer to the beginning process of acculturation. The different qualities and types of community

add another layer to understanding what integration means; systems of support differ based on definitions of community.

The UNHCR definition of local integration is “a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It imposes considerable demands on both the individual and the receiving society” ([UNHCR, 2018](#)). While this definition introduces a number of different domains, it remains general and open to considerable variation based on circumstance. The definition also hints at a two-way approach to community by realizing both the role of the refugee and the host community. The narrative surrounding integration can remain refugee-centered while also including “mutual accommodation” as opposed to “insertion” (Ager & Strang, 2008) therefore expanding responsibility for a successful transition to include the host society as well as the refugee.

With the increase in numbers of refugees resettled around the world, research has begun to shift towards post-migration circumstances. The focus on post-migration factors allows room to develop meaningful, targeted interventions which aim to improve the experience of the resettlement period while still acknowledging the influence of pre-migration factors and past experiences. Evidence continues to suggest that the post-migration resettlement period may have more of an influence on refugees’ wellbeing than pre-migration history (Correa-Velez & Gifford & Barnett, 2010). This points to the importance of examining the social, political and economic structures of the host country and the various facilitators of and barriers to leading a healthy, happy life.

#### *1.4. Overview of Contents*

The introduction describes my interest in the topic of refugee integration and sets the stage for the main areas of investigation in this thesis. Meanwhile, Chapter Two provides the information needed to understand the context of Iraqi and Syrian refugee resettlement in the US. This information includes a basic history of the resettlement process and a brief explanation of the Iraqi and Syrian refugee crises. Chapter Three is the literature review which provides information on the existing literature and situates my own research within the field. Chapter Four details my research question and explains the philosophy regarding the design of this study. This section also describes the advantages of the chosen structure, the sample participants, their recruitment, the interview process and the analysis. Chapter Five starts by acknowledging that refugee's experiences are not all the same and shows how people start from different places. It goes on to highlight how these differences emerged from the interviews including a description of survival mode, expectations versus reality, and social support. It also includes an analysis of gender norms and a comparison between the Iraqi and Syrian participants. Chapter Six, shows where my results agree with the existing literature, where it disagrees and where it adds something new. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with reflections on the research and thoughts on future directions.

#### ***2. Background***

This chapter provides necessary background information to set the stage for conceptualizing refugee resettlement in Connecticut. I look at the history of Syria and Iraq to add cultural and historical context to the lives of Syrians and Iraqis resettled in the US. This analysis sets-up the framework for understanding the similarities between Iraqis and Syrians while also

acknowledging the differences in their history and traditions in order to better understand how their specific pre-migration backgrounds impacted their post-migration experiences.

### *2.1. Historical and Legal Framework*

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN Refugee Convention, 1951, Article 1A (2)).

The UNHCR is the primary body tasked with providing durable solutions for refugees that “end the cycle of displacement and allow refugees to lead normal lives” (UNHCR, 2017). These solutions include local integration into the country of asylum, voluntary repatriation to the country of origin and finally resettlement. The UNHCR finds refugees in need of resettlement and then collaborates with various partners such as resettlement states, international organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to match them with a state that is willing to offer permanent residence in their countries. However, refugee policy is implemented on a country-by-country basis, with huge differences between each country’s acceptance and treatment of refugees. There have also been changes in national refugee policy over time.

The “Refugee Processing and Settlement” report by Christopher Reinhart, Chief Attorney outlines the steps of the refugee resettlement process in the United States:

“In the United States, the refugee process begins when the U.S. State Department receives an application for refugee status or a referral from UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or certain NGOs. According to the State Department, about 75% of

refugee cases are UNHCR referrals and about 25% are direct applications. The process for determining eligibility for resettlement is long and multi-step. After collecting information from Resettlement Support Centers around the world, it is given to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officers who conduct in-person interviews with applicants where they are located to determine whether they meet the definition of a “refugee” under federal law. The next step is multiple security checks as well as health screenings.

Refugees approved to come to the United States usually attend a three-day cultural orientation about the U.S. and what to expect from resettlement agencies and others upon arrival. The federal government works with nine domestic resettlement agencies that operate in about 180 U.S. communities to resettle refugees. The State Department develops placement plans for refugees but resettlement agency representatives consider refugees' information at the department's refugee processing center to determine where to place them. Refugees with relatives in the U.S. are often settled with or near them. The State Department develops placement plans but the agencies determine the placements. In other words, the law does not give the states a role in the placement process other than through required consultations between the federal government and resettlement agencies and states at various times.

Resettlement agency personnel meet refugees at the airport and help resettle them in a community. They provide services for 30 to 90 days including help finding safe and affordable housing and other services to promote self-sufficiency and cultural adjustment. The State Department's Reception and Placement Program provides resettlement agencies with a one-time sum per refugee which is typically used for a refugee's rent, furnishings, food, clothing, and the resettlement agency's expenses. Refugees may be eligible for assistance from the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) programs for up to five years.”

-Refugee and Processing and Settlement: Connecticut Government

Retrieved October 8, 2017, from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/rpt/2015-R-0293.htm>

Refugee resettlement is a long and multi-step process. While the government provides refugees with some resources and services, they are often lacking in both quantity and quality and operate within a tight and often rigid time-frame.

## *2.2. The Iraqi Refugee Crises*

To understand the current Iraqi refugee crisis, the long history of conflict in Iraq must be examined. While adequately summarizing this history of conflict is beyond the scope of this thesis, events as far back as the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, the 1991 Gulf War, and the consequent uprising in the south and a legacy of sanctions should be taken into consideration. These wars led to an extreme lack of pre-planning before the 2003 invasion and mismanagement by the United States after 2003. As the social networks and systems collapsed, the Iraqi state was no longer able to meet the needs of or take care of its people. As Philip Marfleet (2006, p.12) put it, “it is the cumulative effect of pressures on the Iraqi population that is the key to understanding recent patterns of movement. Living standards have declined steadily since 2003, while new crises of security have led more and more Iraqis to seek ‘exit’.” These circumstances combined with pressures of a civil war in 2006-2007, led to what was at the time the largest displacement of population in the Middle East since 1948 (Sassoon, 2008). Similar to most stories of migration, the first to leave were the well-educated followed by the middle class and finally the lower class who lacked the resources to leave earlier. Iraqi refugees fled to neighboring Syria and Jordan and -to a lesser extent- to Egypt and Lebanon. The influx gravely impacted those receiving countries and put considerable pressure on their already strained resources. In addition, since, with the exception of Egypt, none of the neighboring countries have signed the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Iraqis do not benefit from many of the rights that should be granted to refugees. The situation in these countries is tense as they continue to be disproportionately impacted by the sheer number of refugees fleeing violence.



### *2.3. The Syrian Refugees Crises*

The history of Syria is also marked by oppression, colonialism and dictatorship. Many point to the 2001 Arab Spring as the tipping point, where popular protest led to harsh government response and greatly contributed to the current humanitarian disaster. The uprising became a civil war with the formation of a variety of pro and anti-Assad groups (McHugo, 2014). A handful of countries also took sides with Iran intervening on behalf of the Assad regime while rich oil countries on the Persian Gulf countered Iran's influence by sending money and weapons to the rebels. In 2013 with a divide between Sunni powers supporting rebels on one side and Shia powers supporting Assad on the other side and the threat of chemical weapons being used against the civilian population, the United States began training Syrian rebels against Assad while Russia backed his regime. In February 2014, a group based in Iraq broke away from Al-Qaeda over internal disagreements about events in Syria. The new group called itself the Islamic State (ISIS) and became Al-Qaeda's enemy. ISIS took over part of Syria fighting both the Kurdish and Syrian rebels (McHugo, 2015). This history has led to the complete destruction of the legal, political, economic and social systems of the country and the death of upwards of 500,000 Syrians ("I Am Syria", 2018). Syria is both unstable and unsafe and has become one of the largest humanitarian crises since the end of World War II. The United Nations reports that the number of refugees who have fled the country now exceeds five million, including more than 2.4 million children, and millions more who have been displaced internally (Al Rifai, 2017).

### *2.4. Refugees in Connecticut*

As of November 2015, a total of 2,932 refugees have settled in Connecticut (U.S. State Department data and the Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2015). The number of refugees resettled each year varies with 2011 being a low of 375 refugees and 2013 being a high of 547.

For the fiscal year 2015, 519 refugees were resettled in Connecticut from 18 different countries (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2015).

Iraqi refugees have a long history of resettlement in the US. Despite the US's military intervention and its role in spearheading the Iraqi invasion, up until 2006 Iraqi refugees got no assistance from the United States. From April 2003 to the end of 2006, the United States admitted only 466 Iraqi refugees. The US government's financial investment was also particularly skewed as the US was spending more than \$8 billion per month to wage the war compared to \$20 million for the whole year of 2006 in refugee aid ([Sasson, 2008](#)). Increased pressure from the media and congress subsequently led to a slight rise in Iraqi admittances. However, most of the new commitment did not translate into actual resettlement. In 2008 a law often described as "a token gesture" (Sassoon, 2008, p. 112) was signed effectively creating 5,000 special immigrant visas every year for the next 5 years. These were earmarked specifically for those at increased risk because of their employment and involvement with the US war in Iraq, including an estimated 100,000 Iraqis who were perceived as traitors due to their employment status with US contractors. In 2015 only 95 Iraqi refugees were resettled in Connecticut ([Office of Refugee Resettlement](#), CT).

Meanwhile, the Syrian refugee crisis is often referenced in mainstream media as being a more recent international development. The Obama administration committed to resettling 10,000 Syrian refugees by 2016 and surpassed that goal by about 2,500 people ([Connor, 2016](#)). Of these refugees, 39 Syrians were resettled in Connecticut in 2015 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, CT). As more and more Syrians began to resettle in Connecticut, some institutions such as schools began to think about ways to adapt and welcome them into their communities

(Nix, 2016). At the time of this writing, the Trump administration has suspended admission of Syrian refugees until further review of security screening measures (Krogstad & Radford, 2017).

### *2.5. Understanding Integration as an Expansion of Resettlement*

There is a large emphasis on the importance of the integration of refugees after resettlement. This concept of integration has greatly influenced the development of refugee policy in the United States. For example, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides a variety of services to refugees including: cash and medical assistance, English as a Foreign Language (ESL) classes, case management services, and employment help. This assistance is given to facilitate refugees' self-sufficiency (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2015).

Understanding the American government's emphasis on economic self-sufficiency can help explain refugee programming and assumptions towards definitions of integration more generally. Having an accurate understanding of what integration looks like to refugees as well as policy makers can help increase social cohesion and inform better policy outcomes.

### **3. Literature Review**

Concepts of integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization are often used to understand adjustment into a new society. These concepts deal with degrees of cultural preservation, connection and interaction in the new context. According to cultural psychologist John Berry integration allows for both cultural preservation as well as the establishment of meaningful connections with the host society. Similarly, assimilation maintains the formation of new relationships but leads to a loss of original culture. Meanwhile, separation connotes the lack of connections with the host community but preserves cultural identity. Finally, marginalization is a term to describe the lack of both new social connections and protection of culture (Berry,

1997). Due to the fact that “assimilation” is often characterized as being suppressive to minorities (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006), the term “integration” carries a more positive connotation.

It is worth noting that this terminology is also used in reference to immigration experiences as well. However, there are important differences between immigrants and refugees. Analyzing why and how one left her or his country means taking into account how pre-migration factors directly influence one’s post-migration experience.

As previously mentioned, there is not one agreed-upon definition for “integration” that exists within the literature. Recently, there is more attention to the role of meaningful connections and the preservation of culture as key components of adjustment in terms of involvement and identity formation. Many different researchers have put forward their own frameworks for integration. These varying frameworks allow us to identify the growing consensus of key factors and overlapping themes. For example, a highly influential study by Ager and Strang in 2008 proposes key domains to integration based on four overall themes: “achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups within the community; and structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment” (Ager & Strang, 2008, p.166). While this conceptual framework has been used in other studies (Atfield & Brahmhatt & O’Toole, 2007), Strang and Ager specifically point out both the interconnectedness of the domains and the flexibility in application of the framework. While this is just one framework for integration, many other studies have similarly attempted to classify components of integration (Bosswick &

Heckmann, 2006). However, the ways in which researchers talk about the domains and sections highlight the discrepancies between different models and point to the variations in thought that leads to differences in the way refugee integration is discussed.

