DREAM OF THE HANGING GARDENS: MALE IRAQI REFUGEES AND EXILES IN JORDAN, THEIR MIGRATION AND ADAPTATION EXPERIENCES

by

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Abstract

This study shares the stories of ten Iraqi refugees and exiles who experienced war in Iraq and migrated to Jordan. Through the methodology of narrative inquiry, this study gives voice to their stories of adversity and loss. It investigates the meaning they make of their experiences and how that helped them cope and adapt. Using thematic analysis, themes were highlighted within each narrative. Then, three common themes were identified amongst all ten narratives: 1) the role of religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions in coping, 2) the inner strength gained from experiencing war and from identification with the Iraqi nationality, and 3) the search for a purpose and the desire to make a contribution. This research contributes to the field of counselling psychology by providing rich and detailed contextual understanding of the ways in which Iraqis coped with their war and migration experiences. This study also examines the role of the researcher, as well as the limitations of the research, future research suggestions, and the implications for counselling psychology.
Preface

This dissertation was approved by the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) Office of Research Services (ORS). It received a full board approval from the ORS Behavioral Research Ethics Board (certificate number H09-01200).
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“Work is love made visible”
-- Khalil Gibran

“We are each of us angels with only one wing, and we can only fly by embracing each other”
-- Luciano De Crescenzo

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all the participants in this project, to my parents, to my departed grandparents, to all my mentors, to all my teachers, to all my role models, to all my ancestors, to future generations, to love, to freedom, to compassion, and to the humanity in all of us.
Chapter: Introduction

The story of humanity is marked by triumphs and tribulations. Over the past hundred years there have been many human-induced events that have affected the civilian population, including two world wars, hundreds of regional conflicts, civil wars, and terrorist attacks. These events have led to certain humanitarian trends and developments on a worldwide scale. Beginning in 2002, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) witnessed a steady decline in the number of refugees (2007). However, this trend was short lived, and by the end of 2007 the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) reached 25.1 million. At that time, UNHCR provided protection or assistance to 11.4 million refugees under their responsibility. This was an unprecedented increase of 2.5 million refugees (UNHCR, 2007).

Challenges in providing protection are compounded by the struggles of the many states that support these refugees. The majority of these countries, such as Jordan and Syria in the Middle East, face challenges in supporting their own population while dealing with the large influx of refugees. Even though many countries are generous in their admissions policies and practices with refugees, refoulement still occurs. Refoulement is the forced return of refugees to places where they experienced prosecution (Barne, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Both developing and developed countries face challenges in dealing with the global trend of refugees and IDPs. Canada is one of the countries in the industrialized world that plays a role in supporting refugees. It helps those that seek protection from both within and outside of Canada through two programs: the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, which provides protection to individuals making refugee claims from outside Canada, and the Domestic Asylum System which supports individuals making refugee claims from within Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). Canada accepts 25,000 refugees a year.
1.1 Refugee mental health

Due to the magnitude of problems associated with the influx of refugees and the limited resources available, mental health issues often do not receive adequate attention during emergency responses (WHO, 2009). Traditional responses to refugees and IDPs center around providing protection and necessities, such as food, water, and shelter. Estimates from the World Health Organization indicate that out of the twenty three million refugees under the care of UNCHR, five million have chronic mental health issues due to serious traumatization before the wars they were exposed to, while another five million suffer from “psychosocial dysfunctioning” affecting their communities and their own lives. In fact, it is estimated that 50 percent of refugees suffer from mental health problems, including trauma, chronic mental health issues, distress, and suffering (WHO, 2009). The impact of traumatic events and wars on refugees seems to be long lasting:

Consequences remain in the personal and collective memory even long after peace agreements and repatriation has been accomplished. Traumatic experiences such as killing, material losses, torture and sexual violence, harsh detention and uprooting, all affect peoples’ behaviors for generations. Life in overcrowded camps, deprivations, uncertainty over the future, disruption of community and social support networks lead to psychosocial dysfunctioning. (WHO, 2009, p. 1)

Research on refugee mental health indicates that there is a prevalence of numerous psychological disorders. However, there seems to be noticeable variations in prevalence and symptomology across refugees from different populations. For instance, the rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) vary from 7% to 86% (Davidson, Murray, & Schweitzer, 2008) while the rates of major depression vary from 3% to 80% (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh,
Refugees also suffer from medical problems and other unexplained somatic symptoms (Hollifield et al., 2009).

Research indicates that the stressors which refugees experience occur in two stages (Keyes, 2000). The first group of stressors are associated with pre-migration experiences, such as living through a war, loss of family, and fears for safety. The second stage of stressors occurs during post-migration, after the immediate danger is removed. These latter stressors emerge as a result of the change in life and the challenge of dealing with issues related to the new location, such as adapting to a new culture, employment/unemployment, language barriers, and other adjustment difficulties (Keyes, 2000). There are other factors within each of these stages that play a role in the mental health of refugees, such as threat to life in the pre-migration experience, and compatibility with host cultures in post-migration (Davidson et al., 2008). The resolution of the conflict that occurred during pre-migration is associated with better mental health while post-migration conditions are indexed by economic opportunities (Porter & Haslam, 2005).

It should be pointed out here that the reactions of refugees to their ordeals and experiences should not be viewed as psychological and pathological abnormalities. WHO poignantly encapsulates this important view: “Refugees’ reactions are normal reactions to abnormal situations” (2009, p. 1).

This brings us to a few questions of interest in this research: How can we best understand refugees’ reactions, given their cultural context and the meaning they make from their experiences? How does this meaning facilitate their adjustment to the new environment? What helps them cope and adapt to their adverse conditions?
1.2 Salutogenic perspective

The majority of literature focuses on the pathogenic psychological developments in refugees exposed to war. In fact, most of the research that has been conducted on those exposed to war focuses on the challenges individuals face, such as depression, anxiety, and somatic difficulties (Karam & Ghosn, 2003). There are gaps in the literature around understanding the experiences of refugees from within their own cultural context and the meaning they make of those experiences. There is also limited research on refugees’ ability to cope with their horrific experiences and their ability to adjust well in their new situations. This study explores the stories and experiences of Iraqi refugees and exiles living in Jordan. It investigates the meaning they make of their experiences while coping with adversity. This research will contribute to the field of counselling psychology by providing rich contextual details and cultural implications that will help us better understand the nature of refugee mental health. It will also help us understand how we can best support refugees through their transition and adjustment.

Some literature has begun to emerge from a nonpathogenic perspective on the exposure to traumatic events and adversity. A salutogenic perspective, meaning origin of health, is an alternative perspective to studying traumatic stress (Antonovsky, 1979; Antonovsky & Berstein, 1986; Fontana & Rosenheck, 1998). A salutary notion suggests that coping with stressful life events can also provide opportunities for personal growth and positive reappraisals. This concept has been investigated in the literature for some time (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It proposes that there may be much to learn from those that remain healthy despite their pathogenic exposure and that exposure to trauma may lead to benefits (Waysman, Schwarzwald, & Solomon, 2001).
However, this salutogenic perspective has received little attention to date in investigating the experiences of refugees and understanding the cultural meaning of their experiences. The salutogenic paradigm can be applied to understanding how refugees organize their responses to their war experiences and how these, in turn, impact their mental health. This research adopts a salutogenic perspective.

1.3 The refugee context

By the end of 2007, the UNHCR identified two countries as the leading countries of origin for refugees: Afghanistan, the country of origin for largest group with 27% of global refugees (almost 3.1 million), and Iraq was the second largest group with 2.3 million who sought refuge in neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2007a). There were over 4 million displaced Iraqis in total, including the nearly 2.2 million Iraqis displaced within the country, very few of whom would be returning home (UNHCR, 2007b). In fact, the Iraqi influx of refugees marks the largest displacement crisis in the Middle East since 1948, when the Palestine refugee crisis overwhelmed the region after the establishment of Israel (UNCHR, 2009).

In 2007, Iraqis became the leading group seeking asylum in the industrialized world. A staggering number of Iraqis were leaving their homes, an estimated 60,000 Iraqis a month due to the escalating violence in Iraq (UNHCR, 2007b). There is a widespread misperception, however, that the majority of refugees are hosted in the industrialized world. Data suggests that most refugees remain in their region of origin. In fact, 95 percent of Iraqis who have been displaced are still in the Middle East (UNCHR, 2007a). What are the implications of this data and what is the historical context of the massive numbers of Iraqis in exile?
1.4 Historical context of Iraqi displacement

Dictatorship and turmoil in Iraq’s political history over the past couple of decades set the scene for massive Iraqi displacement. The inauguration of Saddam Hussein to presidency in 1979 marked the beginning of human rights violations and violence in Iraq’s modern history. The violence was further escalated by the regime’s unprovoked eight year war with Iran (from 1980 to 1988), and by the invasion of Kuwait (from 1990 to 1991) (Shoeb et al., 2007). The impact of the latter war on Iraqis was devastating. The 1991 Persian Gulf War cost Iraq an estimated $170 billion in destruction and damage. Mass bombing extended beyond military targets as coalition forces decimated Iraqi infrastructure from roads, bridges and hospitals, to water and sewage treatment facilities (Ayra & Zurbrigg, 2003). The impact of the destruction was further compounded by the twelve years of sanctions imposed on Iraq. Within the first year of the post 1991 Gulf War, over 170,000 Iraqi children under the age of five died due to infections, diarrhea, and malnutrition. According to UNICF estimates, this figure reached 500,000 for children under the age of five by 1998 (Ayra et al., 2003).

These sanctions were not lifted until after the United States led the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003 (Global Policy Forum, 2002). Iraqis began fleeing from the economic devastation and violence fueled by: the occupation forces, the insurgency, various militias, the millions of criminals freed from prisons when the regime was toppled, foreign nationals aligned with Al-Qaida, and from the Baathist party members who remained loyal to Saddam Hussein (Fagen, 2007). Even though the invasion began in 2003, it was not until 2006 that mass exodus of Iraqis started. The bombing of Askari Mosque in Samara, in February of 2006, marked a new escalation of violence and sectarian conflict (International Rescue Committee, 2008). The escalation of events impelled Iraqis to seek refuge in neighboring countries. By mid-2007, over 2
million Iraqis were living in neighboring Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, and few were returning home (UNCHR, 2007b). The majority of the Iraqis (about 50-60%) registered in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria under UNCHR were Sunni, while Iraqi Shiites represented less than 30% of the total (UNCHR, 2009). Of particular interest in this research is the experience of Iraqis in Jordan.

