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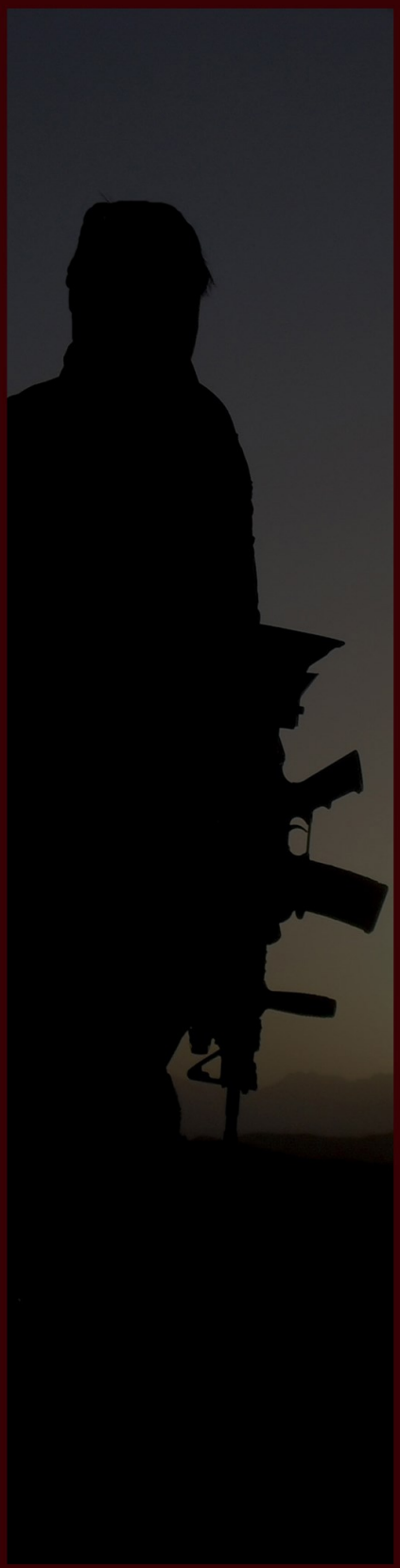

Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS - CESRAN

Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security

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INDEXING & ABSTRACTING

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The Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (JCTS) provides a platform to analyse conflict transformation and security as processes for managing change in non-violent ways to produce equitable outcomes for all parties that are sustainable. A wide range of human security concerns can be tackled by both hard and soft measures, therefore the Journal's scope not only covers such security sector reform issues as restructuring security apparatus, reintegration of ex-combatants, clearance of explosive remnants of war and cross-border management, but also the protection of human rights, justice, rule of law and governance. JCTS explores the view that by addressing conflict transformation and security holistically it is possible to achieve a high level of stability and human security, requiring interventions at both policy and practitioner level. These would include conflict management, negotiated peace agreements, peacekeeping, physical reconstruction, economic recovery, psycho-social support, rebuilding of primary services such as education and health, and enabling social cohesion. Other macro-level governance issues from constitution writing to state accountability and human resource management also need to be considered as part of this process of change.

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CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS - CESRAN

RESEARCH ARTICLE **JCTS** *Volume 7, Number 1, 2019*

"The country chooses you": Discourses of mobility and immobility among Iraqi refugees

Ken Crane*

* *La Sierra University, California*

ABSTRACT

"The country chooses you, you don't choose the country". This aphorism implies that people affected by the bureaucratic framework of refugee resettlement experience a diminished sense of agency. This paper explores to what extent displaced people can claim a sense of agency in spite of this conventional wisdom. It draws on fieldwork undertaken with Iraqi refugees in the US and Istanbul (2011-2016) and on the migration narratives of 51 Iraqi refugees. It analyses choice points throughout the continuum of resettlement and shows various ways in which these refugees achieved mobility in difficult circumstances; it also reveals the limits that constrain human agency when migrants' aspirations are mediated by the increasingly restrictive policies produced by nation states and international humanitarian bureaucracies. Governments' interest in appearing "in control" of refugee movements has been heightened by the global war on terror, as is illustrated by recent shifts in US refugee policy.

Keywords: *Iraqi refugees, forced migration, mobility, resettlement, social networks.*

Biographical Note*: Ken Crane is an educator, researcher and practitioner who worked in resettlement programmes for Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in California in the early 1980s and in health and agriculture programmes in Sudan for people displaced by war and war-induced famine. His research at the Julian Samora Research Institute in Michigan explored the religious involvement of Latinx youth in Mexican immigrant communities. Most recently he served as a volunteer with agencies supporting the resettlement of Iraqi refugees in southeastern California. He is currently an associate professor of sociology and global studies at La Sierra University in southeastern California.*

Introduction

"The country chooses you, you don't choose the country". This kind of aphorism punctuates the refugee narratives of the 51 Iraqis resettled in California between 2008 and 2015 who are the subjects of this study. At best, it reflects a tension between personal agency and bureaucratic structure; at worst, it reflects a diminished sense of agency and passive resignation to the bureaucratic vagaries of refugee relocation programmes. This ethnographic study is informed by the scholarship of anthropologists such as Alessandro Monsutti who maintain that refugees can indeed become "agents of their own life in spite of all the hardship they are facing".[1] It explores to what extent displaced people can remain agents of their own lives when they are waiting for some benevolent country to act on their behalf, and it questions how much room there is for personal and group agency within the larger institutional culture of formal refugee relocation, with its highly bureaucratic and programmatic structures.