It is important to understand the various factors, barriers and facilitators of integration. Several factors have been identified as being associated with high symptom levels related to anxiety and depression. Watters (2001) among others believe that refugee integration must be addressed holistically, for example, by including employment and education as part of refugee health. Another example shows evidence of a strong correlation between discrimination and high symptoms levels of depression and anxiety (Pernice & Brook, 1996), however PTSD as a clinical understanding of trauma is too narrow to support psychological healing (Taylor & Francis, 2001). Putting trauma and healing in a sociopolitical context allows us to understand resettlement as a possible location for both. This direction of exploration is needed to begin to highlight the relationship between health and everyday stressors (Fazel & Reed & Panter-Brick & Stein, 2012). For example, unemployment and separation from familial support are commonly considered risk factors. Meanwhile, ability to speak the host country's language is considered a protective factor. Access to a like-ethnic community is highly debated with most recognizing that there are short-term benefits but potentially harmful long-term effects (Beiser, 2006). Since there are many conflicting studies, further research at the local level can help us understand the intricacies behind specific contexts (Fazel & Reed & Panter-Brick & Stein, 2011).

The various frameworks of integration help highlight some of these issues and point to potential policy developments. While the majority of the research on refugee integration takes location into consideration, it also neglects to distinguish refugees as being different from one

another; rather, it lumps people from different ethnic backgrounds into one category of “refugees.”

Refugee groups have different attributes which makes it important to understand integration in the context of what it means to a specific group of people in a particular place. Looking at the differences in culture, history, traditions and reasons for fleeing one's home for specified refugee groups helps acknowledge the differences in refugee experiences. This distinction is important both in the pre-migration and post-migration periods as the social and political influences of the host country will impact each group of refugees differently. In other words, acknowledging that being a refugee from Somalia is different than being a refugee from Iraq due to the inherent differences in experiences and backgrounds in their home country, as well as the discrepancies in the way they will be treated by American society. In terms of policy, it helps tailor specific interventions that would be most useful to the specific group of people. In addition, realizing that being a refugee in Connecticut is not like being a refugee in California, Texas or Minnesota is important to avoid generalizing experiences. More specifically, being a refugee in Middletown is unlike being a refugee in New Haven or Hartford which means different systems of support may be needed accordingly. As Kirkwood et al. said “It is therefore important to explore notions of integration not simply to create a common definition that is suitable for measurement, but rather to understand how such conceptions function to justify and criticize certain integration practices” (Kirkwood & McKinlay & McVittie, 2014, p. 3).

Since integration cannot be looked at separately from the existing social political climate of the host community, understanding integration must incorporate how these factors impact the refugee experience. A study by Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett put belonging at the center of

understanding wellbeing. They argue that the social climate influences opportunities to flourish in the new country as refugees are impacted by how valued they feel as they try to become “at home” in their new country. Their model for wellbeing puts social status—whether that includes social inclusion or exclusion—and discrimination as key predictors of both physical and psychological health (Correa-Velez & Gifford & Barnett, 2010).

Feelings of belonging can be traced back to individual relationships and the importance of building connections. A study by Clare Daley aims to address the lack of sufficient literature on the individual interactions of both people and groups from different backgrounds at a local level. The study automatically assumes that social cohesion is to be desired and in line with the ability to be integrated as a goal. While the study mentioned that some participants did not express a desire to mix with other cultural groups, this too carried the underlying assumption that this lack of interest was in some way problematic. Interestingly, despite this negative connotation, she mentions that participants seemed to feel happy because they were safe and content even without opening themselves up to interactions or relationships with other people around them. The findings point to the importance of family, culture and religion as they found that “community participants defined themselves and others primarily according to their ethnic and cultural bonds” (Daley, 2007, p. 162). In this study, the focus on similarity of identity was the main indicator of a strong relationship whereas all other relationships between groups was labeled as superficial and surface-level with “a general lack of meaningful and ongoing relationships” (Daley, 2007, p. 167). However, the study focused on relationships of people between different groups and did not necessarily give the same attention to the individuals’ interactions with members of their own social group.

While Daley's study investigated community connections specifically, Ager and Strang (Ager & Strang, 2004b) used an inductive approach to understand integration at the local level without imposing any definitions of integration and still found the same importance of individual and group relationships. The UK government's Home Office commissioned social scientists Ager and Strang to develop a framework for the assessment of refugee integration called the "Indicators of Integration" (Ager & Strang, 2004a). This study analyzes recurrent themes and issues brought up in common definitions of integration, leading to a conceptual framework for integration. To ground these theoretical concepts, Ager and Strang examined the local experiences of refugees in Pollokshaws and Islington. The aim of this supportive study was to "identify local understanding of integration" by using qualitative methods with the belief that this method "enables the way local people think about such ideas to be identified, rather than imposing pre-existing concepts and ideas upon those interviewed" (Ager & Strang, 2004b, p. 2).

The study found that relationships seemed to be at the core of understandings of integration, with an emphasis on both the range of relationships as well as their depth and quality. Relationships were described on a spectrum including measures of tolerance and acceptance. These bonds could describe close ties between friends, mixing between different groups of people and the "fitting in" associated with finding a sense of belonging among the larger community. In addition, they found that their study fit in line with the existing literature on the variety of factors that acted as either protection or risks to the process of integration.

By focusing on the local experience, Ager and Strang (2004b) acknowledged the importance of context and the significance of place for opportunities and resources. In addition, the study started its research from the community level by beginning with group discussions. The



methodology utilized semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The report includes a total of 62 semi-structured interviews—29 with refugees and 33 with non-refugees—between November 2002 and March 2003 in Glasgow and Islington. The study aimed to avoid defining integration using the research questions but instead sought to “elicit dimensions of understanding” (Ager & Strang, 2004b, p. 20).

Centering the narrative around refugee voices, incorporating community involvement at all levels and utilizing an inductive approach, are all key concepts that I believe allow us to move towards a more holistic attempt at understanding refugee experiences and away from imposing assumptions onto vulnerable groups. These are approaches that my own research relies upon.

However, while I agree with the inductive approach taken in the Ager and Strang study, it also contains one essential limitation: the lack of recognizing refugees as distinct peoples. Instead, the literature once again merges “refugees” into one category. This is a common problem among refugee-related research as well as refugee policy development. This problem is significant because the culture, traditions and history of a people—in addition to their pre-migration context and the reason they fled their country—all affect how they understand the role of integration once they are resettled in the receiving/host countries. In addition, acknowledging social phenomena present in the US such as colorism and Islamophobia shows that refugee experiences will not be unified after resettlement. For these reasons, I chose to look at two ethnicities of refugees—Syrian and Iraqi—specifically to address this gap in the literature and to begin to acknowledge differences among the refugee population. This thesis is primarily interested in investigating the social processes at the local level that shape the lives of people from Iraq and Syria as they adjust to their new host communities in Connecticut.

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1. Research Question, Objectives and Design*

I wanted to understand refugee experiences in Connecticut from the perspective of refugees themselves. In addition, I wanted to elaborate on their mechanisms of support in order to help translate refugee experiences into policy recommendations for host communities. To achieve this, I decided to examine their own stories of integration. I used an inductive qualitative approach to try to avoid imposing pre-existing analytical frameworks of assimilation and adjustment. This inductive qualitative approach meant creating situations in which refugees could express themselves in their own terms, unfolding their stories in their own ways. To facilitate this, I took advantage of my Palestinian culture and Arabic language skills to develop an emic relationship, one that emphasized my similarities and downplayed my etic role as a researcher.

By utilizing a semi-structured interview format, I made each interview participant-centered, allowing the participants to focus on what they thought was important, using my own questions as probes to help them go into more depth. By intentionally using prompts in response to participants' leads I avoided directing them to address pre-conceived issues or theories. Due to the centrality of conversation in human interaction (Lamont & Swidler, 2014) interviews are often considered a prime mode of social research, used to gain holistic understandings of experience. In addition, the philosophy I attached to the tool of the semi-structured format allowed for the acknowledgment of the existing power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee. Allowing participants to choose the location of the meeting meant that I was often brought into the family as a friend before and after the interview. I intentionally constructed the

interview as a conversation led by the participant, with only general and follow up prompts intended to clarify.

Feminist research highlights conscious attention to power and the intention to subvert the traditional power of researchers to define participants. It re-emphasizes, that research based on an equalitarian relationship between the interviewer and interviewee increases the validity of the research and so often focuses on incorporating various means of actively involving the participant in the research process (Westmarland, 2001).

Acknowledging power dynamics includes an attempt to address researcher-outsider dynamics by confronting the barriers between interviewer and interviewee. Researchers are often not members of the group they are investigating. Noting the status of the researcher is important as it relates to understanding the researcher's context (gender, class, ethnicity) and how it relates to the "perception of relative power" (Angrosino, 2005, p. 734) and narrative interpretation (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.55). When the researcher is a member of the group they are investigating they have a pre-established connection with the participants based on shared language, identity and experiences. These similarities often lead to faster acceptance and a degree of legitimacy which creates a common ground to begin research and easier access to participants. The resulting connection often allows for more open dialogue and a greater depth to the data gathered (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). While I am not Iraqi, Syrian or a member of the refugee population in the US, I share an overlap of language and history through my own identity as a Palestinian. This identity helped facilitate faster bonding over similarities in culture, tradition and history. Since I am fluent in Arabic I was able to connect directly with my participants instead of having to go through a translator. In addition, it allowed participants to

Speak freely in Arabic without having to worry about trying to use English. Similarly, being a woman allowed me to take part in spaces occupied by both men and women (whereas a male interviewer would not have had access to female spaces). This led to a unique interviewer-participant relationship where I was often welcomed into participants' homes, invited for breakfast, barbecues and family bike rides. While the interviews took an average of 58 minutes (80>x>35), I incorporated relationship building into my interviewing techniques therefore allowing time before and after each interview to get to know the participants. This allowed me to invest time in breaking away from the traditional interview dynamics and allowed me to explore the advantages of a semi-structured format that was more conversational. This led to stronger rapport and ease of establishing authentic results.

In addition, I have extensive experience working with Iraqi and Syrian refugees in refugee camps in Jordan as well as resettled refugees in the US which allowed me to foresee potential miscommunication and tailor the format of the interviews in a culturally appropriate way.

Regardless of whether the researcher is a member of the group they are investigating, a hierarchy of power often still exists. I attempted to challenge this dynamic by emphasizing collaboration in the research design. This means that the refugees played a key role in both the wording and the content of the questions to ensure culture sensitivity and increase the authenticity of the results. In addition to soliciting extensive input from refugees, the interview questions were modified through several rounds of review by various professors and NGO workers. At the end of each interview space was given for the participant to point out the most

relevant questions, the worst questions and add other relevant information to improve subsequent interviews.

To avoid imposing pre-conceived assumptions or definitions of integration, I stimulated conversation through open-ended questions grounded in the refugees' own personal experience. In most cases the participants were very talkative and so I rarely had to use my prompts. For the few participants who were less talkative I relied on my prompts more heavily. The use of in-depth interviews encouraged refugees to tell their stories in their own words, free of any formulaic process of social and political science. Additionally, the questions themselves acted more as prompts for myself with the wording of each question phrased in terms of the on-going conversation. For example, the questions which I used as prompts included:

- 1) Please describe a refugee who was resettled in the US and is now living in Connecticut (perfectly integrated) and completely content with their life.
- 2) What expectations of the United States did you have before you arrived?
- 3) Where do you go if you want to meet people?
- 4) Imagine where you would like to be in 5 years. Describe your situation.

