

IDENTITY-MAKING AND 'HOME':
RESETTLEMENT OF POST-2003 IRAQI REFUGEES IN
PORTLAND, OREGON AND AUSTIN, TEXAS

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines post-2003 Iraqi refugee narratives of identity in the United States and the intricacies constituting the establishment of 'home' in the country that remains an occupying force within their native land. The project provides insight into the lived experiences, feelings of belonging, and resettlement of Iraqis in two U.S. cities. I draw on interviews focused on the resettlement experiences and expectations of Iraqis currently living the Pacific Northwest city of Portland, Oregon and how that may compare to constructs of identity and conceptualizations of home in the southwestern city of Austin, Texas. I employ work by geographers and the growing body of literature on diaspora, refugee studies, and resettlement in other related disciplines to frame important and challenging questions about refugee identity, home-making, and sense of belonging.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Rick and Beverly Blotter.
“Where thou are – that – is Home.” --Emily Dickinson

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

10/21/2011

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been — a place, half-remembered, and halfenvisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free.
—Field note entry: Starhawk, *Importance of Belonging*, 2002

1.1. Introduction

Where is *home*? For many people this is a simple geographic question requiring little thought; for others it is more complex. As the opening passage conveys, it is often “someplace where we can be free,” somewhere we are safe and belong (also see Baumeister et al. 1995). Home is both material and symbolic; it is also abstract and shifting. For refugees, such notions of 'home' are as much linked to integration, multiculturalism, or acculturation as they are to identity-making and sense of belonging. Whether home is a physical dwelling that no longer exists or a homeland torn apart by

war, the reconstitution of one's home becomes more complicated when migration is forced and the possibility of return is impossible.

This thesis examines post-2003 Iraqi refugee narratives of identity in the United States and the intricacies constituting the establishment of 'home'— in the country that remains an occupying force within their native land. The project provides insight into the lived experiences, feelings of belonging, and resettlement of Iraqis in two U.S. cities. I draw on thirty-two interviews¹ focused on the resettlement experiences and expectations of Iraqis currently living the Pacific Northwest city of Portland, Oregon and how that may compare to constructs of identity and conceptualizations of home in the southwestern city of Austin, Texas. I employ work by geographers and the growing body of literature on diaspora (Brah 1996; Shain and Barth 2003; Sokefield 2000; Van Hear 1998), transnational migration (Mitchell 1997; Sherrell and Hyndman 2006), and resettlement in other related disciplines to frame important and challenging questions about refugee identity, home-making, and sense of belonging (Al-Ali et al. 2002, 2005; Ahmed et al. 2003a; Hiruy 2009).

Research on this topic must be nuanced enough to recognize agency and culpability for categories of Iraqis outside and within the study's scope. Memories of

¹ This includes nineteen Iraqi refugees; thirteen individuals associated with local and state agencies, interpreters, community members.

Iraq before the U.S.-led invasion and promises of a “new and democratic Iraq” during conflict both gave varied degree of hope and meaning for the refugees in this study, their association with Coalition forces prior to resettlement resulted in very different formations of identity, sense of belonging and concepts of home.

The definition of home is widely debated in geography, and a complicated issue when one considers the inter-relationship of locus, meaning, and politics complicated by refugee life. Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that home is a “*spatial imaginary*: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, which construct place, extend across space and scales, and connect places”(2). Given that refugees are uprooted from their home and are displaced to another country outside their *homeland*, their experiences of home are not a unidirectional ‘return’ to the hinterland. Conversely, as Hiruy (2009) argues in his study on African refugees in Australia, refugee displacement is multidimensional and multidirectional; whereas the nature of forced displacement creates fluidity and multiplicity in identity as groups reconfigure themselves in response to media representations of refugees as a problem. Further, as refugees negotiate the systems of privilege *and* oppression in their refugee home, so do they also maintain economic and social ties to their country of origin. This leads to shifting, if not contradictory, feelings and concepts often linked to ideas about home, home-making (Blunt 2005a, 2005b; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Hiruy 2009) and belonging

(Appadurai 1996; Dorai 2002; Hall 2003; Fouron 2003). I would argue that refugee notions of 'home' are so complicated that they cannot be uncovered by the theoretical mind. Instead, they require an on-the-ground, ethnographic approach that allows refugees to speak about home to the analyst, and not have the analyst tell them about their feelings of home. This approach has yielded that Iraqis embrace the representations, discursive constructs, and material aspects of Austin or Portland as *home* (Dorai 2002; Manzo 2003), while continuing to maintain 'nostalgic illusions' of a 'peaceful' or 'democratic' Iraq that may or may not exist today or in the future (Ahmed et al. 2003a; Blunt 2005a).

Although I focus on Iraqis who have obtained refugee status or Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) in the U.S., my conclusions could be applicable to the experiences of wider groups of refugees, particularly those displaced by U.S. military action. Simultaneously, however, my research on Iraqi immigrants has uncovered a set of unique questions about the complex ways that home and identity become meaningful in the particular disparate contexts of Iraqi refugees. Iraqis, as well as many other refugees and exiles across the world, have witnessed the physical destruction of their home and their homeland caused by the impacts of the Iraq war (Blunt 2005a, 2005b; Blunt and Dowling 2006). Through their experiences of 'extreme domicide'—or “the deliberate destruction of home” by war, displaced people are traumatized by acts of overt violence often “in the pursuit of

specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims” (Porteous and Smith 2001: 12). Post-2003 Iraqis who are now living in Portland and Austin are varied in the degree to which they see their host country as home (Al-Ali et al. 2002, 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006) and the extent to which they share a sense of “domicide,” confirming the observations of Portes and Rumbaut (2006) and Valenta (2009a) that immigrants’ experiences vary both across groups as well as within particular migrant communities such that broad generalizations obfuscate more than they simplify living conditions. There is a clear and unique Iraqi component that involves the “putting up with” or “dealing with” the frustrations associated with being displaced *because of* fighting alongside American troops; troops that promised to liberate and democratize their country. This thesis emphasizes the critical differences in how Iraqi refugee communities in Portland and Austin see the U.S. from other political refugees—as a liberating force and as 'home'.

Iraqis' notion of home, then, is undoubtedly bound up in notions of security and insecurity, crucial to ideas of home and identity-making in the context of militarization according to William Walters (2002). The concepts of security and insecurity are also held by the U.S. as the host country with legal authority, and thus become “bound up with themes of mobility,” resulting in immigration policies and a politics of *homeland* security that “depend upon, and perpetuate, a normative assumption of the nation-as-home” (247)

for some individuals and not others.

For Iraqis displaced by the U.S. militarization of the Middle East, negotiating a new identity and creating a sense of home is not as simple as looking at their ‘successes’ or ‘failures’ under resettlement policymaking or agency support. Instead, an examination of this issue requires deeper understanding of how Iraqis negotiate the systems of privilege *and* oppression generated through homeland security policies as well (Horst 2004; also see Blunt and Dowling 2006). The notion of home for Iraqi refugees, I am suggesting, is bound up in legal and symbolic negotiations – that is, socio- and juridico-cultural systems (Foucault 1981, 1986; also see Lemke 2010).

On the one hand, the post-2003 Iraqi refugees experience is shaped by past memories of living under an oppressive regime, contested spaces (Cohen 2001, 2010) as well as the stigmatization associated with the post- 9/11 EuroAmerican world that acts as the new host society (Walters 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Valenta 2009a, 2010). At times, the subtlety of being labeled refugee, Middle Eastern, Muslim, or simply being associated with 9/11 terrorism is traumatic at a personal level and is also often viewed as problematic for both the host country and the refugees resettling there (Al-Rasheed 1994; Valenta 2010; also see Silva 2010; Sharma 2010). On the other hand, refugees and asylum seekers are simultaneously rendered visible and invisible as they negotiate the laws of homeland security vis-à-vis legal identification, a process which they occupy

positions of non-recognition and 'over-recognition' (Humpage and Marston 2006; also see Potts 2011). My study is significant because it provides a space for advancing research and debate about refugees by highlighting alternative arguments concerning home, identity, belonging, and resettlement (Hiruy 2009; Su 2012) both as an intellectual and policy endeavor (Berubé 1994).

Many questions arose as I grappled with issues of refugee status in the context of militarization. As a former human terrain analyst with the U.S. Department of Defense prior to entering graduate school, I have first-hand experience with war zone contractors and support personnel who became refugees when their lives were threatened if they stayed in Iraq. This taught me a great deal about the distinct issues that surround Iraqi resettlement within the U.S.— a state to which many of these refugees feel patriotically attached, but a nation that also implicitly denies them a sense of belonging. How does U.S. discourse about *homeland* security affect diasporic notions of home and belonging for Iraqis during escalated times of military intervention in Iraq? This field-based experience on site in Iraq helped launch my exploration of issues such as Iraqi home, identity, and refugee resettlement within the larger context of academia and policymaking circles.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Significance

The resettlement of Iraqi refugees in the United States since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq has only minimally been covered in the media and the academy (also see Boustany 2007). As such, the patterns, experiences, and identities of this particular group of wartime refugees have remained invisible to most Americans. By 2007, a handful of international reports and articles questioned why so few refugees have been provided sanctuary through legal means in the United States and the United Kingdom (Cochetel 2007; Frelick 2007; Walshe 2010). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2011), tens of millions people have been uprooted by conflict and persecution worldwide since World War II (2011), yet only a small number are admitted to the United States despite its role as a major 'displacer'. In 2011, UNHCR reported there were an estimated two million Iraqis who fled their country to escape the violence within their borders. Nearby countries of Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and Lebanon were the receiving-countries for the bulk of those displaced peoples. However, it remains that a much smaller number of Iraqis have received refugee status within the coalition force countries that 'liberated' them (BBC News 2007; UNHCR 2011).

It is important to note that coalition countries like the U.S. and the U.K. employed thousands of Iraqis as contractors, translators, guides, and intelligence workers during the war to aid in the overthrow of the Iraqi government. Indirectly, countless numbers of Iraqis became targets of violence as they aligned themselves and interacted with coalition

forces through the delivery of goods, community-building, or political engagement. Risking their lives, Iraqis fled the violence of their country in search of asylum within the borders of the countries they had supported during the liberation of their own country (see Swarns 2007). However, by March 2011, data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) statistics documented that only 58,811 of the 186,097 Iraqis referred by U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) had been granted refugee-status. This is a relatively small number compared to the millions displaced by the Iraq war.

In spite of the fact that the war in Iraq is now *officially* over, the effects of the conflict continue to resonate in the lives of the displaced. Since 2003, for example, an entire community of Iraqi refugees has been relocated to cities in many parts of the United States. Individual narratives from this refugee group provide an opportunity to analyze the constructs of identity and home-making in the aftermath of violence and exile (Barnes et al. 2006). For Iraqis, concepts of 'home' here in the U.S. are complicated by their transnational experiences and the details surrounding displacement (Blunt and Downing 2006; Black 2002). Furthermore, the blending of cultures and ideas has also had far-reaching effects on the Iraqi diaspora in the U.S. and how Iraqis of different generations view themselves as a 'displaced' people.

Central to contemporary debates about race, ethnicity, identity, and nationalism

are notions of diaspora (Barnes et al. 2006; Van Hear 1998), categorization, and perceptions of exclusion (Geschiere 2009; Trudeau 2006) - particularly as it occurs along the axes of 'whiteness' (Dyer 2000; Fanon 1986; Frankenberg 1997) or 'brown spaces' (Bronwen Walter 2001: 206; also see Silva 2010; Sharma 2010). Therefore, the narratives and layered identities of post-2003 Iraqi refugees within the American context provide an ideal space to bring together and examine the situation that caused their displacement, the challenges of resettlement, and possible ethical considerations for this group of migrants (re)creating home in the United States.

Iraqis expressed an active maintenance of transnational ties, religion, individualism, nationalism, and political activism in their homeland but not necessarily America due to life in exile and feelings of belonging or feeling at home — a practice that challenges refugee and geographic research. My research also reveals a critical gap in current literature: at a global scale, most prior refugee research has emphasized demographic patterns. Population geographers have incorporated studies of refugees into mainstream migration studies as part of international migration movements. At this scale, migration flows of those in exile are acknowledged but are not scrutinized to a great degree and analysis is consistent with neo-classical explanation and theories (White 2002; also see Salt 1993; 1996). While the refugee situation is comparable to that of immigrants who come to the U.S. primarily on their own volition, the resettlement

process of refugees is, in essence, a different experience because their migration flows are controlled to a large extent by the U.S. government, not simply processed by it (Wright 1981; Miyares 1998; Potocky-Tripodi 2002; Singer and Wilson 2006; Mott 2006). In the case of Iraqi refugees, the same government who participated in the invasion of their homeland under the auspices of liberation and creation of a new 'democratic' Iraq has controlled the resettlement of war and post-war refugees. The significance of examining this particular community raises questions about the relative invisibility (Ghorashi 2010) of post-2003 Iraqis settling in the U.S. the past nine years and their settlement in a new country. I would like to thus pose the following question as a frame for my study of Iraqi home and identity: what, if any, ethical responsibility does the U.S. have for the refugees we 'create' during and in the aftermath of the recent/ongoing proxy war(s) 'on terror'?

At the same time as contributing to the global debate on the difference between a refugee and a migrant, my research intervenes in migration studies by calling for the inclusion of refugee perspectives on resettlement policy. In the case of Iraqis in Austin and Portland, this brings to the surface the central importance of home as well as political, cultural, and emotional factors as keys to identity. Furthermore, my research points to the problematic merging of all refugees into one classification. This issue has been significant to feminists in particular who work to question the single narrative of 'refugee' that fails to pay attention to internal differences particularly along the lines of

gender, race, ethnicity, class, and nationality (Malkki 1990; Mousa 1992; also see Krulfeld 1992; Fujiwara 2010; Hyndman and Giles 2011). To construct my intervention, I highlight how discourse and the popular culture of displaced people coming to the U.S. lumps groups into single or minimal category(ies) for political, legal, or economic purposes, generalizing and homogenizing the experiences of a wide variety of narratives (Lee 1989), in a way that resembles the collapse of the diversity of human beings under the category of 'man' (Silverstein 1995, 2004).

Migration research is dominated by a focus on immigration from Latin America and Asia to the U.S.; refugees from sending regions like the Middle East and Africa are often placed within an "other" category (Belanger and Rogers 1993; Rogers and Henning 1999; Schmidley 2000; Mott 2006, 2010). This 'other' category collapses the differences of an incredibly heterogeneous group of individuals, and has arguably had a stifling effect on those groups 'chosen' by researchers. Despite the smaller numbers of migrants from these regions, the impacts are large both for the host community and in the lives of the refugee. Research on the experiences of Southeast Asians (Airriess and Clawson 2000), Russians and Ukrainians (Hardwick 1993; Hume and Hardwick 2005) and Cubans (Grenier and Perez 2003) has opened up discussion regarding non-traditional gateway locations (Singer 2004) migration patterns, experiences, and adjustment of refugees which are not uniform nor should be categorized as a singular or 'othering' narrative.

While undeniably political, the objective of this project is not to critique the role of state or voluntary resettlement agencies (VOLAGs)² in the lives of refugees (Mott 2006, 2010; also see Ziegler 2010), but instead to build upon this prior scholarship in order to understand a specific refugee community that has been displaced by U.S. military campaigns in recent years. My project constitutes a critical inquiry, not a critical condemnation.

1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

The aims and objectives of this study stem from the notion that refugees are shaped by their interactions and experiences, be it their attachment to a former home, the situation that forced them out of their homeland, the institutions that work with them in the countries of asylum or resettlement, or the host communities and their institutions. Epistemologically, within a framework of post-colonial and feminist scholarship (McDowell 1992, 1999; Roberts 1981), I contend that the ‘lived experiences’ of refugees are knowable (Manen 1990; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Eastmond 2007; O’Neill 2008). I seek to understand these lived experiences of forced displacement and place attachment in order to analyze the interconnections between identity, home-making, belonging,

² Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart (2006) and others (Judkins 2011) have considered the role of “voluntary organizations” or “voluntary associations”, which are “defined as associations that originate out of the migrant communities and are controlled by them, but not the VOLAGs that “resettle” refugees to the United States” (Mott 2006: 24).

resettlement, and other key phenomena in the life of a refugee (Cox and Connell 2005). To meet these goals, I employ qualitative methods of investigation, including interviews, participant observation, and fieldwork (Crang 2005; Dowling 2005; Dunn 2005; Evans 1988). As will be further articulated in later sections, the first component to questions about lived experiences is not asking to what extent has identity or home changed, but rather *how* have they changed. What is the substance of these changes—the constraints, decisions, and understandings that are embedded in present experiences? Listed in order of scale particular to Iraqi refugees first, then to broader implications on U.S. refugee status in general, this research is built on four questions:

- 1) How are notions of identity and ‘home’ constructed by post-2003 Iraqi refugees living within the borders of the United States? In what ways do new concepts of home resemble and/or call upon pre-resettlement ideas of home for Iraqi refugees?
- 2) How are refugee ideas of home and resettlement affected by their notions of place attachment, identity, and belonging?
- 3) How can the narratives of this particular group of Iraqi refugees contribute to understanding the geographic discourse of different U.S. refugee communities as a whole?
- 4) What, if any, are the ethical considerations for the resettlement of refugees in the United States—the country that 'created' the situation which caused their displacement?

Posing these questions is a worthwhile pursuit for many reasons. In the past nine years, the United States has granted asylum to nearly 60,000 post-2003 Iraqi refugees and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants. Notably, the nuances and complexity of the growing community of Iraqis living in the U.S. is not a single story nor should be considered one. Additionally, to present refugees in this study as powerless or without any culpability for their current circumstances will erase their agency.

Overall, research conducted and analyzed for this thesis was not completed to be filed away on a library shelf. Instead, it is viewed as an actionable document that provides Iraqi refugees a space to share their experiences with a wider intellectual and policy community. Further, the analysis presented in the following chapters lays a foundation for future studies of the patterns, experiences, identities, and challenges of other refugee groups in other parts of the world.

1.4. Thesis Outline and Chapter Summaries

The following chapter identifies some of the key research by geographers and scholars in other related disciplines based on a qualitative research methodology (Crang 2005; Dowling 2005; Dunn 2005). I draw upon different theories in the social sciences to examine the empirical data gathered during my time in the field. To frame the study, I use

literature addressing the complex and multi-layered constructions of identity (Massey 1996; Hall 2003; Barnes et al. 2006) and critically explore how the concept of home (Black 2002; Blunt and Varley 2004; Blunt and Dowling 2006) is an entry point to understanding refugee communities living in exile (Al-Rasheed 1994; Dorai 2002; Brekke 2001, 2004; Su 2012). I build upon research addressing displacement (Black 1991, 1993; Zolberg 1989; Walters 2002; Mallet 2004) and also theories and concepts on transnationalism (Vertovech 1999, 2001; Wahlbeck 1998) and heterolocalism used in migration and refugee studies (Zelinsky and Lee 1998; Hardwick and Meacham 2005; Skop 2010). In this same chapter, I outline my methodology with a detailed description of the methods used during the research process in Portland, OR and Austin, TX between 2010 and 2012. I do so to provide an understanding as to how qualitative analysis was employed to examine Iraqi refugee narratives of home and identity-making.

Chapter III contextualizes the “War in Iraq” and the ‘making’ of the post-2003 Iraqi refugees. I begin by describing how the U.S. invasion of Iraq led to massive displacement of people with a relatively small number relocated to the United States since 2003. I identify various categories of displacement in recent decades and discuss how the history of different refugee groups fleeing Iraq to settle in the U.S. relates to shifts in Iraqi identity and belonging. I conclude this section with an outline of resettlement and the meaning of 'success' as framed under U.S. policy on refugees.

Chapter IV presents the results of my findings on the Portland and Austin case studies. Here I offer a comparison of Iraqi refugee experiences in each of these cities to interrogate a broader understanding of this group through empirical analysis of two locations in the United States.

In the final chapter I summarize the findings of data analysis relative to the research questions and objectives of the study. I revisit and discuss war refugee identity and how this group I call *U.S. Combat Zone Refugees* relate to the ethical and political implications of lumping all refugees into “one-size fits all” resettlement categories under current U.S. policy. Concluding the discussion, I highlight the limitations of the research and remedies through further investigation and future research.

CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS
AND METHODOLOGY

“Discourses” do categorize people, and sometimes the labels are denatured caricatures of what those people are or believe themselves to be.
—Edelman, 2002: 409

2.1. Chapter Overview

I build here upon a collection of scholarly articles and government documents related to displacement and (re)settlement at the global scale and in the United States. In addition to engaging with academic work, I have also compiled newspaper articles and editorials related to refugee integration and post-2003 Iraqi displacement. With an absence in the current research about refugees who become displaced due to U.S. military campaigns abroad, it is necessary to use multidisciplinary theoretical insights to guide my strategies in research design. Here I use refugee studies as a way to blend together home and diasporic studies, complicating the symbolic and material conditions of home, identity-making, and belonging. The purpose of this approach is to examine and employ

various techniques in qualitative analysis to conduct an investigation of a holistic analysis of post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in the U.S.

2.2. Theoretical Underpinnings

Despite an influx of refugees into the United States in recent decades, critiques focus on the lack of parallel growth in the study of refugees, to a great extent remaining under the rubric of "immigrant" studies in the U.S context (Ahearn and Athey 1991; White 2002; Mosselson 2006). Even within the rich interdisciplinary tradition of human geography there are far too few geographers focused on refugees and asylum seekers (Black 1993; White 2002). This is problematic for interrogating refugee flows, documenting their transnational experiences and place attachment at different scales, and understanding how the experiences of refugees may differ from other migrant groups (White 2002; Cox and Connell 2005). Regardless of such critiques, foundational contributions by geographers on UN refugee policies (Hyndman 2000), exiles living in the U.S. (Skop 2001), and on the shifting identities of Russian, Ukrainian, as well as various African refugee groups in Portland (Hardwick 1993; Hume and Hardwick 2005; Hardwick and Meacham 2005) must be acknowledged.

To situate my study, I began with a discussion of how home studies can be used as an entry point for understanding refugee identity and belonging both symbolically and materially. Building upon this, refugee studies and the growing body of literature by

geographers helps to frame important and challenging questions about post-2003 Iraqi identity and resettlement in the U.S. (Brah 1996; Al-Ali et al. 2002, 2005; Ahmed 2000, 2007; Ahmed et al. 2003a). Geography provides a perfect lens to analyze how location affects home-making for refugees both temporally and spatially. Displacement inevitably complicates and changes people's identities and relationships with each other, as well as objects and places. In order to live as 'normally' as possible within a new place, refugees in exile seek to make their new life mimetic of their past experiences.

Scholars have examined the push-pull factors surrounding refugee diasporas, particularly issues of identity, and the social and political facets of the resettlement experience at all levels (Skop 2008). While migration specialists and organizations regularly report on the large number of displaced persons and refugees from humanitarian crisis zones or conflict areas, and theorists challenge notions of systems of oppression or institutionalized power, only in recent years has research about this new wave of Iraqis living in the United States begun to surface. Singling out armed conflict as the primary cause of the status of the world's refugees is problematic. The situation is often far more complex, and must account for how an interplay of political, socio-economic, and environmental situations create particular refugee situations. Post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in the U.S. are of particular interest because they are living in the country that 'created' the situation 'causing' their displacement — and their displacement is often a

result of helping the host country ‘liberate’ their home country. Here the significance of refugee identity-making and sense of belonging is tied to functioning in the webs (Geertz 1973: 5) of a culture—the U.S. society and community—and complicated further by the status of being a refugee that this society 'created'. Adam Seligman (1992) expands upon this further, “It is precisely this dialectic and tension between public and private, as constitutive of civil society” that encompasses the public sphere as “that arena where—in Hegelian terms—free, self-determining individuality sets forth its claims for satisfaction of its wants and personal autonomy” (1992:5; see also Dawahare 2000). Therefore, within the U.S. context, this study examines the contradictions and tensions surrounding post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in a host country to which they feel patriotically attached, but exist in the presence of a nation which, at times, also implicitly denies them a sense of belonging.

2.2.1. Home

Sandra Dudley (2008) argues in, “A sense of home in exile,” that displaced persons 'materialize' home in exile, and in so doing are attempting to connect two points spatially (the ‘here’ and the preexile ‘there’) as well as two time periods (the displaced ‘now’ and the premigration ‘then’). The connections are continually being renewed through ritual practices, clothing, food, and myriad everyday activities (Hall 2003;

Dudley 2008; Massey 1996). Moreover, as noted by Cohen (2001, 2010), the abstract sense of place and home is often more fulfilling “than in the harsh realities of contested space” (284; also see Relph 1980). This highlights the complexity of the phenomenon of violence and displacement which invokes emotional attachment to place and the creation and recreation of place. Displacement according to Blunt and Dowling (2006) is key to aspects of place attachment and belonging tied to the “multiple senses of home” (2) both materially and symbolically. Setting up an understanding of home as a theoretical concept across time, places, and scales as layered and complex, Blunt and Dowling (2006) contend:

Home as a sense of belonging or attachment is also very visible in one of the key characteristics of the contemporary world: the historically unprecedented number of people migrating across countries, as, for instance, refugees and asylum seekers, or as temporary or permanent workers. Notions of home are central in these migrations. Movement may necessitate or be precipitated by a disruption to a sense of home, as people leave or in some cases flee one home for another. These international movements are also processes of establishing home, as senses of belonging and identity move over space and are created in new places (2006: 1-2).

Here home is not simply a site in which we live, but also, “an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings” (2006: 2). These feelings, ideas, and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial and may be of belonging, desire, and intimacy or possibly fear, alienation, or

violence (Blunt and Varley 2004: 3; Blunt and Dowling 2006). For geographers in particular, my analysis of the Iraqi refugee community living in exile provides rich opportunities for understanding evolving refugee identity and acculturation through the examination of how home is space(s), place(s), practice(s), feeling(s), and/or an active state of being in the world (Mallett 2004, Bachelard 1958).

Richard Black (2002) points out conceptions of home are “linked to concept of identity and memory as much as territory and place” (126). In this sense, refugees make home and re-make it. Home is imagined, desired, and remembered through a reference to physical places, buildings or beliefs, customs and/or traditions. As Black (2002) argues, “most important, as a concept it is something that is subject to constant reinterpretation and flux, just as identities are renegotiated” (126). This research on refugees returning to their homeland draws upon the concept of the “metaphysical loss of 'home' and the security and confidence of identity” (Black 2002: 126) associated with the 'project of modernity'. Berman and Berger as well as Morley and Robins (1993) use the concept of *Heimat* from the German/European context to examine the “mythical bond rooted in a lost past, a past that has already disintegrated” (7) as opposed to ideas related to a particular region, state, nation, or community. Black (2002) argues:

This distancing of home in the past (or, one might add, in space) makes it more difficult to grasp or define. This is reflected in the experience of many immigrant

and refugee groups, where there is a sense that the more distant 'home' is in time or space, or the more unlikely or impractical a return 'home' might be, the stronger that group's identification with, and yearning for, such a return becomes (2002: 126).

Here an example of an earlier study of displaced Iraqis in London by Al Rasheed (1994) is useful in understanding how an 'abstract' or 'imagined' home to return to becomes a myth and involves overlaying an inaccessible 'point fixed in space' (also Black 2002).

In Ghorashi's (2003) definition of the homeland one understand how a sense of belonging better is linked to symbolic notions of home. It is the physical 'locatedness' of a homeland that is disparaged and the emotional attachments are expressed. Lisa Malkki (1992) notes:

By adopting a de-territorialized notion of home, I show that the feelings of belonging and foreignness do not have to be related to a fixed place, either the homeland or the new country, but that they are related to one's position in life. The sense of belonging is not related to the soil, but rather to what a place can offer and how one can become part of a life in a certain place. In this way, the notion of place is not fixed but it is fluid. It is the meaning of a place that is then essential. The creation of meaning comes from memorized experiences of certain places. These memories, which change over the course of time, remain part of one's life; and it is through these memories that feelings of belonging can be created. The link here is then not the place as such but positionality in a place (Ghorashi, 2003: 20).

As hinted at earlier, for refugees, a sense of belonging and concept of home becomes even more complicated when migration is forced and the possibility of return to one's homeland is nearly impossible. Upon arrival to the host country, refugees have a desire, and are encouraged by resettlement agencies, to rapidly begin their new lives and establish feelings of belonging (Ghorashi 2003, 2004). Here, instead of connecting to a fixed place, a sense of belonging is connected to the establishment of a new life in the aftermath of losing their homeland. Therefore, drawing upon the relevant theoretical framework on meaning and experience of home helps situate research which explores the concept as a multi-layered, ongoing process for refugee groups or individuals and their various evolving identities following displacement and throughout the resettlement process (Ahmed 2000, 2007; see Ahmed et al 2003; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Wiles 2007).

2.2.2. Refugee Studies

Refugee Studies provides an understanding of the differences in migration compared to other forms of territorial displacement. Shaped by geographic, sociological, anthropological, feminist, and ethnographic ideas, the examination of refugees in academia and the 'national order of things', suggests an examination of the circumstances of particular refugee groups in order to bring to light the “complexity of the ways in

which people construct, remember, and lay claim to particular places as 'homelands' or 'nations'" and the invention of "homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases-not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit" (24-25).

Malkki (1992) and others draw upon Said (1979, 1986), Hannerz (1987), Hebdige (1987), Appadurai (1988, 1990, 1996), Clifford (1988), Rosaldo (1989), and Robertson (1988) across disciplines who brought new awareness of "the global social fact that, now more than perhaps ever before, people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced" (1992: 24). Furthermore, Malkki's (1992) work attempted to clarify the complexities of notions of native places and nativeness, "as more and more people identify themselves, or are categorized, in reference to deterritorialized 'homelands', 'cultures', and 'origins'" (1992: 24; also see Basch et al. 1994).

Literature addressing the dynamics of cultural identity and negotiated nature of sense of place for refugees has challenged the assumptions 'rootedness' of people and its grip over policy (Black 2002). The examination of refugee conceptions of home in my study builds on Malkki (1992, 1995) and Black (2002) in suggesting that a sense of nationhood need not have a physical location. Arguably, attachment and belonging involve a sense of being rooted to a certain location. Malkki (1992, 1995) pointed out belonging is vital to the human spirit yet, for refugees there are different views of what it

means to have a sense of belonging to a specific place. Early anthropological analysis of forced migration focus on the direct connection to agricultural practices; the soil and a sedentary life of indigenous people is often a “negative outsider view of 'incarceration' in a specific place or region” (Malkki 1992, 1995; Black 2002) and does not offer a space to understand resettled Iraqis in the contemporary U.S context. Important to my study is Malkki's (1992, 1995) focus on how those who are displaced from their homeland historically are viewed as having a dangerous moral character leading to difficulty with acculturation. Removed from their sense of rootedness (Papastergiadis 2000), they are viewed as prone to various sorts of crime or apathy. In the case of this recent wave of Iraqi refugees to the United States, the post-9/11 context complicates implications for both the host nation and the settled Middle Eastern refugee community.

Additionally, the enthusiasm in anthropology and Refugee Studies for the concepts of transnationalism and globalization (Vertovech 1999, 2001; Wahlbeck 1998) continue to have significant implications for the practice of ethnography and geographers in understandings of the contemporary Middle East (Shami 1996). In discussing forced migration in the Middle East, Shami (1996) examines the importance of retaining the analytical concern for forms and forces of regionalism, while at the same time rethinking them in the light of global changes (1996: 3-4).

A consideration of two problematic topics: Arab nationalism, or rather al-‘uruba

(which translates best as Arabness, and which highlights the identity rather than the ideology); and contemporary Islamic identity, which is better conceptualized as transnationalism rather than fundamentalism (1996: 3).

Building upon Shami's (1996) work, recent scholarship (Black 2002) suggests viewing refugees through dated ideas about rootedness is problematic and may account for the *flattening* or invisibility (Ghorashi 2010) of certain refugee groups during the resettlement process. From war to settled citizen, refugees negotiate the formulation of a new identity and home while being negatively categorized by the public or communities in which they settle.

2.2.3. Identity, Resettlement, and Belonging

Resettlement agencies draw upon literature that suggests informal networks (Mott 2010) and support from within the already-present refugee community is paramount to the success and sustainability of new refugee livelihoods (Hume and Hardwick 2005). These studies, however, often fail to consider identity or belonging as a process that is as external to these communities as it is internal. Violent landscapes and globalization are particularly necessary to explain how culture and identity for refugees have been upended or altered from the outside (Appadurai 1996; Meyer 1999; Hall 2003; Croucher 2004). In light of this, I explored the difference in scholarship which considers identity as a

dialectically reflexive and performative process (Bourdieu 1992; England 1994; Schmidt 2007). This accepts identity as constructed in and through discourse and difference, while refusing to accept that identity expresses essence (Barthes 1983; Foucault 1981; Hall 2003; Sandoval 1991; Trinh 1991). The conceptualization of identity as provided by Stuart Hall (2003) in his essay, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” offers a framework to discuss the complexities of refugee identity and its production spatially and temporally. Hall (2003) posits:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (2003:222).

This is particularly important to the case of post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in the United States. As time passed, both their self and social identities for this wave of migrants continued to be shaped by a post-9/11 America, the ongoing war in their homeland, and now the withdrawal of troops. The notion that identity is adaptive and transforming allows researchers to understand the way feelings of belonging and a sense of home for refugees are shaped spatially and temporally as well as at different scales. Hall continues:

Cultural identity... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from

somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (2003: 225).

Hall's framework link the nature of identity formation and maintenance as well as an emphasis of the role of past and future projections to present senses of self which appeals to the complexities of a sense of home in exile. However, the unique narratives of refugees cannot easily be placed within the umbrella of a 'cultural identity'; it also occupies the mental space of a national identity which migrates with the individual or group (McCrone 2008).

One objective of this thesis is to tease out if or how social science scholarship has analyzed the links between the production of refugees in a specific location, the political violence at that time, and the complexity of identity-making in the current state of displacement and resettlement. The process in which an individual or group has to maneuver effectively or confidently from one country to another plays a key part in belonging and the sense of place that they adopt. The way that a refugee may understand themselves as a part of that place is part of their identity. Doreen Massey (1996) suggests:

It is the relation between identity, spatiality, and power which is crucial. Just as with mobility, degrees of spatial enclosure and openness/porosity and their relation to the construction of identities may be established through a range of very different social relations (1996: 115).

Although not specifically addressing refugee identity, Massey's statement suggests the navigation of different spaces and contexts is linked to the process of identification. In this sense, we can infer that there are many versions of the formation of Iraqi refugee identity, each reflecting and relating to broader patterns and processes of power, movement, and connection within the violent landscape prior to their displacement and challenges faced throughout resettlement (McSpadden 1987; Bates, et al. 2005; Chanoff 2005). Building upon this, arguably the outcome of resettlement is shaped in part by past and present social and emotional experiences which are important for researchers, policy-makers, service agencies, social workers, and others aiding with the relocation of refugees. Current policies and established (re)settlement planning practices — the articulation of various neoliberal guidelines — call for rapid self-sufficiency soon after arrival while privileging economics as primary mode of achieving it (White 2002; Walters 2002; USCIS 2010:3). Expanding on the notion that refugee identities are shaped by their interactions and experiences—be it their attachment to a former home, the situation causing displacement, or the institutions that work with them in their host countries—geographic research about resettled refugees would benefit from a better

understanding as to how identity-making, belonging, and home are tied to resettlement success.

Noting the difference between the goals of Iraqi resettlement and the realities on the ground, this study demonstrates that many Iraqi refugees see the 'success' of their settlement in relation to a number of factors beyond the traditional reliance on the development of social capital and networks at the local level (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Portes 1998; Allen 2007). As such, it challenges scholarship which centralizes social capital as essential to finding employment and other economic opportunities (White 2002; Ziegler 2010 and Tamaki 2011). Alternatively, a study in Portland, Maine found refugees with ties to local resettlement agencies were actually more successful in finding and keeping jobs than those depending on family members or other previously resettled refugees (Allen 2007; also see Ziegler 2010).

2.3. Summation

In order to frame this study I have highlighted how contributions in literature and scholarship from a wide body of discourse help to analyze how identity, belonging and home are embodied, constructed, and appear at multiple scales. Malkki (1992) argues, “Since both cultural and national identities are conceived in territorialized terms, uprootedness also threatens to denature and spoil these” (34). It is though examples of

how a relocated refugee's nationhood or national identity for former homelands, that researchers can unpack themes about home-making and identity formation in resettlement. I agree with Black (2002) when he calls upon geographers and social sciences to recognize the benefits of using concepts of home in furthering discussions about refugees. The notion that national identity is mobile and connected to many things beyond a sense of place, therefore, suggests that many refugees maintain an identity and sense of home linked to their former homeland while constructing and negotiating new identities during resettlement (Black 2001; Zetter 1999). This helps challenge the problem with automatically linking refugee studies to a concrete place and exposes the biases of research centralizing sedentary people as the 'norm' in a globalized world (Malkki 1992).

Significant to this project is the growing body of geographic work examining refugees specifically within the United States and North America (Hardwick and Meacham 2005, 2008; Mott 2010; Ziegler 2010; Singer 2004; Skop 2010). These studies feature different aspects of resettlement in the American context while providing insight into variations between communities of refugees across the country, particularly in non-traditional immigrant gateway cities (Singer 2004). Additionally, these studies and narratives suggested not only are there visible characteristics of refugees like skin color, dress, or language difference in post 9/11 America; they stress the sometimes negative

and unneeded attention is centered on physical locations as well as symbolic spaces accessed by refugees (Butler and Spivak 2007; Mott 2010, Silva 2009). These include built structures, such as schools, places of worship or businesses, in communities where refugees establish home and a sense of belonging (Mott 2010; Antonsich 2010). Theory and scholarship highlighted in this project are utilized with the intent to contribute to an understanding of cultural and material processes of refugee lived experiences for more effective and sympathetic assistance for those living in exile.

2.4. Overview of Methodology

A qualitative research methodology centered on the use of interviews, fieldwork, discourse analysis of newspapers and media, and participant observation (Geertz 1973; Evans 1988) was employed in this thesis in order to document and analyze the resettlement experiences and perceptions of Iraqi refugees. I used combined techniques in order to generate a holistic investigation of the understandings and experiences of the North American Iraqi identity-making and conceptions of 'home'. The research project draws upon both primary and secondary data collected during ongoing fieldwork exercises in Portland, Oregon and Austin, Texas. I conducted nineteen semi-structured interviews using a voice recorder as well as recording field notes during participant observation while engaging with members of the Iraqi refugee communities in these two

cities. Additionally, I interviewed thirteen individuals who work with refugees in both locations (volunteers, university students/interns, public school teachers, etc.) as well as staff members of refugee organizations including: *Immigrant Community Refugee Organization* (IRCO) of Portland, *Iraqi Society of Oregon*, *Oregon Iraqi Refugee Project*, *Caritas of Austin*, *Refugee Services of Texas*, and Austin Police Department Victims Services. These exchanges focused on identifying demographic characteristics of refugees and obstacles to resettlement faced by refugees, as well as highlighted the strengths of their organization and experiences with Iraqis compared to other community groups. Due to the close proximity of Portland to the University of Oregon, fieldwork was ongoing, from June 2010 and March 2012. Fieldwork in Austin took place during a two-week period of time in March 2011, an eight-week period in July and August 2011, and one additional week in March 2012.

2.5. Data Collection and Analysis

2.5.1. Primary Data Collection

Research conducted in June of 2010 and March of 2011 was shaped and propelled by my personal interest in the ongoing war in Iraq and the number of people displaced by this conflict. During my initial work as a volunteer and intern I made frequent trips to apartment buildings, stores, coffee shops, and community spaces frequented by 'clients';

here I employed the ethnographic practice of participant observation in order to gather details of day-to-day life of refugees settled in both Austin and Portland (Ely et al. 1991; Geertz 1973). I kept a journal of observations, which also provided a space for reflection and 'thick' descriptive analysis (Geertz 1973) to be revisited throughout the project.

As a volunteer with aid agencies in both Portland and Austin, I connected with former clients who had been “out of the system” for more than three months. I invited them to participate in my study. My participant pool ended up comprised of men ranging in age from eighteen to mid-seventies, with the only requirements of participation being that they had (1) lived in the U.S. for more than six months, (2) had a sufficient grasp of English as a second language, and (3) were no longer clients of the aid agencies who provided initial support for their case. Every aspect of participation was voluntary. The potential for political repercussions for the participants is a subject that has been given careful consideration in the conceptualization of this project. This issue was addressed by employing a strict code of anonymity for all research participants. Since many of my interview subjects involved migrants with traumatic experiences prior to and during their passage to the United States, I was prepared to omit any questions that participants felt uncomfortable discussing. Interviewees were informed that they could stop the interview at any time, and I attempted to maintain awareness of their emotional state throughout the interview.