This research focuses on the post-2003 Iraqi experience, for which out-migration peaked in 2006, though that migration continues into the present. In tracing the dialectical tension between agency and structure, it draws on life history interviews conducted with Iraqi refugees who were resettled to the US, as well as on interviews in Istanbul with NGO staff and refugees waiting for US resettlement. The interviews provide data on how various actors within the US Refugee Assistance Program (USRAP) coordinated processing and pre-departure clearances for those going to the US; it also casts light on how local NGOs dealt with refugee assistance for those people who were applying to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Turkish government for protection status.

The article begins by presenting an overview of the main theoretical constructs that have been used to explain the role of human agency in migration. Those constructs are considered here not as isolated factors but as elements in group-mediated processes that facilitate migration. The article also evaluates how such processes worked in the Iraqi experience of forced migration and it pays particular attention to choice points where human agency might be exercised; the exercise of agency at this kind of choice point is understood here to take the form of human actions that emerge in response to immanent and generalized violence. The article elaborates on these choice points in Turkey, which is an understudied country of first asylum for Iraqi refugees. It then explores what "involuntary immobility"[2] means within a discourse of human agency as migrants confront closed pathways on their routes towards their migration goals.

Conceptualizing human agency within forced migration

Studies of the Iraqi refugee experience during the post-2003 period contradict older typologies of the forced migration experience.[3] Iraqis categorically rejected the forms of humanitarian governance (UN camps) that had ordinarly prevailed in the post-WWII context, but to recognize their ability to survive outside of that structure is not to downplay the extreme hardships they faced which included gaps in education for their children,[4] exploitation in the underground economy,[5] and increases in the vulnerability of single women, war widows, and girls.[6] Recognition is also important for those people whose attempts to leave danger and find permanent solutions outside the region were denied.

Within micro-theories of migration, the human capacity to move across borders is seen as largely being enabled by social ties,[7] and over

[1] Monsutti, "States, Sovereignties and Refugees", https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/states-sovereignties-and-refugees-view-margins (Accessed 4 June 2014).
[2] Carling, "Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility".
[3] See Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Middle East*; Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees*; Diane Amos, *Eclipse of the Sunnis*; Harper, "Iraq's Refugees"; Tobin, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis".
[4] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Iraq's Children 2007".
[5] Diane Amos, *Eclipse of the Sunnis*; Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees*.
[6] Diane Amos, *Eclipse of the Sunnis*.
[7] See Rumbaut, "Assimilation and its Discontents"; William Thomas et al., *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America.*

time these "group-mediated" processes create an internal momentum or "cumulative causation" which sees migration becoming progressively easier for successive migrants.[8] This "embeddedness" of social relations within networks facilitates the mobilization of economic and informational resources, such as social capital.[9] Social capital is thus a vital component within the expansion of migration networks and builds on internalized norms and bounded solidarity, reciprocity, and enforceable trust.[10] Social capital provides "gateways" which make successive migration easier (though sometimes more insular) as it builds on accumulating information flows and resources, which are both economic and cultural (Ruth Gomberg-Munoz's study of Mexican restaurant workers in Chicago offers interesting insights into this kind of process).[11]

Of particular relevance to the Iraqi experience is the growing body of anthropological research into the ways refugees have devised ingenious methods to mobilize translocal social capital and financial resources effectively via networks, despite the seemingly desperate situations they inhabit.[12] Translocal networks are not bounded by borders and allow resources to be mobilized both locally as well as through transnational ties between migrant communities. For example, the Hazaras of Afghanistan have circulated goods, money, and information between Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan since the outbreak of war in the 1970s.[13]

Becoming the "chosen" in the US resettlement ecosystem

For those who participate in US refugee resettlement programmes, the notion that "the country chooses you" seems to have a natural logic. The constellation of government agencies that co-exist within the USRAP grew out of a national response to the massive refugee crisis that emerged in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, a response that was eventually formalized by the US Refugee Act of 1980. The act mandated that the admissions mechanism should literally begin at the top, with the president establishing the ceiling number of refugees to be admitted in any given year. Determinations about who should be chosen are then made at processing centres managed by the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (USPRM) in liaison with the UNHCR; its "asylum officers" initially determine whether a case has been made for a legitimate and well-founded fear of persecution (after 2008, Iraqis accepted under the Special Immigrant Visa programme did not require UNHCR referral). After the USPRM accepts a person for processing, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services coordinate a series of security clearance interviews during which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and officials from the CIA and FBI weigh in. Once these hurdles are passed, medical exams follow as well as coordination both with the government offices that manage US social services and with NGO resettlement partners at the federal, state, and municipal levels. By the time refugees board a flight from Istanbul or Amman to Los Angeles, their lives will have been touched by five agencies of the US federal government, as well as the UNHCR; the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which coordinates travel arrangements; and the NGO partner resettlement agency in their destination city.