A full list of questions can be found in Appendix A.

In addition, considerable care was given both to the cultural appropriateness of the wording and the use of different technical terms. For example, the term "integration" is itself not particularly clear; instead questions that incorporated understandings of "mixing" or "belonging" were explored. Many studies have cited the lack of cultural sensitivity in refugee specific work as a major limitation in the research (Keyes, 2010). This gap is important to address specifically in relation to mental health since mental health symptoms are influenced by culture (APA, 2013).

I would have preferred to conduct follow up interviews but I was limited by a number of different factors. For example, most participants were extremely busy trying to make a living from low paying jobs. I simply wasn't able to ask for follow-up interviews without causing them severe inconvenience. This restriction was further complicated by the fact that I did not provide compensation for their time.

#### *4.2. Sampling and Recruitment of Participants*

To narrow the scope of my research, I chose to focus on the state of Connecticut. By focusing on one state I hoped to add social and political context to the refugee's experiences. Still, I found that refugees resettled in Wallingford described extremely different experiences from those in New Haven. Several factors led to such differences including the community's familiarity with refugees or immigrants, the presence of similar ethnic communities close by, and the accessibility of public transportation. Due to the discrepancies in experience between cities, it is important to avoid over generalization of experiences for the sake of producing research results.

Initially I planned to focus exclusively on Iraqi refugees. I was trying to avoid lumping refugees from different ethnicities and nationalities together, which is a common limitation in refugee research. Acknowledging the unique aspects of each refugee group allows for a more holistic examination of resettlement and integration. Similarly, the American political context itself, specifically the influence of racism, colorism and Islamophobia, leads to great diversity in experience after resettlement. Having decided to focus on one group, I initially chose Iraqi refugees specifically because I was already well connected to the Iraqi community in Middletown and because I speak Arabic and could converse with them in their native language.

Due to a perception shared among my Iraqi interviewees Syrian refugees were later included in this study. Many of the Iraqi participants felt that, in general, Iraqi refugees failed to create bonds with each other causing an absence of community after resettlement. They compared themselves to Syrian refugees who they said tended to form stronger support networks for themselves. In order to explore this, I decided to incorporate Syrian refugees in my sample to examine the similarities and differences between the two groups.

Iraqi and Syrian refugees come from very similar cultural and historical backgrounds, and share Arabic as their main language. Yet even though the two groups have a number of characteristics in common, they still interpreted and interacted with community support in very different ways. This substantial difference in experience between the two groups highlights the importance of recognizing them as similar yet distinct. Acknowledging this difference between the Iraqi and Syrian sample shows that “blanket” policies that pool refugees into one category may be overlooking the needs and issues of specific groups.

I left my selection criteria as open as possible to allow for the largest number of participants, as I anticipated difficulties with both availability of Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Connecticut and my ability to contact them.

My sample criteria were as follows:

- Meet definition of a refugee found in Section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act
- Born in Iraq or Syria
- Over 18 years old
- Lived in the US for at least one full year
- Lives in Connecticut
- Willing to participate in the study

Criteria Rationale: Participants had to be at least 18 years old to comply with rules regarding the status of minors. However, I also tried to include a range of ages to capture differing educational opportunities and life experiences. Participants were required to have lived in the US for one full year to allow for the completion of any initial resettlement program. I limited the geographic scope to the state of Connecticut to avoid generalizations. Factors such as employment status, marital and family status and language proficiency were not taken into account for the sample criteria. I made efforts to obtain as equal a distribution of men and women as possible.

Length of time in the US or time since resettlement was also important since issues faced by a refugee in their first year of resettlement will likely be different from the issues they face after their fourth year. Several studies emphasize the importance of temporal context and show that there may be a disconnect in understanding risk and protective factors in the long and short term. For example, there is debate on the outcomes of involvement of refugees within like ethnic communities. While there is evidence of utilizing like-ethnic communities as a resource for social support and connection in the short term, it may also limit participation in the broader society in the long run (Beiser, 2006).

Based on similar narrative-based, qualitative refugee studies I chose to include twenty participants in my study (Schweitzer & Greenslade & Kagee, 2007). Ten were from Iraq and ten from Syria. The focus of this type of qualitative study is to identify themes and patterns that describe shared experiences as a refugee in the United States. In addition, the diversity of the sample aimed to capture a range of opinions which helped understand the multiplicity of experiences.



Table 1: Participant Profile

	<b>Iraqi</b>	<b>Syrian</b>
<b>Refugees</b>		
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	3	6
Male	7	4
<b>Total</b>	10	10
<i>Age</i>		
18-24	2	2
24-30	2	5
30-36	3	2
36+	4	1
<i>Length of resettlement</i>		
1>x>2	2	6
2>x>3	3	4
3>x>4	n/a	n/a
4+	5	n/a

I partnered with Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven Connecticut, a refugee resettlement organization I volunteered with, to gain initial contacts within the refugee community. While the IRIS staff were helpful in identifying likely participants, I was surprised at how difficult it was to get participants. Many refugees just didn't have time to take part. After compiling an initial contact list based on IRIS's suggestions, I utilized my own connections using the "snowball sampling" method, where community members referred other potential participants. Several leaders in the refugee community were instrumental in connecting me with other potential participants which highlights the importance of relationship building. Statistical representation was not a goal of the study; however, I was able to identify a range of participants and hence incorporate a variety of opinions.

### *4.3. Interview process*

To limit the burden of the process on the participants, and to respect their time, I always met with them wherever was most convenient for them. Interviews mostly took place inside participants' homes. I also met two participants in cafes and one in a mosque. I always began by reading each participant the consent form, telling them about myself and asking if they had any questions. All but one participant agreed to having the interview tape recorded for the purpose of transcribing. Five interviews included participation from both the mother and father of the family. These group interviews allowed the participants to use one another to delve deeper into the questions while still answering each question fully and individually. The rest of the interviews were one-on-one sessions.

As I previously mentioned, I invested a lot of time into community building so by the time we started the interview it flowed quite naturally. I saw the impact of the community building as I was invited to family dinners and outings. In fact, the interview I did at the mosque got interrupted several times because past participants I had interviewed kept stopping by to say hello. The result of my own participation with the refugee community was something unique and larger than the scope of this thesis. The relationships reinforced the agency of the participants and allowed me to get a closer understanding of their experiences.

### *4.4. Analysis*

All the interviews (but one) were tape-recorded and then fully transcribed. I transcribed all but two of the interviews. The transcription process was the first step in the analysis process as I began to familiarize myself with the data. I then reviewed the transcripts using the Braun and Clarke method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method deals with generating

an initial comprehensive code book and capturing everything of potential significance. The initial codebook was then used to analyze broader themes and tell a story. The codes and the themes were used to create the analysis of the interviews. Incorporating quotes grounds the analysis in participants lived experiences and centers their narratives. While there is no attempt to formally quantify the study, following Ager et al. terms such as “most” and “some” may be used to signify prevalence (Ager & Strang, 2004b). I aimed to build my theory from the material provided in the interviews rather than testing any of my own pre-conceived theories.

## ***5. Interview Results***

I chose to work with Syrian and Iraqi refugees because of their similarities in culture, traditions, history and language. The results of this study show strong resemblance between the two nationalities in many of the key themes articulated in the interviews especially as it related to what I call the “Survival Mode.” However, there were also some stark differences between the Iraqi and Syrian groups especially in terms of social support and mixing with the Arab community. These differences in how each group uses community as a center of social interactions and support highlights the importance of noting trends within refugee communities, but also going farther and investigating the potential differences between groups of refugees as well.

### *5.1. “We All Start From Different Places”: The Individuality of the Refugee Experience*

In noting trends among Iraqi and Syrian refugees living in Connecticut, it is also important to note that the differences within the groups upon arrival lead to varying experiences while living in Connecticut. Noting these differences allows us to remember the agency of these extremely resilient people, and accounts for a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. This attention to detail helps avoid generalizing while still noticing emergent themes and patterns

among different groups of people. As one participant stated in reference to what tools a refugee needs to succeed in the United States:

You know I asked some people what it was like in the United States. Some people said good some said bad. Each person said something different according to their experiences and their opinions. It was only when I came here that I saw what it was really like because it depends on the place you are resettled, the language you have when you get here, and the job you are able to get. So people call me all the time and ask me: If we come what will it be like. I always say come and see but I can't tell you how it is going to be. Each person will have their own experience. I was lucky because I used to be an English translator and I have experience so I am able to work and I can make money. But if you don't come with skills and experience then you won't be like me.

This sentiment in dissecting the transition to the United States is echoed in many different interviews. What I share in this thesis is the lived experience, thoughts and feelings of people who are trying to start a life in the United States after becoming refugees. While their experiences are not generalizable to all groups, there are some common patterns that emerged that would be useful to note both for a deeper understanding of refugee group experiences and better policy development by host communities. I will begin by outlining the main themes that resulted from the interviews that were present in both the Syrian and Iraqi groups. I will mention all structural differences between the groups that may have had an impact on the study. I will then highlight the differences between the two groups and make a case for greater cultural sensitivity and increased attention to cross-group differences in experience.

### *5.2. Survival Mode: "Everything Was Hard"*

The period directly after arrival must be examined by acknowledging that the process of resettlement is both unnatural and disruptive. "Survival mode" is a time-limited phase during which refugees are coping with meeting basic needs, that are often not met during the early stages of resettlement. Refugees' problems change as time progresses; the issues refugees will

face in the short-term are different from those they may face in the long-term. The period directly after resettlement is marked by uncertainty, confusion, and instability. Adjusting to a new environment is difficult under any situation. In the case of refugees, it is compounded by the lack of choice and agency refugees feel as they are forced to flee their homes as well as the trauma they have experienced.

This survival mode period lasts different lengths of time based on individual circumstances but must be taken into consideration when evaluating the immediate needs of refugees and understanding natural reactions to unnatural situations. Survival Mode is about how refugees deal with issues related to language, employment, education, culture and transportation. A focus on fulfilling one's basic needs is the first step in the resettlement process.

#### *5.2.1. "Language Is the Key to Success": English Proficiency at the Center of Communication, Employment and Belonging*

"Language is the key to success." I heard this sentiment over and over again at the beginning of each interview. Most participants had very limited English when they arrived, with most participants rating themselves between 1 and 2 on a scale of 10 for perceived English proficiency upon their first arrival in the US. The government and NGOs highlight language as one of the biggest priorities upon resettlement. A variety of different English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are offered at partnering community organizations such as Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS).

Lack of proficiency in English leads to feelings of embarrassment or shame, therefore discouraging the participants from interacting with people in a variety of settings. This hesitation stems from the frustration of feeling unable to express oneself, the fear of being seen as dumb

and the loss of eloquence and meaning that results from attempts at translation. One Iraqi participant noted the importance of language in accessing different social spaces:

Language is first. You need language to build any type of relationship. Once you have the language you can get a good job, with a good job you can make new friends and integrate more in the society. This way of mixing generally is how you get to know a society. Whether it is with your kids at school, in the street. You want to be able to defend yourself, to be able to express yourself and say what you think. I want to feel like the language is accessible to me. I am not a mute person, but I can't always explain myself because without language I am limited.

This quote highlights how language can act as a barrier in many different ways, including employment and social interactions. For example, one person noted the direct way his language level acted as a barrier to him succeeding at work.

The fact that I am not fluent means that at work I am alone. My supervisor will purposefully avoid talking to me and instead send over one of the other Arabic-speaking employees if he needs something from me. I think some of them know I am smart but I am often unable to explain myself in English. I know that if my language was better my position at work would improve.