All interviews used during the study were semi-structured and involved a combination of pyramid and funneling approaches and open-ended questioning (Ely 1991; Dunn 2005; Hay 2005). I encouraged participants to share their opinions openly on wide-ranging topics, and welcomed their ideas for reshaping questions or contributing new questions throughout the process. From the beginning, I went into interviews with the intention of establishing a broad outline of questions and then working toward discussions of topics requiring deeper investigations and reflections. Themes explored in interviews covered potentially sensitive issues, therefore this combined technique proved effective. By designing the research process as interactive or responsive and conducting it ‘with’ as opposed to ‘about’ the interviewee, my work became an avenue to connect and promote a dialogue between the researcher and participants. This approach provided an opportunity to identify underlying messages in order to flesh out the deeper associated themes that arise during the interview process.

Some of the initial questions guiding my background query prior to fieldwork included:

- 1) What decisions most impacted the geographic locations of resettlement?
- 2) How/does this impact individual 'success' in the resettlement process?

Here I began framing questions about the migration, settlement and relocation experiences of refugees in Texas and Oregon. For example:

- 3) Geographically, does location create specific challenges or opportunities during the resettlement process?
- 4) What ideas/opinions about the United States do refugees have prior to the process of resettlement?
- 5) Did these ideas/opinions change post-settlement?

I then began shaping questions related to:

- 6) How do refugees identify themselves once they are granted asylum or refugee status, during and post the resettlement process?

These questions provide overarching themes which aided in the creation of leading and probing interview questions (Dunn 2005; Hay 2005) during the fieldwork stage of the study (See Appendix 1 for the schedule of semi-structured interview questions.)

During each interview, I aimed to cultivate an environment that was comfortable and engaging for both the participant and myself (Ely 1991). Interview questions sought answers related to Iraqi (Appendix 1):

- 1) Cultural maintenance, identity, community, belonging, and place
- 2) Transnational journeys and processes through which Iraqi refugees settled in the United States
- 3) Lifestyles and view of home in Portland and Austin since resettlement in the U.S.
- 4) The impacts of the geopolitics of Iraq on identity and home-making in the context of the U.S.

These themes allowed me to maintain an organized structure during the actual interview

without pigeonholing participants in a way that would stifle their contribution to the experience. I encouraged participants to share their ideas and opinions on wide-ranging issues. I would ask throughout the interview if there was a better question I could be posing in regards to a particular subject. I began each interview with a general description concerning my objectives and an outline of topics and questions about identity and sense of home, then allowed the participant to focus on which topics were of greatest interest or concern to them in Austin or Portland.

The design of this thesis was intended to be a responsive and collaborative project, influenced by contemporary feminist scholarship that centralizes the theorization and analysis of intersecting and mutually constituting axes of inequality and experience, such as race, class, and gender (McCall 2005; Valentine 2007, Braun 2011). This approach is typically referred to as intersectionality, and has been at very least at the center for feminist intellectual debates since the 1990's. The wide applicability of intersectionality approaches has raised important methodological questions for geographers (Valentine 2007) and others concerned about the power dynamics inherent in notions of objectivity and object/subject dichotomies (England 1994: 242). Adopting a flexible and reflexive approach to fieldwork (Bourdieu 1992; England 1997; Schmidt 2007), I sought to foster a cooperative and open setting for interviewing.

My participant pool ended up comprised of a mainly men (a ratio of 5:3) ranging

in age from eighteen to mid-seventies. For this project I required that participants had arrived to the U.S. post the March 2003 invasion of Iraq and at a minimum had lived here for more than six months. I asked for participants who were no longer clients of the aid agencies who provided initial support for their case. This served to ensure there would be no conflict of interest between my role as a researcher and my position as an intern or volunteer with local refugee resettlement agencies.

The individuals whom I interviewed held many lifestyles, class backgrounds, and diversification in causes of displacement. Their stories of everyday life are narratives of a dynamic interplay between personal 'truth' and experience. I interviewed participants who identified as single, married, or homosexual. Religious orientation included an atheist, Muslims, Christians and Yazidi. Ethnic, tribal, and national identification came through in interviews as well, these included, but were not limited to: Assyrian, Kurdish, Chaldean, and Mandaean. Formal education among participants ranged from the equivalent of high school certificates to doctoral degrees. Current primary occupations included security guards, auto mechanics, small machine operators, interpreters, students, artist, domestic worker/house-cleaner, language instructor, temporary postal worker, and hotel/hospitality workers. Interviews were conducted in a wide variety of locations, from the home of the participant to their workplace, the mall, the local community center, the participant's church, coffee shops, and en route to various locations on a bus; the choice location was

often dictated by the demanding work schedules of the participants. Many participants held more than one job at a time and some only had one day off a week.

This research focused on participant's lived experiences and sense of home (O'Neill 2008; Taylor 2009; also see Lavie and Swedenburg 1996), and aimed to capture the complexities of individual and group identities, institutions, structures, and systems, and across geographical, historical, and cultural contexts (Purkayastha 2010; Braun 2011). Eastmond (2007) argues, "Placed in their wider socio-political and cultural contexts, stories can provide insights into how forced migrants make sense of displacement and violence, re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and community, or bear witness to violence and repression" (248). I tried continually to pay particular attention to my role in the production of narrative data and the representation of lived experience of this small group of refugees settled to Austin and Portland in order to better inform an analysis of identity-making, belonging, and sense of home.

2.5.2. Primary Data Analysis

Moving into the second phase of the analysis process, descriptive codes were used to gather results on the broader themes of identity and resettlement explored during the interviews. In order to analyze the data I took notes and used a digital voice recorder during interviews and in some circumstances a short questionnaire was filled out. I

transcribed the interviews and used content analysis (Hay 2005) to flag words such as: home/homeland, security, safe/safety, community, belong(ing), and identity. The analyzed data was collated and cross-referenced with research questions in order to produce results that address my original research topic (Ely 1991; Hay 2005).

Initially, I continued to question the kind of support Iraqi refugees receive upon their arrival in the United States and ascertained whether ethnicity or religion are motivating factors in the spatial patterns and sense of place of this refugee group. As in previous refugee research (Hardwick and Meacham 2005, 2008; Mott 2010; also see Ziegler 2010) the basis of a pre-existing structure in one's homeland or social networking ties in the host country were viewed as influencing settlement patterns and sense of belonging or attachment. However, this was not as apparent with all participants in my study of Iraqis during the preliminary stages of fieldwork. Here questions relating to Iraqi transnational journeys and the processes through which they resettled in U.S. cities gave way to participant emphasis of themes in the construction of identity, sense of place, belonging, and conceptions of 'home' or home-making. Since all interviews included specific questions concerning identity, belonging and sense of home, direct commentary on these subjects was highlighted. Additionally, comments that indirectly related to concepts of home and self were considered, especially as they were often intermingled with observations concerning the local community or resettlement experience.

I avoided quantitative accounting of interview material, which is highly conjectural given the meta-level texts 'said but not said' during interviews. I preferred instead to evaluate the similarities and differences among participants in the two study locations based on an approach informed by discourse analysis. Looking at the nuances in lived experiences, perceptions, and performances of identity-making or attachment to place, I pinpointed themes described, embodied, and understood by participants, based on a number of axes of difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Valentine 2008; Young 1990). I sought to deemphasize sensationalized stories of the war in Iraq and tragedy back in Iraq. This is important because male participants frequently spoke about extreme stories of civil strife or fighting alongside coalition forces, even in cases of SIVs that had little to do with danger or extreme fear of reprisal leading to their displacement. From this tendency, I deduced that these were stories that participants inferred that I wanted to hear, based on predominant narratives of refugees in popular culture and media. Furthermore, when surveying interview material, I gave added weight to the statements that participants stressed it was important that I know. Finally, some of the transcribed interviews were returned to the participants for reflection and review helping to ensure consistency and continue a relationship of trust between myself and the participants in my study.

2.5.3. Secondary Data Collection

I initially intended to also depend on a number of secondary data sources for this analysis. However, while there are several on-line and text-based databases on refugees in different parts of the world, they are limited by the focus of the organization that has compiled them. For instance, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR), Migration Policy Institute (MPI), national governments, and the U.S. Census Bureau databases often lump the movement of people into categories for the purpose of mapping diaspora or analyzing the political, socio-economic, or security issues of migration, immigration, and policymaking. Activist organizations hone into current news and sensationalized media reports of the growing refugee crisis at the international level with the intention to use this information to affect the individual. This is often viewed as exploiting states' inability to provide the local scale with monetary support or humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, when analyzing data or questioning the unique causal factors producing refugees, scholarship has a wide gap in consensus on how to find answers that cover global, regional, state, and local issues. There is another problem with garnering data on refugees from media reports – the lack of distinction between categories of refugees. Migration statistics often do not account for internally displaced persons (IDPs) who find their way across borders after years of displacement or so-called economic migrants who get to the U.S. and apply for political asylum or

refugee status once in country. As a result their numbers are over or under estimated with very little attention given to the narratives of the refugees themselves—they are reduced to numbers or statistics for analysis.

Since media coverage is not uniform in all of the regions or states in which the violence and war forces large numbers of displaced to flee across borders, biases in stories are prevalent and in many cases the situation goes underreported. Moreover, as the news media prepares its content for popular consumption rather than academic use, information reported in popular discourse is often of little use in academic research. For example, some articles on the civilians affected by violence and war is reported by incident and location while others report by the estimated number of noncombatants in a given area in a set period of time. As argued by scholars and analysts (Neuendorf 2002; also see: Overman 2005), it is very difficult to produce a dataset based on press descriptions, “precision in refugee numbers is difficult: conservative estimates claim that more than 1 million Iraqi refugees have found their way into Syria and Jordan. The numbers could be twice that.” (Overman, 2005) and “from 2004 to 2007 violence accounted for several thousand U.S. and British civilian contractors to apply to leave the country fearing reprisals against their lives” (BBC News, 2007; also see Ludden 2008).

To provide context and background for my findings, I also conducted a discourse analysis of newspaper clippings from 2003-2012 as part of my project. These sources

included international, national, state, and local papers: *BBC, New York Times, Washington Post, The Associated Press, Portland Observer, Oregonian, Portland Tribune, Oregon Capitol News, Beaverton Valley Times, The Texas Observer, The Daily Texan, Austin Chronicle, Oak Hill Gazette, Austin American Statesman, Lake Travis View, Austin Business Journal, Hill Country News*, and more. Additionally, I listened to and read transcripts of news reports and videos featured on National Public Radio (NPR), Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) *Wide Angle* - "Iraqi Exodus," local Oregon and Texas News Stations, and Austin Refugee Roundtable focusing on popular culture's representation of Iraqis living in the U.S. context.

2.5.4. Secondary Data Analysis

I employed the use of descriptive analysis techniques with secondary data (Ely 1991; Hays 2005) in order to locate and flag key words in the text. Drawing on themes about identity, resettlement, and belonging, again I was able to flag similar words and themes which appeared frequently in the secondary data and agreed with the study's primary data, these included:

- a) security, homeland security, safe(ty)
- b) local support, network(s), community, family, and tribal ties back in Iraq

- c) location of resettlement, host country, homeland, feeling at home, home
- d) identity, identification, identify with
- e) feelings of being welcome, belong(ing), fitting in, being American, feeling like 'others'

It is important to note that, while the primary and secondary data offered similarities in themes and word use, the sources were quite different. Where primary data came directly from refugee stories and participant observations, secondary data was mined from popular culture and media sources—e.g. articles and commentaries— 'about' refugees, Iraqis, and Middle Easterners, etc.

2.6. Limitations

I conducted interviews without the assistance of an interpreter, as all of my participants spoke English as a second language to varying degrees. Aware of the various cultural and communication issues that can arise through interpretation in an interview situation, I decided not to use an interpreter and only interview participants who had a sufficient grasp of the English language. Although this approach may have limited access to a larger study group, I negated some potential problems relating to third party translation, miscommunication, or cultural sensitivity.

The nature of my access to participants, and my particular subjectivity (as a young Anglo female, speaking rudimentary Arabic) compelled me to be extremely mindful

when engaging somewhat intimate dialogue with a stranger—e.g., young, single Muslim male participants. Understanding social codes already implicit in the nature of a research-oriented interview, all manner of cultural differences and numerous power structures had to be considered in order to form a connection and foster a genuine discussion of the participant's life. I understand this study seeks to highlight a particular component of a complex and intricate topic.

CHAPTER III

CONTEXTUALIZING THE U.S. IRAQI REFUGEE SITUATION

09/21/09

At a hearing on Capitol Hill two weeks ago, a young Iraqi gave gripping testimony of the price paid by his countrymen who have risked their lives serving the U.S. occupation. The 27-year-old former military translator, whose name was withheld for his safety, told senators of receiving death threats and surviving a car bombing after he was identified as a friend of the Americans.

It was a story eerily reminiscent of tales from Southeast Asia more than three decades ago, when hundreds of thousands of our loyal allies faced imprisonment and death as the Vietnam War drew to a close. The world still remembers the agonizing photo of crowds swarming the last U.S. helicopter that took off from Saigon in 1975.

Although Iraq, as yet, offers no image to match that one, its refugee crisis is almost as dire. According to the United Nations, as many as 3.4 million people have fled (including many who left before the U.S. invasion), a number that continues to escalate. Yet since the 2003 invasion, only 466 Iraqi refugees have been allowed into the USA.

As our leaders face a worsening situation and as calls for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq grow louder, we should remember the lessons of 1975. President Gerald Ford put his political capital on the line to rescue some 130,000 Vietnamese. (Nearly a million more would be admitted through other channels in the years that followed.)

—First field note entry: Excerpt from USA Today article by Goodheart and Bohrer, January 29, 2007

3.1. Chapter Overview

In this chapter I contextualize the history of the post-2003 Iraqi refugees by describing how the history of the U.S. invasion of Iraq is important to understanding the recent migrant group's identity and concepts of home once resettled to the United States. As discussed in the chapter's opening excerpt, the “War in Iraq” led to massive displacement of people³ with a relatively small number relocated to the United States since 2003. Next, I identify various groups of displaced Iraqis in recent decades and briefly highlight these different waves of refugees fleeing Iraq have come to resettle in communities in the U.S. By tying this to literature surrounding other refugee groups displaced by U.S. military campaigns abroad, such as the Vietnam War, I question the implications of the *lumping* of all 'refugees' into one category. Through the narratives of this most recent wave of Iraqis and how they view themselves as “refugees” in “the system” (or U.S. resettlement structure) but not necessarily like other refugees or other Iraqis living in the same communities. I also briefly discuss resettlement 'success' as framed under U.S. policies regarding refugees does not necessarily reflect how post-2003

3 UNHCR (2003, May). The Iraq Situation. <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>. And United Nations "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugee." UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=protectandid=3c0762ea4>.

Iraqi refugees view successful settlement. Notions of invisibility and/or the *flattening* of post-2003 displaced Iraqis into the all-encompassing categories within the North American Iraqi diaspora has had significant effects on their construction of identity as well as acculturation within the context of the U.S. and at the local level.

3.2. The “War in Iraq”

The modern state of Iraq that the United States invaded in 2003 had suffered from decades of war and sanctions. Once a cosmopolitan country with a vibrant economy, Iraq had been transformed into a repressive and stagnant state under the regime of Saddam Hussain. The impacts of the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and years of United Nations sanctions resulted in economic depression, high unemployment rates, and a 'brain-drain' of educated classes as well as skilled professionals (Alnasrawi 2001). Historically, the effects of the Ottoman, Heshemite, and British powers seemed to ensure that the stability of tribal, familial and religious ties however, some would argue the state's tumultuous history would trump any sense of national unity (Marr 1985; Tripp 2002).

Prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, research regarding the pending refugee crisis warned of the implications and possible consequences of conflict for the citizens of Iraq and bordering nations. The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies (CCIS) at the University of California, San Diego released a report, “War in Iraq: An Impending

Refugee Crisis? Uncertain Risks, Inadequate Preparation and Coordination,” by Gil Loescher (2002), just prior to the start of military operations in 2003. This piece warned against underestimating the impending refugee calamity. Loescher explains:

It is impossible to predict with any degree of certainty that there will be a new Iraqi refugee crisis as a consequence of a possible war. The exact extent of any refugee problem will ultimately be determined by the manner and duration of a military campaign and the extent to which it might produce internal political upheavals in Iraq both during and after the conflict (2002:1).

By and large, the “War in Iraq” is *legally* defined in the U.S. as beginning with the initial operations on March 20, 2003, continuing through President George W. Bush's formal announcement of the end of major combat operations May 1, 2003, and concluding with the declaration officially ending the war on December 15, 2011. The report continues:

While these risks are hard to quantify at this stage, what is clear is that the mechanisms and resources needed to respond to worst-case scenarios are not yet in place and the lack of coordination and contingency planning between the military and international and nongovernmental agencies to date is a cause for great alarm (2002: 1).

Loescher's report fell upon deaf ears and today millions of Iraqis remain in transition.

In spite of the fact that combat operations for U.S. troops have now been *officially* over since May 1, 2003, the effects of the conflict continue to resonate in the lives of the displaced complicating not only how they see the U.S. as *home*, but also how their new

host country sees them. For example, interviewees in this study overwhelmingly identified 'the war' as the years spanning from 2003 to the present day. When asked about the war being over, participants expressed emotionally charged phrases like:

“...the last seven years of the war is hurting so many lives...the news stops talking about it now that more of the army came home. But even your army is still dying in Iraq.” (30 year old female from Portland, March 2010)

and:

“Texans think the war is over, it is not over. People flee and die everyday.” (26 year old male and former Interpreter/guide for U.S. Army, Austin, July 2011)

These quotes are representative of many participants in this study who emphasized the situation that *caused* their current refugee status and violence in their homeland. For the displaced Iraqi combat zone refugees, SIV holders, and asylum seekers in this study, the timeline is very different; for many post-2003 Iraqis, the build-up to the war and years of reconstruction following combat operations spanned from intelligence gathering and continues today with a substantial presence of U.S. and coalition force troops actively engaging in peace-keeping and/or state-building efforts.

At times of conflict or in the name of national security, the prevention of the production of refugees tends to be pushed down on the list of priorities as in the case of

the war in Iraq (also see DeFronzo 2010). Nevertheless, through military campaigns, the United States has displaced millions of people from Korea to Vietnam, Afghanistan and now Iraq leaving the international community to deal with what is often presented to the public as, “yet another group of refugees” (UNHCR 2003; also see Stockman 2008) fleeing violence in their homeland.⁴

Motivation for the U.S. led invasion into Iraq aside, by 2004, debate about the transition from war to state-building efforts focused on a failed state with an indeterminate number of internally displaced people, civil strife, and mass exodus of anyone who could flee (Feldman 2004; McGovern 2006). Noah Feldman's *What We Owe Iraq* (2004) described the dilemmas of state-building following the war and acknowledged the moral obligation the U.S. had to the country and people of Iraq. Similarly, George McGovern and William Polk's *Out of Iraq* (2006) examined the implications of a failed Iraq at the global scale. While both pieces briefly discuss the “human costs” of the continued presence in Iraq, acknowledging the issue of displacement and the creation of refugees, neither offer substantial debate nor a solution to the problem.

4 News agencies and NGO reports following the 2003 invasion discussed the impact of the conflict and displacement of “yet another group of refugees” (UNHCR 2003) of concern to the international community. For example, this June 24, 2003 UNHCR press release about displacement and the ongoing violence in Iraq: “The UN refugee agency is stepping up efforts to help refugees and internally displaced Iraqis in post-war Iraq. These range from finding alternative housing for hundreds of displaced Palestinians in Baghdad, to registering undocumented Syrian refugees, and providing relief aid for Iraqi Kurds returning in the north.”

3.3. Pre and Post-2003 Iraqi Refugees

The literature on the Iraqi diaspora identifies different waves of Iraqi refugees in the past three decades (Tolay-Sargnon 2007; Jamil, et al., 2007; Jamil et al., 2012). These include: 1) those who fled the violence of the Iraq/Iran war in the 1980s; 2) individuals seeking refuge in the early 1990s during and in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; 3) and the newest wave of refugees displaced from the 2003 War in Iraq.