From the point when a positive recommendation is made by the UNHCR to the moment when a refugee arrives in the US, a process takes place which lasts for at least two years. It should be noted that processing procedures are different for those who apply for asylum at the US borders with Mexico and Canada and for those who already reside in the US, but, from 2013 to 2015, about 26,000 out of almost 70,000 total refugee admissions, including 766 Iraqis, applied under these protocols (DHS 2015).

[8] Massey, "The New Immigration"; Cornelius, "The Structural Embeddedness of Demand for Mexican Immigrant Labor".
[9] Portes et al., "Embeddedness and Immigration".
[10] Coleman "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital"; Granovetter et al., "The Economic Sociology of Firms and Entrepreneurs".
[11] Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, *Labor and Legality.*
[12] Alessandro Monsutti, *War and Migration*; Chatelard, "What Visibility Conceals"; Al-Ali et al., "Refugees and Transnationalism".
[13] Alessandro Monsutti, *War and Migration*.

The aphorism that "The country chooses you" has an unintended logic in relation to the US' overseas military and political interventions which have opened up migration pathways to the US in many of the major refugee communities, including those in Iraq, Vietnam, Cuba, El Salvador, and Guatemala.[14] In some cases, a decision to allow entry to certain groups has grown out of a sense of responsibility for the consequences of US wars, particularly in relation to the plight of South Vietnamese allies who faced re-education camps after the victory of the North Vietnamese.[15]

The destabilizing effects of US foreign policy do not, however, of themselves open the doors of the US to any or all of those displaced through its military interventions. During the 1980s, refugees fleeing the brutalities of right-wing dictators supported by the US during the Cold War in countries like El Salvador, for example, were denied asylum, while it was routinely granted to people fleeing communist regimes in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union.[16] In reaction to 1980s' policies driven by the Cold War, the church-based Sanctuary Movement engaged in acts of civil disobedience by illegally housing Salvadorans threatened with deportation. The movement forced asylum policy debates into the courts and Congress, and favourable decisions on their behalf were rendered in 1987 (Supreme Court) and in Congress in 1990.[17]

Refugees serve the "political rather than economic interests" of the state,[18] when politics is construed broadly to include humanitarian and human rights concerns, and therefore the question of who gains entry into the US as a refugee is intrinsically political; intense lobbying can also be involved before certain groups are recognized as deserving protection. The US opened its doors to Iraqi refugees immediately following the First Gulf War (1990-1991) and accepted 29,080 Iraqi refugees for resettlement between 1991 and 1999.[19] The Iraqis who faced mass displacement after 2003 did not receive the same treatment, and total refugee admissions for the years immediately after the terror attacks of 9/11 were reduced to 26,839 and 28,306 in 2002 and 2003 respectively.[20] For Iraqi applicants, most of whom were staff and translators associated with the US military or the Coalition Provisional Authority, the doors to asylum remained essentially closed from 2003 to 2007. Resettlement officials in the US claim that Iraqis were not fleeing in large numbers until sectarian violence began in 2006 in response to the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest sites for Shi'as. Well before that, however, many Iraqis who worked for the US and its coalition partners had been targeted for assassination by insurgents. It took an intense lobbying effort on their behalf before any Iraqi refugees were admitted in significant numbers. At the forefront of this effort were the List Project – an organization formed by American veterans of the Iraq War – and USAID staff, who lobbied the US government to secure asylum for Iraqi allies marked for assassination. The List Project, along with other humanitarian organizations, helped lobby for the passage of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act in 2008, after which the US began admitting significant numbers of Iraqis.[21] The Act prioritized people who had collaborated with the coalition and their families, who qualified under a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) provision. SIV status allowed those in danger to apply while they were still refugees inside Iraq, rather than after they had crossed into a neighbouring country. The Act also established processing centres in locations to which significant numbers of Iraqi refugees had already fled, including Amman, Damascus, Beirut, and Istanbul.

Enabled by this legislation and by the presidency of Barack Obama, who favoured setting higher ceilings for refugee admissions, around 120,000 Iraqis were resettled in the US

[14] David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door*; Alessandro Portes et al., *Immigrant America*.
[15] Steven J. Gold, *Refugee Communities*.
[16] David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door*.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Hein De Haas, "Mobility and Human Development", 49.
[19] International Organization for Migration, "World Migration Report", https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr2011_english.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2018).
[20] US Department of Homeland Security, "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2004", https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2004 (Accessed 20 November 2018).
[21] List Project, "Timeline of Events".

between 2008 and 2015.[22] Iraqis have now become one of the largest refugee groups to be resettled in the US in the new millennium, alongside refugees from Burma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the *Lhotshampa* of Bhutan (Krogstad and Radford 2017).

The political process via which asylum seekers are granted entry and permanent residence, as well as the social service infrastructure mandated by US law, do appear at first glance to offer proof that "the country chooses you". However, when we map out the longer migration history of individuals, we can identify various choice points along this continuum of resettlement at which human agency mediates the structure of a seemingly hyper-managed process led by nine or ten large bureaucracies.