1.5 Iraqis in Jordan: Urban refugees or guests!

According to the Institute for the Study of International Migration, Iraqi refugees have been caught between two opposing policies in neighboring Arab countries (Fagen, 2007). There is a tradition of “Arab brotherhood” that propels the political and moral consciousness of Arab countries and allows Iraqis to seek refuge there. Middle Eastern countries have had an open door policy for those coming from other Arab nations as part of pan-Arabism (Barne, 2009). However, countries such as Syria and Jordan that host Iraqi refugees, have not established policies that facilitate permanent Iraqi placement. In fact, neither of these countries seem to be anticipating or preparing for any long term Iraqi stay (Fagen, 2007). Neither Jordan nor Syria have signed the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, nor its 1967 protocols. Thus, these countries have not granted Iraqis a refugee status, but have harbored them as a gesture of hospitality, typically viewing them as “guests” for six months after which daily visa monetary penalties apply, and in some cases deportation (Barne, 2009). Human Rights Watch regards Iraqis in Jordan as de facto refugees:

[They are] people who have fled conditions of generalized violence and persecution, who are in need of international protection and who face objective condition of danger in their country, even if they have not registered asylum claims or had those claims adjudicated and
been officially recognized as refugees by either the Government of Jordan or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2006, p. 2)

Therefore, in this study the terms “Iraqi refugees” and “Iraqi exiles” will be used from this point on to refer to Iraqis that live in Jordan and who are considered de facto refugees. The estimated number of displaced Iraqi refugees and exiles in Jordan is between 500,000 to 750,000 (UNCHR, 2007b). Of those, only 50,000 were registered with the UNHCR in Jordan (International Rescue Committee, 2008).

Even though insufficient data exists on Iraqis in Jordan, they are a community who experiences high risks (UNICEF, 2008). Iraqi refugees’ financial resources are minimal. They rely on their savings and on the support of relatives from other countries, which leaves them facing challenges with housing, food, and basic amenities such as heat (International Rescue Committee, 2008). After arriving in Jordan the situation further worsens since most Iraqis are not allowed to work, and as a result need to sell their belongings (Amnesty International USA, n.d.). Many do work illegally, becoming vulnerable to exploitation, low pay, and arbitrary dismissal (Barne, 2009).

The sentiments of Jordanians towards Iraqis have changed over the years. Among the Iraqis that sought refuge in Jordan were the wealthy. Iraqis with resources have taken advantage of the government’s investment incentives and become visible business and property owners in Amman (Fagen, 2007). Economic analysis attributes a boost in the Jordanian economy by 2005 since the beginning of the war in Iraq. Some Jordanians began viewing Iraqis as rich people, owning luxurious apartments and driving expensive cars (Human Rights Watch, 2006). However, the wealthy Iraqis in Jordan are a minority. The majority of Iraqis are refugees living
with hardship and poverty. The sentiments towards Iraqis also changed after members of Al-Qaeda bombed three hotels in Amman in 2005 (Fagen, 2007).

After three Iraqi nationals were linked to the bombings, Jordanians began viewing Iraqis as a burden on their system and a cause for their inflation problems (Human Rights Watch, 2006). This turn of events, coupled with the mass influx of Iraqi refugees in 2006, made a significant impact on Jordanians’ perception of Iraqis living in Jordan. Jordanians began blaming Iraqis for causing the deterioration of their own quality of life.

There is another factor that may have contributed to tensions between Iraqis and Jordanians. Iraqi refugees in Jordan do not fit the conventional understanding or image of a refugee. In fact, it is of relevance to point out the ways in which Iraqi refugees and exiles differ from typical refugees. A report entitled “Five years later, a hidden crisis” by the International Rescue Committee highlights some of the key differences (2008).

Unlike camp-based refugees, Iraqi refugees and exiles do not live together under the tents of refugees camps. Instead, they live in apartments scattered in urban cities. Refugees in camp-based situations are often given refugee status and receive basic services from aid agencies and the international community. The majority of Iraqis in Jordan, on the other hand, have uncertain legal status and receive little or no aid from either the host country or the international community. Part of this difficulty stems from the fact that it is difficult to reach Iraqi refugees with information, as they are scattered and isolated in urban settings. As a contrast, camp-based refugees can be easily provided with information about their benefits, resettlement options, and rights. Lastly, very few Iraqi refugees are registered with the UNHCR. Camp-based refugees are registered with authorities and are a part of an organized process where surveys of refugee health can be conducted, producing more accurate estimates of their situation.
1.6 Research questions

The challenges stemming from the nature and situation of Iraqi refugees and exiles has contributed to massive gaps in the literature documenting their experience. There is very little known about how Iraqis in Jordan are surviving, adapting, and thriving. This dissertation investigates the following question: What are the experiences of coping and adaptation of Iraqi refugees and exiles living in Jordan? The goal of this research is to give voice to a population that has been silenced and overshadowed by political turmoil. In order to investigate the question of interest in this study, a number of sub-questions will be investigated:

1. How have Iraqis coped and adapted in Jordan?
2. What does it mean for them to be living in their circumstances?
3. What resources have they gained and lost as a result of their migration?
4. What resources do they now need to move forward in their lives?
5. What are their best hopes for the future?
6. What do they want people to know about them?

1.7 Situating the researcher

Conducting research on a subject involving Iraqis is near and dear to my heart. Iraq is my country of birth and the cradle of my soul. I was born in Mosul, Ninavah – the third largest city in Iraq. My father is from the capital Baghdad, and my mother is from Mosul. My love for Iraq runs deep. Hearing the drums of war in 2003 compelled me to dedicate my Master’s thesis to studying the experiences of Iraqi children who lived through “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (Al-Mashat, Amundson, Westwood, & Buchanan, 2006). I spent sleepless nights thinking, feeling,
and reflecting on their experiences of the war. I had to make a research contribution that gave voice to these children.

Since deciding to pursue doctoral research, I have become compelled again to study a topic connected to my beloved Iraq. The seed for this doctoral research was planted while visiting Amman in 2006. I was in disbelief when I saw Iraqi women begging on the streets of Amman. How could that be? I felt a sense of anger, embarrassment, confusion, and helplessness. Where is the international community? Iraqis have a profound sense of pride, culture, and heritage. What has the world come to? What have we, as Iraqis, become? Why is there such silence around the suffering of Iraqis who have become stateless in Jordan? Is anyone doing anything about this? These were some of the thoughts that I wrestled with.

How can I describe my love for Iraq? I have found myself to be in a relationship with this homeland. Felix Adler has been quoted as eloquently saying “love of country is like love of woman—he loves her best who seeks to bestow on her the highest good” (Wisdom Quotes, 2009). Even though I have been living in Canada for 19 years now, I still feel that I am in a long distance relationship with Iraq.

It is a painful intimacy. It ebbs and flows between longing and peacefulness. I go through periods of deep craving for anything Iraqi. I have found myself going for “quick fixes” by searching the internet for Iraqi songs, images, and videos. Witnessing the destruction of Iraq has been heart wrenching. Coupled with my deep love, grieving Iraq eventually gave birth to my decision to dedicate my doctoral work to my native land.

My hope is that my research can play some role in bestowing the highest good for this cradle of civilization. At the same time, as a Canadian researcher, I feel moved to make a contribution
that would further Canada’s interest in playing a vital role in the international community. This is a personal and professional journey between two worlds.
2 Chapter: Literature review

This chapter is organized to provide the reader with an overview of the most relevant areas of research for understanding refugees’ adaptation and ability to cope. First, the scientific paradigm of this study will be discussed. A social constructionist perspective on philosophy of science will be taken here. Then, both a model on transition and a model on the adaptation to transition will be examined. This will be followed by a discussion on social support theories and models of loss. Since the interest of the study is Iraqi refugees and exiles, a discussion will examine cultural implications of meaning-making when experiencing trauma, psychological growth, and coping. A critique will be provided on the current methods used to measure coping constructs, and a rationale for an alternative method will be discussed. Then, the discussion will turn to a resource-based model for understanding refugees’ adaptation and well being. A number of studies that investigate factors contributing to this adaptation will be provided. This will be followed by a review of specific studies that examine the mental health of Iraqi refugees. Lastly, the discussion will end with the research questions of interest.

2.1 Scientific paradigm

This research has been conducted by using a particular scientific paradigm. A social constructionist paradigm was employed to understand the specific experiences of Iraqis, given their cultural background. A closer look at this paradigm will be provided as well as the rationale for its selection. Psychology and psychotherapy in the 20th century have mostly been built on certain assumptions and notions. These were largely modernist in nature. For instance, a modernist’s view espouses the search for universal truths, believes in the existence of an objective knowledge of reality, views language as a reflection of reality, and holds the belief that
we can engage in neutral scientific inquiry (Wong, 2006). These notions and assumptions have been challenged by the postmodern philosophical movement of constructivism and social constructionism. Social constructionist thought embraces the notion that knowledge is constructed instead of discovered. Social constructionists turn to language to examine how people construct reality through their relationships in the world. This turn to language by social constructionists is applied to literary, social, and hermeneutical theory (Bidwell, 2007). A brief historical overview will shed light on the emergence of this paradigm.

In Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) classic book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, the authors outline a paradigm of the sociology of knowledge and a theoretical treatise that offers a new perspective. They argue that all reality is derived and mediated in social interactions. At the beginning of their book, Berger and Luckmann postulate this main tenant of their argument, stating “reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs” (p. 1). Thus, people’s reality is socially constructed through social interactions. In other words, making sense and meaning of one’s experience cannot simply be understood in isolation. In this research, a social constructionist perspective has helped us understand the ways in which refugees construct their reality through their social interactions.

There is one last element that needs to be highlighted in regards to Berger and Luckmann’s work. Even though they are writing from a sociological perspective, they extend their argument to theories on identity. Berger and Luckmann explain:

Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality, and like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, and even reshaped by social relations. (p. 159)
Hence, the formation of identity and its maintenance is constructed within social interactions. This means that social experiences shape our perception of truth and reality, which includes our perception of who we think we are. This notion will be kept in mind while interviewing Iraqi refugees and exiles. This author postulates that Iraqis’ social experiences and interactions play a role in their coping and perception of reality.

Wong (2006) discusses the social constructionist’s view and how it emphasizes the social and linguistic creation of knowledge from both a macro and micro level. At the macro level, cultural elements and institutional practices shape the meaning we attach to our experiences. At the micro level, “social construction takes place within day to day discourses between people in interactions,” and this has implications on how the self is understood as being “interpersonally constructed and constantly being redefined moment by moment within each social interaction” (p. 135).

We have now seen how Berger and Luckmann provide a sociological account of social constructionism that lays the foundation for viewing identity as socially created. It is of relevance to point out that in psychology, the emergence of social constructionist ideas is mostly dated to K.J. Gergen’s 1973 paper, entitled “Social Psychology as History.” According to this paper, psychological knowledge is culturally embedded and historically influenced. Therefore, we must extend our inquiry beyond just being individually focused and look at social, political and economic realms. Burr (1995) also highlights Gergen’s argument that there is no point in looking for “once-and-for all descriptions of people or society, since the only abiding feature of social life is that it is continually changing” (p. 11).

In summary, social constructionists argue that human concepts and knowledge are inseparable from social context. Thus, an important assumption in social constructionism is that
knowledge is located between people rather than within them (Bidwell, 2007). This means that people’s perception of reality is best understood through interaction and conversation with others within the context of language. This study took a social constructionist approach to better understand the experiences of Iraqis who were exposed to war, have gone through the migration process, and adjusted to life in Jordan.