Generally, Middle Eastern migrants came to the United States in two historical periods. The first groups arrived in the years before and during World War II, and the second came post–World War II. Between the years of 1924 and 1965, immigration to the United States from Arab communities was extremely limited. In accordance with the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, a quota of no more than 100 Arabs were admitted annually. “Early immigration reports suggest that immigrants from the Arab community did not come to the United States in response to persecution or political repression” (Kobel 2000: 3). Specifically, the literature suggests most “Muslims came seeking economic wealth that they ultimately planned to transport back to their native countries” (ibid: 3). This changed when a large number of Iraqi refugees migrated to the U.S. fleeing the 1991 Gulf War. Approximately 10,000 Iraqi refugees were admitted to the U.S. at this time. The two main groups seeking asylum and refuge included “the Kurds, a minority group in Iraq

who were the target of Iraqi persecution, and Muslim Shi'a, from southern Iraq, who demonstrated animosity toward Saddam Hussein in 1991 by orchestrating an uprising against the regime” (Kobel 2000: 4).

Although the recent “Operation Iraqi Freedom” has been compared to the 1991 military campaign “Operation Desert Storm” - which aided in the defense of the sovereign state of Kuwait from hostile take-over by the Saddam Hussein regime - the two most recent groups of refugees do not view themselves in the same way. In an interview with a staff member working at a refugee resettlement agency in Austin, Texas the delineation of the groups is clearly expressed:

“I was born in America, my parents came here as a different kind of refugee in the 1980s...more like political migrants. We moved back to Iraq when I was in school and left again when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1991...it was scary. I am a U.S. citizen...went to university in the U.S. ...I don’t have anything in common with these new Iraqi refugees...they are different.” (Ash - September 2011)

Further questioning revealed how the participant viewed his own Iraqi-American identity compared to the post-2003 Iraqi refugees clients he assists on a daily basis:

“I work with them everyday and many seem lost, traumatized and like...think they are owed something by this country for fighting in the war and speaking English for the soldiers. I don’t know... maybe we owe them something, I mean they’re not like the Cubans or the Burmese I find jobs

for...do we (owe them)?“ (ibid)

It follows that *lumping* of Iraqi refugees is problematic creating a singular narrative within the diaspora. Iraqi refugees are aware of this lumping and are quite capable of critiquing it. When asked, another participant living in Austin, Texas stated:

“Americans and Europeans think we are all the same. When I made it to Syria they just told me to keep applying (to come to the U.S.) like the rest of the Iraqis. But I had letters from the Army...and the officers...the ones I worked for; I am not like the others (referring to other Iraqis and refugees living in the U.S) ...I didn’t want to leave, I made money as a terp (interpreter) and believe in a democratic Iraq...I had to leave, they put notes on my car and threatened my family that I was working for the enemy and I would be punished.” (28 year old male – August 2011)

Given this difference in the waves of immigration, it is important not to lump all Iraqi refugees together. One would not want to suggest that generalizations about refugees and exiles in the United States are invalid, as such, issues regarding marginalization, acculturation, and identity are vital to aiding in policy-making and assistance throughout the (re)settlement process for all refugees entering the United States. However, as this study demonstrates, drawing lines of comparison between displaced persons receiving special status in the U.S.—such as post-2003 Iraqis and Tibetans or Eritreans—is as problematic as lumping the different historical waves of Iraqi refugees (re)settled here. Instead, one possible way to better understand the tensions post-2003 Iraqis in the U.S.

context would be to look at the making of war refugee identity and other combat zone refugees—like the Vietnamese—whose displacement was also 'caused' by an American military campaign abroad.

3.3.1. The Making of War Refugee Identity

The employment of thousands of Iraqis as intelligence workers, contractors, translators, and guides prior to and during conflict is a practice not limited to the War in Iraq. Using sympathetic members of the local or indigenous populations to aid in the overthrow of a government is a tradition as old as war itself. Historically, throughout all stages of conflict countless numbers of people become displaced for numerous reasons. Those aligning themselves and interacting with the 'invading' force are at serious risk for reprisal resulting in the need to seek asylum outside their country of origin.

Based on this context, Iraqi refugees in this study exist as a particular refugee type in the increasingly diasporic and forced-migratory world. Consequently, they 1) work with the United States or coalition countries; 2) do so not as traitors to their people, but because they imagine a “better Iraq” can be attained through collaboration with the liberating forces; and 3) as a result, are exiled to the United States, a space where they are similarly pushed to the margins of society for numerous reasons—e.g., for their status as a 'refugee' or for occupying what Sharma (2010) has called Brown Space: the trans-racial

territory of the terrorist. As such, these refugees exist in a complex web of militaristic and national alliances with particular implications for their sense of self. As Peake (2011) argues, the contradictory nature of alliances in the spaces of neoliberal militarism reflects new meanings on Clifford Geertz's oft cited definition of culture as "the webs of significance [man] himself has spun" (Geertz 1973:5). Webs, as Peake (2011) notes, are systems of tensions and contradictions collaboratively constructed in discourses of recognition, and most important for this study, identification.

Despite the low number of Iraqis actually granted entry to the United States post-2003 (Cochetel, 2007; Frelick 2007; Walsche 2010), participants in this study would relate being identified as a "traitor" or "collaborator" in Iraq to their experiences of identification or "miss-identification" in Austin or Portland and through state or national popular media outlets. For example, in June 2011, a male SIV participant in Austin asked if I had "read about that Paul senator guy who Kenner blogged about on the Foreign Policy site?" Referring to a post by David Kenner (2011) on "The Cable" a reporting outlet sponsored by Foreign Policy.org, Kenner reported on how Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) took exception to the number of refugees from Iraqi who have been granted asylum in the U.S. "There's a democratic government over there, and I think they need to be staying and helping rebuild their country," Paul said. "We don't need them over here on government welfare. Why are we admitting 18,000 people per year for political asylum

from Iraq, which is an ally of ours?”⁵ This is just one example of how identification of post-2003 Iraqi refugees shapes the making of a war refugee identity for this particular group resettled to the U.S.

Although policy-driven reports such as the Migration Policy Institute’s (MPI) discussion on post-9/11 migration, highlights the changes in U.S. immigration policy as seen through the prism of national security (Walters 2002; Mittelstadt, et al, 2011) and other more general work on immigration rights (Triandafyllidou 2008; also see Wright and Ellis 2000) offer a unique perspective on how refugees are seen through the lens of the state, few specifically focus on the refugees from U.S.-led military campaigns. To better understand the extent of how complex the post-2003 Iraqi refugee identity is, it is necessary to reflect upon personal narratives (George and Stratford 2005), of groups who see themselves as different, and how literary and media discourses have viewed—or failed to acknowledge the reasons for analyzing difference within the all encompassing category of 'refugee' (Cochetel, 2007; Frelick 2007).

3.3.2. *A Vietnamese Comparison and 'Webs' of Tension*

To situate the concept of U.S. war refugees and examination of their identities,

5 Numerous blogs and news agencies reported on the statements made by Rep. Paul, in this project I attempted to retrace sources recommended by participants to better understand *how* and *where* they received their information while living in the U.S. http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/08/rand_paul_lashes_out_at_tsa_iraq_refugees

sense of belonging, and conceptions of home once resettled to the United States, it is possible to utilize other studies about U.S. military campaigns and the refugees produced from these conflicts. I draw for comparison an analysis on the changing Vietnamese identity in America and the situation causing their displacement as discussed by James E. Freeman (1989; 1995) in his work on Vietnamese refugee identity. Freeman's earlier pieces (1989) expand upon the differences in the identities of the more than 200,000 Vietnamese who have entered the U.S. as legal immigrants after 1980 and the 700,000 who directly fled the war because of their political allegiance or ties to the United States.

Historically, throughout all stages of conflict countless numbers of people become displaced for numerous reasons. Those aligning themselves and interacting with the 'invading' force are at serious risk for reprisal resulting in the need to seek asylum outside their country of origin. For the United States, there are a few examples of this in recent history. As highlighted in the opening excerpt of the January 2007 article by Goodheart and Bohrer, the Vietnam War is “a story eerily reminiscent of tales from Southeast Asia more than three decades ago, when hundreds of thousands of our loyal allies faced imprisonment and death as the Vietnam War drew to a close” (*USA Today* 2007). Similarly, the Iraq War has caused millions of internally displaced persons and refugees to flee prior, during, and in the aftermath of the conflict. This link is important to analyzing the historical roots of the Vietnamese refugee exodus and the formation of

Vietnamese American identity in America (1995) and applicable to framing an understanding of other contemporary refugee groups who are produced through U.S. military campaigns abroad and the tensions faced as they resettle in the country that caused their displacement.

Freeman's (1989) work suggests that unlike immigrants who chose to migrate to America, Vietnamese refugee reactions to living in the United States are mixed (1989: 226-267). Presenting the dichotomy the author calls attention to the struggles this group faces in, “a country which abandoned them at the war's end, but then took them in as refugees, giving them political freedom and new educational and economic opportunities” (1995: 7).

Like the Vietnamese, the making of these Iraqi war refugees is only the start of the 'webs' of tensions (Peake 2011; also see Geertz 1973) complicating the everyday lives of post-2003 displaced Iraqis and their construction of identity and a sense of belonging within the context of the U.S. One could argue that the scenario is not the same for refugees coming from Sudan, Tibet, or Russia. For post-2003 Iraqi refugees who supported the liberation efforts in Iraq, not only is the constituting of a new Iraqi identity complicated by their status of 'refugee,' it is reflective of their view of American and their traumatic experiences during the recent conflict in Iraq. Kristopher Nelson's (1996, 2007; also see George and Stratford 2005) research on the role of narratives in the formation of

community draws on Geertz (1973) and Levi-Strauss (1966) to analyze the different scales of meaning and belonging in community. Nelson (2007) argues:

Together, these symbols and myths provide the structure for our world-views. They constitute a cohesive narrative of existence, a kind mental map (or text) which functions, in much the same way as a geographic map, as a guide to the terrain of life. From them we generate ideas, interact with people, deal with new situations, and perform other activities we would be unable to do without a framework in which to make decisions. But inevitably, the categorization which is involved in the process of map-formation leaves distortions or even blank spaces in the map, giant regions of unexplored or inaccurate territory (2007:13-14)⁶.

There are numerous ways in which refugees and exiles reveal tensions in their experiences or express conflictual situations in countries of asylum. In the United States and Europe, for example, widespread socio-economic problems in the past decade contribute to subtle changes in the perceptions of refugees from victims in need of aid to antagonists competing for social benefits, scarce jobs, and affordable housing (UNHCR 1997).⁷ Compounding this further, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks the presence of individuals perceived to be of Middle Eastern decent or Muslim in the U.S. represented an additional threat to the security of the host country. Ultimately, more often in the

6 Also see: Kristopher Nelson blog entry www.inpropriapersona.com/webs-of-significance-clifford-geertz/June 2007.

7 UNHCR Statements, 5 October 1997. Remarks by UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, at the Symposium "Peace is the Name of God."

public eye, refugees are inextricably lumped into one all-encompassing group and then often conflated with economic migrants or illegal immigration, worsening the erosion of the concept and practice of asylum (ibid).

The tensions post-2003 Iraqi refugees face throughout the (re)settlement process, specifically with regard to displacement by the American military campaign in Iraq in the first decade of the 21st century, is complex and multi-layered. Like refugees escaping the Vietnam War, for post-2003 Iraqis, this process was initiated by the need to flee the violence and war in their home country and seek refuge in a new host state—in this case the country who 'created' their displacement. Ethnic violence and civil war, sexual and political or religious persecution, all fall into acceptable causes for flight (UNHCR 2011). I would argue that in a post- 9/11 world, where the state's role becomes surveillance over welfare, both the symbolic and material aspects of identity (Sharma 2010) and home are complicated by the mediation of 'refugee' in the identity-making process. Again, drawing upon Geertz (1973) as well as Levi-Strauss (1966), I highlight similarities in the tensions of resettled Vietnamese and post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in the country that caused their displacement. The refugee is bound up in symbolic and/or mythic representations which, in the present and over time, serve to generate and maintain meaning (also see Nelson 1996, 2007). Here, the concept of 'home' is not only important, but necessary for understanding how participants in this study express how they navigate daily (De Certeau

1988) 'tensions' (Geertz 1973) during the resettlement process and how meaning can equate to into a sense of belonging in their new host country.

On the other hand, a comparison of Vietnamese and Iraqi refugee groups is arguably problematic, work by Record and Terrill (2004; also see JFQ 2011) has extensively debated that a comparison of the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. This literature often maintains that: “in the areas of U.S. military commitment, war aims, nature and scale of operations, loss rates, pacification and state-building activities, role of allies, and domestic political sustainability reveals more differences than similarities between the two conflicts” (JFQ 2011: 103).⁸ However, discussion regarding displacement lacks analytical exploration of lived experiences making it difficult to compare some aspects of post-2003 Iraqi refugee living in the U.S. Therefore this study seeks to examine how they may differ from other refugees, across diasporic communities, in their formation of new identities and sense of home in exile.

3.4. Refugee Resettlement Process

The complex and expensive process of refugee resettlement begins at the

8 See, for example, Robert Freeman's, “Is Iraq Another Vietnam? Actually It May Become Worse,” April 19, 2004, available at www.commondreams.org/views04/0419-11.htm; Danny Schetcher's, “The Unreported Vietnam-Iraq Parallel,” May 1, 2005, available at www.commondreams.org/views05/0501-32.htm; Melvin Laird's, “Iraq: Learning the Lessons of Vietnam,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6 (November–December 2005), available at www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61195/melvin-r-laird/iraq-learning-the-lessons-of-vietnam; Warren Wilkins', “Iraq: The New Vietnam,” May 1, 2008, available at

international level and involves numerous actors and agreements (Chambers 1986; UNHCR 2011; United States 2011). The process initiates with the pre-screening, identification, and referral of people who have been forcibly displaced outside their national borders. The word ‘refugee’ carries an explicit meaning and those identified as refugees fall under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2011) making them the recipients of a certain degree of attention and support. ”Refugee” is a status referring to a subset of the displaced — defined narrowly by the 1951 Convention on Refugees as someone 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 to or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UNHCR 2011). Under this mandate, approximately twelve million people worldwide are refugees.

Although the bulk of refugee referrals come from the UNHCR, the United States, through cooperative agreements also receives recommendations of resettlement support from U.S. embassies and certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well. Even though the UNHCR estimates over forty-two million people currently displaced in the world (UNHCR 2011) the criteria set over sixty years ago remained relatively unchanged.

Once a displaced person is identified as a refugee, the resettlement project is in

just the initial stage. At the international level, the UNHCR mandates finding “durable solutions” as a primary goal in addressing the current refugee situation. The three possibilities for refugee placement under UNHCR guidelines prioritize repatriation to the refugee's home state first. The second possibility is local integration in the receiving state and finally, resettlement to a third state. For a refugee or refugee group to be resettled, they are first selected and recommended by the UNHCR for resettlement to a third state which has voluntarily agreed to accept them (UNHCR 2011). In this case, that country is the United States.

3.4.1. United States Resettlement

After the comprehensive and rigorous screening process, potential applicants who are able to successfully meet the criteria as defined by the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 chosen to resettle in the United States begin a long and arduous process of building a new life. The U.S. Department of State’s (State) Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) has overall responsibility for the management of the inter-agency partnership identified as the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The USRAP and has the lead in proposing admissions numbers of refugees and processing priorities in status of individuals or groups. Following the events on September 11, 2001, the refugees admitted to the U.S. fall under regulations and rules unlike immigrants or other incoming

visa groups, ultimately, the enforcement of these directives is the responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, U.S. immigration and refugee policy has developed based on narrow and evolving theories of 'national security'. Immigration reform legislation, federal regulations, and administrative policy changes have been justified in terms of the nation's safety. On 1 March 2003, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was folded into the massive new U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), formally making immigration a homeland defense concern (Keller 2005: 749-50).

The events of 9/11 affected all immigrants coming to the U.S., for refugees and asylees in particular, the changes were even more critical. Donald Kerwin (2005) highlights in his piece, "The Use and Misuse of 'National Security' Rationale in Crafting U.S. Refugee and Immigration Policies," how the process and policy were questionable.

Counterterror and immigration experts increasingly agree on what constitute effective and appropriate immigration policy reforms in light of the terrorist threat. Unfortunately, many of the post-September 11 policy changes do little to advance public safety and violate the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. These include reductions in refugee admissions, the criminal prosecution of asylum seekers, the blanket detention of Haitians, and a safe third-country asylum agreement between the United States and Canada. Other measures offend basic rights and may undermine counterterror efforts. These include 'preventive' arrests, closed deportation proceedings, and 'call-in' registration programs (2005: 749-763).

Currently, the United States continues to lead the world in number of refugees it resettles annually. Since 1974, the U.S. has resettled over three million refugees (USRAP 2011). All refugee resettlement is voluntary. In 2011, approximately 80,000 refugees were resettled in the U.S., 13,823 were Iraqi. Each year the U.S. Department of State proposes a ‘ceiling’ for refugee admissions, which then must be approved by the legislature (State 2010). Historically, the U.S. has volunteered to assist refugees from particular geographic regions or political affiliations. Present admissions continue to be determined through a combination of UNHCR recommendation and U.S. interests (Boas 2007).

The process by which a refugee enters the U.S. continues to be logistically challenging. Individuals are put through a demanding admissions and screening process. This rigorous process requires detailed personal histories and cause for displacement (United States 2011). The nature of the process, coupled with the low number of admissions means that refugees arriving to the U.S. have spent years in refugee camp(s) or temporary homes (United States 2011). Once in the new host country, refugees typically must learn a new language, navigate a new culture and manage a whole new set of hardships (IOM 2011; *Caritas of Austin* 2011).

In the United States, the current resettlement structure is based on the definitions and strategy proposed in the Refugee Act of 1980. In reaction to the influx of hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the Vietnam War, this act set the groundwork for

creating and administering state-led integration programs shouldering the weight of resettlement (Freeman 1989, 1995). Defining refugees, structured resettlement, and importantly, setting the precedence for priorities within refugee resettlement, the Act framed successful refugee integration as economic self-sufficiency (Kennedy 1981; Leibowitz 1983; United States 1980). Due to the fact it “failed to reduce welfare dependency among refugees” as one of its primary objectives, a 1981 amendment was passed to help alleviate the economic issues arriving refugees came up against (United States 1981). The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) was established by the original act with the explicit mission to “provide(s) people in need with critical resources to assist them in becoming integrated members of American Society,” (ACF 2008) through the coordination and implementation of refugee resettlement programs (Kennedy 1981: 143).

3.4.2. U.S. Federal Response to Post-2003 Iraqi Refugees

In March 2010, seven years after the onset of war, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) was tasked with reporting to Congressional Committees the status of post-Iraqi refugees resettled to the United States. GAO report number GAO-10-274 entitled “Iraq: Iraqi Refugees and Special Immigrant Visa Holders Face Challenges Resettling in the United States and Obtaining U.S. Government Employment,” released on March 9, 2010 provides:

[...] information on the (1) status of resettled Iraqis in the United States and the initial challenges they face, (2) benefits afforded Iraqi refugees and SIV holders, and (3) challenges they face obtaining employment with the federal government. (GAO-10-274).

Reports suggest, as of the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samara in February 2006, “the United States has taken a lead role in resettling the displaced” (ibid). However, policy before and during the first four years of the military campaign in Iraq waxed and waned in regards to actual admittance of refugees from this region to the U.S. “The number of Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States declined from 3,158 in 2000 to a low of 66 in 2004 before rising to 1,608 in 2007. Since large-scale Iraqi refugee processing was announced in February 2007, DHS and DOS have worked cooperatively to increase the number of Iraqi refugees admitted to the U.S.” (ibid).

Triggering the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, the bombing event in Samara resulted in the international community urging the U.S. government to consider an increase the number refugee, asylees, and special immigrant visas (SIVs) admitted to the U.S. for resettlement.

In 2003, Iraqis of all ethnicities and religions temporarily fled the general violence of the U.S.-led military intervention. But the displacement that has occurred since the February 2006 bombing of the Samarra mosque affected all of Iraq's different groups in unprecedented proportions, altering the demographic fabric of the nation for the foreseeable future. Sunnis fled Shi'a-dominated areas

for predominantly Sunni provinces or went abroad; Shi'a fled Sunni provinces for predominantly Shi'a provinces or abroad; Arabs evacuated Kurdish areas of Iraq and Christians have largely left the country altogether. As an unintended consequence of the U.S. invasion, Iraqis of all ethnic and religious backgrounds who have worked for Coalition forces have been targeted for assassination (Schneller 2010).