Spaces for human agency within the resettlement continuum

The words *crisis* and *decision* are etymologically connected. "Crisis" originates from the classical Greek verb *κυίν- ειν* – "to decide" – and in English it has come to mean, among other things, "a turning point". The chaotic and violent aftermath of the US invasion in 2003 was a turning point for Iraqis as they had to assess whether to stay or flee and ask where to go and for how long. In this section, I analyse crises and turning points in life trajectories that emerge in oral histories from Iraqis who decided to leave Iraq for surrounding countries. Following the model of Chatty's anthropological work on dispossession and displacement throughout the Middle East, I will use "the individual narratives of forced migrants and their descendants [… to gain an] understanding of their coping strategies and mechanisms".[23] These strategies and mechanisms will be analysed through a close assessment of the anonymized experiences of four individuals who will be referred to here as Yousef, Siham, Marwan, and Rana, and their family networks.

Yousef

Yousef was an engineer who managed wastewater treatment in Iraq's oil fields. Also an entrepreneur, he opened a shop in Baghdad that sold women's accessories, cosmetics, and jewellery. Yousef's shop and home were in a neighbourhood of Al-A'amiriya in western Baghdad near the airport, along the road heading west to Abu Graib. Sunnis had migrated here from Anbar, making it an area with a Sunni majority, but it had a mixed population of Shi'a, Kurds, and Christians. Yousef's shop was popular and often crowded and after the invasion it attracted the attention of the US military, who routinely checked the shop for suspected insurgent activity. Over time, US soldiers began to buy souvenirs for family members back home and Yousef's hospitality towards the Americans in turn attracted the attention of insurgents: "They questioned why the American Army would come in. They thought that it meant I was collaborating with them, and because of that I was threatened". After receiving a series of threats, he moved his family in with his brother in a different neighbourhood for several months while he decided what to do next. Yousef and his family thought of going to Egypt where they had friends, but this option was too expensive, and the visa application process was slow and uncertain. In 2007, an Iraqi friend in Aleppo who had left two years earlier suggested that they join him in Syria where no visa was required. That year, Yousef found work in a textile factory that made children's clothes. He described himself as a "labourer" who worked fourteen-hour days. His wife, Nuha, worked from home making jewellery.

They rented a house for only six months, thinking that they would soon be able to return to Iraq, but a year passed and the news from Iraq was still not good: "We realized that Iraq was moving towards the worst. The situations there were deteriorating. So, with this deterioration, the decision [to seek resettlement] becomes stronger". Nuha's mother and her brother's family decided to leave and came to Syria as well, not to Aleppo but to Damascus where her brother, who had

[22] US Department of Homeland Security, "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2013"; US Department of Homeland Security, "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2016".

[23] Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Middle East*, 6.

been an art teacher in a primary school, found work at a friend's print shop.

Two years later, the family was still in Aleppo, and Yousef's wife delivered their youngest child. Medical care was expensive, but since they had registered with the UN in 2007 for aid and resettlement, 80 per cent of the medical costs were covered by a UN programme. Eventually, the situation in Aleppo became dangerous and Yousef and his family had to leave for Damascus where he managed to find similar factory work. It was during this time that the family considered resettlement more seriously, but from Yousef's perspective it was unclear which country might choose them: "It is according to the stories, and according to the information that got included in the protection letter of the files of all the Iraqis, the settlement started becoming effective, to America, Germany, Australia, Canada". Yousef and Nuha were not sure where they would end up; they had extended family in Germany, Sweden, Australia, and the US and believed that "Whatever country accepts the file of the refugee, they transfer you there. […] So, for us, America accepted us, and they transferred us to America". In fact, Nuha's cousin in California, who had been in the US since 2008, had arranged with a resettlement agency in California to be their sponsors, and this had prompted the agencies involved to resettle them in California. The family arrived in Fontana, California, in the summer of 2013. Six months later, Nuha's brother also arrived from Syria, sponsored by the same cousin.

Siham

Siham grew up on her father's farm in the small village of Alanish in Kurdish northern Iraq, where she was born in 1972. Alanish is located just outside the city of Zakho, 80 kilometres north of Mosul, a few miles east of the border crossing with Turkey. It is a region where Assyrian Christians have lived for two thousand years.[24] In 1975, Siham and her family moved to Baghdad for better work opportunities. Her father, a farmer by trade, found work as a gardener for the University of Baghdad and also worked in a restaurant. They lived in the Baghdad suburb of Al Jadeeda which was a mixed community that included Sunni, Shi'a, and Christian people. Siham's father recalls that "They [Muslims] were very kind to us". Siham only managed to complete third grade before the bombing raids during the Iraq-Iran War, which began in 1980, prevented her from continuing at school. Siham eventually married in Baghdad but her husband died from liver failure and to support herself she went to work in a textile factory where she stayed for seven years.