2.2 A model of transition

William Bridges (2001, 2003, 2004) offers a useful model for conceptualizing transition. Although most of his writing is in the context of individuals facing organizational transition, the model sheds light on various life transitions including personal loss relating to death, loss resulting from relocation and moving, and loss arising from ending relationships. He offers a three-phased model that can help us understand the process that people undergo when dealing with change. Before descriptions of the three phases are provided, some definitions and distinctions will be highlighted.

Bridges distinguishes between change and transition. Change is situational whereas transition is psychological in nature (2003). Change is external; transition is an internal psychological phenomenon (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008). It is not change but transition that creates challenges for people. According to Bridges, this is the case because change is an ongoing part of life that we all face. Transition, on the other hand, requires a letting go process. In fact, Bridges argues that people often attempt to manage transition by creating changes in their lives. Bridges illustrates his points by providing various examples. For instance, people make the external decision of moving to a new town or leaving their partner in the hopes of creating an internal shift. However, problems occur when they realize that the same old patterns and obstacles arise
in their new town or new relationship. In other words, people are confronted with the same problems when they make changes in lieu of working through the transition.

Working through transition requires a process of letting go. The letting go process applies to dealing with various losses in one’s life, whether the loss relates to one’s career or the death of a loved one. Failure to do so leads to challenges in working through the transitions. In short, people resort to “external change to distract themselves from the harder business of letting go of their subjective realities and identities” (Bridges, 2001, p. 17). In other words, people make change to avoid making transitions.

The key point that Bridges emphasizes is that transitions are different in that they are not outcomes. Rather, transitions are the starting point for creating an ending to the previous old situation that is being left behind. Bridges elaborates, “Change can happen at any time, but transition comes along when one chapter of your life is over and another is waiting in the wings to make its entrance” (2001, p. 16). Therefore, the main function of transition is to help people to deal with and come to terms with their changing world.


1. **Ending.** This is the first phase of transition as people face losses. In this phase people engage in the letting go of the way things were. More importantly, it is in this phase that people let go of who they used to be. It is a process of letting go of one’s old self-image, old values, old attitude and old realities. Bridges describes the challenges that people often confront in dealing with this phase. Ending brings about various feelings as people make sense of what they are letting go of. At the same time, there is a questioning of the reasons for the change. For instance, a person may say “why did this have to happen to me?”
2. **Neutral zone.** Bridges suggests that it is this in-between phase that people find most challenging. He argues that it is the most uncomfortable phase as it opens us to a new world of possibility. It is a space in which anything can happen. It is most disconcerting when the outcome “cannot be foreseen – where there is just an ending and a neutral zone that stretches beyond the horizon- this state of possibility can be quite terrifying” (Bridges, 2001, p. 38). It is in this phase that people’s lives “decompose and then recompose around a new theme or idea” (p. 39). Bridges argues that we are able to recompose through this phase by engaging in various processes that support our shifts: reorientation, personal growth, and authentication of who we are.

3. **New beginnings.** In this phase people feel that they have begun a new chapter in their lives. This may include new values, new identities, new attitudes, and new understanding. This phase brings “a new sense of ourselves, a new outlook, and a new sense of purpose and possibility” (Bridges, 2001, p. 6). This is where people embrace their new realities.

   Bridges postulates that these three phases of transition apply to two different types of transitions equally. One type of transition is triggered by external events. Bridges refers to this type of transition as “reactive transition” (2001, p. 4). In this form of transition, the change that occurs leads or triggers people to go through a transition. One may argue that the migration of people during times of war is a reactive type of transition. The second form of transition is not triggered by an external event. Bridges refers to this as the “developmental transition” (2001, p. 4). It is a form of transition that is spurred by “a natural, inner unfolding of those aspects of ourselves that are built right into how we are and how we are made” (p. 5). Developmental transition shifts the way we experience the world. For instance, moving to adulthood is a developmental transition, as is the midlife transition. Bridges provides a useful model for
understanding transition in various stages of life and changes. This model was employed while examining the experiences of Iraqis who had experienced war and migration.

### 2.3 Human adaptation to transition

Nancy Schlossberg (1981) provides a different framework for understanding transitions and adaptations in the adult experience. In her 1981 article entitled “A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition,” Schlossberg develops a continuum that integrates several models: individual models, lifespan models, transition models, stage theory, and age theories. She argues that transition does not occur in a sequential order, nor do all individuals experience transition in the same manner.

What is certain, according to Schlossberg, is that adults do experience change. These changes, in turn, require that the person create a new network of relationships. In addition, these changes require a person to see themselves in a new way. Schlossberg defines transition as follows: “Transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5).

Schlossberg also defines adaptation. She views adaptation in terms of one’s relationship with the transition process. She postulates that “adaptation to transition is a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (p. 7). The model that Schlossberg presents proposes that there are three major characteristics that play a role in adaptation to transition.

The first set of factors in Schlossberg’s model pertain to the characteristics of the transition. These factors are briefly described below:
1. **Role Change.** Many individuals go through either a role gain or loss depending on the transition (e.g. loss of a spouse or working in a new job). Schlossberg argues that regardless whether the person experiences a role loss or gain, the process involves a degree of stress.

2. **Affect.** Some changes involve feelings of pleasure while other changes are painful.

3. **Source.** Some changes happen due to an individual’s choice (internal) while some are a result of circumstances or other people (external). Schlossberg suggests that individuals are more likely to accept a transition when it is internally initiated.

4. **Timing.** Some changes occur “on-time” while others are “off-time” (p. 9). This refers to social norms around what is considered as an acceptable change at a certain age.

5. **Onset.** Some changes are gradual while others are sudden. When change is sudden, Schlossberg argues, there is not enough time to prepare or rehearse for it.

6. **Duration.** Difficulties in adapting to change depend on its expected duration, whether permanent, temporary, or uncertain. Uncertainty is proposed to be associated with the highest degree of stress and negative affect.

7. **Degree of stress.** The degree of stress in transition is dependent on the factors listed above. The second set of determining factors in Schlossberg’s model pertains to the characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environment. She describes three main factors:

   1. **Interpersonal supports.** These are essential to successful adaptation. The interpersonal support system is described with respect to three types: a) intimate relationships, b) the family unit, and c) the network of friends.

   2. **Institutional supports.** These are various agencies that an individual can turn to for support such as religious institutions, occupational institutions, community groups, or state welfare.
3. **Physical settings.** These factors are so obvious that they can be easily ignored. They contribute a sense of well being, impact stress levels, and affect a person’s general outlook. They can include living arrangement, climate, urban location, and workplace.

Lastly, Schlossberg postulates that the third major determinate of successful adaptation to transition relates to individual factors. These significant factors include: 1) psychosocial competencies (such as attitudes and behaviors), 2) sex (pertains to gender-role identification), 3) age and lifespan stage, 4) health status, 5) race/ethnicity, 6) socioeconomic status, 7) value orientation (personal values such as religious beliefs), and 8) previous experience with a transition of a similar nature.

Schlossberg revised her model in 1995 to provide a framework for helping professionals to understand and work with adults in transition (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg et al. identified four major factors that impact a person’s ability to cope with transition: 1) situation, 2) self, 3) support, and 4) strategies used to cope with the transition. The revised model became known as the 4S model.

Schlossberg’s (1981) model can be used as an overarching framework for understanding adaptations to transition. Her model illustrates the complexity and multidimensionality of the adaptation process. Her transition theory was used in this study as the backdrop for understanding the adaptations of Iraqi refugees and exiles to their transitions.

### 2.4 Social support theory

Both the social constructionist paradigm and Schlossberg’s transition model emphasize the significance of social experiences in the understanding of one’s reality. The focus will now turn to social support theory. Cohen and Wills (1985) provide a model for examining the effects of social support on mental health. They propose the buffering model. Cohen and Wills’ buffering
model suggests that social support buffers or protects a person from the effects of stressful events. They also propose the main-effect model, which suggests that social resources have a beneficial impact regardless of whether or not an individual is under stress. Furthermore, their definition of psychological stress links feelings of helplessness and loss of self-esteem to the appraised stress. One can assume that Iraqis experience a multitude of feelings as the majority in Jordan are unemployed, face an uncertain future, and have endured hardships.

It is of relevance here to briefly mention the stress response. In his 1956 book, entitled “Stress of Life”, Seyle proposed the adaptive responses to stress. A key theorist on stress research, Seyle outlined the common components of the adaptive responses to stress: 1) the alarm phase that initiates readiness for action (increases in adrenocortical system and hypervigilance), 2) the resistance stage representing the organism’s attempt to regain and maintain homeostasis, and (3) the stage of exhaustion. It is at the latter stage, according to Seyle, that adaptive energies are depleted and may cause irreversible damage to cardiovascular, digestive, immune, and circulatory systems. Therefore, lack of social support may allow for the natural course of stress to take its toll on the human organism. A brief description of the mechanisms in which social support may act as a buffer to stress is provided next. Figure 2.1 illustrates Cohen and Wills’ model.

Cohen and Wills propose that social support impacts the causal chain that links stress to illness. Physical health outcomes are connected to “emotionally induced effects on neuroendocrine or immune system functioning or through influence on health related behavioral patterns such as cigarette smoking, alcohol, use, or medical help seeking” (p. 312). They suggest that social support has an impact on the stress chain responses at two points: 1) on the appraisal process, and 2) on the stress reaction. Support plays a role on the appraisal process by
“attenuating or preventing a stress appraisal response” (p. 312). They propose that a person redefine the harm or potential harms of a situation when there is the perception that others will provide them with the necessary support. At this point within the stress chain process, social support also boosts perception of their ability to cope with the stressful situation. This in turn prevents the situation from being appraised as being highly stressful.

Cohen and Wills also propose that social support plays a role in reducing the stress reaction and influencing physiological processes. By doing so, social support acts as a buffer between the experiences of stress and the development of both physical and emotional symptoms of pathology. Cohen and Wills propose that a person’s social support can alleviate the impact that the appraisal of stress can have on them. One way that a person’s social support alleviates this impact is by providing the distressed person with solutions to their problem. Another way social support reduces the impact of stress appraisal is by “reducing the perceived importance of the problem, by tranquilizing the neuroendocrine system so that people are less reactive to perceived stress, or by facilitating healthful behaviors” (p. 312).

Social support theory helps us better understand the impact that social support has on Iraqis. Refugees are uprooted from their social support network and many ties are severed as a result.
This may have a detrimental effect on their ability to adapt to transition. Thus, losing one’s social support can be understood as a loss. Looking at social support theory can help us bridge bereavement models with the loss of community and social support for refugees. In fact, one of the ways in which social support theory conceptualizes bereavement is as a loss in a person’s important network of friends and family. This in turn, has direct effects on the bereaved person’s physical and mental health (Kato & Mann, 1999). Let us turn to models of loss and bereavement in order to provide frameworks for understanding the many losses that refugees experience.

2.5 Loss and bereavement models

The majority of refugees endure many traumatic losses, including the loss of community and culture (Van Ommersen, 2001). These losses are in addition to any personal loss they may experience, such as the loss of a loved one. Thus, models from the field of thanatology (i.e. the study of dying and death) are useful for enhancing our understanding of the experiences of refugees. There are many terms used in thanatology to describe the experience of loss such as bereavement, grief, and mourning. Servaty-Seib (2004) summarizes these terms:

Bereavement is the state of having experienced a loss…this definition corresponds with the accepted practice of describing an individual as bereaved, rather than as bereaving. Grief is the generally passive and involuntary reaction to the state of bereavement…the complex responses associated with grief span the affective, cognitive, physical, behavioral, social, and spiritual domains of human functioning. Mourning involves the active processes of coping with bereavement and grief. (p. 126)

Let us now examine some theories and models on the experience of loss.