The *Migration Information Source* (MIS) reports, out of the total number (3,765) of Iraqi-born lawful permanent residents (LPR) who were admitted to the U.S. in 2007, refugees and political asylees accounted for just thirty-eight percent (2011).⁹ The actual goal for 2007 U.S. fiscal year (FY) was to admit 7,000 Iraqi refugees, actual entrants admitted equalled 1,608 (BBC 2007). The low number of refugees admitted prior to 2007 was scrutinized in the international press, neighboring countries dealing with masses of displaced, and by NGOs¹⁰ aiding in relief efforts. Nevertheless, between 2000 and 2007, just 0.4 percent (33,349) of the over eight million immigrants who received LPR over the

9 Data Sources include: U.S. Census Bureau. 2010 American Community Survey. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics. 2010 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, various tables. Available online. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Iraqi Refugee Processing, Fact Sheet, February 11, 2009. Available online. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, USCIS Announces New Special Immigrant Visa for Certain Iraqi Nationals who Worked for the U.S. Government, USCIS Update, July 9, 2008. Available online.

10 "UN welcomes US Iraq refugee plan," BBC News, a 15 February 2007 report, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6362289.stm#map, (accessed April 12, 2010). "Warnings of Iraq refugee crisis," BBC News, a 22 January 2007 report, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6286129.stm (accessed March 1, 2011). "Number of Iraqi Refugees Admitted to U.S. Declining Despite Promises to Boost Admissions," Published January 2, 2008. Associated Press, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,319571,00.html#ixzz23kMJuGeI> (accessed February 3 2012).

same period were Iraqi-born. This figure includes refugees, asylum seekers within the overall migrant category and did not separate war refugees aiding in the war effort.

In 2008, however, the number of Iraqis admitted to the United States as refugees increased to 13,823 (MIS 2011). Working closely “to enhance processing capacity of Iraqi refugee applicants while ensuring the highest level of security,” (ibid) the DHS and DOS reported an increase number of Iraqis resettled in 2008. Ambassador James Foley, Senior Coordinator on Iraqi Refugee Issues, testified before Congress in 2008¹¹ stating, “over the last decade or two, we’ve admitted several thousand refugee arrivals per month in a number of cases involving Burmese, Somali, Liberian, Russian, and Kosovo Refugees. And we’re going to do it this time with the Iraqi case load” (Briefing on Developments 2008). Additionally, the MIS (2011) disclosed, “In support of these efforts, USCIS consistently deploys more than 45-50 officers per quarter to the Middle East to conduct refugee processing circuit rides. To date, USCIS reported it has interviewed more than 101,000 Iraqi refugee applicants” (also see GAO 2010).

The Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2008 provided clear guideline procedures for Iraqis facing persecution as a result of their collaboration or assistance to the U.S. These refugees were expected to receive special visas expeditiously, allowing for their safe

¹¹ "Briefing on Developments in the Iraqi Refugee and Special Immigrant Visa (SVI) Admission Programs." (by Ambassador Foley), U.S. State Department, February 4, 2008.

resettlement. Unfortunately, U.S. agencies tasked implementing procedures to aid applicants failed to comply with numerous parts of the legislation. “Many of the reporting requirements have gone unmet, and many additional procedural hurdles have been put in place. As a result, application processing may take years instead of weeks or months” (IRAP 2011).¹² The impact of policy failure for this new wave of U.S. war refugees applying for SIVs reinforced the state of “limbo” displaced people around the globe experience. Moreover, for many participants in this study, their new host nation is the same country that led the military campaign that 'caused' their displacement, yet U.S. agencies remained unsympathetic to their plight.

Legally, Iraqi refugees and SIV holders are eligible for assistance and certain public benefits upon arrival in the U.S. The DOS provides resettlement agencies \$1,800 per person to cover basic housing, food, and assistance for accessing services during their initial thirty days in the U.S. In some cases, if basic needs have not been met, support may continue for up to ninety days. All refugees automatically receive these benefits no matter where they settle, as expected there are minor variations in resettlement assistance from one state to another. Iraqi SIV holders specifically must elect to receive these

12 Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) “led a coalition of NGOs and attorneys in drafting a set of comprehensive suggested reforms to the SIV process.” Which was a result of the group's participation in a “series of briefings at the White House with members of the National Security Council, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense on potential reforms to the Special Immigrant Visa Process” (2011). Report found at: http://refugeerights.org/wp-content/files/Iraqi_SIV_Program_Recommendations.pdf

benefits within ten days of receiving their visas. As a result of December 2009 legislation, qualified Iraqi refugees and SIV holders can receive certain forms of assistance for up to seven years through public benefits programs. However, prior to December 2009, SIV holders' eligibility for public benefits typically were terminated after just eight months. If they do not qualify for public benefits, some Iraqis have received monetary and medical assistance up to eight months from HHS if they have access to the information in time. HHS also funds a variety of social services and access to training for up to five years. This includes job preparation and English language classes, for both Iraqi refugees and SIV holders.

It is important to note that “the diversity visa category, which is authorized under section 203(c) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, makes available 50,000 permanent resident visas annually to persons from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States” (MIS 2009, 2011). The act specified that “potential immigrants must apply for eligibility and visas are awarded at random by lottery selection” (ibid). Although not specifically designed to address the situation regarding displaced Iraqis affected by the war, this act did help to increase the number of Iraqi refugees admitted following its implementation.

It is easy to find criticism in the post-2003 Iraqi refugee situation, especially when compared to the hundreds of thousands of displaced Vietnamese who came to the U.S. in

the aftermath of the war. All in all, since the “large-scale processing of refugees began in fiscal year 2007,” just a little over 166,000 Iraqi-born individual were referred for resettlement in the U.S. (DHS 2011). The DHS reports that between 2003 and 2011 the USRAP approved over 84,000 Iraqi applicants for resettlement and admitted a little more than 58,000 of them, admittedly continuing to fall short of U.S. goals¹³ set year after year.

During the war in Vietnam, no one fleeing the conflict was allowed into the U.S. as a refugee. However, in the decade following the April 1975 airlift out of Saigon, nearly 300,000 were permitted to resettle. The wars are similar, but the situation is different. Whether through legal or illegal avenues, entry to the U.S. prior to the events of 9/11 has to be taken into consideration. Following 9/11, the “tightening” of the borders and the establishment of DHS federal agencies, like the PRM, argue the number of admitted remained low because of the slow admission process, paperwork, and clearances. On the other hand, for participants in this study, the low number of refugees from Iraq admitted to the U.S. in the past decade is a topic that often reflected views about the recent economic downturn, being associated with 9/11 terrorism, xenophobic America or otherness. In the following chapter, I will highlight these ideas and more as the narratives

13 According to Gary Ackerman (2008) in his report, “Neglected Responsibilities: The U.S. Response to the Iraqi Refugee Crisis” and the U.S House of Representatives (March 11, 2008), the goal for the fiscal year was to resettle 12,000 Iraqis to the U.S. But by January only 375 were granted approval. Meeting this goal seemed unattainable; after five months into FY08 just 1,876 Iraqis refugees (averaging 375 per month) had been resettled.

and lived experiences of post-2003 Iraqis living in two U.S. cities are discussed.

CHAPTER IV

EXPERIENCES, IDENTITIES AND HOME: IRAQI REFUGEES IN PORTLAND AND AUSTIN

8/5/11

There had been a lull in my interview schedule about a week into Ramadan, so I was happy to get a call asking if I had time to meet Marwan. He suggested at a small “hip” coffee shop called Dominican Joe's in the SoCo district, where a few of the participants in my study said they liked the coffee and music. Daily temperatures in Austin were now over a hundred degrees and few participants were excited to venture out in their free time. It was almost sundown and a relatively short walk down North Congress Avenue to the meeting place. Consumed by the heat, I stopped on the crowded bridge to take a drink of water. Sweat poured down my face as I realized the famous SoCo bats would be ready to take flight if that sun would just sink lower in the sky. A man with a heavy accent near me pointed out the Texas State Capitol Building to my back and in broken English said, “This is my home, the Loon [Lone] Star state.” His friend corrected him, “Lone, like Aaah-lone (emphasis added to his pronunciation). “This is because it only has one star on the flag. Come on now, we must eat and drink before our shift.” The first man responded quietly in Arabic, “Insha'Allah.” I walked on and thought about the symbology of the capitol building, the flag and the conversation I just witnessed. Home has so many meanings. Here, on this bridge it is a refuge for hundreds of thousands of protected bats, and the city is home to these two men on their way to work after a long hot day of fasting.

—Field notes related to interview with Marwan

4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter draws a comparison between Iraqi refugee experiences in Austin and

Portland to interrogate a broader understanding of identity, belonging and home among the wider Iraqi refugee group. An analysis of data collected during field exercises has revealed a number of patterns concerning the connection between home and identity that extend beyond the local community, connecting Iraqi immigrants across state boundaries and outside of well-established, large scale, traditional gateway cities.

When setting out to determine the study location(s) and scope of this project, my primary concerns included: a) the accessibility of Iraqi refugees in a given location and, b) the size of participatory group in that city. With these considerations in mind, I narrowed my focus to comprise of non-traditional immigrant cities within the United States as a way to understand the *creation* of discourses of home, instead of the *adoption* of those very discourses — as is the case in traditional gateway cities. I looked at the literature on migration within the past decade on locations with emerging trends in cities with fewer established networks for migrants. Organizations like the Brookings Institute and government agencies have a long history of publishing data on migration in the U.S., therefore initial city selection was not difficult.

Fieldwork took place between 2010-2012 with multiple trips to both locations. As expressed in this chapter's opening passage, Austin and Portland became familiar places for me, both in terms of their physical landscapes and emotional geography. My goal was to use the narratives of refugee research participants in both cities to better understand the

lived experiences of making home by Iraqis. By exposing myself to their practices and notions of home *in situ*, I encountered the everyday struggles that settled refugees endure in building senses of identity, belonging and home within their new host nation. I was reminded daily that these refugees have been exposed to or experienced trauma and persecution which they carried with them to their new home (Wise 2004). Often, refugees' life experiences have entailed being threatened, interrogated or physically harmed. Fearing for their lives, concerned about solicited information being used against them and their families or simply stress from forced displacement often leaves lasting physical and psychological damage to cope with. The extent of disclosure in the interviews became possible through the relationship of trust built between the participants and myself. As an intern and volunteer in both the Portland and Austin communities over the past two and a half years I learned invaluable skills and support techniques to compassionately engage in instances where memories or experiences were emotional.

The pull of immigrant populations to U.S. metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, New York and Detroit has historically forced migration scholars to focus on the importance of these spaces as 'gateway states': California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Michigan (Frey, 2005, 2006; Gozdziaik and Martin 2005; Singer 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2006). As mentioned above, this case study analyzes the narratives of participants in two metropolitan areas located in the United States but outside

traditional gateways. Chapters on both Austin and Portland are found in the recent, *Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America* (eds. Singer et al 2008) highlighting the growing immigrant communities in areas outside the norm. Research by Skop and Buentello (2008) places Austin a “pre-emerging gateway” category, while in the discussion on Portland, Hardwick and Meacham (2008) define the city as a “re-emerging” gateway, calling for more research in these growing locations.

One motivation for choosing Austin and Portland for my study was to draw upon the experiences of resettled post-2003 Iraqis in two similar types of urban environments. These cities lack the large-scale social networks that typify traditional immigrant “gateway cities” (Singer 2004). In these non-gateway cities, I was able to focus on the actual *production* of identity and home in the first instance, and not simply the adoption of historically situated, pre-existing discourses of home and identity as occurs in gateway cities. My initial intuition in these sites was to address White's (2002) critique that geographic research on refugees is typically only found at the local or international scales, reproducing a false clear distinction between the two at the expense of what should be a local-state-international tripartite micro- to macro- structure. As I discuss in the case studies in this chapter, however, White's critique is actually moot based on empirical evidence. The local and the state, as Tsing (2006) states in her response to Appadurai (2006), can only be understood and experienced at the local level. While

political economic approaches can address the means and mediums of flows of capital and potential domination, it cannot address whether domination actually occurs and through what means. This study, while not addressing domination or imperialism, does argue against White's conception by way of Tsing's critique, suggesting that the state and the transnational are always already mediated by the local. More to point, however, my research suggests that state-level location differences are absent in refugee experiences of defining identity and home.

4.2. A Tale of Two Cities

If one is not familiar with Austin, Texas or Portland, Oregon it is possible to simply look at a map or the geography of these two locations and discover unexpected similarities. The capital city of Austin is centrally located in the Texas Hill Country about a four hour drive south of the internationally renowned Dallas-Fort Worth on I-35. Here you find short spiny hills hugging a bustling urban landscape with the tree-lined, slow-moving "little" Colorado River winding through the center. Historical areas, modern downtown, and green spaces remain filled with youthful residents and tourists accessing a wide range of activities throughout the metropolitan area. The physical landscape of Portland is also varied topographically with the tree-lined Willamette River running through the middle and abundant green spaces throughout. Although the Pacific

Northwest city is not the capitol of Oregon, it is the largest and most populated city in the state. Portland is filled with parks, outdoor markets and historical areas accessed rain or shine keeping its residents involved and active. It would be easy to stop here and suggest other than climate, these sister cities would be perfect sites for a comparison or contrasting of lived experiences; however, it was important for this project about identity-making, belonging, and home to look deeper than generalizing about the two self-identified “weird” cities in the United States.

4.2.1. Are Austin and Portland Really Similar?

Shifting the focus of this chapter to a deeper look at the economic, political, and cultural similarities of the two cities, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the city of Austin experienced a boom economically. High-tech industry grew, bringing new enterprises and changes to the greater metropolitan area on whole. With the upturn, Travis County and surrounding counties saw increased growth and immigration of a wide range of people seeking new opportunities in the southwestern United States.

Comparatively, Portland is also home to high-tech-industry, although the city has not experienced the same rapid economic growth Austin has experienced in the recent decade. Still, the story is very similar, along with the lure of promising tech-jobs in both locations increasing numbers of immigrants have followed—many from Southeast Asian,

Chinese, Korean, Indians, and Pakistani—who make up a “brain drain” assemblage from around the globe (Hardwick and Meacham 2008).

In recent years, both Portland and Austin have held the attention of researchers and geographers interested in topics ranging from immigrant settlement and suburbanization (see, for example, Hardwick and Meacham 2008; Skop and Buentello 2008; Skop 2009) to attachment and sense of place (Long 2008, 2010), although few studies have significantly explored refugees in this context. Hardwick and Meacham (2008) highlight the importance of examining a gap such as this:

The post-1970s ever increasing population diversity in a place long dominated by white residents from other parts of the U.S. and Europe, make the Portland metropolitan area an ideal case study to (re) conceptualize larger socio-spatial questions related to refugee diasporas to other cities in the U.S. (2008: 254).

As with Portland, it is during this growth period forty years ago that Skop and Buentello (2008) argue changes in Austin's immigrant communities began to emerge and take shape. Joshua Long (2008) describes the cultural landscape of Austin from the 70s on:

A close examination of U.S. urban growth and development patterns since the 1970s would actually reveal that Austin, Texas is far from weird. Austin's ability to attract high-tech industry and creative human talent has made it a model success story, a sort of prototype of “creative city” development (2008: 29).

In both literature and popular media,¹⁴ Austin and Portland both have more than just topographic similarities in common for residents living in these locations. As mentioned, both areas experienced growth in industry, economy, and immigrant populations. Both metro areas have had ongoing gentrification downtown and in older inner suburbs as well as experienced densification in the central business districts, commercial, and residential areas. Furthermore, in his description of Austin and other “creative” locations around the United States, Long (2008) draws attention to Portland's similarities once again. He continues:

Comparable to similar emergent creative cities like Albuquerque, Boulder, or Portland, Oregon, Austin has struggled with issues of suburban sprawl, affordable housing, and rapid population growth. Akin to major creative hubs like Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston, Austin has gained a reputation for its diversity, tolerance, and progressive politics (2008: 29).

Long's work emphasizes how socio-economic and political characteristics are key to the discourses that construct a sense of place and, arguably, belonging to a community. Since Long's work only briefly discusses similarities between Portland and Austin, it was necessary to continue to draw from contemporary research highlighting the changing urban landscape and historical significance of Portland as well. For this particular

¹⁴ A survey of secondary data (Cope 2005) from local and state media sources as well as online blogging sites offered informal comparisons of the experiences of residents, former residents and travelers to both locations.

research project on refugee home and identity, it was important to factor in the notion that the cultural landscape and range of socio-economic as well as political characteristics found in both Austin and Portland impact residential experience across racial, class, and gender lines. Remaining true to approaches used in population geography and demographic research, Skop and Buentello (2008) and Hardwick and Meacham (2008) offer a more quantitative analysis of migration in the two cities.

For example, Portland has experienced a number of demographic shifts in the refugee and immigrant communities since the Vietnam War. In a span of twenty years, twelfth ranked Portland was a top metropolitan resettlement area for refugees by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, placing nearly 34,300 refugees in the year 1983. Hardwick and Meacham (2008), examine the political, socio-economic, and cultural processes of change reshaping the urban landscape in Portland, urging further research on the “re-emergence” of this immigrant city. The focus of the authors' 2008 piece suggests refugee networks and dispersed spatial patterns in the suburbs and metropolitan Portland are quite heterolocal; more importantly, they contend:

Since newcomers who arrive with refugee status come under the wing of a well-organized system of resettlement decisionmakers at the local level, regional, state and national levels, heterolocal clustering may be more pronounced than in other cities and suburbs, where immigrants make up the bulk of the foreign-born populations (2008: 251).

I use this literature as a springboard to question the Iraqi refugee resettlement experience as communities in both high-tech industry cities. As Long argues, increases in land values, contestation in areas adjacent to downtown and the urban core forcing economically challenged families and groups in to low-income neighborhoods. Therefore comparisons in research of Austin and Portland thus share not only similar fluvial-arboreal characteristics, but also cultural geographies of immigration and refugee spaces. It is here—in the “between-ness”, as Long argues, is important to place studies—where I would argue is the opportunity for comparison of refugee experiences of making home emerges.

4.2.2. Austin and Portland MSA Data

Compared to other metropolitan areas, the city limits of Austin are relatively larger by more than 250 square miles. This is due to city planning and regulations annexing areas for “smart growth” initiatives stretching north and south along the I-35 corridor (Skop and Buentello 2008). The fast-growing city of Austin has a population of 790,390 and between the years 2006-2010 U.S. Census Bureau (2010) data categorizes 19.5 percent of the population as being foreign born. Comparatively, the population of Texas is 25.1 million according to the same data set, of which the number of foreign-born persons is estimated at 16.1 percent of the total state population between the same four year span (ibid). The Austin metropolitan statistical area (MSA), as defined by the U.S.

Census Bureau (2010) includes: Travis, Hays, and Williamson—focused on in this study—as well as Bastrop and Caldwell counties. Based on the Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) data set, approximately 93 percent of the total population and nearly 96 percent of the immigrant population for the metropolitan area are found in the three core counties in this study (2010; also see Skop and Buentello 2008). This data includes, but does not necessarily separate resettled refugees, asylum seekers, secondary migrants, migrant workers or other immigrants, therefore is offered as more of a backdrop to understanding the similarities between Austin and Portland, instead of interoperation of statistics on residential patterns of refugees.

Portland, on the other hand, covers a much smaller area, just over 130 square miles of land. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), PUMAs, and socio-spatial analysis of refugees in previous research on Portland (Hume and Hardwick 2005; Hardwick and Meacham 2005, 2008) refers to the Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) as a “re-emerging gateway” city. Comprising of Clackamas, Multnomah, Washington, and Clark (located in Washington state) counties. The population for the city of Portland is 583, 776 (U.S. Census 2010), of which the number of foreign-born persons between 2006-2010 equaled 13.4 percent of the city's total population. The population of Oregon is 3.8 million, of which the number of foreign-born persons equaled 9.7 percent of the total state population between 2006-2010 (ibid). Again, these numbers include but

do not separate resettled refugees, asylum seekers, secondary migrants, and migrant workers from other immigrants.

Agencies *Caritas of Austin* and *Refugee Services of Texas* (2010) report that between one or two families come to Austin from Iraq every week. Of about 238 refugees who came to Texas between October to June 2008 about 80 were from Iraq. By 2009, nearly 3,000 Iraqis officially resettled in the state; of that number more than 1,000 were settled in Travis County. Similarly, according to the *Immigrant Refugee Community Organization* located in Portland, over 150 Iraqi refugees came through their agency in 2010, and by 2011 there are approximately 3,500 Iraqis living in Portland MSA (IRCO 2010).

4.2.3. Local Refugee Support Agencies

Caritas of Austin is a progressive organization working with refugees, located downtown just blocks from the capitol building. Resettling refugees under the auspices of the State Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Caritas of Austin* works closely with other voluntary agencies (VOLAGS) at the local, state, and national levels. Since the mid-1970s, the agency has resettled more than 10,000 refugees from Eritrea, Cuba, Colombia, Sudan, Burma, Iran, Iraq, and many other countries. Other agencies in the area include *Refugee Services of Texas* and *Catholic Charities*.