This statement also points to the ways language influences interpersonal relationships and dynamics. In the social realm, this means a reticence in meeting Americans and could explain why many participants tended to stay within their own ethnic communities. For example, the participants who talked about having friendships with Americans often complained that these relationships tended to stay at the surface level due to a basic lack of connection and an inability to understand one another driven primarily by the language barrier. As one Syrian woman explained:

It seems like most relationships in America are very surface level. I want to have closer relationships with some of the people in my building. They will say "hi" to me and ask how I am but they won't invite me over. Me and my other Syrian friend always sit on the porch outside. Once the lady from the third floor came and joined

us but we could not understand her and she could not understand us. She seems like a very nice person, but without having language we are unable to understand each other so our relationship will never really develop.

In addition, a few participants went even further by drawing a connection between language and belonging, relating both back to stability and the ability to rely on oneself.

Resettlement does not just mean employment or meeting my basic needs. It also means being an active member of society. Knowing what your worth and what you owe. We need to be able to connect using language so that we can really become part of the community. Once we belong we will understand our own rights and responsibilities and be able to rely on ourselves.

Participants also complained about the expected timeline for learning English, with one Syrian saying:

All Arabs are the same. We all need English but we have only been speaking Arabic our whole lives. Every class they say, you have been here so long why don't you speak English yet? All I said back is, do you know Arabic? The teacher said no and I said, 'Exactly!' I asked, 'Would you be able to learn Arabic in one year?' She said 'no.' I asked her, 'Then why do you expect me to be able to learn a new language in one year when I have been speaking Arabic for 54?' Of course, she didn't have an answer. It took me so much time to learn ABC I can't imagine being able to have a conversation in English anytime soon.

Four participants also mentioned problems directly related to being able to attend the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the first place. Many pointed to the unrealistic expectation of fully committing to attending ESL classes while also juggling work and childcare. All these concerns illustrate how lack of English proficiency determines where refugees feel comfortable and how that impacts both their work and social experiences.

### *5.2.2. Employment: The Path to Self-Sufficiency*

Employment was often talked about as an immediate priority and the next step after learning enough English to get by. The U.S. government expects all working-age refugees to find a job within six months of arrival (USCRI, 2017) and government benefits typically end 8 months after arrival as well, whether or not the refugee is able to gain employment (DSHS, 2017). Financial stability is directly associated with self-sufficiency. This emphasis on self-sufficiency was apparent in the way many participants defined independence. Discussion surrounding self-reliance included examples such as limiting financial assistance and even expanded to hesitance in asking for help in times of emergencies or sickness. Refugees may be less willing to trust others due to past experiences when they did not receive the help they needed. Hence, an emphasis on self-sufficiency may be considered the outcome of a self-protective response towards the refugee experience.

Financial difficulties- due to unemployment or under-employment- were an ongoing theme throughout the interviews, mostly as they related to the high cost of rent. Participants were quick to acknowledge the help they received from the government but consistently noted that it was not enough and pointed to the unrealistic expectations set up by the aid timeline. The participants feared the end of their government benefits and the financial burden of providing for themselves and their families without assistance. While attempting to practice their right to self-determination, they are limited by a lack of access to the resources needed for true agency. Additionally, many refugees found it extremely difficult to advance beyond entry-level positions at work, even with advanced degrees from Iraq or Syria. As one Iraqi said:

I was the manager of my IT division for the US army when I was in Iraq, now I fix computers. I am not complaining because everyone has to start somewhere but I



don't think I will be moving up or advancing. This is very disappointing since I have so many years of experience.

A Syrian participant added:

The problem here is that people do not recognize certification from places outside of America. I have been working in electricity all my life and they completely refuse to acknowledge this. I have 25 years of experience, but instead of letting me work in my field I am a pizza delivery man.

There is a lack of recognition in the US that a technical certificate or degree received in a different country could reflect an education of equal value as one received in the United States. Since there is no process to get these credentials recognized in any way, refugees are having to start from scratch regardless of where they were in their careers.

### *5.2.3. Education: The Route to Recognition*

Many of the male Iraqi refugees had much higher levels of education than I expected based on my experience working with refugees with Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS). Many had technical degrees from Iraq and a few had master degrees in their respective fields. The majority had hopes of continuing their education in the US, or at least repeating their technical certification so they could re-enter their field of specialization. However, while many participants were planning on continuing their education in the US, they found it difficult to juggle the additional time commitment with work and learning English. While time is one barrier, money is another. Even after refugees are employed they still face the difficulty of paying for school and having transportation to get there.

While many participants are actively pursuing their education and certification, others focused on the opportunities their children will have access to through an American education. In

fact, 7 participants explicitly cited hopes of a better education for their children as the main reason for applying for or agreeing to move to the US.

The sample of Syrian participants were generally less educated in comparison with the Iraqi sample. They were also less likely to have specific goals related to education, instead focusing on getting back to the type of employment they had in Syria. These jobs ranged from technical jobs to manual labor jobs like painting houses or unskilled work such as selling clothes. This variation shows the spectrum of goals related to education. The refugees want to be able to return to the same type of employment and socio-economic status they had achieved in their home countries. However, in the United States they find they are unable to work in the fields in which they have the most expertise. Education and language are significant barriers to the recognition they need for satisfactory employment.

#### *5.2.4. Culture: Incorporating Different Ways of Thinking into a Dominant Host Culture*

Cultural differences arose in multiple contexts as being a main barrier for mixing with the American community and success in the US more generally. These cultural influences were largely based on the notion of “culture shock” and lack of American familiarity with Arab culture.

Gaining an understanding of American culture was identified as one of the most essential factors for refugees’ success in the United States and as one of the hardest to attain. Participants often struggled to identify exactly what makes American culture so different, often reverting back to saying, “They just think differently.” However, it was easier for them to give concrete examples of cultural differences they dislike. For example, two participants mentioned their dislike for the American tendency for kids to move out when they were 18 or any time before marriage. One participant was a mother who was exasperated by American parents who kicked

their children out when they came of age. The other was a single young man who elaborated on his untraditional living situation without his family and the difficulties that arose due to his loss of their support.

Culturally, the United States is very different. Here when a boy turns 18 he leaves the house and separates from his family. Of course, we don't have anything like this. The family must stay together until the sons and daughters marry. Then when they move out they are starting a new life with their new family. I came here alone so for me things are much harder. I have had a very hard housing experience because my family is not here. So instead I have to live with other single men who I do not know and sometimes it is hard because they are messy and loud and have a very different lifestyle than me. If I can't live with my family I would rather live alone. Of course, the reason I came to the United States was because I thought it would be easier to bring my family here if I was already resettled but obviously that didn't happen and now of course it will be even harder because I don't know how I will find a wife without my family's help.

This quote also gives us insight into the specific problems a refugee who comes to the United States alone may face. Refugees who come without their families are almost always single men and tend to be placed in group housing with other single men from different refugee backgrounds. All four of the single men in the sample discussed this living situation as negative and talked about moving out and living on their own as being most important to them. In addition, without the support of their families they were less likely to eat traditional food as often and more likely to avoid cooking instead opting for fast food. As highlighted in the above quote, the role of family is also essential for maintaining the structure of marriage in Iraqi and Syrian cultures. The lack of familial support in the US leaves single men worried about their future. These problems had a compounding effects on single men leading to an increased level of isolation from that found in the refugees who had come with their immediate families.

It is important to remember that this initial shock from having to learn a completely new way of thinking usually has a much bigger effect in the period directly upon arrival. While all

refugees are supposed to receive some form of cultural orientation before coming to the United States, these programs can range in length from three hours to a few days (USCRI, 2017). In fact, most of the participants claimed to have gotten no course at all, and the few who did said that it was not useful and did not help them prepare to cope in the American context. One Iraqi participant explained:

I came from Iraq so I didn't have orientation, like they gave me books to explain, something simple. The other thing is, even if you do have a cultural orientation, you don't understand the way of life here until you try it, no one can just explain it to you.

In addition, many refugees complain that Americans lack familiarity with Arab culture and tradition. This concern, however, was highly dependent on location. Refugees living in New Haven, which is a hub of resettlement, tended to comment on the multi-cultural nature of American society. Those living in Wallingford often felt a more pronounced isolation deriving from a lack of diversity in the area which led to a gap in cultural and historic understanding or awareness. The degree of pre-established cultural intersection in a neighborhood had direct effects on tolerance. Lack of familiarity with a diversity of cultures usually led to increased levels of discrimination, which will be elaborated on in another section. With time, however, the participants said they begun to get used to American life. As one Iraqi refugee put it:

You get to know them and who they are or how to interact with them. The feelings are good, but if you don't know the culture well then you won't fit in well. I mean it's like a glass of water with some oil. The oil won't mix with the water in the beginning. That was us when we came to America. We were the oil and they were the water. We didn't mix with them. If you leave the oil and water for 2 days or so, they'll mix. The passing of the days helped us mix with them. I've been here for about four years and now I'm starting to belong. It takes a lot of time. It's hard to come here from a country where you were raised and a country where you know the people.. it's hard to go to another country where you don't... to begin from zero.

Another participant explained this change in perception by using the example of clothes. She said that when she first got to the US she felt scandalized seeing everyone running around “naked,” but now she just thinks of it as being different and said that everyone should have the right to live the way they want.

These cultural differences, in combination with problems with communication due to limited English ability, can help explain the importance of having like-ethnic communities close by. All the participants who lived outside of New Haven said that life would be much easier with a refugee community who spoke Arabic close by. The participants often considered the language and the culture real barriers to building deep and meaningful connections with Americans. People from the same background are able to provide a level of support and advice that refugees can't seem to find in other places.

My community is where the Arab community is and where people from that culture is. When I go to places with Arabs I feel comfortable and relieved. Even if my wife and I just go to New Haven and eat in an Arab restaurant I get completely comfortable because I got the Arab influence so then when I go back home I feel better.

Feedback from the interviews was consistent with this differentiation. People spoke of acculturation in the public domain through involvement with work and school but a preservation of culture in the private domain of the home. For example, neither the Syrian nor the Iraqi refugees made many cultural or traditional changes in their daily routines. All 20 participants reported eating the same food they did in their home country, whether this was traditional Iraqi food or Syrian food.

However, some participants began to adopt new behaviors that they deemed more American. These were rarely mentioned but included things like exercising more and using

English more often. Holidays were also commonly brought up, especially in relation to the difficulty of having to celebrate alone as well as when describing beginning to participate in new cultural celebrations. For example, Eid, a Muslim holiday celebrating the end of Ramadan, is a time for the gathering of family, which is markedly missing for a lot of refugees and is exacerbated by the general lack of recognition of Eid in American society. Meanwhile, others talked about participating in holidays such as Halloween or the Fourth of July. As one participant said, “It is important to change your culture a little for your children so that when they go to school they don’t feel like foreigners.” This participant went on to explain that they were thinking about getting their children a Christmas tree so that they could have the same celebration as their classmates.

There was a difference in how the older and younger generations reacted to cultural changes. This generational gap was evident in the fear elders had for the youth in their community. Many families with young kids were afraid that their children would lose their Arabic language skills. To counter this loss, the children were put in Arabic classes at near-by mosques. However, many parents felt like this was not enough and so began to enforce “Arabic-only” policies inside the house. Here we can see an intersection of competing priorities. On the one hand, the government and NGOs prioritize language development amongst the refugee community and envision children having a role in helping their parents learn. However, the parents try to preserve their native language, actively working against its loss in the only way they know how. This is a complex example of a place where the needs of the refugee community and those of the US government are competing and even seem to cancel one another out. It highlights how the approach to language improvement must be considered within a culturally-appropriate strategy. There is no research that says refugees that maintain their native language

are any less able to learn English. Hence, perhaps attention given to the preservation of their native language would encourage refugees to also focus their energy on learning English.

#### *5.2.5. Transportation: Independence in Mobility*

One thing that surprised me was the importance the participants placed on owning their own car. Every single interviewee had one car per family and it was one of the things participants mentioned as being most important to a successful life in the United States. They often described the freedom and independence that came with having a car as “life-changing.” They looked back on their time pre-car with sadness, remembering the difficulty of getting around and their hours of waiting for public transportation. Their busy schedules and a general lack of good public transportation made a car essential. Due to the value the participants placed on having a car, access to adequate transportation should be added as a key component of successful integration.