Kubler-Ross (1969) proposed a five stage theory that explores the experiences of those that are going through a loss. The five stages are: 1) denial, 2) anger, 3) bargaining, 4) depression and
5) acceptance. Kubler-Ross’ stages were originally proposed for examining a person’s adjustment to the prospects of their own death. A brief critique needs to be mentioned here. There is no evidence that there are discrete numbers of responses to the experience of loss. There is also no evidence supporting the idea that these stages occur in a linear fashion (Servatys-Seib, 2004). This model is not being proposed here to predict certain linear reactions in refugees to their experiences of loss. Instead, it is a model that may be transferable in helping us better understand how refugees make sense of their experiences.

Bowlby (1969) provides another framework for understanding loss by reassessing the role of attachment and attachment theory. Bowlby’s work has made a significant impact on the bereavement literature. Attachment theory proposes that humans are predisposed to bond with primary caregivers as infants, and then bond as adults with significant people in their lives such as in intimate relationships, with teachers, or mentors. According to attachment theory, people that are separated from significant figures in their lives experience distress. Furthermore, it is the attachment style formed in infancy that will affect their relationships as adults. Attachment styles of adults affect how people develop relationships in adulthood, maintain them, and relinquish them. Attachment theory has been useful in the field of bereavement in that it proposes that the style of attachment affects adaptations to bereavement (Stroebe, 2002).

Stroebe and Schut (1999) propose a model that builds on and integrates aspects of the Kubler-Ross model and Bowlby’s theory. They developed the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (DPM). It is an integrative framework that builds on cognitive stress, appraisal and coping models, and is compatible with bereavement stress (Stroebe, Folkman, Hansson, & Schut, 2006).
Stroebe and Schut (1999) provide a taxonomy that describes ways in which people come to terms with loss. Even though it was a model developed to understand coping with the loss of a loved one, it may be applied to other types of bereavement. It is a model of particular relevance since it is the first of its kind that offers a dynamic framework for understanding the adjustment process to bereavement. This model specifies the adaptive tasks related to bereavement, the cognitive processes associated with each task, and the context in which effective coping occurs (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

A central tenet in the Stroebe and Schut’s (1999) framework is the idea that for coping to be successful, a person engages in a dynamic process of oscillation. Their model does not suggest that bereavement occurs in stages. Instead, they argue that it is a process of “waxing and waning, an ongoing flexibility, over time” (p. 213). They point out that coping occurs over time and it also does not occupy a person’s attention throughout the entire day. Coping becomes embedded within one’s life. Thus, a person copes by taking a break from grieving and mourning. The other key aspect of oscillation, according to Strobbe and Schut, is that it occurs between two processes: loss-orientation and restoration-orientation.

According to the DPM, each of these domains involves specific reactions. First, the loss-orientation domain involves processing and dealing with some aspect of the loss experience of the deceased person. Strobe and Schut (1999) argue that the traditional concept of grief work falls under this domain. They suggest that a person engages in various processes in coping with the loss, such as: thinking about the deceased person, ruminating, yearning, crying, processing the nature of the death, and reflecting on the loss of future plans with the deceased. Loss-orientation involves the breaking of bonds and ties. This domain also includes denial and avoidance of dealing with the changes that will occur. Emotional reactions of this domain range
from painful longing to pleasurable reminiscing. They argue that negative emotions predominate the early periods. As time goes on, positive affect plays an increasingly important role in coping.

The second domain in the DPC model is restoration-orientation. Not only does the person have to cope with stressors associated with the loss itself, but a person has to deal with other secondary stressors related to the bereavement. These stressors are secondary in terms of timing but not in terms of intensity. In other words, some stressors within this restoration-orientation domain arise days after a loved one is gone. A person engages in activities around things that have to be dealt with as well as engages in the adjustments that are secondary to the loss. This domain contains numerous sources of stress: learning tasks that the deceased used to do (e.g. cooking or finances), arrangements to reorganize life, dealing with social interactions, legal issues, and developing a new identity without their partner. As with loss-orientation, restoration-orientation involves emotional reactions. Emotions in this domain can include pride and relief for mastering new skills and having the courage to be alone. Stroebe and Schut suggest that other emotions occur in this domain as well such as loneliness, despair, fear, and anxiety.

As mentioned earlier, a key tenet in DPM is the notion of oscillation. Stroebe and Schut (1999) propose that successful mental and physical outcomes can occur when there is oscillation between the domain of loss-orientation and restoration-orientation. Furthermore, despite the range of emotions and challenges individuals face with bereavement, Strobe and Schut argue that people are resilient. In fact, research indicates that people have the capacity to recover both physically and emotionally from their loss over the long term (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007). In other words, bereavement becomes a life event that people adjust to. Stroebe and Schut (1999) argue that oscillation plays a role in bringing about optimal adjustment. This model provides a framework for understanding how concurrent stressors can be dealt with.
Another significant contribution of DPM is that it provides room for exploring social and cultural contexts. Even though grief seems to be a universal reaction, the expression and experiences of loss is shaped by social context within a culture (Catlin, 1993). Not only does DPM provide a framework for examining bereavement processes from both an interpersonal and intrapersonal level, it also accounts for cultural differences.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) illustrate their perspective by drawing on research that compares emotional expressions in Muslims in Bali and Egypt. They suggest that since the Muslim community in Bali demonstrates minimal expression of grief and crying, they engage more in restoration-orientation activities. On the other hand, the Muslim community in Egypt engages in an open expression of grief, anguish, and reminiscences over the loss. They suggest that by examining the different patterns of reactions, it becomes apparent that “underlying both patterns are cultural belief systems that dictate the way that grief is manifested and expressed” (p. 220).

Stroebe and Schut (1998) also argue that the balance between loss-orientation and restoration-orientation is based on the cultural meaning that is given to the grieving process. For instance, Navajo Indians differ from Kota Indians in their grieving process. The grieving of Navajo Indians is limited to a few days. The bereaved person is not expected to show signs of grief or discuss their loss. Underlying Navajo’s cultural grieving norm is their belief in the power of the spirit of the deceased person. Violations of this norm could cause harm to those that are living. Kota Indians have prolonged grieving that is expressed in two ceremonies: one shortly after the cremation, and another during the annual ceremonies. The annual ceremony honors the deceased and those that have passed before him or her. Stroebe and Schut’s (1998, 1999) work demonstrates the significance of cultural interpretation on the experience of loss. Cultural meaning is also relevant when looking at the experience of trauma, which will be examined next.
2.6 Culture and the experience of trauma

It has long been understood that traumatic events have an impact on those experiencing the event. Traumatic events “overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life,” and “overwhelm the ordinary system of care that gives people a sense of control, connection, and meaning” (Herman, 1992, p. 33). In other words, one of the key responses to traumatic events is that people look for meaning and attempt to find some causal attributions. As mentioned previously, this is one of the reasons that a social constructionist perspective is taken in this study.

Let us attain a better understanding of the process of meaning-making. Meaning-making can be seen as being located in a public and social realm of language and cultural practices (Bracken, 1998). Meaning is grounded in cultural paradigms: “Our understanding of our worlds and ourselves is not generated by a set of particular internal schemata but is instead incorporated in our social practices” (p. 50). This may promote the case for the use of a methodological approach that can capture the richness of social practices which individuals engage in within their cultural context. One that can also encompass different forms of coping mechanisms.

What does culture mean and what implications does it have on mental health? There are many definitions that have been suggested for the concept of culture. Al-Issa (1982) suggests that most definitions regard culture as:

…those aspects of the environment that are man-made, including the subjective environment, which consists of the beliefs, values, norms, and myths that are shared by the group and symbolically transmitted to its members, as well as the physical
environment, which is comprised of artifacts like roads, bridges, and buildings that
are handed down from one generation to another. (p. 3)

Culture can also influence our scientific paradigms. Western notions and theories on
mental health are not born in a vacuum. They have been developed from within a certain
cultural paradigm and framework. Western notions of mental health draw upon “cultural
assumptions concerning the nature of ordinary personal experience and social interaction
in order to interpret behavioral disturbances which are regarded as extraordinary,
abnormal or disruptive” (Marsella & White, 1982, p. 14).

It is safe to suggest that culture has a paramount impact on how individuals engage in the
process and outcome of meaning-making. Western models on trauma and coping have been
mostly based on Western cultural perspectives. The interest in psychological trauma resulting
from traumatic events in the mental health field was energized and focused by the definition of
clinical PTSD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the
American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000; Shavlev, Yehuda & McFarlane).

Summerfield (1999) provides critiques on the Western conceptions of trauma and
PTSD. Inherent in our Western assumptions, Summerfield argues, is the belief that
response to trauma is captured by our Western psychological frameworks, especially the
diagnosis of PTSD for individuals who are exposed to war and other traumatic events.
This takes the focus away from the fact that “suffering arises from, and is resolved in a
social context, shaped by the meanings and understanding applied to events” (p. 1454).

Summerfield provides the example of Palestinian men tortured by the Israeli army and how
their experience could be understood and healed. In their social context, these men are absorbed
back into their society as having suffered for the common good. He adds, “traditional
construction of manhood, honor and heroism within the Arab culture milieu were also invoked” (p. 1458). This highlights how individuals that experience traumatic events make sense of their experiences based on their perspectives. In other words, making sense of war experiences is not an individually centered event. This is what Kleinman refers to as “social suffering” (1995, p.189). Thus, we can better understand trauma as a form of social suffering and not as an isolated experience. Social suffering may emerge as a form of coping, and can be seen as a part of Iraqis’ ability to adapt and cope with their war and migration experiences.

Another example may further illustrate the importance of situating stress and coping within a specific cultural context. Eagle (2005) found that there are cultural idioms and meaning-making systems used in the African cosmology to explain traumatic events and provide custom practices for the restoration of harmony and balance. Eagle explains that in the African cosmology three sets of possible causes are used to explain misfortune: mystical, ancestral, and magical. Eagle found that coping can be understood as a way of engaging in custom practices that evoke a meaning-making framework that is unique to the African culture. In fact, meaning-making is a key element for the process of healing from trauma. Neimeyer (2001) suggests that a principal aspect of healing occurs through the reconstruction of meaning in response to trauma and loss. This richness of cultural healing practices would be missed if social context was not taken into account.