The refugee resettlement agency works with Iraqi refugees to initialize the making of home. Through interviews with staff, they conveyed that the fundamental best practice of *Caritas of Austin* is the encouragement of social networking ties and community-based visions of home and identity for all refugees. One Iraqi refugee living in Austin for two years describes the impact of this type of organizational approach:

I had no sponsor so... no one, with a home. Caritas rented the apartment for me...where I had a roommate. I was near the other Iraqis and sometimes we would help each other out but not like back in...my...in Iraq. But we speak Arabic and one or two families have a car. (Personal Interview, July 2011)

Here both the material and symbolic aspects of home play out in the ways *Caritas of Austin* helped situate this refugee within an Iraqi network of spaces, both socially and physically. *Caritas of Austin* set him up with an apartment and a roommate, with guaranteed shelter and transportation alike. Symbolically, however, he draws on his experiences in Iraq to encode his experience — the social gatherings, the symbolic exchanges and economies, were not the same as they were in Iraq. In this sense, the local support agency was not necessarily successful in providing Iraqis with a new sense of home — a result of applying techniques successful with Eritreans and Somalians, and assuming that such techniques are universally applicable and not culturally situated.

As discussed in previous sections on U.S refugee resettlement, generally,

VOLAGS place incoming clients in housing within the immediate proximity of other previously settled refugee clients sharing similar languages or cultural practices (Judkin 2011). For incoming refugees or migrants this could potentially pose a problem as cultural—ethnic, religious, or class, etc.—differences accompany individuals and groups to their new homeland. As I observed and discussed with volunteer and state run organizations, this is practiced in both Austin and Portland. For this particular Iraqi interviewee, the bonding or social networking was not embraced as much as within other groups I worked with.

Throughout my time as an intern in resettlement agencies, it was made apparent to me that there are noticeable differences in the lived experiences of refugee entrants in both cities between communities (by country of origin) and even among individuals in families (Kunz 1981). For example, one staff interview with a volunteer at IRCO reflected the notion that in Portland, placed Somalis and other African refugees tended to remain in, or close to, their originally leased apartments. Similarly, interviews with housing specialists in Austin highlighted how two groups of Eritrean men were placed four to an apartment and a year after the lease had come to an end seven of the eight men remained living in the same quarters. Yet, Iraqi participants in both cities were eager to move once the lease was up. One interesting factor regarding female roommates in Austin, is that the two single Iraq female interviewees placed with other non-Iraqi

roommates appeared to be satisfied with their living situations. Given the limited time, resources, and space for affordable housing, agencies do their best to place new clients in homes that satisfy state and federal requirements but not necessarily accommodate their cultural and social needs.

Setting the city apart from others of similar size around the U.S., the city of Portland has one of the highest cumulative number of adult volunteer hours in the United States annually. The *Immigrant Community Refugee Organization* (IRCO) is a non-profit organization located in northeast Portland benefiting from such public outreach. Like Austin, IRCO has been resettling refugees under the control of the State Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement. Since 1975, IRCO has resettled more than 12,000 refugees from Somalia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Djibouti, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries. As in many other places around the United States, VOLAGS, such as *Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon*, *Kurdish Human Rights Watch*, *Lutheran Community Services Northwest* and SOAR (*Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees*), work closely with state-based social service programs and local level support networks. Also similar to *Caritas'* approach, IRCO's focus is to locate housing for new clients within areas of town and suburbs that already have similar cultural landscapes.

4.3. Iraqi Refugee Stories—Exile, Identity, and Home¹⁵

In speaking with refugees who are no longer clients of a resettlement program in either Austin or Portland, my overall objective was to understand how their experiences and feelings or sense of belonging reflects identity or home after having resided in the U.S. All participants in my study had been settled in the U.S. for at least six months with the majority of participants living in their current location for at least a year. In what follows I present narratives of the experiences of post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in Portland and Austin. I offer cases which exemplify other participant experience, while respecting the fact that no two stories are alike or fully representative of all refugees. I focus on the lived experiences and daily practices (De Certeau 1988) of making home as a refugee living in the United States. However, as numerous cultural theorists have argued (Hall 1990, 1996; Blunt and Downing 2006; Sassen 2001), any discussion of home must be tied closely with a discussion of identity, as both are locked into a dialectic of coexistence and co-constitution of various spaces—global, regional, national, local (Caouette 2010).

4.3.1. Ali's Story – Iraqi Proud in the Lone Star State

¹⁵ Again, unless otherwise stated, names and some demographic details in the study have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

...Who am I? I am, Ali and I am Iraq. (proudly patting his chest) Yes, yes...I meant I am Iraqi. I came here three years ago after working for the Army. All of my family is still in Iraq. I came alone. We...I wanted a great Iraq. Free like here. This did not come true. Now, this is my home. Allah be willing, I make a home here, you know. I have jobs...three jobs. We learned to do many jobs in the time of the...how do you say it? After the Kuwait war? ...yes, the sanctions. (January 2010)

...When I came here to start over, I did not know what to expect. I heard stories from the men I was 'terp' for and from the movies, of course (laughter)...stories about America and even the Texas. I try to tell my family what it is like on the phone, mostly I tell them I am safe and there is no oil in Austin (more laughter). I do not plan on going anywhere else...I cannot go back. So, (shrugged 'Ali') Austin is my home, I have truck and apartment...and I am ok. (January 2010)

This first story is about Ali an Iraqi man who came to the United States in 2009 after applying multiple times for both refugee status and a special immigrant visa. With a university education from his home country, Ali speaks Arabic and English fluently and often made references to the movies he would watch with his family in both English and with Arabic subtitles.

As expressed in the opening quote, Ali is proud to be Iraqi and for his service to both his home country and the U.S. Army during the liberation. Ali's story offers a way to

examine questions about home as both material and imaginative geographies and how resistance and belonging are often shaped by memories of past homes or one's homeland (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 198). Ali often shifted between the past and present when he referred to the dwelling he resides in as “safe,” that “Austin is his home,” and “back home in Iraq.” Blunt and Dowling (2006) argue that experiences of location and dislocation or place and displacement shape how migrants “feel both at home and not at home in a wide range of circumstances” which raises important questions about the destabilization of “a sense of home as a stable origin” unsettling “the fixity and singularity of a place called home” (198).

...I worked for the Americans and the threats started. Mostly they said I needed to stop working, but then they started to say I needed to leave...that I was a traitor. I have lived through many wars. My father had to fight Iran for Saddam. We had a good life, a good home. My mother expected us to be good at school. I come from a close tribe, I am lucky, no one threatened my family. (January 2010)

I met Ali in January 2010; he was in his early thirties at the time, and single with no hope or intention of returning to Iraq, yet as he introduce himself he still proud to be Iraqi. Refugees often consider living in a country of asylum to the be the beginning of a new life. Part of this process involves constructing a sense of safety in the new home, particularly from the threat that forced them to flee Iraq. The formulation of this sense of

safety entails the simultaneous disavowal of the homeland and the construction of home/lessness. Ali's reference to making a home in Austin was immediately followed by his work and material successes, like the SUV he had recently purchased. It became apparent that working three jobs kept him busy and rarely at his apartment.

...I still do not have very much in my apartment. I feel like I want to go home (meaning back to Iraq) soon and find a wife and she will make it a good place. You know, fill it with things...and babies (laughter). (July 2011)

Ali came to Austin nearly three years ago after applying for a number of different visas. When asked about the meaning of home he replied, “I guess really home is back home in Iraq and my house is the apartment where I live. But I make Austin my home now and it is safe.” A house is where you reside, eat and sleep, but feeling at home has emotional and psychological components. Ali's answer to the question about the “meaning of home” is far from unique. On the contrary, it is quite representative of overall responses from participants in this study. Participants in both Austin and Portland were asked for examples of meaning or feeling at home and memories of childhood or their family back in their country were articulated. The body language of participants changed—their faces softened and words drifted in and out as they recalled lived experiences passed.

...I am still Iraqi, no, not American...but yes, how would you say... 'Austinian'? But not Texan...no, I don't think I like Texas, maybe I would like

Oregon? I don't think I want a Texas wife. I hope I can go home and find Iraqi girl. I would bring her back and stay here. (July 2011)

When I asked participants, such as Ali to speak about who they are, where they came from and their experiences, feelings of home emerged in their descriptions. It became clear that home was far more meaningful and complex than "a building for human habitation" (Merriam-Webster 2011) and very much weaved into the narratives of being a refugee in a new homeland.

...They are good with refugees here...maybe not so much Texas, but Austin, yes. I have friends in Dallas and San Antonio, I am happy I don't live there. In Dallas the Americans are different, and the support groups are different too. I don't know...not like Austin. I never really go to (Fort) Hood, visited an army friend once. They are different, I am different, also. And in San Antonio everyone speaks Spanish to me and get mad when I tell them to speak English...(laughter) or try Arabic! (emphasis added) (July 2011)

I met with Ali multiple times over the course of my visits to Austin. By September 2011, Ali worked as a mechanic in the same auto-body shop and had a second job as a security guard at night. When I asked about his job as a mechanic, Ali talked about his co-workers.

...I work with the Mexican people and an Egyptian." He continued, "My first day they kept speaking Spanish to me, then would get frustrated at me when I asked if they spoke English...when they asked what I spoke, at first

I told them. 'Arabic' I said, but got tired of them asking where in Arabia I was from. (September 2011)

The conversation revealed unexpected tension at work for Ali. He expressed that he thought the “Mexican people and customers” just assumed his skin color made him “the same” but the Egyptian gentleman “took issue” with his university education and the “Iraq war in general.” He would get into arguments with the “Egyptian”—as Ali would refer to the man—about “how stupid I was for leaving the Army work and my country because of some stupid threats.” And Ali was half joking and half serious as he discussed how shop workers said it was “Arabs in the Gulf that caused America to be unsafe for immigrants.” Ali became angry but then laughed when he shared this accusation. Saying the “American-ized men were idiots” and he “left that stuff at work, it is stupid to bring it home with you.”

The effect is that the refugees I interviewed are proud to be Iraqi, and they also do not want to be *lumped* in with other refugees or other similar looking migrant groups. Ali recognizes that his brown skin equals invisibility on surface, and that this is good when it comes to issues with post 9/11 discussions. He says he will tell anyone that he has “fought alongside American troops, like brothers!” The racism is not necessarily by direct aggression in cities like Portland and Austin, the cities are known for diversity and tolerance, but instead through microaggressions that render Iraqis invisible (Silva 2010;

Sharma 2010) or different. They are seen invisible in the sense that stereotypes and generalizations erase the actual people and actual stories behind them.

Ali's story is infused with a sense of difference which inevitably reflected in feelings of belonging. Classes at the local community college were starting and he had decided would enroll part-time. We talked about other Iraqi refugees who became students and were placed in English as a second language course (ESL) to test their proficiency. The problem was, “they were put into a class room filled with Spanish speaking students,” Ali recalled. For Ali, it took less than two weeks to get the issue straightened out, yet he was frustrated with “the system” as he said other students referred to it.

Four months had passed since our first interview and Ali shared that he had actively began posting on his Facebook account and decided to “maybe start dating online.” I asked Ali if he had moved from the apartments the refugee settlement agency helped him rent, since his lease was up and he mentioned many times he wanted to “move away from the other refugees.” But he remained in the same location, suggesting it was easier than moving, or that he would move when he got married. He laughed and said he “did not have much to move.”

Throughout the interviews Ali appeared both discouraged and encouraged about his current situation. Lightheartedly, he boasted about “having it better than *others*

[emphasis noted]...with a truck and his family back home.” Then mentioned again that his family had a “wife in mind for him” and he would somehow be traveling back to marry. I asked how this worked with his dating or school and there was pause in the conversation. Ali would oscillate between home being in Austin and home in Iraq in a way that both spaces were very present, part of his identity and at times conflicting. Interestingly Ali—as well as other participants in the study—when referring to Iraq as home, there were times that it was a violent space and other times it was not. For example, Ali's references to home and Iraq at times lost sight of the war or indication that the state was struggling to rebuild, “My home in Iraq is so beautiful, my tribe is strong and my children will be happy like I was...” then, at a later point in the interview, Ali said, “I am angry when I sit in my apartment and watch the news. They never mention how bad it still is in Iraq!” He continued, “I know I sit on my couch safe, when my family must live each of their days not knowing if our home will ever be great again...” pausing, “...but your news just cares about money and Obama and the Mexicans!”

4.3.2. More Austin Refugee Stories

After two interviews, Ali offered to introduce me to other Iraqi refugees in Austin that he knew. I was able to interview five participants from this introduction. All were single Iraqi men in their 20s and early-30s that either lived in the same area of the city. I

was able to deduce that Ali had either worked with or attended mosque with some of the men. The men came to the United States separately but within a few months of each other, save two who were cousins and travelled together from Iraq. Like Ali, three of the men worked with coalition forces in some capacity and came to the U.S. as SIV holders within the last thirteen months. After meeting with these men individually, I recognized some common themes when discussing Iraq and their status as a 'refugee'. First, Iraq was their “home,” and like Ali, they were “Iraqi” and planned on marrying Iraqi women, except for one, Hakim—who eventually revealed he was homosexual. All of the men liked Austin, referring to it as, “diverse,” “friendly to Arabic people,” or “an easy place to be themselves.” A few had been roommates, living in an apartment near the section-A and low-income units frequently filled by resettlement agency clients. They liked Austin because “it was not too big” and “easy to get around by bus” (Personal interviews, July 2011). Only one participant besides Ali, Mustafa, had a vehicle and boasted about making money by giving rides to the refugees living in his apartment building. Mustafa and his cousin Hakim were the only men in the group who remained in the same job the resettlement agency helped them acquire nearly a year earlier. Mustafa said it was “important to work hard in America and save money to buy a home” for his family if “Iraq continues to fail” (August 2011). By the end of the summer, the two cousins moved to different areas of the city. Mustafa had a diverse background working with the

petroleum industry and made it clear he would “always be seeking better employment,” even if that meant he would need to leave the city of Austin or state of Texas.

Although each participant had experienced some form of threat or trauma prior to applying for their special immigrant visa or refugee status, the SIV holders did not see themselves as the same as the other clients of their settlement agencies (Wise 2004). The men would refer to “other refugees at *Caritas*” or “those people who had orientation classes” with them in a way that suggested difference. Additionally, during the individual interviews, the men spoke about each other and interactions they had with “other Iraqis” which provided a more nuanced account of not only their 'refugee experience' (Wong 1991; Stein 1986; also see Griffiths 2002) but also their own identity and belonging within different spaces of daily life (De Certeau 1988).

Again, difference as this concept prevailed as a major theme from interviews with participants in both cities. Difference has a commanding effect on the formation of a sense of belonging and identity as identity necessitates identification (Hall 1996; Silva 2010). When refugees find barriers to belonging or to identify with their new host country, this reinforces a sense of marginality.

As the participants communicated, differences are also constructed through places and at different scales, therefore are fluid, constructed contextually and relationally (Pratt and Hanson 1994; also see Potts 2011). For example, conversations with the SIV holders

suggested a separation from Mustafa, Hakim (and other Iraqis not participating in this study), partly due to the fact they did not openly discuss working with coalition forces back in Iraq, they had moved away from the area at the end of lease commitments, and because Hakim was gay. Hakim's story is discussed in a separate case study.

The stories contained in this section offer a poignant illustration of the difference and multiplicities which are often tied to cultural and national identity construction, while also demonstrating the way that mundane practices and issues of language, race, ethnicity and differences affect a sense of how one identifies and belongs (Butler and Spivak 2007). As discussed in the methods section, the emphasis on presenting differences among participant interview material is for the purpose of looking at the nuances in perceptions of home and formation of identity among post-2003 Iraqi refugees in both Austin and Portland. The next case study focuses more on the tensions in daily lived experiences and the politics of belonging, specifically how state sanctioned exclusion (Geschiere 2009; Trudeau 2006) of immigrant tertiary education often inhibits their ability to develop a sense of place attachment, identity, and belonging.

4.3.3. Nadia's Story – Home and Belonging in Portland

...Portland is not like Seattle, it is my home...my family has our community here. We have our church here. Yes, we miss Iraq, I am Iraqi...but that

place is no longer my home. My family is very much at home in Portland.
(October 2011)

...I wanted Iraq to be a place for democracy so it could be, like here...but it is not. I worked hard there, I worked for the U.S. and now I am able to work hard for my family here. Being Iraqi is not the same anymore, I am...Iraqi...but do not ever see that as my home again. (October 2011)

The second refugee story is about an Iraqi woman living in Portland named, Nadia. A confident and well-educated woman in her forties, Nadia and her family were relocated to Seattle, Washington after applying for refugee status in Baghdad. This mother and breadwinner of her family said she had little problem finding employment in Seattle in 2009. She said finding a good paying job was easier “in a place where they seemed to have more... (*pause*) different ethnic groups.” However, she continued, “in Portland it was more difficult. The economy in the U.S. is not the greatest and they—Americans—don't believe my education is valid.” Nadia worked both with a private U.S. corporation and then with the U.S Army Corps of Engineers helping with reconstruction projects in Baghdad. Being part of large financial institutions associated with the government had little influence once in the U.S. She wondered how she could be “so respected as a professional in her home country by Americans,” but then her background and education “mean so little” when she moved to Portland.

...I was a Christian living in Iraq, my education was respected. Before the war I worked and went home and we kept to ourselves. But I had a good job and we had a home... (pause) ...it all changed. (October 2011)

Nadia shared her experiences as a female growing up in Iraq. After she earned a bachelor degree in English literature at a university in Baghdad, Nadia went to work for the Central Bank of Iraq in the mid-1980s. When the U.S. military campaign began in 2003, Nadia was still at the bank and because of her English competency, was hired to work with “the Americans in understanding financial and banking procedures.” As a woman, “there was no problem, no not really,” she continued. “Not being Muslim, some...yes, but under Saddam this was controlled.” Following the invasion in 2003 the situation changed dramatically. Nadia and other female Portland participants explained how women all put on scarves—*hijab* in Arabic—to avoid being singled out, followed, or kidnapped. They became targets if identified as being Christian, educated, of a particular class, political ideology or just an easy mark. Nadia and her family left Iraq for the U.S. in 2009 and she recalled the feelings she had when the time came that she could remove the scarf and “just be herself,” however, Seattle “just never felt like home.”

My sampling from Portland was not limited to Christian Iraqi refugees, however this narrative was fairly representative of how belonging to a community plays a role in the resettlement experience and sense of home. They also provide the opportunity to understand the how the concepts of home and belonging are multi-dimensional and

difficult to separate from someone's identity. For example, Nadia—a mother, volunteer, teaching assistant, and translator—relocated her family to Portland after living in Seattle for two years. She had been commuting between the two cities regularly to stay active in a church she had discovered while visiting a friend. Once the family relocated to Portland the situation became more complex. The same networks offered emotional and spiritual comfort in their new community but could not provide work connections or financial assistance. Signs of the economic downturn were apparent in Portland, and Nadia's identity did not equate to how she was identified. She was still a foreigner, refugee, and non-native English speaker, who's tertiary education was not recognized as equivalent in the United States.

Christian Iraqi families in Portland expressed the importance of building social ties among their faith-based community networks in Tigard and Beaverton. During potlucks and get togethers, traditional Iraqi food would be cooked and shared in ways that reminded them of their homeland. This sense of the familiar and similar could be attributed to finding comfort and a sense of belonging in places and with people of the same or similar cultural heritage. This sense of belonging and unity was communicated in interviews with family members and individual Iraqis, Christian and non-Christian. However, just as in conversations with Ali of Austin, these similarities and familiarities can cluster along racial, religious and ethnic lines while at the same time reinforce

difference at different scales, as I will further expand in the section discussing Hakim's story.

At work and in daily practices, Nadia and other participants voiced their frustrations with marginalization and identification.

...Portland is a good home, people ask me about my accent and I tell them I am from Iraq. I think they think because I speak Arabic that I am Muslim and that is uncomfortable for them. But I am Christian. Arabic does not mean I am Islamic. Portland people say they are more liberal than Seattle but we sometimes stand out more here. (October 2011)

As argued by Krulfeld and Camino (1994) for asylum seekers and refugees, whose lives in their new host societies are often characterized by “positions of liminality and marginality” (ix) notions of identity as they intersect with feelings of belonging are highly embodied and complex (Mellor 2008; Pattie 1999). For example, Nadia's body language changed during this part of the interview. She chose her words carefully and the conversation shifted from themes about belonging to community, identification and political freedom, to the events that occurred on September 11, 2001 and safety. She explained to me that “it did not matter if Iraq had nothing to do with the horrible day,” she paused and seemed to search for the words, “maybe it is still about the Middle East and people from there. But we just want to *be...long* (emphasis added) ...to be here and safe. You know, like your study, we want to feel at *home* (again, emphasis added).” Nadia

slowed down when she said, “be...long” and “home”, elongating the words, appearing to think about using them specifically at that time.