Things changed for Siham's family in post-invasion Iraq. Her sister, who was attending a technical school, felt pressured to wear the hijab, and, during the intensification of violence from 2006 onward, it became dangerous even to travel to work due to bombings and kidnappings. Several members of the family's St. Elias (Chaldean) parish were killed during one attack. Christian friends and relatives began to leave the area until they were the only Christian family left in the neighbourhood. In 2006, a young man came to the grocery store run by Nahith, Siham's brother, and delivered the threat that his sisters should wear hijab and stop attending their church or face consequences. Nahith threw a can of tomato paste at him and told him to get out. The family feared that the young man would return with an armed group and felt that it was now too dangerous to stay in Iraq. In November 2007, Siham's brother Nahith and two younger sisters drove north through Iraqi Kurdistan and crossed the border into Syria. There they met up with other Iraqi-Assyrian and Chaldean refugees living in northeastern Syria, not far from the Iraqi border. Siham, her father, mother, and older sister drove to Syria and joined them in April 2007. Even though threats of violence toward the family had been the deciding factor in their decision to leave, Siham's father stressed that they did not run away in the middle of the night: "It was 6 in the morning. We took our time. It was normal".

[24] The term "Assyrian" is commonly used by Christians in Iraq to designate both the geographical centre for Christianity in Iraq and their origins in the Assyrian empire. The term "Chaldean" is used in a more ethno-religious sense to describe those who adhere to the Chaldean Catholic faith (Eastern rite Catholics) and speak Aramaic. See Kaldu, "Contemporary Chaldeans and Assyrians", https://kaldu.org/2015/07/contemporary-chaldeans-and-assyrians/ (Accessed 30 September 2018).

They stayed in Syria for six years, waiting to see what would happen in Iraq and they worked mostly in warehouses which Siham's father claimed were used for storing women's undergarments. The family also received food assistance and were granted refugee status by a UNHCR programme to which they applied for protection. Feeling that there was no future for Christians in Iraq, they applied to the UN for resettlement. All of Siham's father's siblings had by this time left Iraq for resettlement in Australia, Europe (France, Germany, and Finland), and the US (San Diego). They communicated with cousins who lived in a Chaldean parish in Riverside, California, who agreed to be their sponsors through the USRAP. In 2011, they travelled to the UN's offices in the Damascus suburb of Kafr Sousa, where they were interviewed by the American "delegation", which was made up of officials from the DHS. In September 2012, the family arrived in California, although Siham's two brothers remained in Syria. One had begun the paperwork for resettlement along with Siham but was in a delicate phase of his marriage arrangements and decided to apply separately with his wife. Both brothers were being told that they did not qualify for resettlement because they had left Iraq from the Kurdish Autonomous Region, which, unlike Baghdad, was labelled a "safe zone" and was therefore presumed too secure to warrant any protection status being granted if its residents chose to leave Iraq.

The stories of Yousef's and Siham's families, Muslim and Christian, show how far post-invasion Iraq had drifted into chaos and civil war. By 2006, all ethno-religious groups were vulnerable and ethnic cleansing at the neighbourhood level accelerated. At its peak, the massive displacement of Iraqi people totalled between 1.5 and two million people within Iraq with an estimated 750,000 and two million people respectively displaced to the neighbouring countries of Jordan and Syria.[25]

The cases described in this paper are clearly relevant to the exploration of mobility within the constraints of forced migration, but they also illustrate what the sociologist Chatelard has characterized as migration within a "continuum of previous displacements".[26] Iraqis like Yousef and Siham were able to integrate with translocal social networks created by previous outmigration and this helped them to survive their extended exile in the countries that surround Iraq.[27] Though it is generally accepted that migration networks follow the logic of bounded or group solidarity, it is important, as Chatelard has illustrated, to identify the ways in which Iraqi migration has also involved a pattern of social differentiation. Historically, Iraqi Shi'a and Christians built networks in countries like Syria, which allowed these groups relative freedom to operate openly,[28] and so when the Iraqi diaspora emerged in other countries in the new millennium they were able to operate "within socially fragmented transnational spaces".[29] Subsequent migrations and the formation of diasporas in countries of exile followed pathways which were also characterized by ethno-religious solidarities. The following two case studies, which further illustrate this pattern, explore the stories of Iraqi people who found protection in Turkey.

Most of the media coverage and research on the Iraqi refugee crisis has, logically enough, focused on Jordan and Syria where the majority of Iraqi refugees sought either short- or long-term refuge. As a result, Turkey has been an understudied and overlooked site during the post-invasion period, up until the Syrian refugee influx into Turkey from 2011 onwards. However, it is useful to analyse the role Turkey played in the Iraqi refugee crisis. Turkey hosted one of the key Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) processing centres for Iraqis headed for the United States, under contract from the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). According to

[25] UNHCR, "UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Jordan", 2015, http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486566&submit=GO (Accessed 13 February 2014); UNHCR, "UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Syrian Arab Republic", 2018, http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html (Accessed 13 February 2014); Harper, "Iraq's Refugees".

[26] Chatelard, "What Visibility Conceals", 19.

[27] Chatty et al., "Unlocking Protracted Displacement of Refugees and IDPs".

[28] Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees*.