Now that we have examined the impact of culture on both trauma and loss, and have discussed a number of relevant models, let us turn to this study’s interest in salutogenic conceptual models and perspectives.
2.7 Adversity and trauma: Posttraumatic and adversarial growth

There are numerous terms in the literature that address this salutogenic concept. Linley and Joseph (2004) use the notion of adversarial growth to describe the positive changes that may occur while struggling with adversity. They argue that this process propels an individual to a higher level of functioning from what existed prior to exposure to trauma and adversity. They suggest that growth from adversity has three aspects (Joseph & Linley, 2006). First, individuals that face trauma and adversity report that their relationships are enhanced, such that they value their family and friends more. Another change that occurs, according to Joseph and Linley, is that individuals change how they view themselves. A shift can occur from viewing oneself as a victim, to seeing oneself as a survivor, which offers a person greater sense of personal resiliency, wisdom, and acceptance of his/her vulnerabilities. A third aspect of growth is that individuals often report a change in life philosophy. Joseph and Linley report that some survivors describe a new outlook on life as they renegotiate what matters to them. They also report that some trauma survivors express a new religious or spiritual component to their life.

These three changes that can occur as a result of facing traumatic events are also echoed in the work of Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998, 2006). They propose the concept of posttraumatic growth, which is defined as the “individual’s experience of significant positive change arising from the struggle with a major life crisis” (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000). According to this model, posttraumatic growth is initiated when the same circumstances that cause psychological distress are also those that increase the person’s risk for developing psychological difficulties (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998). They view both distress and growth as co-existing in a person following traumatic experiences. Similar to Joseph and Linley’s (2006) work, Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) found that people who faced traumatic events report
perceived growth in three areas: change in relationship with others, change in perceptions of self, and a changed philosophy in life.

The concepts of posttraumatic growth and adversarial growth can help us better understand Iraqis’ responses to their adverse experiences and how they make sense of them. The process in which psychological growth occurs needs to be examined from a perspective that takes into account both the individual’s coping abilities as well as the cultural context from which meaning is generated by the individual.

2.9 Coping mechanisms

Coping may be a paramount ability for dealing with traumatic events. Coping is often described as a person’s cognitive and behavioral efforts that deal with internal and external demands of stressful situations (Norlander, Schedvin & Archer, 2005). The coping process unfolds in the context of an event or stressful situation that “is appraised as personally significant and as taxing or exceeding the individual’s resources for coping” (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 747). In a context of war, there are countless events that are stressful in nature and can be appraised as taxing and requiring coping resources. Unfortunately, there seems to be limited work published that specifically examines the coping styles used by war survivors and refugees that can lead to positive changes after a war (Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2003; Rosner & Powell, 2006).

One study by Powell et al. (2003) found that posttraumatic growth occurred with survivors of the war in Sarajevo. They found that posttraumatic growth for those who were exposed to the war in Yugoslavia, between 1991 and 1995, was related to whether or not they fled the city during the conflict. They found that those who fled the city and stayed in more stable environments showed greater posttraumatic growth. However, there seems to be limited
literature that explores in an in-depth manner the cultural meaning-making and coping processes used by people that may lead to posttraumatic or adversarial growth.

The coping literature examines coping from a more individualistic perspective that focuses on internal processes outside of the social and cultural realm. For instance, Folkman & Lazarus (1980) distinguish between two main coping styles: emotional-focused coping and problem-focused coping. They suggest that problem-focused coping addresses the problems that are causing the distress. Emotion-focused coping is aimed at alleviating the negative emotions related to the problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This focus on the internal processes of coping is also evident in the work of other pioneers in the coping literature. Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub’s (1989) propose the idea of active coping. Carver et al. suggest that active coping includes “initiating direct action, increasing one’s efforts, and trying to execute a coping attempt in stepwise fashion” (p. 268). They propose that coping includes many aspects: planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking social support for instrumental reasons, and seeking social support for emotional reasons. A description of these coping processes will be discussed next to illustrate the inherent drawback in relying solely on cognitive appraisal models for understanding the refugee experience.

Planning is an aspect of active coping that occurs during the initial coping phase and not during secondary appraisals. Carver et al. distinguish planning from problem-focused coping. They suggest that planning involves coming up with specific action strategies and thinking about the steps that needs to be taken to best handle the problem. The suppression of competing activities is another coping mechanism. It is the notion of putting aside any distracting projects to deal with the stressors. Restraint coping represents a person’s ability to hold themselves back and to avoid acting prematurely. Seeking social support for instrumental reasons is the notion that a
person seeks advice, assistance, and information from others. On the other hand, seeking social support for emotional reasons occurs as individuals seek the understanding, moral support, and sympathy of others. Carver et al. also identify acceptance of the reality of the stressful situation and turning to religion as functional coping responses.

When looking at the different coping strategies that Carver et al. and others have proposed, several drawbacks emerge. How enriching are these cognitive appraisal models to our understanding of the experiences of those in a cross-cultural context? Does the multiple conceptual and nomenclature understanding of coping provide us with a unified understanding of coping? If not, then can we solely rely on these cognitive appraisal models for understanding refugees’ adaptive capacities? Indeed, there are limitations in our Western conceptualization of coping. Western perspectives focus on examining the internal processes that may lead a person to consciously take action to cope with their stressors. In fact, even when social related coping is mentioned, it is examined from a perspective that values the internal appraisal process at an individual level. These cognitive appraisal models are useful, but they fall short of viewing coping as a dynamic and rich interactional process that can occur within a cultural context from which meaning is generated.

2.10 Rationale for an alternative method

The discussion above has highlighted the conceptual problems in the field. However, there are also methodological challenges in measuring salutogenic constructs. There are many constructs relevant to this study. A critique of all the relevant constructs (e.g. well being, adjustment, mental health, etc.) and the methods used to assess them is beyond the scope of this chapter. One main construct will be examined. The coping construct was investigated in the
literature since it is of particular interest to the salutogenic perspective of this study. A historic perspective of coping measures will be briefly outlined next.

Prior to the 1970s, the research on coping was mostly dominated by the perspective of ego psychology. From this perspective, coping was understood as being “adaptive or mature defense mechanisms which are unconscious and can be assessed only by making use of clinical observations, projective techniques or open-ended response format procedures” (De Ridder, 1997, p. 418). Early in the 1970s, Richard Lazarus developed a cognitive phenomenological theory of stress. This approach provides a transactional explanation of the stress process (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). In other words, the stimulus of stress is not so important to this model. Instead, it is the appraisal of the stressor and the success and failure of coping efforts that are of relevance. When stress occurs, an individual copes by using both cognitive and behavioral strategies to deal with both the internal and external demands as well as with conflicts between the two (Rexrode et al., 2008).

Interest in the measurement of stress and coping led to the widespread development of measures during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Unlike their predecessors, the first new wave of measures took a more contextual approach to stress and coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). These measures were mostly developed by researchers to assess coping in specific stressful situations. The first generation of measures were in the form of checklists which listed thoughts and behaviors that people used to address stressful situations. One of the most popular measures was the Ways of Coping Scale (Rexrode et al., 2008).

However, there is no gold standard in the field of psychology for the measurement of coping. Other instruments that have been used to measure coping include the following: COPE, Coping Response Inventory, Coping Strategy Indicator, Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations, and
the Daily Coping Inventory (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Unfortunately, the instruments used to measure the construct of coping are filled with methodological and psychometric problems. Denise De Ridder (1997) wrote a seminal piece entitled “What Is Wrong with Coping Assessment? A Review of Conceptual and Methodological Issues.” There are a number of conceptual and methodological issues that De Ridder and other scholars raise in the field, which will be explored next.

Danoof-Burg, Ayala, and Revenson (2000) raise an important question with respect to the concept of coping and its measurement: Are the concepts used by researchers to measure coping understood by participants in the same way as they are intended? In other words, do the participants understand the definitions used by researchers in the same manner in which they were anticipated? Danoof et al. (1984) asked 101 rheumatoid arthritis patients to complete the Stone and Neale’s Closed-Ended Checklist, a structured self-report questionnaire. Then, Danoof et al. asked the patients open-ended questions about each coping strategy that they reported using. Patients were asked to elaborate on what they thought and felt about each strategy they reported using. Danoof et al. then developed a coding scheme and analyzed 565 text descriptions of specific coping efforts. They discovered that researchers measured unidimensional types of coping or strategies in their assessment, whereas participants interpreted a coping strategy as encompassing more than one type of coping. Danoff et al. concluded that, for the most part, participants understood the researchers’ definitions of coping. However, they found that “some checklist items, particularly those reflecting cognitive or affective coping constructs, may be less likely to be interpreted in the manner intended by researchers” (p. 192). This may create confounding variables when attempting to separate emotional-focused and problem-focused coping.
The problems of confounding items are significant. Steed (1998) points to the problems that arise from content confound of instruments based on Folkman and Lazarus’ work. He argues that the operationalization of the constructs of appraisal and coping are arbitrary. Steed also argues that when a positive evaluation of an outcome is completed, it is particularly difficult to distinguish between reappraisal and coping. For instance, certain items on the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations are conceptually similar to stated aspects of primary appraisal. Furthermore, coping is often investigated “in relation to stressor outcomes which are commonly operationalized in terms of anxiety and depression” (p. 197). For instance, the wordings on some of the items on the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations are similar to those used in items on the State-Trait Anxiety Scale.

Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood (2003) also provide a thorough review and critique of coping measures. They analyzed 100 assessments of coping. They then used current category systems employed in developing groups of coping strategies, and compiled a list of 400 ways of coping. In their examination of over 100 category systems used in coping scales and coding systems, they did not find two sets of categories that were the same. They suggest that the lack of consensus on how coping as a construct has been conceptualized and measured in the field is slowing down the progress of the measurement of coping. The key issue here is a fundamental problem in the field. Skinner et al. eloquently state the following:

The fundamental problem in identifying core categories is that ‘coping’ is not a specific behavior that can be unequivocally observed or a particular belief that can be reliably reported. Rather, it is an organizational construct used to encompass the myriad actions individuals use to deal with stressful experiences. (p. 217)
If coping is an organizational construct and not unidimensional, then instruments that have been developed may not be as reliable or valid as their publishers espouse.

There are other problems linked to this issue. There seems to be a disagreement in the field on whether coping is a process or style, and whether people consistently cope with different situations similarly (Rexrode et al., 2008). Another significant problem is the inability of measures to assess those strategies that individuals use which are outside of their awareness (Steed, 1999). If an individual is automatically and unconsciously using certain coping strategies, then could assessment measures truly tap into the domain we are interested in studying?

Steed highlights the idea that it is only when automatic coping strategies do not work that individuals become conscious of engaging in some coping strategies. In other words, it may also be fruitful to investigate coping strategies that individuals use in non-stressful situations, in addition to stressful situations. Dannof et al. state that “with checklists aiming to produce reliable and user friendly multi-item scales, the complexity of coping may be missed” (p. 192). If there is no agreement or standard approach used in the field, then how can we be confident that what we are measuring is valid and reliable? Thus, alternative forms of capturing the construct of coping may be useful for research.

There are also reliability and validity problems in coping instruments. De Ridder (1997) argues that assessment instruments measuring the coping construct come short in their ability to meet validity criteria. There is a scarcity of detailed empirical agreements on both the number and actual coping responses that exist. This has put into question the construct validity of many measures. De Ridder highlights how lack of conceptual clarity of the coping construct has led to the absence of criteria that can be used to determine construct validity. Instrument developers also compare their measures to other coping measures, which themselves have methodological
flaws. Another problem in validity with most coping instruments pertains to the strategies used in claiming that there are stable factors in coping dimensions. Many measures seem to use exploratory factor analysis which is criticized as not being the most effective way for developing coping measures. The reason behind this critique, as De Ridder elaborates, is due to the fact that factor analysis and other psychometric analysis were designed to investigate constructs considered to be stable, such as personality traits.