Where work by Valentine and Sporton (2007, 2008, 2009) explores identity and belonging among Somali refugees and asylum seekers, the two concepts are not clearly defined. Although belonging cannot be removed completely from identity (Loader 2006: 25, also see Antonsich 2010), in this study I do not conflate or privilege the two in regard to home for post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in the U.S. Recognizing Antonsich's (2010) argument that using the concepts synonymously is problematic (644), I build upon his concept of ‘place-belongingness’ as “personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place.” (645) Whereby home is representative of “a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort and security, and emotional attachment” which should take into account both how someone identifies with the world around them and how they feel in that place (646). It is through narratives like Nadia's we see how “belonging is about emotional attachment,” as Yuval-Davis et al. (2006:2) argues; it is both embodied and in experiences of marginalization that the politics of belonging and place attachment can be understood.

To unpack this further, Antonsich (2010) asserts that any discussion of belonging should encompass both 'place-belongingness' and the 'politics of belonging', as the two mutually inform each other in the analysis. The ‘politics of belonging’ is “a discursive

resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion” (Antonsich 2010: 645; Geschiere 2009; Trudeau 2006; also see Yuval-Davis et al. 2006). Again, contending that identity should not be removed completely from belonging, I draw on the proposal that identity is not only claimed, but also relies on being accepted or recognized by a wider community (Valentine & Sporton 2009; Valentine et al. 2009). Participants like Nadia are emotional about their jobs, education, economic success, and how their community accepts them.

Both the emotional and political nature of belonging help to frame the ability to understand the highly embodied, material nature of both belonging and identity, and how that is expressed in the daily lived experiences of the refugees interviewed. As discussed in previous chapters, I relied on participant observation and thick description (Geertz 1973) to better analyze the themes and concepts expressed by participants. For example, Nadia, sitting across from me in a button down blouse and long skirt, held the small gold cross on the chain around her neck between two fingers and moved it back and forth as she described how she wore a scarf for years “trying to blend in” during the war. It didn't mean anything, it just meant we (Christian women) would not stand out. We could be invisible.” Then, she compared the past decade to the present when they discussed the idea of being identified as Middle Eastern refugees living in the United States today. Nadia finished her thought, “Where I live, we can live our lives, do God's work and not

to bother anyone.” I argue, participants, like Nadia, attempt to overcome barriers to belonging, sameness and differences through aspects of identity-making and home.

Hall (1996) suggests identities are “more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are...all-inclusive sameness” (4). Nadia's story not only helps to understand how 'otherness' is still part of her experience as a resettled refugee living in the U.S., it also highlights the highly political nature of identities and how they are mobilized to construct boundaries. Here it is important to take Hall's (1996) notion that “identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse” (4) and further it by drawing upon ways in which identity and belonging are embodied in the lived experiences of post-2003 Iraqis refugees making home in the U.S. By doing this I draw upon Connolly's (2002) argument that, “identity requires differences in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self identity” (64) and Said (1978) who suggests the way in which a European identity became the dominant by contrasting itself against the constructed inferior, the 'otherness' of the orient. Before moving to Portland, Nadia and her family drove the three hours south from Seattle “whenever possible” to attend church services, volunteer, and work with assisting other Arabic speaking refugees in the area. She was very happy explaining how she “knew, someday, Portland would be their permanent home,” making it clear that her family desired to “belong” and “fit in.”

4.3.4. More Portland Refugee Stories

Other participants like, Faris, a Muslim man in his late-30s, came to a similar conclusion as Nadia when he brought up the topic of living in post- 9/11 U.S. Faris said, “we all feel this, Arabs living in America. Maybe the people in this city think they are better at hiding it, but they are not. My cousins in DC say it is the same everywhere and he left Iraq when Saddam went into Kuwait” (January 2011). Faris shifted away from feeling like an outsider and compared himself to “the people of Portland.” Like Nadia, Faris also volunteered as an Arabic interpreter, “I give my time to help other Iraqis coming to America to understand how to live here because some people helped me to fit in when I came.” As highlighted by participant testimony, there are a number of organizations in Portland specifically focused on helping Iraqi refugees integrate in the communities they are placed. *Oregon Iraqi Refugees* and *Iraqi Society of Oregon* are two nonprofits that identify the Iraqi communities in Tigard and Beaverton specifically as “isolated” and in need of support.

I interviewed the founder of the *Iraqi Society of Oregon*, Dr. Baher Butti, who fled Iraq in 2006. Butti worked as a counselor for the Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) Intercultural Psychiatric Program helping refugees and immigrants from Iraq with “the challenges faced by newcomers to Oregon” (October 2011). In

preparation for the interview, I was directed to the *Colors of Influence* website, by photographer and advocate, Jim Lommasson.¹⁶ The site featured the nonprofit organization's mission and Dr. Butti's "story." "Read it, out loud," Lommasson suggested, making it clear that this was who I needed to talk to about the war, belonging and Iraqis living in the United States. (October 2011).

After 2003, Iraq entered a new era, when the country needed to know what the world looked like. I feel that I am lucky that I came to Oregon, which seems to be made up of the most accepting and tolerant people. I started working in the Intercultural Psychiatry Clinic at OHSU, serving immigrants and refugees in Oregon. Most of the people we serve have suffered psychological trauma from wars in their native countries. I started the Arabic clinic, which was developed in preparation for the arrival of Iraqi refugees. (Colors of Influence website, 2008)

In 2006, Butti was exiled in Jordan after he fled Iraq. Unsure of his fate and unable to work as a psychiatrist back in Iraq, Butti was invited by Dr. David Kinzie, professor of psychiatry at OHSU, to speak about the psychological consequences of the war in Iraq (also see DeFronzo 2010). Butti gained asylum in the U.S. after speaking at a number of international conferences.

Portland Iraqis, like Butti, participated in Lommasson's nationally recognized

¹⁶ Jim Lommasson's 2011 exhibition: *What We Carried: Fragments from the Cradle of Civilization*, was a collaborative project conceived by Lommasson and the Oregon Iraqi Refugees. The project was on view from October 7-29, 2011 at the Launch Pad Gallery in Portland, featuring a public panel discussion highlighting the narratives of Iraqis who fled during this current conflict.

refugee project highlighting what material items they carried with them to the United States. The project discussed how the journey from Iraq was arduous for most refugees making it difficult to bring along the smallest of items from their former homes and lived experiences. In a panel discussion about the project, one Iraqi woman discussed how it provided the opportunity to see how refugees both symbolically and culturally identify with different objects and art. When she discussed her feelings about the exhibition, the woman spoke about how her family will never be able to “get back their belongings lost in the ongoing war.” She then transitioned into a description about what it was like living as a Christian under the Saddam Hussain regime, noting the tensions felt living in Iraq before and after the onset of the war in 2003. And, although she did not directly compare this to living in the U.S, she hinted at how hard it was to live in a place “you feel you don't belong,” a number of times.

In follow up interviews with the panelists, it was evident by their responses that they viewed settlement to Portland differently than the nonprofit organizations. The female panelist stated, “Home is a comfortable and friendly place to be...a community to live in. It is safer... (fading off) in most places.” This clashes with concerns of unsupported isolation as argued earlier by Butti's organization *Iraqi Society of Oregon* in 2008. Noting interviews with participants took place during and following the exhibition, panelists were mingled with the public and private donors who funded refugees beyond

their initial federal support provided by resettlement agencies. In this setting, participants expressed that they felt the city generally offered their families security and community. Even Butti said, “There are quite few of us here, and... (dragging out his words) ...we fit in with the people...which is good.”

One of the featured artists at the gallery, Samir Khurshid, also an Iraqi refugee living in Portland, commented through a translator, “the news and organizations are good in Portland, they do not make us feel bad about coming here.” Khurshid, in his early twenties, felt his English was not “perfect enough to talk” to me. However, he understood and responded to informal and unstructured questions. After Khurshid's comment, the female panelist took me to one of the pieces in the exhibit hall and said, “read *this* one” pointing to a photograph and caption that read:

In 2003 someone told me that Paul Bremer sent a message to George Bush saying "we are not in the Gulf... we are in Mesopotamia." Well, first it's unfortunate that Bremer relies on Hollywood to believe that Gulf is still using camels for transportation and expects to see flying carpets in Baghdad! Second, it's a pity that I was not given the chance to show him before going to Baghdad this photo of teachers in school annual party in Baghdad... in the 60's...I could have told him that Iraqis are modern, and we are civilized enough to build our own Democracy.... Maybe, and just maybe, he could have limited his job to ousting Saddam and not oust the cradle of civilizations itself!! Thank you Jim Lommason.. late is better

then never! (Lommasson, What We Carried: Fragments from the Cradle of Civilization 2011)

She laughed and said that it did not matter if Iraqis “were modern or educated or liberated our country with you.” As discussed in previous sections, of the study's participant pool in both Portland and Austin, nearly all of the interviewees clearly stated they watched the local and national news, followed English and Arabic international media and many actively blogged or emailed to remain “informed” about what was happening in Iraq and around the United States.

For Iraqi refugees in Portland, identity, belonging, and home were closely linked to community. In a different setting, a male participant in his thirties, Aziz, spoke frankly about volunteering and working within the refugees, particularly with other “Arabs” as he identified them. Aziz, who immediately said, “I am Iraqi, always,” discussed living in the U.S. and referred to Portland as welcoming. “I do not know about America, but people in Portland work hard and they volunteer a lot, they are very aware of the environmental things,” stated Aziz. He commented about how he really did not ride bicycles in Iraq or recycle but “it seemed like a good thing to do to keep things clean.” Aziz continued:

...I tell my family that everyone rides the bicycles here and some of them cost thousands of dollars, but they don't believe me. My bike was just twenty-five dollars...(laughter)...it cost me more to do repairs to it so I could go to work. (March 2010)

Aziz discussed how his “American friends” all worried about the environment and their bicycles getting stolen, then commented:

...they don't know how to imagine the war or fields of oil or what my tribe lived through under Saddam. They, how do you say it? Compost? ...the food we would give to animals. And people grow food in boxes their front yards in some places. I tell my family they all have cars but ride bicycles to be healthy. (Pause) This is funny because, maybe, you invaded us because of our oil! (ibid)

This participant often directed his comments at me specifically when referring to the United States, Americans, the government, or the troops. He asked if I rode bicycles and grew my own vegetables. He continued, “I think 'other' refugees, you know, the Africans and the Asian people ride bicycles more than Arabs. Maybe because we did not have to before we lost our country.”

As discussed in earlier sections, refugees negotiate the systems of privilege *and* oppression in their refugee home, so do they also maintain economic and social ties to their country of origin. This leads to shifting, if not contradictory, feelings and concepts often linked to ideas about identity, home, home-making (Blunt 2005a, 2005b; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Hiruy 2009) and belonging (Appadurai 1996; Dorai 2002; Hall 2003; Fouron 2003). At the end of Aziz's interview, his comments suggested that he volunteered to *fit in* or *belong* within the context of Portland, the city he made his home. Although I

highlight Dr. Butti, Faris, Aziz, and Nadia who are: (1) all active in the communities they live in, (2) volunteer with refugee resettlement agencies, and (3) remain up to date with local and national politics as well as the ongoing situation in Iraq, the ratio of participants in both Austin and Portland who work with refugees is comparable. The study revealed that the number of translators in the Austin participant pool was actually higher; the difference being that in Austin, funds are set aside specifically for translators and interpreters assisting new arrivals, while in Portland organizations actively asked former clients to volunteer.

4.3.5. Hakim's Story – Austin Pride?

The third refugee story is about Hakim, a homosexual male in his twenties living in Austin. Unlike the majority of participants in this study, Hakim had no formal tertiary education in Iraq; instead he learned to speak English as a child and took classes once he arrived to the U.S. Hakim did not identify as a Muslim, however he would respectfully respond to his cousin Mustafa's referenced to “Allah” or the “Prophet Mohammad” if engaged.

I was introduced to Hakim and his cousin together and expected to conduct a group interview when I arrived at the coffee shop meeting place. After about twenty minutes, Hakim excused himself to make a phone call and said he would come back for

his “own time” with my “research project.” Hakim was incredibly friendly, very present sense of humor, and open to sharing his narrative. Mustafa was more reserved and left to go to work shortly after our talk.

It was not difficult to see in his physical movements that Hakim did not *look* or *act* like the other Iraqi men participating in the study. This participant dressed in tight jeans and t-shirts, wore multiple rings on his fingers and large faux designer sunglasses and expressed effeminate behavior often associated with gender performance and “acting gay” (Zimmerman 1987; Sánchez 2012). Following a description of the new apartment he wanted to rent with “some downtown friends,” Hakim shared with me how he really liked downtown Austin while revealing that he was gay. The participant described in detail his fondness for a number of dance clubs and bars which flew the rainbow flag above their buildings. Hakim asked if I knew the places he was talking about and said, “they are for homosexuals. But a lot of straight people go there to dance too.” After work, dinner and a nap, Hakim and his future roommates would head “downtown near 4th and Colorado, where I am most at home.” Using the word *home* and pointing at my notebook. Hakim knew he would “never be able to live in the high-rise apartment buildings downtown,” but a few of his friends would share a place across Lady Bird Lake, within a short bus ride to their favorite hangouts. Hakim said he changed his name when to the club, taking on a Western identity. When asked why, he replied:

...many of the boys from [the] Middle East do it, no one says our names right anyway. We changed our names in Iraq, too. Soldiers called us all 'Ali' or 'Mohammad' so I was told to pick names like them. Like: Mike or Sam or George...that guy they called 'Hor-hay' (emphasizing the pronunciation) and now that I live in Austin, my Egyptian friend says that is because we look like the (whispering) Mexican people. (August 2011)

During his interview, I learned how Hakim tried to work with Coalition forces in Iraq. His tone and description suggested he felt marginalized, physically and emotionally traumatized for his sexuality. Hakim tried to humorously describe his interactions with U.S. Army troop members, repeating the jokes and slights used by soldiers from both his home country and the occupying presence.

...they would shake their butts and move their arms like me then tell me I was going to get my head blown off or my ass shot. At first I did not really say something because I knew that I may be leaving for Turkey and I needed to make as much money as I could to go. And maybe... (winking) ...they liked me. (July 2011)

Hakim briefly worked as a food server on a command outpost (COP) in Iraq but said he quit to make his first flee attempt to Turkey sometime in 2007. With aspirations of making it to France or Amsterdam, Hakim found life in the refugee camps was not what he had expected and returned to Baghdad. Once he arrived in Austin (2010) Hakim said he quickly felt “at home” when he “went out at night to dance.” He described how he was

“crazy for thinking France would be better than America.”

There were physical changes in Hakim's body language when he transitioned between his life in Iraq, the refugee camps, and life in Austin. He spoke about feeling alone and unwanted in Iraq. He was relieved his cousin came with him to the U.S., explaining that Mustafa was like an older brother and that many of his family members or fellow refugees just “acted like” he had “something wrong” with him. Some family members did not even speak to him until he began working for the U.S. Army, saying he might be on the “right path” in his life “doing something for his country.” This treatment was carried with Hakim to the U.S. through the actions of “other refugees” living in Austin.

Erasure is the practiced denial of sexualities and genders, rendering people who identify as LGBTQ invisible (Eribon 2004:46; Namaste 2000; also see Jordan 2009). Hakim's life is one of multiple erasure, both by those who generalize his story and those Iraqis that erase his status as Iraqi. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the other Iraqi SIV holders living near Hakim and his cousin Mustafa's first apartment, distanced themselves from the two in conversations. This did not seem to bother Hakim as much as it did Mustafa. As Spicer (2008) highlighted in his study of refugees' and asylum seekers' experiences of neighborhoods, participants emphasized the importance of “social networks with people of the same ethnic or religious identity and other black and

minority groups.” (491) Therefore refugees living in traditional gateway city neighborhoods with a history of immigration can “mitigate some of the more extreme forms of social exclusion” (Spicer 2008: 507; also see Geschiere 2009; Trudeau 2006). For participants in Austin or Portland, where there are smaller, less established Iraqi communities, mitigation of exclusion may be more difficult. Lichtenberg (1999) argues, “Our native culture provides us with a sense of being at home in the world” (173, in Hedetoft 2004). Still, the typical desire to be around familiarity or ‘sameness’ masks the more problematic reality for agencies hoping to build social networks among smaller refugee communities. Individuals often seek ‘sameness’ until they feel they do not belong and are different. In the case of Hakim, it is the act of finding 'sameness' downtown at the clubs and not with other displaced Iraqis which demarcates him from others in this study. Arguably, this is indicative of a society not excepting of ‘difference’ over the dominant ‘sameness’. In other words, the descriptive ‘gay communities’ or 'refugee communities' exist but rarely does one discuss ‘straight communities’ or 'non-displaced communities', as the latter constitutes a certain ‘norm’ of society not compelled to 'seek', but rather are sought.

Hakim spoke about wanting to “belong” when he lived in Iraq, and how he now

“belongs in Austin,”¹⁷ but only after he sought out a place where he belonged. He hoped, “democracy would bring tolerance for everyone” from his homeland, then quickly chastised the United States for thinking they could change the Middle East.

I highlight Hakim's story to demonstrate differences among participants in the study. Linking mobility to the tensions and resistance among coexisting global and local sexualities (Jordan 2009) is a growing body of scholarship offering a way of better examining the fluid and multi-dimensional aspects of Hakim's identity and sense of belonging. Keeping in mind that these narratives of home also reveal the longing aspect of be-longing (Kumsa 2006: 236) in the world, Patton and Sanchez-Eppler eds. (2000) argue:

When a practitioner of “homosexual acts,” or a body that carries any of many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces—nation, region, metropole, neighborhood, or even culture, gender religion or disease—intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place (3; also see Jordan 2009). Drawing on participant's lived experiences, like Hakim, provides a sense of how refugees are not all 'created' equal and how lumping continues to be problematic. In the end, Hakim expressed he was very pleased with his acceptance into the “gay community of

17 Research on Queer migrations and sense of belonging has emerged in Refugee Studies and Feminist scholarship. For example: Mary Bryson, Lori MacIntosh, Sharalyn Jordan, and Hui Ling Lin, “Virtually Queer? Homing Devices Mobility and Un/Belongings,” *Canadian Journal of Communications* 31, no . 4 (2006); 791–814; Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (London: Routledge, 1996); Anne-Marie Fortier, “Re-Membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s),” *Theory, Culture and Society* 16, no . 2 (1999): 41–64

Austin” and did not want anything to do with “other refugees, Iraqis, or Muslims.”

Neither Hakim nor Mustafa had much to say about the agency that initially supported them in their resettlement or their status as a refugee. Hakim repeatedly stated he, “wanted to leave that all behind him” and “did not care if America failed in Iraq.” When asked, about feeling safe in Texas, the participant laughed. Hakim knew his cousin was interested in moving to Dallas, Houston, or San Antonio for better employment opportunities, and then stated, “I will never move to these places, I am safe in Austin, but Austin is not Texas.” Hakim finished by saying, “I have a good job and new roommates, I will keep this my home.” Then, a few minutes later smiled and said, “Or maybe I will go to New York or San Francisco.”

4.4. Identity, Belonging, and Home in Exile

Undeniably, “belonging is a deep emotional need of people” (Yuval-Davis, 2004: 215), therefore *to belong* somewhere is a powerful state of being. Feelings of belonging in relation to a sense of identity are expressed in association to the places in which participants dwell or where they lived (Gilmartin 2008; Mellor et al 2008). When someone does not belong it is not just disempowering, but emotionally damaging and often causing a reformation of identity. For some participants, the transient nature of belonging—when they felt like they belonged one moment, and then became painfully

aware of their own 'difference' the next—highlighted how a sense of attachment and acceptance is further complicated in the lives of settled refugees.

Nearly all participants spoke of the need to belong in order to feel at home. Although each participant had experienced some form of threat or trauma prior to applying for their special immigrant visa or refugee status, the SIV holders did not see themselves as the same as the other clients of their settlement agencies. Here notions of belonging and home are attached to nostalgic memories of liberating Iraq from an oppressive dictatorship and a sense of agency as they identified with the action of fighting alongside of U.S. soldiers.