#### *5.3. “I Have Never Felt More Shocked in My Life”: Expectations Versus Reality*

We threw a huge party for the entire neighborhood when we found out we were going to America. We killed a goat and celebrated all night. Then we came here and cried so much because we just wanted to go home.

All 20 participants reported shock at what they found once they arrived in the United States. The life they found was much harder than they expected it to be and they were surprised at the paucity of help they received. Many had expectations that their housing would be free and were surprised to find themselves responsible for paying their own rent which many described as “a true crime.” Others expected that they would be able to focus on taking English classes and learning about the American community but found instead that they were expected to work and provide for themselves as well adapting to a new way of life.

In European countries, refugees are treated very differently than in the United States. In other countries, a refugee doesn't need to work or have a job. The country provides him with a monthly stipend and they give him a home so he doesn't need to pay rent. But for the refugee in America, the case is very different. In America, the country tells me "you are threatened in this country, if you come we will give you aid for not longer than 8 months." After 8 months, you need to become like the Americans, you need to work, and do what they do and think like they do. Refugees don't understand that concept. The refugee thinks he'll come to America and relax because now the country will save him. But isn't the country supposed to save the Americans before it saves the refugees, those are its real citizens. So, the refugee needs to understand America before he comes. If he understands what America is like, he won't be shocked.

This quote highlights both a miscommunication and misrepresentation of what life will be like when refugees get to America. Many participants mentioned knowing nothing about the United States before arriving with one saying that he pictured it "like a heaven on earth" but was surprised to find "poverty, unsafe neighborhoods and homelessness."

Despite the gap between expectations and reality, when asked about returning to Iraq the majority of Iraqis said they would stay in the United States while the majority of Syrians said they wanted to move to any Arab country as soon as they got their green card. Many Iraqis said that despite the pain, fear and lack of support in their homeland, they had family who were still there who made them feel connected to their country. However, their belief that the situation in Iraq was not going to improve kept them focused on their children and the safety and opportunities that would come from continuing to live in the United States.

Especially now it is dangerous because you don't know what will happen. We are scared that if we leave here we won't be able to come back. Our life is here, our children's future is here, everything is here. We don't have anything there anymore. Our whole life is here the only thing we are missing is the rest of our family. It is very hard. I think even if all the problems were fixed it would be very difficult for the children to go back now. Even now sometimes we ask them what they think about going back for a visit and they don't want to. They don't like it especially the younger ones. I think they are scared they won't be able to come back here. But also, it is not just fear. They have started seeing their lives and their futures here, especially because they are able to make a comparison between their life here and



their life there. Let's talk about our oldest daughter. She was at the top of her class in Iraq and is now at the top of her class here. Of course, the level of caring and attention and the importance they gave her when she was working as a research assistant at a university this summer is far beyond anything she had experienced before. She says, 'Dad, this is the country that I feel is mine now. This is my home.' She was able to make that comparison.

Meanwhile the majority of Syrian refugees claimed that they were just waiting for their green card so they could go to any Arab country, since it is too dangerous to go back to Syria or Iraq. While some participants were motivated to stay in America for their children, others decided that it was more important to raise their family in an Arab culture instead of an American one. As one Syrian mother said:

I don't want to live in America I want to go back to any Arabic speaking country. I do not want to stay here. I am too tired. I am worried about my son (11 years old). He goes to school and sees things very different from us. You know how it is here. I am worried about him and about my daughter. I can see that sometimes they want to become like Americans. They see this person doing this or a friend doing that and I always say no don't go close to sinful behavior or anything against your religion. I am very, very worried about this. I talk to them about it daily. They always say, 'Yes mama we know it is forbidden in Islam.' I always tell them to go pray, and my son reads Quran every day after he prays. I am so, so worried about them, my small ones. My older ones I know they are raised correctly. I am not worried about my sons in college and in the 11th grade. But for girls it is different, especially her teenage years. They are still developing and may be influenced by what they see around them.

Another Syrian mother echoed:

I preferred to stay in Jordan because it is an Arab country and I understand how life works there, but my husband really wanted to come to the United States. As soon as I get my green card I will go back, God willing.

While the participants expected cultural differences, and came to the United States anyway, many were still surprised at the degree and intensity of the disconnect. Some of these views can be traced back to the divide between expectations and reality and what some feel is

both a misrepresentation of and miscommunication about what life in the United States will be, leading them to feel like they made an uninformed decision.

There were two main differences between the participants who want to stay and those who want to leave. The first was whether they had come directly from their home country or whether they had been living in a different country like Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey prior to resettlement. While most of the Iraqis came straight from Iraq to the US, many Syrians had been living in a different country for several years prior to resettlement. While the Syrian refugees obviously had many difficulties before coming to the US, they reported being generally happy and content. They describe their daily life in the country where they sought protection and their life in their home country as being very similar. This was due to the similarities between both communities, especially in language and culture. In contrast to those experiences, the US seemed like a gamble that had not paid off and was generally not worth the cost, since they already were familiar and content with the life they had before resettlement. Another major factor which surely had an influence was the length of time since resettlement. The six Syrian participants who explicitly said they wanted to go back to an Arab country, had been in the US for a shorter time compared to the Iraqi participants. As previously mentioned, time has strong effects on adjustment and should be considered in an analysis of the differences in attitudes.

#### *5.4. Beyond Survival: What Does Real Support Look Like?*

Satisfying one's physical needs does not mean that one's psychological needs have been met. Beyond survival mode, humans still need support to be able to do well and be happy. Many participants talked about something missing in their life even after satisfying their basic needs. This gap is often brought up indirectly and is much harder for the participants to explain. Many participants noted difficulties meeting new people or felt like they were not fully participating in

society. Several participants noted the importance of having the “closeness” in a relationships that enables you to “ask for help if you need anything,” and they missed this strength in the United States. Most participants who already knew someone living in the United States tried to live near them when they resettled. Whether it was someone they already knew or someone they met after they arrived, many participants talked about how helpful it was to have guidance and advice. In some cases, their mentor was an individual or a family and others mentioned IRIS as a source of support. Those who were resettled by co-sponsorship with a local group mentioned their respective coalitions. These American connections could have been starting points for the development of community, however while the participants were able to name people they engage with they still found most of these relationships fell short of what they consider to be friendships. There is a distinction between receiving help, which often leads to surface level relationships, and the formation of community and deeper friendships, which is lacking.

There were a variety of opinions on whether mixing or integrating with the American community should be considered a goal. Most saw mixing with the American community as important but a few discouraged it for cultural or religious reasons. Social support was directly related to where people met. Over 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the participants reported feeling extremely isolated. Spaces in which people were most likely to have opportunities to meet others included the work place, religious centers and universities. How refugees were able to engage with these different places led to an examination of social inclusion and social exclusion.

#### *5.4.1. "Fitting in Feels Good": Social Inclusion*

The importance of identifying common places of meeting and their centrality in relationship formation highlighted the theme of social inclusion as illustrated throughout

numerous interviews. Social inclusion marks an entry point into the social arena, where by association it is easier to come into contact with people who may share commonalities. For example, some parents became part of the school community through their kids.

We went to watch her [our daughter] get an honor. Or our son had a show there too. Our kid's school let us mix with the community more, get to know more people, like their friend's parents, and to speak to them more.

Another example of this mixing can be found if refugees study in a university. In this sample, the younger refugees were much more likely to be continuing their education than the older ones, hinting at a generational divide.

As one participant explained:

I feel like I am part of the community at university because I have made a lot of friends there. We help each other study. It is a stressful major but it is easier because I made a close friend, my best friend, and it is great because I feel like I can rely on her a lot.

Another added:

I finished my MA at University of New Haven in two years in computer science. I was very excited to start university because I thought it would give me the chance to really get involved with other college students. At the time, I didn't know anyone. I thought that if I joined University I would have some opportunities to meet new people and make some friends.

The workplace operates in a similar way by putting people with shared interests or skill sets in close proximity.

My coworker has been so helpful. He really helped me learn about how to do well at this job, and he always defends me and tells my boss how good I am. It has meant so much to me to have a friend like him.

Male refugees are more likely to have jobs than women, in fact, only one woman in my sample was employed. This shows a gender divide where men are more likely to have opportunities to mix than women.

One woman participant highlighted this very issue when she said:

At least my husband goes to work so he sees people. I stay at home all day so how am I ever supposed to meet anyone or make friends?

Socially inclusive spaces like universities, school systems and the workplace facilitate broader mixing and give people a chance to build relationships. However, these opportunities for social inclusion are not readily accessible to all refugees.

#### *5.4.2. "We Can't Eat with Them": Social Exclusion*

While these spaces of social inclusion stimulated cross-cultural contact, several social situations were mentioned as deterrents for refugees, keeping them from mixing and interacting with the larger American community. These exclusionary sites included restaurants and places where friends meet and hang out.

One refugee explained that every day after class his American friends went to a bar to hang out. He said that he felt uncomfortable going with them because of his Muslim faith and he felt too embarrassed to speak up, so he never went with them. He reflected that his classmates probably thought he was unfriendly, but he strongly dislikes Americans' use of drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol were consistently mentioned by participants as their least favorite

part of American culture. The comments surrounding drug and alcohol illustrated both the effects of social exclusion as well as general feelings of unsafety.

Another Iraqi participant gave another example saying:

When we eat out it is usually at Arab restaurants because we eat halal food (prepared by Islamic standards). We would love to eat at American restaurants like burger places, since we have this type of food in Iraq too. But the problem is that restaurants and grocery stores that aren't Arab or Muslim aren't halal. We are limited in where we can buy our food.

This attention to halal shows that even the places that people shop and eat may be constrained by cultural or religious factors. Muslims vendors usually sell halal meat and many of the people working in those circles are immigrants or refugees, and so it becomes easy to avoid branching out and having to meet people from other backgrounds.

### *5.5. Time: The Inhibition of Community Formation*

The concept of time, while relates directly to culture, was significant and prevalent enough that it deserved its own classification. When asked what they did in their free time every single participant responded with the same answer “What free time? I don't have any.” The lack of free time in refugees' lives is integral to understanding the disruption that happens in the creation of community. Participants reported that one of the main challenges they faced daily related to being on time, planning and keeping to a schedule. Having free time outside of work is important for distribute and devote energy to the social arena as well as those related to work. The centrality of cultural understandings of time division and prioritization became clearer as participants described their relationships and social scenes in their home countries. Participants

often described life in their home countries as incorporating social relationships such as dropping in on neighbors, hanging out after work, and impromptu nights at cafés. With the emphasis placed on planning and scheduling in American culture, realms of social interaction shifted from ones that had previously been informal, fluid and spontaneous to formal, structured, and planned. A quote from one of the Syrian participants shows how the American understanding of time can be incongruous with Arab social relationships:

I think my schedule is now more accurate. I learned the importance of time. In Syria if I want to hang out with my friends I don't tell anyone in advance I just knock on the door. But here you need to call in advance and plan it. So honestly I don't see people as much because it isn't as easy as it used to be.

Another commented:

We have to depend on ourselves because here time is very filled with work and making money. In Syria there was a specific time for work and then you go home and you can visit with people. Here most of your time is filled with scheduled appointments, work, going to English classes, going to the hospital, and fulfilling other responsibilities. There is not enough time for friends.

These statements illustrate how culture influences how we think of our time and what we do with it. It is almost as if refugees live in two versions of time: American time and Arab time. This means refugees are trying to simultaneously accommodate two different senses of time and aren't finding ground for new connections. Moreover, their old understanding of time – the Arab one – is disappearing, leading to a neglect of old relationships, thereby severing old community ties.