[29] Chatelard, "What Visibility Conceals", 20.

interviews with ICMC officials at the BPRM centre, one third of all Iraqi refugees during the peak years of Iraqi resettlement to the US were handled through the regional PRM office in Istanbul.[30] The majority of those individuals ended up being resettled in California.[31] During this time, there were only two asylum officers at the UNHCR office in Ankara and so the office could only handle two cases per day.[32] This meant that the BPRM's eligibility interviewers were essential in handling the large number of cases coming not only through Turkey but also from the BPRM satellite offices in Beirut, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Kuwait. The cases of people who had relatives in the US were referred by the UNHCR to the BPRM processing centre in Istanbul, where staff assisted them in preparing for screening interviews with US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) officials. The cases of those people who were more likely to be resettled in the EU or Australia were referred to the relevant embassies.

Having operated for centuries as a strategic land bridge between east and west, Turkey continues to be a key transit country for refugees fleeing wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia; for Iraqi asylum seekers attempting to reach the EU, Turkey has been the primary transit country. The Turkish demographer and sociologist Ahmet Içduygu cites 1991 as a significant year for Iraqi migrants in Turkey because it was then that Turkey granted temporary safe haven to half a million Kurdish Iraqis who were fleeing Saddam Hussein's brutal chemical weapon attacks on Kurdish civilians. While the vast majority of these Kurds returned to Iraq after a safe zone was established in Iraqi Kurdistan, a residual population remained in Turkey and subsequently constituted "a bridge-head for more Iraqis to enter Turkey, or to use the country as a transit area towards the West".[33] While it was assumed that this group was an exclusively Kurdish population, Içduygu's breakdown of the displaced Iraqi population showed that it included many Arabs, Chaldeans, and Turkomans too. It should be noted that respondents confirmed Chatelard's insights about the relevance of network factors when they cited the presence of "friends" and "familiarity with the country" as reasons for choosing to either transit or remain in Turkey.[34]

Marwan

Marwan had lived most of his life in Mosul, in northern Iraq's Nineveh province, "the city of two springs," where "the weather is not too hot, but the politics, man, that's something else". He received a diploma in engineering before he left Iraq and his choice to leave was motivated by the 2008 Al Qaeda kidnapping and murder of the Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulus Rahho in Mosul. Marwan went first to Aleppo, but as the situation in Syria became more tenuous in 2011 he found his way to Istanbul where his mother and sister had gone in 2009.

By the time he arrived in Istanbul, Marwan's parents had already been resettled in the US and he fully expected to follow them there. While he was waiting for his resettlement application to be processed by the PRM office in Istanbul, he lived in Kortulus, a community to which many Iraqi Chaldeans had gravitated. He was in constant contact with his parents in the United States via internet portals such as Skype.

Iraqis fortunate enough to be granted refugee status, like Marwan, were assigned by Turkish authorities to live temporarily in about 50 "satellite cities" throughout the country. The downside to this arrangement was that many experienced isolation while they were living within a non-Arabic language community. To counter this, BPRM sponsored Turkish language classes and, until the funding ran out, it provided psycho-social support via counselling for people who either suffered during their adjustment to Turkey or who were dealing with trauma associated with their flight from Iraq. Some officials at the processing office felt that being "forced to learn Turkish" was good preparation for their adjustment in the US.

Reductions in social capital are rarely beneficial to migrants and so it is not surprising that Iraqis

[30] LM [Anonymized,] Interview by Ken Crane. Istanbul, Turkey, 9 September 2011.
[31] International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), *Restoring Dignity, Inspiring*
Change.
[32] DK [Anonymized,] Interview by Ken Crane. Istanbul, Turkey, 15 September 2015.
[33] Ahmet Içduygu, *Irregular Migration in Turkey*, 22.
[34] Ibid., 33.

in Turkey found ways to circumvent the satellite city restriction in order to live at least part of the time in Istanbul, "a place where people find co-ethnics where they get help" according to one NGO source. Two factors converged that allowed a support network to emerge for Chaldean Iraqis like Marwan and Rana, whose case I describe below. The historical existence of a Chaldean community in Istanbul, albeit smaller than that which had existed in the past, as well as a network of NGOs that provided assistance, created an environment that helped refugees eke out an existence while they waited for placement in other countries. In addition, the presence of the PMR processing office facilitated a strong transnational linkage between the historically large Iraqi-Chaldean community in southern California and the Chaldean Iraqis who gravitated to Istanbul. Although PRM officials downplayed the significance of Iraqi communities in the US as influential in resettlement decisions, the visits made by PRM officials from Istanbul to major resettlement destination points in California seems to confirm Chatelard's findings from Jordan that networks have been built on expectations of final resettlement destinations and reflect the ongoing influence of previous policy decisions and government mechanisms.

This decision space along the resettlement continuum in Istanbul reveals important mechanisms related to the exercise of human agency. First, Iraqis exploited historically developed social networks in order to transit through or live in Turkey. Second, in line with Chatelard's observations, social differentiation has shaped Iraqis' future migratory trends and circumstances, as is illustrated by the fact that a significant number of the Iraqis who gravitated to Istanbul were Chaldeans. Third, as in Jordan and Syria, but on a smaller scale, social networks developed over time in Turkey and social pathways expanded which connected Iraqis in Istanbul with specific communities in the US, a finding which aligns with the principle of cumulative causation.