This study reveals many similarities among Iraqis in both Austin and Portland who maintain a transnational 'Arab identity' (Al-Azmeh 2004; also see McCarus 1994) defined by past memories of their homeland. This is more often associated with Islamic or Muslim identification. However, whether distinguishing themselves as Christian, Muslim, or other, many keep alive an 'Iraqi' identity rooted in a sense of belonging to a nation-state (Loader 2006; McNevin 2006) that they fought to liberate or rebuild but were forced to leave. This is accomplished through blogs, international media sources, and the maintenance of transnational familial or tribal ties still residing in their homeland.

Arguably, as Bond (2006) posits, the “three most prominent markers of national identity are residence, birth and ancestry” (611). I argue, when refugees occupy a space in

which they cannot claim any of these “passive criteria of belonging” (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002: 102, in Hedetoft 2004), the formation of place attachment and belonging is further complicated. This is reflected by Marwan, who stated that “I am not exactly a part of the American society, even though I want to be...in Texas, you have to know the history and I don't” (Marwan, Austin, August 2011). To Hedetoft (2004) this is “institutionalised belonging in the form of...ethno-national versions of historical memory” (25-26; also see Loader; McNevin 2006). Marwan feels he does not belong to Texas—thus American society—because, as argued by Hedetoft, his birth and ancestry excludes him from the national narrative. Here a more critical analysis of identification and belonging entails the inclusiveness of ‘naturalizing’ certain people in discourses of who “authentically belong [s]” (Hedetoft, 2004: 26).

Additionally, very apparent at the local level, post-2003 Iraqis share ideas about their refugee identity and material aspects of home as they embrace a kind of individualism associated with capitalism similar to the 'American identity' posited by Hollinger (2004). Although not typically cultivated through ethnoracial ties or social capital in non-traditional gateway cities, Iraqis in both communities clearly articulated they wanted to “build a decent life” for their future and family. For example, Ali said he wanted to return to the Middle East and marry a woman his tribe approved of, then “bring her home and possibly move to the southern part of Austin.” As the participant described,

it is “Where the tech families live, with good schools, homes with garages, and green yards.” Hollinger (2004) suggests that the *American Dream* is part of the American identity; an identity shaped by capitalism and a 'keeping up with the Jones,' rhetoric.

Participants expressed an active maintenance of ties to religion, nationalism, and political activism in their homeland but not necessarily the United States. In the case of Aziz in Portland, his social activities involved participation in, and the promotion of environmentalism at the local level. When asked, about state or regional politics, few participants reflected in-depth knowledge or need to express an opinion. On the other hand, local, national, or international issues involving refugees or the War in Iraq were prevalent in discussions throughout the interview process. Participants took pride in keeping up on current events and expressed disappointment in the lack of news in the news (Interviews with Samir, Portland, May 2010; Hassan, Austin, July 2011) in their new host country.

Contending that identity is a 'process of becoming' (Ghorashi 2003, 2004), post-2003 Iraqi refugees and SIV holder who fled their homeland during U.S.-led invasion are different from Iraqis who resettled to the U.S. prior to the war. This is because they see their current positioning in society as drastically different. Being able to find a sense of belonging to a new country outside of the homeland presented Ali, Nadia and Hakim with various emotional reactions. They discovered a sense of belonging which

they had lost as a result of their displacement, but were also confronted by the cultural tensions found in a post 9/11 America (Ignatieff 1994; McNevin 2006). Participants attempted to express their painful memories of war along with frustrations regarding the millions of displaced Iraqis; while at the same time confronting the fact that they live in the very country that has left them with unfulfilled promises of a “new democratic Iraq.” Such experiences help to situate the concept as a multi-layered, ongoing process of home for these refugees and their various evolving identities following displacement (Ahmed 2000, 2007; see Ahmed et al 2003; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Wiles 2007) and during resettlement. Here research and analysis must be nuanced enough to recognize agency and culpability for categories of Iraqis outside and within the participant pool. Such experiences before the war and during conflict both gave varied degree of hope and meaning to many Iraqis. It is important to keep in mind many participants in this study volunteered to work with Coalition forces and take pride in their association with U.S. troops. It is through this discussion about their resettlement that varied degrees of the formations of identity, sense of belonging, and concepts of home are revealed. Therefore, such notions are important to consider for future analysis of refugees displaced by U.S. military operations overseas, then resettled to the United States.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

9/1/11

Hassan: Did they shoot at you? While you were in Iraq?

Me: Yes, Hassan. 'They' shot at me. Who do you consider 'they' ?

Hassan: 'They' aren't my people. I just cannot believe they are my people.

Did the soldiers protect you? They protected me... just like I was one of them you know...

... I was one of them, you know. The soldiers. I even wore the same uniform. We wore ACUs. Did you wear the ACUs?

... I was one of them [the soldiers]. We were brothers. They even gave me a combat patch. I was just like them...

—Interview with Hassan, Austin September 2011

5.1. Chapter Overview

In the final chapter I summarize the findings of data analysis relative to the research questions and objectives of the study. I revisit and discuss war refugee identity and how this group I call *U.S. Combat Zone Refugees* relate to the ethical and political implications of lumping all refugees into “one-size fits all” resettlement categories under current U.S. policy. Concluding the discussion, I highlight the limitations of the study and remedies through further investigation and future research.

5.2. Conclusion

This thesis centered on the lived experiences of post-2003 Iraqi refugees who discussed their identity, feelings of belonging, and sense of home in the context of resettlement to non-traditional gateway cities in the United States. One research question guiding this project was: *How are refugee ideas of home and resettlement affected by their notions of place attachment, identity, and belonging?* For participants in this study, belonging is important to reconstituting new identities and making home in the country that caused their displacement. Through a detailed examination of three post-2003 Iraqi refugees stories, Ali, Nadia and Hakim, I was able to expose ways belonging, identity, and home are constructed and intersect through examples of the ways in which acceptance and belonging for post-2003 Iraqi refugees are linked to inclusion and exclusion (Geschiere 2009; Spicer 2008; Trudeau 2006). These notions are wrapped up in race, ethnicity, education, nationality, gender, and sexuality. For participants and their families who can never return home, the U.S. has been both a safe location to resettle and a place of forming a sense of attachment and seeking acceptance.

I asked: *How are identity and 'home' constructed by post-2003 Iraqi refugees living within the borders of the United States? And, In what ways do new concepts of home resemble and/or call upon pre-resettlement ideas of home for Iraqi refugees?*

Throughout this project I have provided examples of how identity and belonging for displaced post-2003 Iraqis resettle to the U.S. is linked to how home is the symbolic ordering of material conditions not of Iraqi refugee's own making. The 'causes' for displacement for this particular group resonate in their narratives and effect how they view themselves within their new host communities. Dr. Butti (2008) of the *Iraqi Society of Oregon* argues:

Families need all kinds of programs to help integrate them into the larger American community, and bridging cultural gaps between the two communities. At the same time, we'd like to preserve the values of our own culture, while also working to integrate into the wider American culture. Obviously, this requires a delicate balancing act so that one is not isolated within his own culture, while making sure that one does not "float" without any culture, or perhaps lose ties with one's own culture altogether. These scenarios are all traumatic in their own way, and will likely create generational conflicts in the community. (*Colors of Influence website 2008, accessed 2012*)

Ultimately, thesis to draws attention the multiple ways identity formation, feelings of belonging, and home intersect, are fluid and layered both materialistically and symbolically (Saldanha 2008; also see Blunt and Dowling 2006) for post-2003 Iraqi refugees living in the United States. Refugees are on one hand made visible by their displacement by the U.S.-led war in Iraq, and on the other hand marginalized and rendered invisible by their status as 'refugees' in society. In essence, they have had to

endeavor more to 're-make' themselves as visible, worthy to belong and identify with their new host country—the country that both 'liberated' them and displaced them. It was not my intention to portray a marginalized group of victims. For example, neither Ali nor Nadia see themselves as marginal. They are educated individuals who have homes, jobs, vehicles, credit cards, and the time to volunteer in their communities; proof that agency and achieving a more stable sense of belonging for the new wave of Iraqis is possible. Yet, in post-9/11 United States, the process of attaining this is much harder for particular individuals or groups identified as an 'outsider' than someone who is accepted by the national narrative.

In seeking to understand: *How can the narratives of this particular group of Iraqi refugees contribute to understanding the geographic discourse of different U.S. refugee communities as a whole?* Where Refugees Studies and diaspora frequently centralizes the identity of migrant groups in examinations of resettlement and adaptation (Sorenson 1990), I argue this cannot be separated from an analysis of 'home' or belonging for this particular group of Iraqi refugees. Here geography is an ideal space for the expansion of critical scholarship about refugees living in the U.S. This offers geographic discourse a broader framework to discuss both the material and symbolic aspects of refugee 'lived experiences' and resettlement for other similarly situated refugees.

Through examinations of the 'lived experiences' of post-2003 Iraqi refugees

settled to non-traditional gateway cities, similarities and differences in identity-making, feelings of belonging and a sense of home are revealed at different scales. Both groups emphasized the importance of when they felt safe as well as finding meaningful, productive, and rewarding employment in order to fill their dwellings with new “comforts,” “things,” and “belongings”—material objects acting as replacements for what had been lost. Indeed, in some ways symbolic examples of home (Mallett 2004) differed between Portland Iraqi refugees from Austin participants. Most Portland participants used language that described experiences of “feeling at home” in times of community, advocacy, volunteering, and celebration and compared that to memories from their past dwellings and lives growing up in Iraq, while Austin participants expressed more focus on individualism rooted in notions of economic success and the so-called *American Dream*.

Home is imagined, desired, and remembered through a reference to physical places, buildings or beliefs, customs and/or traditions. For Portland Christian participants, elements of human interactions with the physical environment—volunteering in their children's school, meeting new refugees at the airport, helping with apartment set-up—not only alleviated anxiety of displacement, it was often associated with building community and belonging. However, this was not the case with many 20-35 year old SIV holders in both Austin and Portland, where the 'imagined' aspects of home stemmed

from material aspirations related to cultural aesthetics about the ‘correct’ or ‘ideal’ way to live and feel (Dudley 2008). First, they aimed to build a life “like Americans” as “an individual” (Hollinger 2004) at the local level living in their new host city, and second, they took pride in a transnational home carried with them in artifacts, past memories and experiences of Iraq.

For participants living in both cities, references to an 'imagined' Iraq were expressed through various examples about what they remembered their physical home to be before the war and displacement. This often was in relation to what they thought a home should be like in the United States. For example, Ali idealized memories about returning to the “early-90s Iraq” where he rebuilt cars and learned the “tricks and trade of mechanics.” On the other hand, like others, he expressed frustration with his tertiary education not being recognized as equivalent in the U.S., affirming a similar message about how “Iraq *has* the best colleges and universities.” Ali and other participants acknowledge that this was a battle they could not win, and many would return to school so they could quit their jobs and “be like other Americans” (Ali, Austin, July 2011; Narwal, Austin, August 2011). They carry with them the reality that neither their former homeland nor their present situation were what they had ever imagined prior to March 20, 2003.

5.2.1. U.S. Combat Zone Refugees

Regarding the question: *What, if any, are the ethical considerations for the resettlement of refugees in the United States—the country that 'created' the situation which caused their displacement?* When it comes to marginalization along lines of class, race, gender, religion, or nationality in post-9/11 United States, I argue for this group of refugees, that life in exile and a sense of belonging or feeling at home are not separate from identity or identification (Silva 2010). For example, the comparison between the generation of war refugees by U.S. military campaigns abroad is not limited to the current war in Iraq. The category of *U.S. Combat Zone Refugees* includes the Vietnamese, post-2003 Iraqis, and others, who are faced with the knowledge that the country they now call home is the very state that invaded their homeland and caused their displacement. This dialectical opposition between feeling a true sense of belonging and coping with the cause of uprootedness greatly influences the formation of their identity.

Hopkins' (2010) focuses on the performative nature of identity and the way in which “words, act, gestures...work to generate a core identity” (525) and how maintaining this sense of identity is defined in relation to where you came from prior to displacement is key to understanding how home is perceived throughout the resettlement process. Ignatieff (1994) suggests, “Where you belong is where you are safe; and where you are safe is where you belong” (25). Arguably, both Austin and Portland Iraqi

participants feel safe living in their respective cities, while simultaneously being marginalized or treated as 'outsiders'. This 'othering' category collapses the differences of individuals and groups, and has had a stifling effect on both the treatment and acceptance of Iraqi refugees living in the United States from the events on September 11, 2001 and on into the next decade (Belanger and Rogers 1993; Rogers and Henning 1999; Schmidley 2000; Mott 2006, 2010).

It is often the case that displacement from a refugee's homeland is associated with violence and painful memories. As discussed in earlier sections, Al Rasheed's (1994) study of displaced Iraqis in London aids in understanding how ideas about returning to an 'abstract' or 'imagined' home becomes a myth that involves overlaying an inaccessible 'point fixed in space' (also see Anderson 1983, 1991; Black 2002). Questions about any ethical consideration or moral obligations to this particular group are difficult to diagnose. With all participants, to some degree, acknowledging the stigmatization associated with the post- 9/11 EuroAmerican world this study is significant to give voice to those interviewed (Walters 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Valenta 2009a, 2010).

Through the analysis of mixed feelings toward their new host country—the United States—post-2003 Iraqis cannot be viewed as free from culpability for starting a war that has left their homeland in such devastating shape. I argue the more important question is: *Can the U.S. afford not to seek morally just or ethically legitimate solutions to promoting*

stable diasporic communities committed to not only the success of their native homelands, but their adopted ones as well? Of course there are challenges associated with marginalization, adaptation, and feelings of belonging for all refugees relocating to a new host country. However, as expressed by participants, current U.S. policies, resettlement agencies, and even the media fail to distinguish between refugees displaced for causes not related to U.S. foreign-policy abroad; rendering them 'invisible'. Simply recognizing the refugees who “served” and “worked alongside Coalition force troops” (SIV holders, Austin, August 2011) is a powerful step forward in the eyes of participants I interviewed who feel “Americans just don’t see them” (Hayder, Portland, March 2010).

Research on this topic must be nuanced enough to recognize agency and culpability for categories of Iraqis outside and within the participant pool. Memories of Iraq before the U.S.-led invasion and promises of a “new and democratic Iraq” during conflict both gave varied degree of hope and meaning to Iraqis. For the refugees displaced in this study, their association with Coalition forces prior to resettlement resulted in very different formations of identity, sense of belonging and concepts of home. Therefore, ethically it remains problematic to continue to lump post-2003 Iraqis into the same all-encompassing category of 'refugee' in the U.S. because it ignores the circumstances which caused their displacement. Still, participants create their own place,

in many ways transcending the categories as seen as limiting in discourse. Therefore, again, one must be careful when identifying a group as a 'group'. I recognize that, by focusing on how they are coping with the physical, psychological, and emotional trauma carried with them to their new home (Wise 2004), this study has *created* another category.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Initially, the participant pool's lack of diversity concerned me with regard to age, gender, language, legal status, and length of residence in the United States. It was my goal to seek volunteers willing to participate in both Austin and Portland representative of Iraqis who had relocated to the U.S. after 2003. At first, I had only a few interviews with male SIV holders between the ages of 20-35 who, by word of mouth, recommended others to the study. This would have resulted in a very different project. I approached this project from a perspective that difference is beneficial, as "the breadth of transnational cultural, historical and political understanding... contribute[s] immeasurably to the richness of...data and depth of analysis" (Pratt, et al.: 100). Finding volunteers to participate in both Austin and Oregon who did not all come from one network was important early on in the research process. I expanded my pool by being accessible to curious onlookers during my participant observation exercises at local businesses, coffee

shops, and community events. I believe overall research on both refugees and SIV holders demonstrated how difference in research on displaced persons adds to the analysis. Moreover, the relationship between home and race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are interesting and offer a space to continue to add to geographic discourse on home and resettled refugees.

Working with people who have experienced extreme physical, psychological, and emotional trauma is of concern for researchers and at times limiting (see Wise 2004).

When interviewed about Iraqi refugees in Oregon, Dr. Butti (2008) said:

There are different phases of loss that a refugee goes through in the process. Leaving the country is traumatic, then there's the trauma of going somewhere and dealing with uncertainty while waiting for asylum in another country. Finally, coming to a new environment, the refugee suffers cultural shock. All these traumas take place, and in many cases, they are not dealt with properly. (*Colors of Influence*, 2008)

For researchers who share experiences similar to those of their research participants it can be more challenging to uphold academic distance (Schmidt 2007). However, I recognized early on in the interview process, participants felt curious and comfortable with my own experience as a contractor in Iraq. While still maintaining distance, I was able to communicate an understanding about the violence and war that provided me with credibility as an 'insider' at times. In follow-up discussions, participants reflected on the

interviews as having a therapeutic effect. Schmidt (2007) highlights how bringing personal refugee lived experiences into the research process often deters policy-makers because of institutionalized positivist notions of ‘objectivity’. Overall, I did not find my positionality to be a drawback within this study.

This significance of this study is the contribution to a growing body of literature that calls for the inclusion of refugee perspective in academic discourse and on resettlement policy. It would be interesting to expand the project to include other refugee groups displaced by different contemporary U.S. military campaigns. The list might include refugees from the ongoing war in Afghanistan or the Kosovo Conflict in the late 1990s, who have been allowed to resettle within the United States. A comparison of refugees from these violent political landscapes to refugees from the Vietnam War and Iraq War may offer further insight to unpacking how *U.S. Combat Zone Refugees* may differ from asylum seekers, exiles, and refugees displaced for other reasons. Additionally, I would like to expand this study to include a discussion on imperialism and ideas regarding to develop a framework that explores how the generation of refugees by U.S. *wars on terror* may result in differences in identity formation, feelings of belonging, and sense of home from other motivations for conflict.

This study offers a critical alternative to discourse that continues centralize the topic of immigration and those who come to the U.S. primarily on their own volition.

Alternatively, as with the resettlement of refugees, this project concentrates on the fact that there is a difference in the 'lived experience' because of the migration flows are controlled to large extent by the U.S. government, not simply processed by it.

Importantly, in a world of growing intercultural contacts and migration future geographic research on refugees can build upon the case of Iraqis in Austin and Portland, by recognizing the importance of the material and symbolic aspects of home as well as political, cultural, and emotional factors of resettlement are key to identity formation and feelings of belonging for refugees.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

1. Leading Question: Can you tell me about your life prior to coming to the United States?
 2. Leading Question: For example where were you born, where did you grow up, how long did you live in Iraq or other countries?
 3. Probe: Do you know people in the United States that you knew in Iraq?
 4. Leading Question: How did you come to live in the United States?
 5. Probe: Did you get to choose where you would live in the United States?
 6. Probe: Is this the first place you have lived since coming to the United States?
 7. Leading Question: How did you learn about the process to come to the United States?
 8. Leading Question: Can you describe the experience of your journey to the United States?
 9. Probe: Did you have any ideas about the U.S. before coming?
 10. Probe: How have these ideas about the U.S. changed now that you have lived here for some time?
 11. Leading Question: Can you describe the experience once you arrived in the United States?
 12. Leading Question: Did you receive assistance once you arrived?
 13. Probe: Can you describe the support or assistance you received?
 14. Probe: Do you feel welcome in the United States? In the state/city you live in?
 15. Leading Question: Can you describe what the word 'home' means to you?
 16. Probe: Do you feel at home living in the United States?
 17. Probe: Would you say Portland/Austin is your 'home'?
 18. Leading Question: What do you do to feel at home?
 19. Probe: Where do you feel the most at home?
- Additional specific questions about identity, daily life, and practice.

20. Leading Question: What does it mean to you to be “Iraqi”?
21. Leading Question: What does it mean to you to be “American”?
22. Probe: What does it mean to live in Texan/Oregonian or Austin/Portland?
23. Leading Question: Can you talk to me about Iraqi culture in the United States?
24. Probe: As a person not living in Iraq how important is to you to keep your Iraqi culture?
25. Probe: Do you feel your experience in coming to America has encouraged you to change anything about yourself?
26. Leading Question: What do you feel influences your identity?
27. Probe: Can you explain how you have come to understand and feel this way
28. Leading Question: Has American (or other) culture(s) changed or added to your identity as an Iraqi?

APPENDIX B

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DHS	United States Department of Homeland Security
DOS	United States Department of State (State)
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IRCO	Immigrant Refugee Community Organization
IRAP	Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project
LPR	Legal Permanent Residential Status
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USCZR	United States Combat Zone Refugees
USRAP	United States Refugee Admissions Program
VOLAG	Volunteer Agency

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