De Ridder’s (1997) research indicates, with few exceptions, that the majority of coping instruments suffer from psychometric flaws. Namely, coping instruments seem to be plagued by problems of low internal consistency. They also lack test-retest reliability. For instance, in her review of the Ways of Coping Questionnaire, Conger (1988) discusses the reasons behind the low internal consistency. The estimates are low due to the small number of items in each scale. She also argues that the stability estimates are weak. She states that “the estimates that were used do not provide compelling evidence for the dependability of the measure” (p. 2). In Hess’s (1988) review of the same scale, she critiques the developers for exclusion of supporting reliability information – such as level of significance and sample parameters or factor loading. Hess also points to her concerns about the lack of evidence on face validity in their manual. No evidence was presented, according to Hess, on the face validity of this scale across different cultural or ethnic groups. The groups used were white and middle class. This theme is consistent across the instruments used in the assessment of coping. De Ridder (1997) also points to the general inadequate research on construct validity and predictive validity of these instruments. More recent critiques of coping measures express similar concerns (Rexrode et al., 2008). In short, the lack of a gold standard in measuring the construct of coping coupled with the
psychometric problems inherent in these instruments suggests the use of alternative means for capturing the construct of coping.

2.11 A cultural salutogenic model of refugee mental health and adaptation

The discussion thus far has raised the importance of using a model of coping that is culturally appropriate. Ryan, Dooley, and Benson (2008) propose a conceptual model on refugee adaptation and mental health that is of particular relevance to this study. They propose a Resource-Based Model for understanding refugees’ well-being and adaptation.

Firstly, Ryan et al. provide key critiques on a number of models used in the literature for investigating refugee experiences. They start by critiquing Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation. They argue that even though Berry’s model incorporates relevant cross-cultural issues to migrant adaptation, it overemphasizes the role that acculturation plays on the actual process of adaptation. In fact, they argue that there is an “overculturalized” view of the migrant adaptation process. They refer to Lazarus’ (1997) work, entitled “Acculturation Isn’t Everything.” They argue that the demands of acculturation placed on a person going through the migration process are only a subset of the demands that occur during relocation. This may be particularly true with Iraqis in Jordan as they share similarities with that neighboring country.

Furthermore, Ryan et al. (2008) suggest that it is misleading to label the stressors of refugees as acculturation stress. This disguises the universal needs, such as family separation and unemployment. In fact, they use the term “migrant adaptation” instead of cross-cultural adaptation since they believe the former encompasses a wider context that goes beyond issues related to being in a new culture. They define migrant adaptation as a: “process through which individuals seek to satisfy their needs, pursue their goals and manage demands encountered after relocating to a new society” (p. 7).
Ryan et al.’s (2008) main critiques of Berry’s model as well as other cognitive appraisal models is that these are individually focused and do not focus on the greater context. This critique can be summed up by their statement, “Individuals do not enter potentially stressful encounters from a social vacuum but from a world in which access to resources is socially structured along such dimensions as gender, socioeconomic status, legal status, and ethnic background” (p. 4).

The main tenet of Ryan et al.’s (2008) model is that fulfilling basic human needs is paramount to human survival. In order to satisfy these needs, resources are required. It is through the mobilization of resources that individual needs are met. Resources are seen as key factors that are considered under this Resource-Based Model. They argue that resources support people in many ways: by satisfying people’s needs, allowing them to pursue their goals, and by assisting in managing the demands of life. Ryan et al. propose that a key risk factor for the experience of distress of refugees is the loss of major life goals. Furthermore, managing the demands of life requires the mobilization of resources. This model outlines numerous resources:

1. **Personal resources.** This encompasses both physical and psychological resources. Physical resources can include health and mobility. Psychological resources include both a person’s skills (e.g. social skills) and their personal traits (e.g. hope).

2. **Material resources.** This refers to access to money, possessions, and employment.

3. **Social resources.** This refers to personal relationships and their benefits.

4. **Cultural resources.** This is referred to as the “toolkit” that a person obtains from their culture. They can include linguistic skills, education, literacy, and beliefs.

Lastly, a refugee’s loss of their resource pool (or its decrease) can be understood by looking at the pre-migration, migration, and post-migration phases. Refugees’ adaptation is anchored in
their ability to regain some of their lost resources and develop new relevant ones in the new host country. In summary, this model provides a key framework for understanding refugees’ well-being that is resources-based. It provides a multidimensional perspective that goes beyond viewing refugees as individuals who are bearers of pathological symptoms or users of certain internal coping styles. This model, according to Ryan et al., gives refugees a voice.

2.12 Studies on refugee experiences

After conducting a thorough literature search in multiple databases (e.g. PsycINFO, MEDLINE, etc.), the focus in the literature became evident. Most studies examine the impact of specific variables within the different phases of the migration experiences (pre-migration, migration, and post-migration) on refugee mental health. Furthermore, most of the literature seems to be quantitative in nature and focuses on measuring distress in terms of symptoms and mental health disorders, such as PTSD (Hunt & Gakenyi, 2005; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006; Van Ommersen et al., 2001). A number of reviews and meta-analyses on refugee mental health further confirmed this initial finding (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Porter & Haslam, 2005; Rousseau & Drapeau, 2004). Even though refugees’ voices are rarely heard, these studies do shed light on variables that impact their experience.

Davidson, Murray, & Schweitzer (2008) conducted a review on mental health and well-being of refugees that is of particular relevance. They highlight variables and outcomes investigated in the literature pertaining to refugee mental health. Davidson et al. organize their findings in a chart that is very useful. Their chart is adapted to tables (see Appendix A). Table 2.1 highlights pre-migration variables that impact refugee mental health, such as the level and nature of trauma and demographic information. Table 2.2 highlights post-migration variables, such as time since departure from homeland. Table 2.3 reveals the mental health and well-being outcomes
measured in the literature, such as work self-efficacy. Table 2.4 highlights the key systems factors that have an impact on refugees’ experiences. The latter variables are noteworthy, as Davidson et al. suggest “one should not narrowly examine the experiences of individuals without taking account of the systems and communities that surround refugee resettlement and how the social and cultural environment affects the individual experience of resettlement” (p.165). The systemic variables are of importance as they may add distress to the post-migration experiences of refugees, which are not under their control.

These variables highlight the diversity of factors that influence the mental health and well-being of refugees. The number of variables that come into play is endless. Most studies isolate and focus on a few of these variables. However, by focusing on unitary variables we risk losing the rich information that can be gained in understanding the full story of refugees. Their stories become reduced by researchers to a priori variable selection. Quantitative studies also provide minimal opportunities for refugees’ voices to be heard.

### 2.13 Iraqi refugees: Investigating their experiences

There are a few studies that have investigated the experiences of Iraqi refugees. The majority of these studies, however, follow similar research designs used generally in the field. In other words, studies examining Iraqi refugees’ experiences are mostly quantitative in nature and focus on particular variables that impact well-being that are associated with mental health disorders.

Hikmet Jamil and colleagues have conducted a few studies examining the general health and mental health of Iraqi refugees in the United States (Jamil et al., 2002; Jamil et al., 2005; Jamil, Nassar-McMillan, & Lambert, 2007). These quantitative studies suggest that there are both pervasive and severe mental health issues that meet diagnostic criteria as well as general health problems with Iraqi refugees. Ibrahim Kira and his colleagues’ work, carried out within a
community mental health investigate factors of Iraqi refugees’ experiences that impact both well-being and adaptation (Kira et al., 2006a; Kira et al., 2007; Kira et al., 2006b). Similar to the work of Jamil and colleagues, Kira and colleagues investigate etiology and specific factors relating to mental and physical health of Iraqi refugees in the United States.

One of Kira et al.’s studies (2006b) examines retributive justice, the elimination of the oppressive regime in Iraq and the mental health of Iraqi refugees. This is of particular interest for the current study given that they examine posttraumatic growth variables, which may be relevant to the stories of Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The sample consisted of 501 Iraqi refugees. The data was collected using multiple measures to access PTSD, cumulative trauma disorder (CTD), futuristic orientation, post-traumatic growth attitude (PTGA), social support, sociocultural adjustment, and other measures. An interesting finding was that:

The process of regaining self-control and executive functions seems to be one of the key processes of psychological and social healing and recovery. Path analysis confirms the model in which regained self-control and executive functions is the central predictive variable of the positive changes in both mental health and social and psychological variables. (p. 163)

Kira et al.’s (2006b) findings highlight the role that cultural beliefs and religion have on the process of healing. The religiosity factor, as the authors explain, was a paramount cognitive coping factor that seemed to support the healing process of refugees. In their sample, religiosity was positively correlated with sociocultural adjustment, strong political beliefs, and looking to the future. All these factors were also significantly and positively correlated with a post-traumatic growth attitude.

Kira et al. (2006b) also found that loss of control was the one factor that was most strongly correlated with negative mental health. It would have been interesting to ask these participants
about the factors that have helped them to enhance their sense of self-control, and the cultural meaning they attribute to their post-traumatic growth attitudes. Furthermore, it may have been helpful to investigate the resources they believe could provide them with opportunities to gain self-control, as well as the resources that can enhance their post-traumatic growth attitudes such as personal, material, social, or cultural resources.

Waxman (2001) conducted a quantitative study examining the adaptation of Bosnian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees in Sydney, Australia. The study examined the relationships between pre-migration background (e.g. education level, English language proficiency) with post-arrival economic adjustment. Waxman was also interested in the relationship between economic status and the initial post-migration experience. The 77 Iraqi participants in the study were from various ethnic and religious backgrounds such as Kurds, Christians, and Shiite Muslims.

Waxman found that English language proficiency was the major contributor to the unemployment status for all the refugees. He found that current employment status was not affected by the adverse conditions that the refugees faced in pre-migration, such as detention camps or negative exit conditions from their country of origin. Interestingly, he also found that those refugees who had experienced imprisonment or camp conditions were more likely to look for work than those that did not suffer similar pre-migration experiences. Waxman suggests that “the survival from trauma incarceration may be a source of confidence building and self-reliance” (p. 495). He also found that the longer time the refugees were in Australia the greater their likelihood of finding employment. However, Waxman pointed out that being employed did not mean that they were getting paid at the skill level they had acquired before entrance into the country.
Takeda (2000) also conducted a quantitative study exploring the adaptation of Iraqi refugees. He investigated the psychological and economic adaptation of 105 male adult Iraqi refugees in five cities in the southeast United States. He found that 75% of Iraqi participants were experiencing serious psychological distress, as measured by the Center for Epidemic Studies Depression (CES-D) scale. He also found that 20.6% of the participants were unemployed. Takeda found that the refugees were having challenges in economic self-sufficiency. He concluded that one of the factors that resulted in the high unemployment rates was the refugees’ perception about migration. Takeda discovered that some Iraqi refugees perceived their presence in the new country as a temporary experience and were less motivated to search for and commit to long term employment. For instance, some were hoping to migrate to an Arabic or Muslim country. One may argue that these refugees were hoping to migrate to a place that is more familiar to their cultural background. Takeda also discusses an important implication pertaining to the potency of social support on well-being: “Those who cannot obtain enough support from families or relatives are having psychological difficulties, while those with enough family support psychologically adapt well in this country” (p. 16). Even though the study did not investigate the stories of these refugees nor did it give them voice, it does highlight the importance of social support and takes into account some cultural considerations.