Rana

Marwan, Siham, and Yousef were among the 120,000 Iraqis who started a new life in the US, but it is important to point out that the majority of those displaced in post-invasion Iraq did not permanently leave the country or region. Many who attempted to do so were unsuccessful, as the case of Rana, an Iraqi woman in her late 30s, makes clear. After the attack on Our Lady of Deliverance Chaldean Catholic Church in Baghdad on 31 October 2010, she felt that it was no longer safe for Christians anywhere in Iraq, even in her hometown of Mosul in the Kurdish Autonomous Region. With the help of friends in Turkey she and her husband and children made it to Istanbul. Unfortunately, she and her family were denied refugee status because the Kurdish Autonomous Region, in contrast with Baghdad, was considered a "safe zone" secure enough that people who left it would not be eligible for refugee protection. Her husband occasionally did day labour work, even though at this time even refugees with temporary protection did not have permission to work. Rana tried to support herself and her children as a hairdresser in Tarlabaşi, one of Istanbul's poorest neighbourhoods, and she earned about $500 a month.

Things got worse when Rana's husband eventually abandoned the family. At one point, she and her children were locked out of their apartment when she fell three months behind with her rent payments. Rana and her children moved in with an elderly couple and paid daily for their room and board. An NGO tried to help the eldest son to find a job as well as help Rana appeal to the UNHCR to reopen their asylum case. Eventually, Rana and her children returned to Iraq. The NGO that had helped the family in Istanbul eventually lost all contact with them, and their fate in Iraq is unknown.

Rana and her family are among those who have experienced what Carling called "involuntary immobility".[35] They are among the displaced people of the world who are unable to find ways out of conflict zones or are unable to surmount obstacles that prevent them from finding a safe place to live where a viable livelihood is available. The Iraqi narrative in the US, gathered through research for this study, was heavily

[35] Carling, "Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility".

weighted with resettled people's concerns about family and friends still in harm's way, either in Iraq, where over four million remain internally displaced, or in Syria, where approximately 50,000 Iraqis still live despite that country's deadly civil war.[36]

One missing piece that would have made Rana's position more viable was the granting of official refugee status, which would at least have given her more protection from deportation and exploitation by unscrupulous landlords. The fact that she survived the abandonment of her husband while supporting four children in the underground economy of Istanbul actually demonstrates that she had an above average set of survival skills, but without refugee status her situation remained too tenuous for her and her children to remain in Turkey. Both the cause and solution for Rana's predicament lie somewhere in the interaction between the sovereign power of states to grant rights based on their interpretation of their own refugee policies and accepted refugee conventions, on the one hand, and the efficacy of those mobility factors (networks, personal capability, and social capital) which enable migrants to achieve their goals and "expand freedom" on the other.[37]

In all of the cases described above, the exercise of agency, coping strategies, and mechanisms for survival varied widely but enabled survival and progress to a certain point along the resettlement continuum. Decisions to leave were not always made under duress; especially when such decisions were made in response to generalized violence, they could be made in deliberate and patient ways – "we did not run away". Decisions were not necessarily linear and they sometimes involved circular movements back to Iraq which allowed people to assess the possibility of safe repatriation. For Rana, this kind of movement meant a return to an uncertain future. If she returned to Mosul, it is likely that she was forced to flee again when it was overrun by ISIS in 2014.

Rana's story embodies a counter-narrative to any definitions of refugee mobility that characterize it as a linear process that leads to the "durable solutions" represented by asylum and permanent resettlement in the US, EU, or Australia. In fact, her story exemplifies the more dominant pattern because it involves circular movements throughout the region, multiple displacements, and serial migrations in search of protection and/or a livelihood.

Conclusion: discourses of refugee mobility and the War on Terror

The statement that "The country chooses you" takes on a variety of different meanings when it is examined through the lens of Iraq's post-2003 exodus and the lived experience of people like Yousef, Siham, Marwan, and Rana. When their experiences are examined in relation to a continuum of choice points, it is clear that each individual in this study demonstrated that they were, to varying degrees, "agents of their own life", [38] even if their ultimate migration goals were not fully realized. Migrating in response to widespread insecurity and violence, they offer a different typology of displacement: rather than being the desperate masses of the refugee imaginary, so well described by Malkki,[39] they represent an urban class made up of people with varied occupations and education levels who mobilize social capital to survive within informal economies, aided by ethno-religious solidarities. They refused to be confined to camps and survived largely outside such regimes of humanitarian governance, but they were still able to make selective and strategic use of aid from UN agencies and NGOs. Their eventual destinations in the US, while ostensibly determined by decisions made by resettlement agencies, the BPRM, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement, were also influenced by social networks formed by refugees already in the US

[36]UNHCR, "Syria Fact Sheet", 2018, http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Syria%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20February%202018.pdf (Accessed 8 April 2018); UNHCR, "Global Focus: Iraq", 2018, http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2547#_ga=2.248146563.522592044.1523219151-1541788303.1516311258 (Accessed 8 April 2018).