### *5.6. Politics Matter: Discrimination Between the Obama and Trump Administrations*

In their observations surrounding the changes in prevalence of discrimination, the participants also drew attention to the importance of a political lens of analysis. Many different forms of discrimination were observed by slightly over half the participants. This included discrimination at work among higher ups in management as well as with customers. School was occasionally cited as a site of discrimination from both teachers and other students, and public places like the bus stop or at retail stores were also mentioned in four of the interviews. These experiences of discrimination have negative effects on overall ability and willingness to interact with the American community. As one participant said:

You have to be mentally prepared. We are going to stay here, but it is hard because we are different than them and they look at us like we are different. I hope it changes so that we can feel like we belong more but at this point we just avoid the American community because if you don't have a previous relationship with someone they will look at you like you are bad and avoid you. It is not that they are bad people, but they do believe the news and what the media says about us.

These words show that refugees may stay away from interactions with Americans in order to avoid situations of possible prejudice or discrimination against them. Some participants connected experiences with discrimination to a lack of acceptance and belonging. The refugee's perception of belonging and acceptance correlated with their willingness to mix with the American society. The effects of discrimination had a direct impact on the behavior and attitudes of the participants.

In addition, new waves of discrimination arose for refugees after Trump's political win, especially for those who live outside of cities. Outside of New Haven, refugees reported changes in American interactions, made worse by the increase of terrorist attacks in the media.



The American community does not want us here and so they don't help us anymore either. Before when I was walking with my wife some people would come up to us and say I am so sorry for everything that has happened to you. Now when they see us they give us dirty looks.

A female participant gave another example of the change in political climate since the elections and how it caused changes in her behavior.

I have met so many amazing Americans who are kind and giving. You also find some racist ones. Especially now you find more racist ones than before. The election changed so much. Before I was working here in Wallingford they hadn't seen many Arabs or Muslims so sometimes I heard a few comments or got a few strange looks but now it happens all the time. Last week we were playing on bicycles in front of the house here and someone rolled down the car window and started yelling bad things about Muslims. I was wearing my hijab. I hear things like that all the time. Here in my neighborhood someone said "go back to your home." Before I would walk in the street. I used to exercise every day, just running around the block and stuff, but now I don't do any of that anymore. I hear so many comments and see so many looks I feel unsafe. Before maybe they were racist but they didn't say anything. Now they do. In New Haven it is so much better – no one says anything. You know they would ask before, like why do you wear the headscarf and they would listen to my answer. But now they have strong prejudgments that influence how they think. It affects me so much. Since the election, I feel like everything has changed. I face so much more discrimination than my husband because he could be Mexican or some other ethnic group but for me it shows that I am Muslim because of the hijab. Even in the school, sometimes the teachers discriminate. During Ramadan one of my friends wore the headscarf and went to the university and the teacher said her she wasn't allowed in the class anymore. I told her to complain, that it was illegal, but she didn't want to make any problems.

In addition, with this tense political climate comes an additional layer of fear related specifically to government policies. Not only are refugees feeling more unwelcome but there is both a real and perceived threat to their stability and safety in the United States. For participants who had been here during the Obama administration and witnessed the changes that came with the Trump administration, they described this as a unique political environment, one in which

political leadership, government power, and policy combine to undermine refugees' process of coming to terms with their new lives in the United States.

### *5.7. "I Am Stronger Now": Gender Norms and Structural Differences*

Several defining differences emerged between the female and male participants, showing an emergent layer of gender analysis: compared to the men, the women in the sample were generally younger, less educated, less likely to be in school or to be paid for their labor.

In traditional Arab culture, familial division of labor tends to create separate domains for men and women, with women more likely to stay at home and men more likely to be employed for pay. For the most part, these traditional patterns were maintained among refugees in the sample. The difference in everyday schedules, had an impact on how female refugees in the sample interacted with the America community. For example, since the workplace has already been highlighted as a space of meeting, women are often left out of utilizing the work domain as a space to meet other people. Since men are members of the workforce, they are given more opportunity to make relationships and meet potential friends than women who are more often excluded from this social space. Since most women in the sample are not participating in the paid-labor market, they are also much more likely to be in daily communication with their family members living in other countries. While most men said they talked to family at least once a week, very few seemed to communicate on a daily basis. They cited increased responsibility, work and the time difference as reasons. In contrast, all the women participants said they were in contact with their family every day.

While it is true that the sample of women in my study were less likely to have opportunities to engage in new community spaces relative to their male counterparts, there were

three female participants who talked about the changes in their daily routine in positive terms. For some, this new sense of freedom was essential to a stronger sense of their own character and personality, but it also led to a divergence between the public and private domain. One female participant who decided to pursue higher education in a university setting explained:

Of course I still do all the cooking. You know in Iraq we eat a lot of rice and meat but now I really don't have time so I just make some vegetables and rice. I just changed what I cook. I make easier food now because I also have class and other responsibilities to juggle.

This comment shows how her approach to housework has changed as she has adopted a more multidimensional daily routine. She is able to preserve her cultural roots while still adjusting to her new life, freedom and school work. Hence, she is able to maintain her status in the private domain while also expanding her presence in the public domain.

Due to expectations surrounding gender norms in Syria and Iraq, the new sense of freedom they found in the US manifested in several ways. One participant explained:

In Iraq I would never even think about getting in a car and driving. Very few women drive. Now I learned to drive I'm thinking about working too. There is lots I can do. Here I feel like my personality is stronger. Looking back at myself when I first got here and comparing it to who I am now, I am different. I used to cry every day. Now this is gone and I feel normal and much stronger.

In addition the female participants were eager to vocalize their own goals:

I used to only have family goals. I want to see my kids in the highest level of honors since everything I've done has been for them. But now I also have goals for myself. I want to have a job. I have a talent and a passion for cutting hair. I would like to practice more. I am getting a stronger personality and with that change I am becoming motivated to gain more freedoms like pursuing a degree and driving by myself.

While some of the interviews with the female participants were one-on-one sessions, others were joint sessions with their husbands. Many couples talked about how the traumatic experience of resettlement made their marital bond stronger and how responsibilities were now more equally distributed. The husbands were similarly supportive and excited to see their wives begin to take on new roles within American society.

#### *5.8. Differences Between Syrians and Iraqis: Community Support and Mixing*

There were many similarities between the Iraqi and Syrian samples, which allowed for the recognition of patterns and the extrapolation of themes. However, there was also one stark difference that highlights the importance of not lumping refugees together and instead looking at the unique experiences of each group. I started this thesis focused solely on Iraqi refugees, however, as I began interviewing participants, an important theme emerged in relation to social support. Many interviewees said they wanted to meet other Iraqis and wanted to have stronger relationships of mutual support. However, they also said that those connections did not exist and that there was a lack of mixing within the Iraqi refugee community. Most interesting was their perception that while they did not have strong ties of social support, Syrian refugees did. To investigate this perception, I decided to include Syrian refugees as a comparison group. As nationalities go, Iraqis and Syrians share many similarities. With a long-shared border and common influences of the region, they have very similar cultures, traditions, histories and a shared language (Arabic). However, while there were common and overlapping patterns especially as they related to the survival mode, their subsequent development of bonds and connections needed for social connection and support seemed to be very different.

While three Iraqis and one Syrian firmly voiced their reasons for not wanting to mix with other Arabs, these were the minority. The majority indicated a strong desire to meet other people, especially people from similar backgrounds and were able to articulate different benefits from those relationships.

One participant highlighted the importance of having friends by talking about the birth of his youngest child:

I will give you an example, a while ago my wife got sick and she had awful headaches. It felt like someone hit her on the head so she had to go to the hospital and she had to sleep there. So I was at work and she was in the hospital the kids were alone. At night I would come back after work and try to help but no one was next to my wife while she was in the hospital even though she was very sick. At night we would all call her. During her pregnancy, it was the same thing no one was next to her. There were no people we could call. If there were real relationships and connections between refugees then someone would have helped us but I don't know why Iraqis don't help one another or mix.

It was also clear that to many participants this problem was more relevant to Iraqis specifically.

As one participant explained:

I think it's just the Iraqis though, maybe the other nationalities, like the Syrians, the Iranians, the Sudanese, we see stronger relationships among them. But the Iraqis are different. It is not just in this state, for example, for all the Iraqis in the U.S we have a website, we have Iraqis in the United States. We see that most of the news that they post are about things like work, etc. Many of them say we don't have friends in the US. Even for me and my wife, we don't have any relatives here. From when we came to America we don't have any relatives and we don't have friends. just us and the kids... only us. And that's one of our greatest struggles when we came here and until now we are struggling with it. Because life is hard here when you don't have integration with the community.

Many others voiced their agreement:

We would love to form some relationships and friendships and we wish for this to happen. I don't know why it is not working and we don't know how to meet other people.

When asked to elaborate on why Iraqis were not mixing with one another or forming relationships, participants struggled to give a reason. One tried to explain by saying:

Maybe one explanation is whenever you make relationships you are always worried that you don't know the persons true intentions like what does he think or what is their goal from the friendship. There is some fear when you let another family into your home. Letting them meet your wife and your children, this mixing is also scary. This could cause some big fear and hesitation.

His wife immediately added significant insight by interjecting:

We tell you this as if the problem is just with other Iraqis, but of course if anyone hears this they will say the same thing about us. They may tell you we distance ourselves from others. They look at us like we don't make relationships either.

This fear makes sense in the context of the refugee experience. While community support is important, refugees are wary of being dependent on those who show no care. While the formation of relationships is an opportune place to realize the power of community support in the healing process, it is difficult to break the pre-established cycle of fear and wariness. Refugees may be characteristically less likely to ask for help or trust others due to their past traumatic experiences. Symptoms from trauma come in forms of social isolation. In the context of the refugee experience, increased wariness and general distrust as a result of war can be expected. This fear of others may prevent community from operating as a source of social support and can restrict access to valuable resources. However, if the resulting distance between community members and social isolation was a direct product of the refugee experience, it is a phenomenon which should also be evident in the Syrian sample group. Understanding why social isolation mostly existed within the Iraqi sample requires deeper investigation.

In survival mode it makes sense that other concerns often take precedent over friendships. As one participant said: “If he doesn’t have a job and can’t provide for his family how will friends help him?”

Similarly, others cited their lack of free time and the struggles with adapting to new and busier schedules as being a main reason for the lack of relationship formation.

People are so busy, even on weekends even though you are supposed to free yourself but maybe people don’t realize how important relationships are.

While the disconnect between Arab and American understandings of time and its role in inhibition of community development is extremely important, it still does not explain the disconnect between Syrians ability to form friendships and Iraqi’s seeming inability to form relationships.

One Syrian women told the story of how she met an Iraqi neighbor the first time.

There is no difference between Iraqi and Syrians since we have the same religion, same culture, same everything so I don’t know why the Iraqis don’t mix like the Syrians do. Maybe they just like themselves. All the Syrians are together there are maybe thirty families here and we all know each other and help each other and visit each other. I don’t know why the Iraqis don’t mix. I just was with my Iraqi friend she said in 8 years in the United States she didn’t meet anyone. She didn’t know anyone in her neighborhood and I said don’t you know there are other Arabs here? She said yes but I am scared I don’t like the idea of going to their homes or them coming to mine. So I started introducing her and taking her out with me and showing her around and she told me since she met me her life has completely changed. Since she is 25 and has two children, I introduced her to two families and now she goes to their houses. And I said why didn’t she try before to meet people. You know I saw her everyday she dropped her kids off and she looked like me she was wearing a hijab and I always used to say hello but from afar and then for two months she didn’t show up. So when she finally started dropping her kid off again I asked her where she had been. She said I was in Jordan, and I said why didn’t you tell me my kids are in Jordan I would have had you send them some things. She

was like how am I supposed to know we never have talked before. After this she invited me to tea and so I invited her to dinner the next day and now she is happy and she said it is a different life. I don't know how she didn't explode with no friends. She told me I changed her whole life and now she knows people. I told her my house is her house and her personality has changed completely, she is a different person. She was scared of meeting people and mixing with people. I am 54 years old but Americans love me and they always invite me over. I like relationships and talking to people if I didn't have anyone to talk to I would be so bored I would burst. I don't know what I would do.