Hosin, Moore, and Gaitanou (2006) examined the adaptation and well-being of both Iraqi refugee parents and their children in London, England. This quantitative study investigated the relationship between parental well-being, as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), and children’s psychological adaptations as measured by the Child Behavioral Checklist. They found that 52.46% of Iraqi parents showed very high levels of distress. The parents’ high levels of distress did not seem to be affected by their education level. They did, however, find a
relationship between length of stay in the new country and scores on the GHQ, with higher
distress associated with the early years of migration. The authors postulate that there may have
been factors with the migration experience that could have caused these findings, such as “forced
migration, exposure to violence and persecution, loss of loved ones, forced separation, social
isolation and loss of social network, and living in a dissimilar culture” (p. 129).

Shoeb, Weinstein, and Mollica (2007) collected the stories of 60 Iraqi refugees in order to
adapt the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire for use with this population. Their work is
commendable as they represent a small portion of the literature that investigates cross-cultural
issues pertaining to the experience of trauma, torture, and PTSD with Iraqi refugees. The
interviews were conducted in Arabic and focused on individual life stories. The participants were
asked to provide chronological accounts of their experiences in Iraq and talk about the decision
to leave the country, the experience of escaping, the transition experience in refugee camps, and
their resettlement. In other words, they explored issues in all three stages of migration.

Shoeb et al. (2007) also interviewed Iraqi psychiatrists to first obtain a background
understanding of the implications of cultural experiences of distress. They found that Iraqis with
mental health disorders present somatic complaints instead of psychological issues. They noted
that there is stigmatization of people with mental health issues in Iraq. In fact, those with mental
health disorders can be labeled as being unfit for marriage according to Iraqi cultural norms.
They discovered that any labels of mental health illness in Iraq are only used for serious
psychotic behavior and mental retardation. For instance, the word “majnoon” is used to describe
someone with a mental illness, which means crazy and is derived from the word “jinn” (a
supernatural spirit) (p. 456).
Shoeb et al.’s (2007) interviews with the refugees also revealed numerous local idioms that are used to express symptoms of distress. For instance, Iraqi refugees used the terms “asabi,” which is derived from the word “asab,” meaning nerves (p. 457). This was a condition that is marked by irritability, lack of patience, angry outbursts, and nervousness. The use of the term “nafseetak ta’abana,” is another example of the many idioms used in Iraqi culture that were revealed in the study (p.457). This word means that a person’s soul is tired, which covers a range of symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Their study is rare in that it reveals rich and specific meaning and idioms used in the Iraqi culture. The authors of the study make poignant statements in their concluding remark:

This study reflects the mutual challenges of the biological and cultural PTSD paradigms. PTSD is neither a simple reflection in personal experience of psychophysiological processes nor a culturally constituted phenomenon free of organic constraints…The concern is that researchers and clinicians have relied almost exclusively on such instruments, paying minimal attention to local expressions of well-being and distress among the communities in which they are working. (p. 458)

Even though their research provides rich contextual information, its main focus was on pathology and symptom development in Iraqi refugees. It may also be helpful to investigate well-being from a perspective that examines how Iraqi refugees are coping and adapting. What local idioms and meaning do they use that help them cope? It may also be useful from a pragmatic point of view to investigate what resources they have gained and lost due to their experiences, as well as the resources they now require to move forward in their lives.

Mansouri, Leach, and Traies (2006) examine the experiences of Iraqi refugees in Australia. They investigate the impact of visa status of 12 Iraqi refugees on their acculturation, settlement
and integration. They employ semi-structured individual interviews and a narrative method to incorporate refugee voices. They used the following as indicators of acculturation: English language facility, participation in either ethno-cultural networks or mainstream culture, attitudes towards language and cultural maintenance, perception and networking with host country (social capital), and shifts in group and individual identity and belonging. Mansouri et al. found that temporary visa status was the main barrier to their successful integration in society in Australia. Interestingly, they found that the temporary visa status had a certain impact, “[it] appears to have led to a quickened or ‘forced’ establishment of bridging social capital, and a decreased focus on cultural maintenance, in favor of the more immediate survival focus on establishing permanence” (p. 409).

Mansouri et al.’s (2006) study highlights the high degree of social isolation that Iraqi refugees with temporary visa status were experiencing. It reveals the significance of factors that reside outside of the individual’s internal adaptation and coping capacities, and looks at the external environment in which they reside. This would not have been achieved had the authors focused on isolating etiology of mental health disorders and well-being of refugees.

2.14 Summary

The refugee experience is filled with adversity and loss. The literature on refugee mental health indicates that there are a multitude of factors that influence coping and adaptation. However, the majority of the research literature seems reductionist in nature. Researchers have investigated the experiences of refugees by isolating certain factors in their studies. They often rely on quantitative methods and are based on Western notions of mental health. These notions seem to locate stress and coping within internal individual processes. Refugees in the majority of the literature become symptom bearers of mental health distress and pathology. Therefore, this
research seeks an alternative perspective, one that is salutary in nature. This study investigates the stories of Iraqi refugees and exiles to uncover their experiences of coping and adaptation with war and migration.
3 Chapter: Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and employs a qualitative research design. The method was selected to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of coping and adaptation of Iraqi exiles and refugees? Particularly, the focus of this study was on Iraqis who had experienced war in Iraq and migrated to Amman, Jordan. The chapter begins by exploring narrative inquiry as the method of choice for this study. Then, the focus of the chapter will turn to this study’s procedure, participant selection, and data analysis.

3.1 Narrative method

Narrative approaches may address the concerns that were raised in chapter two regarding the methodological problems in measuring the coping construct. Narrative methods are alternatives to the checklist and inventory approaches. Since its beginning in the late 1960s, the idea of narrative methods has grown at a rapid pace and infiltrated almost every discipline. The “narrative turn” has become cross-disciplinary and has entered many fields: anthropology and folklore, psychology, sociolinguistics and communications studies, history, sociology, and cultural studies (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, p. 427).

Narrative study is interested in the human experience. It is interested in people’s lives and concerns, and has strong autobiographical roots (Phillion, 2002). This method seems to be well suited for “studying the presentation of self in everyday life, for storying experience is a naturalist form of telling others about ourselves” (Riessman, 1990, p. 1195). Narrative approaches are grounded in certain perspectives on how humans see their reality. These approaches view the definitions of self and reality as socially constructed and maintained (Lee, 1997).
As discussed in chapter two, this social constructionist turn to language examines how people construct reality through their relationships in the world. Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) work on the sociology of knowledge laid the foundation for this paradigm. As Gergen (2001) points out, “languages of description and explanation are generated within human relationships – with each other and the world” (p. 806).

These descriptions can be captured by narrative inquiry. As a methodology, narrative approaches have a particular focus on the issues of subjectivity, language, and truth (Lee, 1997). Researchers are not able to delve into the richness of these realms through the quantitative approaches of checklist or inventory forms. As a qualitative approach, narrative methods provide a level of richness and subtlety that is not available in quantitative methods (Steed, 1998).

Narrative approaches create a venue for a deeper understanding of the human experience. They tap into an important part of the human experience: storytelling. Leggo (2008) suggests that we enter into this world through the stories of our family, community, and country. Storytelling is the basic method that humans use to make meaning out of their lives, to sustain that meaning, and also to transmit it (Hollan & Kilpatrick, 1993). This storied form is common amongst the various narrative methods used in research (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative research has many advantages for studying the coping construct and the quality of life of participants. Overcash (2003) highlights two main strengths of narrative approaches: First, narrative research allows the research participants to decide what they feel is relevant and constructive to the discussion. Secondly, according to Overcash, is the idea of “collaborative research” (p. 181), a term used by feminist scholars to refer to an equal power distribution between researchers and participants. These advantages are of particular relevance when working in cross-cultural settings. One can argue that a narrative approach can empower participants by
giving them a voice to share their story. This is especially significant when dealing with cross-cultural or diverse populations such as Iraqi refugees and exiles who have been intentionally or unintentionally silenced.

Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) outline a number of other advantages that narrative methods have over checklist approaches to assessment. Narrative approaches help us learn not only about the stressful situation that occurred, but they also tap into the emotions that were experienced. In other words, they help us understand what people thought and felt as the events and situations unfolded. Secondly, narrative approaches have the advantage of uncovering ways of coping that are not listed or covered on assessment instruments.

There are also cross-cultural implications of narrative approaches. White (1980) argues that narratives help researchers access meaning in the human experience despite the cultural specific context: “We may not be able to fully comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us” (p. 6).

With narrative inquiry, therefore, the cultural context of the research participants can be captured through their stories. This was particularly useful in this project. It allowed for better understanding of the participants’ experiences. It also provided insights into how they coped and adapted with their war experiences and the ensuing migration to the neighboring Arabic country of Jordan. In fact, Phillion (2008) argues that narrative methods have evolved to incorporate multicultural and cross-cultural inquiries that address issues of social justice. They have done so by exploring the experience of those who have been silenced. Through recent shifts, narrative inquiry has moved towards a focus on the “untold experience of marginalized groups and individuals enacted in contested cultural, linguist, and socio-political milieus” (p. 284).
Phillion (2002) has also argued that narrative, as a philosophy, is compatible with multiculturalism. This compatibility stems from an understanding that occurs between researchers and their participants. Researchers gain this understanding by respecting and honoring the histories, the communities, and the cultural perspectives of their participants. Two recent studies with Sudanese refugees highlight the use of this approach in studying coping and adaptation from a multicultural perspective.

Schweitzer, Greenslade, and Kagee (2007) were interested in examining the experiences of newly arrived Sudanese refugees in Australia through the phases of migration (pre-migration, migration, and post-migration). They used a sample of 13 participants and were able to analyze emergent themes from their interviews. They identified themes that characterized the resettlement experiences across the three time frames. These themes included religious beliefs, social support, and personal qualities. Thus, the use of narrative methodology provided a platform for investigating and identifying themes associated with coping responses while honoring their cultural context.

Goodman’s (2004) work also illustrates the richness that narratives provide in understanding the human experience. She explored how unaccompanied refugee youths, also from Sudan, coped with the trauma and hardship in their current lives as a result of experiencing war and violence. She used a narrative approach to analyze the data from the 14 participants who were interviewed. She identified a number of themes in regards to how they made meaning of their experiences: Hope emerges out of their hopelessness, and they use suppression and distraction to cope. Another interesting theme that emerged from her work is the theme of collectivity or “communal self” in how they made sense of their experiences (p. 1183). This work draws
attention to the significant role that narrative inquiry plays in our understanding of cultural manifestation of refugee adaptation and well-being.