[37] Amartya Sen, *Development and Freedom*.

[38] Monsutti, "States, Sovereignties and Refugees: A View from the Margins?", 20 June 2012, https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/states-sovereignties-and-refugees-view-margins (Accessed 4 June 2014).

[39] Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile*.

who became sponsor families for refugee placement. The influence of "prior migration and social networks"[40] had already been well-demonstrated by previous waves of Vietnamese and Cuban refugees.[41]

The Syrian war and the scale of its humanitarian crisis rendered Iraqi refugees less invisible than they had been before that point, but they fully re-emerged into public view when ISIS overran Shindar and Mosul in 2014. This new wave of Iraqi refugees, along with Syrians and Afghans, formed the three largest groups who determinedly crossed the Aegean and moved through the Balkans toward Western Europe in 2015. [42] Pundits and politicians in the US watched the migration events unfolding in Europe with great interest. Some commentators alleged it posed a "near-existential threat" to the EU. [43] Candidate Donald Trump's campaign manager Steve Bannon called it "civilizational jihad personified", [44] and Trump himself brazenly contributed to the threat narrative: "Did you ever see a migration like that … They're all men, and they're all strong looking guys".[45] The spectre of seemingly "uncontrolled" migration facilitated by friend and kin networks was put forward as an object lesson for the American people to encourage them to protect their borders more vigilantly and enhance their scrutiny of refugees. Clearly, the ability of human agency to circumvent borders was part of what was perceived to be so threatening. America, it was argued, like the EU, needed leaders who could reassure their citizens that the government was in control of the "choosing" mechanism. An unintended consequence of the migration events of 2015 was how they were used by political interest groups in the US and Europe to argue for the increased management of migration, the tightening of borders, and enhanced security screening. Although the terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, and San Bernardino, California, were not perpetrated by refugees, unmanaged migration was conflated with terrorist activity, a tactic employed to great advantage by anti-immigrant groups on both sides of the Atlantic.[46]

The discourse which assumes that "The country chooses you" has now tilted, with regards to the implementation of US immigration and refugee policy, to the extent that it is being used to promote heightened control of migration at the state level. US President Donald Trump's statement that national security requires the removal of "extended family chain migration"[47] from US immigration policy grows out of multiple misperceptions, one being that family unification provisions insert an irrational and uncontrollable logic into the apparatus of decision-making about who is allowed residence in the US. Political groups like Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, which have called for reductions in the US Refugee Admissions Program, have likewise built on perceptions that this hyper-scrutinized, multi-year path for refugees hoping to enter the US "exacerbates the terrorist threat to our nation".[48]

The upsurge of a securitization paradigm within US refugee discourse became evident through the level of direct opposition that emerged in relation to the Obama administration's very modest plan to increase the number of Syrian refugees to 10,000 in its 2016 resettlement programme. In the previous year, the US accepted over 70,000 total refugees, including 12,676 from Iraq and 1,682 from Syria. [49] In direct response to President Trump's plan, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed the "American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act" (HR 4038), which

[40] Hein De Haas, *Mobility and Human Development*, 49.
[41] Alejandro Portes et al., *Latin Journey*; Steven J. Gold, *Refugee Communities*.
[42] Crawley et al., "Understanding the Dynamics of Migration".
[43] Poulos, "Obama Bungled US Response to the Arab Spring", June 5, 2016, https://www.pe.com/2016/06/05/james-poulos-obama-bungled-us-response-to-the-arab-spring/ (Accessed 7 January 2018).
[44] Joshua Green, *Devil's Bargain*, 207.
[45] Finnegan, "Trump and the Refugees".
[46] Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at our Door*; Kopan, "Donald Trump".
[47] Trump, "National Security Strategy of the United States", December 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf (Accessed 18 November 2018).
[48] Ann Corcoran, *Refugee Resettlement and the Hijra to America*, 8.
[49] US Department of Homeland Security "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2016". https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2016 (Accessed 21 January 2019).

required much higher levels of scrutiny for nationality groups including people from Iraq and Syria.[50] Had HR 4038 passed the Senate and been signed into law by President Obama, it would have added years to what was already a rigorous six-year process for Yousef's family. Most of the refugees interviewed in this study endured at least two years of waiting and some had waited for as long as eight years for resettlement.

The US government's preoccupation with securing its borders has now extended into ethnic, religious, and national selectivity practices that shape the calculus of who the country will accept as refugees, revealing the darker side of "The country chooses you" discourse. While in his first year in office, President Donald Trump reduced what had been the largest resettlement programme in the world and attempted to ban future immigration from a list of Muslim-majority countries deeply affected by war. These forms of heightened security- and identity-driven refugee policies, now writ large by many nation states, will indeed constrain the choices for those whose best option is resettlement. The Iraqi refugee experience has shown, however, that such policies, while increasing vulnerabilities, ultimately will not foreclose their exercise of human agency.

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