While this Syrian participant was clearly shocked and told this story with exacerbation, it matched the narrative of many Iraqi women who didn't leave their houses much and so had access to very few opportunities to mix and interact with other people.

While I have attempted to divide overarching themes into categories to give them each their fully deserved attention and analysis, experiences of people do not fall neatly into groupings. It is impossible to talk about language without also talking about employment and culture. The intersectionality of the competing factors is evident in the way several themes are recurrent and overlap throughout several domains. Looking at only once section gives a very limited understanding of the issue, instead examining the points of intersection gives a more complete picture of the different experiences.

## ***6. Discussion***

My research findings were consistent with the existing refugee research literature in several aspects. For example, many of the most prominent and prevalent features of integration in research can be found in my analysis of "survival mode." The "Indicators of Integration Framework (IOI)" developed by Ager and Strang (2004) is often considered foundational literature in the field of refugee work (Beirens & Hughes & Hek & Spicer, 2007). This



framework prioritizes ten key themes categorized as domains and organized by four categories. The domains cover markers related to access in the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; social connections both within and between groups and the larger community; facilitators related to the removal of barriers especially as they relate to language, culture and safety; and a foundation based on citizenship and right. While the results of my own study did touch on all of those domains, I found that the prevalence and importance attached to each differed significantly from the results found in Ager and Strang (2004) which led me to develop different groupings for analysis. What Ager and Strang label “the public face of integration” I describe as the most important and often most difficult problems faced directly after arrival. This early resettlement stage is described by the elements of survival mode including those related to cultural differences. A small difference arose in the section related to health which the IOI framework described as “an important resource for active engagement” despite it being reported quite infrequently. In my interviews health arose most often in the context of physical manifestations of stress. These symptoms included complaints of headaches, stomachaches, deteriorating health since arrival and development of skin conditions. All participants who reported health issues attributed those developments directly to the stress of resettlement and everyday life in America, away from their families and friends. The direct link participants drew between their mental and physical health highlights the importance of cultural competence and specificity.

Similar to how I describe social connections as being attainable only after basic needs are met, the “Indicators of Integration Framework” also distinguished social connections as a distinct relationality often impeded by the lack of fulfilment of basic needs.

This chapter elaborates on the key findings of the interviews and places them within the existing refugee literature. An explicit comparison of my Iraqi and Syrian participants highlights the importance of greater localized attention to the differing needs of similar communities and suggest directions for future research.

### *6.1. The Centrality of a Cultural Understanding of "Time" in Examining Social Connections*

The concept of time arose as one of my key themes due to its influence on the inhibition of relationship building and community formation. Examining how participants understand time, how they use time and how they value time gives a unique glimpse into the construction of their day to day activities. All the participants talked about the way that their daily routines and schedules changed once they got to US. This change often involved a prioritization of public life focused on jobs and a neglect of private life including a loss of connection with their friends and neighbors.

It has been established that there are different ways time is conceptualized, understood and used, but the majority of research on the cross-cultural analysis of time has largely focused on international business ventures and consumer researchers (Manari, 1995). However, the importance of time can also be seen in understanding social interactions and relationship building as shown in the analysis of my interviews. Understanding the concept of time involves an evaluation of the cultural context. There are cultural differences in the perception of time and its use in everyday activities (Levine, 1997).

While there are many definitions of acculturation, it is broadly used to refer to the changes that take place to groups or individuals when two different cultures intersect (Phillimore, 2011). Some literature on acculturation has attempted to divide acculturation between two domains- the public and private domains- to give context to the preservation of heritage in the environment of a host culture (Salo & Birman, 2015).

Similarly, as is common on cross-cultural time literature, Bhagat and Moustafa (2002) divide types of societies into individualist and collectivist in nature. In collectivist cultures, there is a larger emphasis on a focus of collective goals over personal goals. The development of interpersonal relationships is given priority even over personal development. Meanwhile individualist cultures place emphasis on attention towards the private self. In terms of time prioritization, this emphasis on the development of the private may lead to an attention to work which may take importance over personal domains or family time. This American negligence of the private life was noted by the Iraqi and Syrian participants in my study who described how people worked all the time and how there was no clear division between work time and social time in the United States. A study by Bhagat and Moustafa (2002) found that non-Americans' saw the tempo of life in the US to be extremely fast-paced, leading to increased focus on work, higher stress levels on health and emotional wellbeing, and a decrease in quality of interpersonal relationships. Similar to the results found in my study, they observed that "pace of life in the United States does not seem to allow for any unscheduled activities or events" (Bhagat & Moustafa, 2002, p. 189). Many of my participants mentioned the importance of schedules and the emphasis of sticking to strict time blocks and its negative influence on relationship building. This hints at the differences in the prioritization of time (Manari, 1995) and the disconnect between the relative importance refugees coming from collectivist cultures place on social

relationships and the importance Americans living in an individualistic society place on schedules.

## *6.2. The Role of Place in Finding Friends*

Analyzing places of engagement show that some spaces are more conducive to successful mixing than others. While some places like schools or work help people with similar characteristics connect and are inherent sites of mixing, other places such as bars leave refugees feeling isolated and excluded.

Experiences of social exclusion or inclusion have significant impact on the subjective health of refugees especially as it relates to the first few years after resettlement (Correa-Velez & Gifford & Barnett, 2010). Many studies of refugees have established the importance of social networks in the process of integration. Strong social networks have been linked to identity formation, confidence, and practical and emotional support. Social exclusion can be seen in the manifestation of isolation, increased stress, vulnerability and general unhappiness (Sales, 2002).

Social bonds may exist between people from similar backgrounds as well as between those from differing backgrounds. Both types of mixing showed a number of positive effects (Stanley, 2001). The barriers related to the development of social bonds include lack of knowledge, limited access to transportation or community centers and discrimination.

A study by Beirens, Hughes, Hek and Spicer (2007) focused on efforts by the Children's Fund in England to promote social connections. They found that similar to the results of my study, schools were cited as main centers of mixing. They found several positive results from the formation of social bonds. These outcomes included increased opportunities for practical

support, better access to services, and enhanced emotional support leading to improved coping with stress and depression. As reflected in the results from my own interviews, there was high value placed on relationships which often intersected with senses of belonging, a protection of cultural identity and overall increased ability to engage with the larger community. The results of my study are consistent with the literature on the importance of social inclusion and recognizes the unique barriers to refugees in Connecticut in getting access to that support. In addition, by centralizing places of meeting in my analysis of social inclusion and exclusion I have opened up the possibility for focusing interventions on such spaces. This is especially significant as my research points to barriers related the access to places of interaction, thereby limiting the mixing or meeting of different people in the first place. Focusing on physical spaces of interaction is the first step to recognize the importance of social bonds and the subsequent support drawn from those relationships.

#### *6.4. "Refugee" as a Broad Category*

It was clear that all twenty of the participants in my sample recognized the importance of having systems of social support. Networks or individuals are helpful for advice and access to information as well as instrumental in emotional support. Shared background, culture and history put members from similar ethnic backgrounds in a unique position to help refugees in the beginning stages of resettlement. That is why "secondary" migration after initial resettlement is common, as refugees locate familiar sources of support and move to be able to access them in a more direct way (Simich, 2003).

The majority of refugee literature does one of two things. It either attempts to focus on one nationality of refugee (Salo & Birman, 2015; Steel & Silove & Bird & McGorry & Mohan,

1999) or lumps all nationalities into one group under the label “refugee” (Simich & Beiser & Mawani, 2003; Ager & Strang, 2008). Research that combines different nationalities of refugees often unintentionally ignores important differences with the aim of being able to draw generalizable conclusions. This undermines the varying experiences different groups of refugees will have after resettlement. My research examined Iraqi and Syrian refugees. By comparing two groups of refugees I was able to realize the similarities between them but also acknowledge their differences, especially as it related to social support from other members of their own nationality or group. While both Iraqis and Syrians wanted support from their like-ethnic communities, the Iraqis reported very little mixing or help. Meanwhile the Syrians had formed much closer bonds and were hence able to give and receive greater levels of help and support. This difference highlights the importance of recognizing the differences that exist among refugees. The rejection of lumping will allow researchers and policymakers to target interventions in a culturally sensitive way, leading to better more specific targeting of issues and a focused way of addressing them.

As previously shown, my research largely agrees with the existing refugee literature. However, it also differs in one fundamental way with the analysis and comparison of both Iraqi and Syrian refugees. Showing that two groups of refugees who look so similar can still have different problems may be a useful insight for future directions and considerations in research.

## **7. Conclusion**

### *7.1. Thesis Conclusion*

This thesis has sought to portray the experiences of Iraqi and Syrian refugees as they resettled in Connecticut. There are many different stories about refugees in the United States.

These narratives share several similar characteristics. All journeys begin with a period focused on survival, which is characterized by difficulties related to language, employment, education, transportation and cultural changes. However, beyond survival mode refugees must also learn what support they need and what that support looks like. It is often difficult to start meaningful relationships because of barriers to full community inclusion, such as cultural barriers or lack of time. Stories around community engagement differed greatly between the Iraqi and Syrian participants in this study. The Syrian participants were often friendly with the other Syrians in their area and relied on them for help, support and advice. While the Iraqi refugees wished for that same type of community support, their experience was marked by feelings of isolation and detachment. The low level of involvement with members of their own ethnic community negatively impacted their overall experience and happiness in the United States.

The strength, quality and quantity of social connections of Iraqi and Syrian refugees differed even though the two groups of refugees had so much in common. This difference in experience shows that not all refugees face the same difficulties once in the United States. Acknowledging these differences allows for targeted interventions for different refugee groups to help improve their experiences.

### *7.2. Recommendation for Policy and Planning*

The interviews shed light on a number of issues which could lead to the development of better practices. These improvements could include better access to English classes and different laws regarding welfare and financial assistance. However, since one of the main conclusions of this thesis was understanding integration as more than just its functional qualities, I choose to focus on the social dimension of integration.

US resettlement policy puts self-sufficiency at the center of successful integration. The importance of self-sufficiency is given equal weight by the participants, as well as the government, who see it as essential for stability. While establishing social connections are equally important for refugees' overall wellbeing, there are insufficient resources and attention given for facilitating these relationships. Community building with both the larger American community and other refugees must take place at the local level and so planning and policy should be centered locally as well. The process of integration itself takes place in the neighborhoods where refugees grow and live. Participants who lived far away from other refugees noted the lack of awareness and acceptance in their neighborhoods. Organized activities could be helpful in increasing contact between refugees and other local residents. Opportunities for meeting other refugees should also be expanded, specifically as they relate to meeting members of one's own ethnic group. This relationship is important as it contains layers of understanding related to past experiences and current transitions and changes. The social aspect is important to incorporate at the policy level since it is essential to understandings of integration and is not currently reflected or represented as much as it should be.

### *7.3. Possibilities for Future Research*

The scope of the thesis was broad in that it examined narratives of integration generally without specifically investigating any one factor. Because of this open, inductive approach there are countless ways the research presented in this thesis could be expanded. However, what distinguishes this thesis from the majority of the refugee literature is the comparison between two nationalities of refugees. My research highlighted that by lumping all refugees into one category and examining them indiscriminately, refugee research is missing a chance at a deeper



understanding of refugee's experiences in the United States. Due to the discrepancies in experiences with social support, another area of research that deserves further attention is the factors that facilitate or inhibit social bonds between members of like-ethnic communities and their impact on integration as well as social and physical wellbeing.

In addition, the content of this thesis may be used by service providers, refugee resettlement agencies, refugees in similar situations and members of the receiving community to identify possible patterns in other comparable groups keeping in mind the importance of context.

#### *7.4. Limitations*

The main limitations of my research relate to the size of my sample. Ten participants from each national group is appropriate for this type of qualitative study, however there was some variation between the make-up of each group. For example, the Iraqi group was more heavily male dominated while the Syrian group had more women. In addition, the Syrian group was generally younger and had been resettled for a shorter period of time. While these differences do not undermine the validity of the results, a more balanced sample may have yielded clearer outcomes.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Outline:

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_

(On a separate handwritten paper attach participant # with participant name)

- 1) Demographic Information:  
المعلومات الديموغرافية
- a) Age and date of birth:  
العمر وتاريخ الميلاد
- b) Gender:  
الجنس

Activity: Please describe a refugee who was resettled in the US and is now living in Connecticut (perfectly integrated).

النشاط: يرجى وصف اللاجئ الذي أعيد توطينه في الولايات المتحدة وأصبح الآن متكامل/ مندمج تماما

Ask them to compare the refugees they know to that person and ask the reasons for any discrepancies (and probe), and only then ask about their own assessment of their own integration  
اطلب منهم أن يقارنوا اللاجئين الذين يعرفونهم بذلك الشخص المثالي وأن يسألوا عن أسباب أي تناقضات- ومسبار- . وعندئذ فقط يسألون عن تقييمهم الخاص لندماجهم

- 2) Pre-migration context:  
سياق ما قبل الترحي
- a) Where are you from originally?  
ما البلد الذي أنت أصلا منها؟
- b) When did you leave Iraq/Syria?  
متى غادرت العراق؟
- c) Where were you just before coming to the US?  
أين كنت قبل المجيء إلى الولايات المتحدة؟
- a. How long were you there?  
متى كنت هناك؟
- b. Do you have refugee status?  
ما هو وضعك القانوني؟ لاجئ ام مهاجر؟
- c. Do you have a green card?
  - i. What would you benefit from a green card? What about a passport?
- d) When did you resettle in the US?  
متى نقلت الى الولايات المتحدة؟
- a. Was the US your first choice of country to resettle in? Why or why not?  
هل كانت الولايات المتحدة الخيار الأول لإعادة التوطين؟ لما و لما لا؟
- e) What expectations of the US did you have before you arrived? Was it different from the reality you found in the US.

ما كان توقعاتك عن الولايات المتحدة قبل وصولك؟

f) Have you lived anywhere else in the US before coming to Connecticut?

هل عشت في أي مكان آخر في الولايات المتحدة قبل المجيء إلى كونيتيكت؟

a. If yes: Why did you move?

إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم: لماذا تنقلت؟

3) Geographic location:

الموقع الجغرافي

a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of your current place of residence?

ما هي احسن و اسوا مواصفات مكان إقامتك الحالي

b. Have you experienced any difficulty since moving to Connecticut and if so what type?

هل واجهت أي صعوبة منذ الانتقال إلى كونيتيكت وإذا كان الأمر كذلك ما هو نوع؟

4) Family situation:

الوضع العائلي

a) Do you have any family members in the US? Are any in Connecticut with you?

هل لديك أي من أفراد العائلة في الولايات المتحدة؟ هل هناك في كونيتيكت معك؟

a. Which family members?

أي أفراد الأسرة؟

i. What are their relationships to you?

ما هي علاقاتهم معك؟

b. What are some important concerns you have for yourself and your family in terms of needs or issues?

ما هي بعض المخاوف الهامة لديك لنفسك ولعائلتك من حيث الاحتياجات أو القضايا؟

c. How often are you in contact with your family that is not in the US?

كم مرة كنت على اتصال مع عائلتك التي ليست في الولايات المتحدة؟

i. Where are your family members who live somewhere else?

أين أفراد عائلتك الذين يعيشون في مكان آخر

5) Education:

التعليم

a) What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

ما هو أعلى مستوى من التعليم الذي حققته

b) Have you been in any educational or training programs since you have been in the US?

هل كنت في أي برامج تعليمية أو تدريبية منذ كنت في الولايات المتحدة؟

c) What are some of your goals regarding education?

ما هي بعض أهدافك المتعلقة بالتعليم؟

6) Language:

اللغة

a) Rate your opinion of your level of English from 0-10 when you first arrived in the US (0 being no English 10 being perfect English)

قيم رأيك لمستواك في اللغة الإنجليزية من 0-10 عند وصولك لأول مرة في الولايات المتحدة (0 كونها لا الإنجليزية 10 كونها الإنجليزية مثالية)

b) Can you communicate with a cashier at a store in English today?

هل يمكنك التواصل مع الصراف في دكان باللغة الإنجليزية اليوم

c) Would you be able to give a presentation in English today?

هل ستكون قادرا على تقديم عرض باللغة الإنجليزية اليوم

d) Rate your opinion of your level of English from 0-10 now (0 being no English 10 being perfect English)

قيم رأيك بمستواك في اللغة الإنجليزية من 0-10 الآن (0 عدم وجود الإنجليزية 10 كونها مثالية الإنجليزية)

e) How does your level of English proficiency affect your involvement with the American community?

كيف يؤثر مستواك في إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية على مشاركتك مع المجتمع الأمريكي

7) Employment:

توظيف

a) If you are currently employed, explain what your job is.

إذا كنت تعمل حاليا، ما هي وظيفتك

b) What was your occupation before coming to the US?

ما كان مهنتك قبل المجيء إلى الولايات المتحدة

c) How do you feel about your current job?

ما هو شعورك حيال وظيفتك الحالية

d) What kind of job would you like to have?

ما نوع العمل الذي ترغب في الحصول عليه؟

e) To what extent are you financially independent?

إلى أي مدى أنت مستقل ماليا

8) Health:

الصحة

a) Do you have any specific health problems?

هل لديك أي مشاكل صحية محددة؟

a. Does it affect your daily life and how?

هل يؤثر ذلك على حياتك اليومية وكيف

b) Did you have any pre-existing diagnosed mental conditions?

هل لديك أي ظروف عقلية/نفسية تم تشخيصها مسبق

c) Have you been diagnosed with any mental disorders since coming to US?

هل تم تشخيصك بأي اضطرابات نفسية منذ وصولك إلى الولايات المتحد

d) Describe your sleep patterns focusing on any irregularities

اوصف أنماط النوم الخاصة بك مع التركيز على أي مخالفات

e) Do you experience any physical symptoms of discomfort?

هل تعاني من أي أعراض جسدية

9) Social Connections:

العلاقات الاجتماعية

a. What kind of institutions do you belong to? (religion, community groups, public groups...)

ما نوع مجموعات التي تنتمي إليها؟ (الدين، والجماعات المحلية، والجماعات العامة...)

b. If there was an emergency who would you call for help?

إذا كان هناك حالة طوارئ من من تطلب المساعدة؟

c. How many connections do you have to people who aren't Iraqi/ Middle Eastern/Syrian?

كم عدد العلاقات مع الناس الغير عرب



10) Like-Ethnic Community:

مجتمع مشابه

a. Are there other Iraqi/Syrian Refugees where you live?

هل هناك اللاجئين العراقيين آخرون قريبين

i. Are there other like-ethnic communities you are involved with

هل هناك مجتمعات مشابه أخرى تشارك فيه

ii. Describe your involvement with these communities

صف مشاركتك مع هذه المجتمعات

b. What expectations did you have of Iraqi/Syrian refugees in the US

ما هي توقعاتك لدى اللاجئين العراقيين في الولايات المتحدة

• i. How did that compare to the reality?

كيف قارن ذلك بالواقع؟

11) Host Community:

المجتمع المضيف

a. Describe a positive experience involving you and an American. Describe a difficult experience involving you and an American.

اوصف تجربة إيجابية بينك أنت وأمريكا. اوصف تجربة صعبة بينك أنت وأمريك

b. What are your networks of social support and what is their role?/ What groups support you if you need anything?

ما هي شبكات الدعم الاجتماعي وما هو دورهم؟

c. How well do you know your neighbors?/ Where do you go if you want to meet people?

كيف/كم تعرف جيرانك؟

d. How much do you feel like you belong in your community?

ما مدى شعورك بأنك تنتمي إلى مجتمعتك؟

e. Do you think you “fit in” in Connecticut?/ When did you start feeling at home?

كلمة بلادي او بيتي بتثبت وانت/ي بامريكا؟ مصطلح بلادي او بيتي بتثبت وانت/ي في بلادك؟ هل تشعر ان لديك مكان في / كنتيكيكيت

f. Was integration an objective you had when you arrived in the US?

هل كان التكامل هدفا كان لديك عندما وصلت إلى الولايات المتحدة؟

i. Is integration an objective you have now?

هل التكامل هو هدف لديك الآن؟

ii. When did integration become an objective?

متى أصبح الاندماج هدفا؟

g. Do you feel independent in terms of mobility? Do you know how to use the bus?

هل تشعر بالاستقلالية من حيث التنقل؟ هل تعرف كيفية استخدام الحافلة؟

12) Discrimination:

التمييز

• a. Have you faced discrimination in the United States? What has it looked like and how has it impacted you

هل واجهتم تمييزا في الولايات المتحدة؟ ما كان ذلك التجربة وكيف أثرت عليك

13) Culture:

الثقافة

a. What Iraqi/Syrian traditions do you continue to live by in the US

ما التقاليد العراقية التي تمارسها في الولايات المتحدة

b. What elements of your culture have you changed/stopped/retained since coming to the US?

ما هي عناصر ثقافتك التي قمت بتغييرها / إيقافها / الاحتفاظ بها منذ وصولها إلى الولايات المتحدة؟

c. What aspects of American culture have you adopted

ما هي جوانب الثقافة الأمريكية التي بدبت ممارستها

d. What aspects of American culture do you dislike?

ما هي جوانب الثقافة الأمريكية التي لا تعجبكم؟

e. What foods do you eat on a regular basis?

ما هي الأطعمة التي تتناولونها على أساس منتظم؟

f. How do you spend your free time?

كيف تقضي وقت فراغك؟

i. Are you involved in any community clubs or groups? If yes, which ones? Are they Iraqi/Syrian? American? A combination?

هل تشارك في أي نوادي أو جماعات محلية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، أي منها؟ هل هم عراقيون؟ أمريكي؟ مزيج

g. What difficulties have you faced with the cultural transition?

ما هي الصعوبات التي واجهتها مع التحول الثقافي؟

14) Involvement in original country:

المشاركة في البلد الأصلي

a. How often do you watch news related to your home country?

كم مرة تشاهد الأخبار المتعلقة ببلدك؟

b. How does the situation in your home country make you feel?

كيف يؤثر عليك حاله بلدك

c. Have you returned to Iraq/Syria since you have been here?

هل عدت إلى العراق منذ أن كنت هنا؟

d. Would you ever want to move back to Iraq/Syria permanently?

هل تريد العودة إلى العراق بشكل دائم؟

i. If yes, why? If no, why

إذا كان الجواب نعم، لماذا؟ إذا كان الجواب بالنفي، لماذا

15) After Resettlement:

بعد إعادة التوطين

a. In In what ways do you think that have you changed since leaving Iraq/Syria?

كيف تعتقد أنك تغيرت منذ مغادرة العراق؟

i. How do you think that has affected your time in the US?

كيف تعتقد أن ذلك أثر على وقتك في الولايات المتحدة؟

a) What are the biggest difficulties you have faced during the resettlement process?

ما هي أكبر الصعوبات التي واجهتها أثناء عملية إعادة التوطين؟

b) Overall, what does "refugee" mean to you? What does "resettlement" mean to you? What does "integration" mean to you? What meaning did those words have before you left Iraq/Syria? Do you feel integrated according to your own definition?

بشكل عام، ماذا يعني "اللاجئ" بالنسبة لك؟ ماذا تعني "إعادة التوطين" لك؟ ماذا يعني "التكامل" بالنسبة لك؟ ما معنى هذه الكلمات قبل أن تغادر العراق؟ هل تشعر بالتكامل وفقا لتعريفك الخاص؟

c) What factors made your transition and integration into American society easier?

ما هي العوامل التي جعلت الانتقال والاندماج في المجتمع الأمريكي أسهل؟

Activity: Imagine where you would like to be in 5 years. Describe your situation.

النشاط: تخيل أين تريد أن تكون في 5 سنوات. صف حالتك.