In summary, coping is a complex and multidimensional construct. It may have become apparent for the reader that the rationale for using narrative inquiry as an alternative methodology was to capture the complexities of the experiences of Iraqi refugees and exiles. Narrative inquiry is interested in the story of human experiences. It delves into the cultural context from which meaning-making is generated and understood. Narrative inquiry provided this study with the means for honoring the meaning that Iraqi participants made of their experiences. It also provided a medium for respecting the sacredness of the historical and cultural context of their stories. This in turn helps us to better understand some of the salutary effects that play a role in their ability to adapt to war and adversity.

3.2 Procedure

Interviews for this study were conducted in the city of Amman, Jordan. Non-probabilistic rather than probability sampling was used in this research. Probability sampling relies on systematic randomization, meaning that sampling of large number of participants is based on the normal distribution. Non-probabilistic sampling, on the other hand, does not rely on systematic standardization. The original intent in this project was to use purposive sampling, a type of non-probabilistic sampling. It is a sampling method used by researchers to access a particular subset of people. This form of sampling relies on having a purpose in mind for the selection of certain participants that are appropriate for the study (Palys, 1997).

It was initially postulated that the use of non-probabilistic purposive sampling would be most appropriate for this study. Recruitment posters would have been placed near areas heavily populated by Iraqi exiles and refugees. The plan was to select participants from a pool of
respondents to the recruitment posters and flyers. Advertisements of the study were intended to be placed throughout the city of Amman, such as in mosques, community centers, and shopping areas.

However, the reality of conducting research with the Iraqi population in Amman required adjustments to the recruitment procedure. After a phone consultation with a personal contact in Amman, who was connected with the Iraqi community, it became clear that the likelihood of recruitment of participants through flyers and advertisements was negligible. Since the majority of Iraqis did not have current legal status in Jordan, they were afraid of initiating contact with anyone that worked with an organization or institution, even if the institution was from Canada (i.e. the University of British Columbia). Therefore, convenience sampling was used. The participants were recruited through the contacts of an Iraqi emergency doctor working in one of the hospitals in Amman.

Issues of trustworthiness and security were highly relevant to Iraqis in Amman. Participants were assured of the integrity and trustworthiness of the researcher by the Iraqi doctor. They were also reassured of their anonymity in the study. A snowball non-probabilistic sampling method was also used to recruit three of the participants. In other words, some participants recruited their acquaintances for this study through word of mouth.

Potential participants were first contacted by phone or in person by the Iraqi doctor. The aim and nature of this study was explained and their appropriateness for this study was explored. They were also informed of the reimbursement/compensation offered for their participation. Given Iraqi customs, it was more appropriate to offer a gift instead of monetary compensation to participants. Thus, symbolic gifts worth $10-$15 CAD were offered, gesturing an appreciation for their participation. Participants were asked about a location where they would prefer their
individual interview be conducted. Each of the participants had the option of having the interview either at their home or at another confidential and private location.

Due to security and immigration concerns for some Iraqis in Jordan, an adjustment had to be made with the signing of the consent form. Only three out of the ten participants were comfortable signing the consent form. However, all ten participants provided verbal consent for their participation in the study. This was the case since the majority of Iraqis were weary of singing any paperwork that resembles a legal document, fearing that their written involvement in any project may result in their deportation or may impact their visa application status in Jordan. Therefore, before the start of each interview the participants were given a consent form in Arabic (see Appendix B for English version and Appendix C for Arabic version). Since the interviews were audio-taped, the verbal consent then became part of the interview. Participants were also offered time to reflect on and discuss the consent form with the researcher. All participants consented to participate.

After consent was obtained, a demographic questionnaire was administrated in Arabic. This questionnaire aimed at gathering some relevant demographic information such as: age, ethnicity, education level, length of stay in Jordan, time since leaving Iraq, reason for leaving Iraq, number of family members in Jordan, current occupation/employment status, and legal status (see Appendix D for English version and Appendix E for Arabic version). This questionnaire took between 5-10 minutes to complete. A chart summarizing the demographic data is provided in chapter four.

The nature of narrative inquiry influenced the way in which information was gathered in this study. Narrative inquiry follows the process of gathering information through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Ten individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in
Arabic (Iraqi dialect), and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded using digital recorders. The interviews were then translated into English. I also took notes during the interviews. Each participant was asked to share their stories. Seven questions were used to facilitate the storytelling of Iraqi participants:

1. How have you been coping and adapting with your war and migration?
2. What does it mean for you to be in your current living circumstances?
3. What resources have you gained and lost as a result of your migration?
4. What resources do you now need to move forward in your life?
5. What are your best hopes for participating in this research project?
6. What are your best hopes for the future?
7. What do you want people to know about Iraqis in Jordan and their adaptation?

Prior to conducting this research, an application was submitted to the University of British Columbia’s Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB). This study was conducted with BREB’s approval (certificate number H09-01200).

### 3.3 Participant selection

This study was interested in the experiences of Iraqi males and females who have experienced war in Iraq and have migrated to Jordan. However, due to my male gender, none of the families contacted offered the option for meeting the women in their families. It was a cultural norm to allow a male researcher to only interview the men in the family. Thus, in respecting the cultural traditions of the participants, an adjustment to the selection criteria was made. Only male participants were interviewed for the study. The other inclusion criteria used for the selection process were:

- Iraqis currently living in Amman, Jordan
- Iraqi civilians who have left Iraq or were forced to leave
- Iraqis who have experienced war
- Adult Iraqis over the age of 18 years
- Iraqis willing to participate in individual interviews
- Iraqis with temporary visa, expired visa, or with a refugee visa status in Jordan
- Iraqis who are able to articulate their experiences

3.4 Data analysis

Narrative inquiry was the method used in this study to give voice to Iraqi refugees’ experiences. Particularly, explanatory narrative inquiry was employed. Explanatory narrative inquiry is useful since it has the capacity to “account for the connection between events in a causal sense and to provide the necessary narrative accounts that supply the connections” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The study sought the connections between Iraqis’ ability to cope and adapt to their circumstances and the meaning they ascribed to it given their cultural context.

Riessman (2008) provides an overview for analyzing narrative inquiry. Of particular interest is thematic analysis. Riessman provides case studies of exemplar research using thematic analysis, which were followed during the analysis of data in this study. All the data that were gathered from numerous points were analyzed using thematic analysis. The various data points included the transcribed interviews, the researcher’s notes during the interviews, and the researcher’s observations from listening to the digital audio recordings of the interviews. Narrative inquiry provides a way for researchers to write the narrative of the participants’ experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002).

Thematic analysis was conducted in this study by first becoming familiar with the data. Upon my return to Vancouver, I began listening to the audio recordings of each interview. This was
followed by reading each transcript several times. I then went back to listening to the audio recording of each narrative while scanning their transcripts. During this process, I used highlighters to mark aspects of their stories that were prominent. I then looked at all the highlighted areas to examine common themes. Following research exemplars cited by Riessman (2008), the sequence of each narrative was preserved. Particular attention was paid to the time and place of the narratives. According to Riessman (2008), a “case-centered” commitment in the analysis process is a hallmark of narrative inquiry (p. 74). I approached each narrative with a case-centered commitment. In chapter four, I speak further about my own journey in the analysis process.

3.5 Credibility and member checks

Member checks were conducted to ensure the accuracy of the findings. It served an important function for attaining credibility, which is a form of validity check in qualitative research. This assures coherence between the participants’ narratives and the researcher’s interpretive work (Riessman, 2008). Member checks procedures help verify the congruency between the findings of the research and reality (Shenton, 2004).

Two forms of member checks were performed in this study. Firstly, member checks were conducted at the time of the interview. I summarized and paraphrased the statements made by the participants. This acted as an “on the spot” credibility check (Shenton, 2004, p.68). This process gave the participants the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on their stories, leading to a more accurate understanding of their narratives and the meaning they prescribed to it.

A second form of member check was conducted by contacting the participants after the analysis was conducted. Eight out of the ten participants had agreed at the time of the interview to be contacted in the future. I sent them drafts of their written narratives. I communicated with
them by e-mail and asked the following question: "Please read the attached document and let me know if I have accurately captured your story at the time of the interview.” Four participants responded and confirmed the accuracy of their narratives. One of the four participants requested some minor edits, which I made. He also requested that his real name to be used in the narrative. I informed him of the confidentiality issues and the challenge relating to his request. He then agreed to maintain his pseudo name in the narrative.

I should also point out here that two of the participants who responded to my follow-up had secured immigration to the United States since the interview. Therefore, it is plausible that the lack of response from the other four participants was due to their relocation. Lack of response may also have been due to reluctance to acknowledge their involvement in the project through a written e-mail response. As indicated before, the majority of the participants preferred to give verbal instead of a written consent.
4 Chapter: Analysis of findings

This narrative inquiry focused on the stories of ten Iraqis who experienced war in their native home of Iraq and were forced to migrate to Jordan. The findings in this chapter were drawn from these ten interviews. Three themes were examined within each narrative. This chapter is organized in the following manner: examining the analysis process, declaring the researcher’s agenda, a discussion of each narrative, and a summary.

4.1 The analysis process

I conducted ten interviews for this study. I first spent a substantial amount of time becoming familiar and intimate with the data, which required reading and re-reading the transcripts as well as listening repeatedly to the audio recordings. My writing process ebbed and flowed; at times I wrote furiously, while at other times I stared for days at the mostly idle flashing cursor on my computer monitor. I spent periods of time reflecting on the stories. I also took time away from the stories in order to re-enter the analysis process with fresh eyes.

I felt a responsibility to analyze the data in a way that best honors the participants’ stories and addresses the research objective. However, this brought the analysis process to a halt several times. I felt frozen in the early stages of writing as I became overly meticulous in my attempts to avoid letting any relevant data go unnoticed. The process became burdensome and unrealistic to achieve. How can I truly tell an unflinchingly accurate narrative of people’s complex inner and outer journeys? How is this achievable especially after just one research interview with each participant that has been shaped by my own perspective? I decided, therefore, to start the analysis by taking a different route. I chose a path that begins by first humbly declaring my own agenda and biases.
4.1.1 My agenda

This project has given me a place to present a story to the world that is often different from the one heard in the general media. I have grown tired of hearing stories in the media about the poor helpless Iraqis who have been broken down and traumatized by war. That story implies that we, in North America, are the ones with the expertise and power to go and “fix” those broken souls. I have found this perspective to be deeply humiliating and repelling. We, now speaking as an Iraqi, are filled with pride, integrity, and nationalism. These traits were planted in me and stirred many thoughts throughout my adult years.

I have reflected in agony over the years, trying to understand the crossroads that Iraq finds itself in now. How have we, the people of Mesopotamia, once called the cradle of civilization, become a nationality that is feared by many nations and people? The word “Iraqi” has become a polluted word that is equated with death, savagery, ethnic cleansing, bombings, war, danger, terrorism, fear, trauma, decapitation, security upheavals, kidnappings, and looting. How have we deviated so far from the days of Mesopotamia, when the land was revered for its history, culture, and scientific advancements? How can a country that was known as the Land between the Two Rivers (Euphrates and Tigris) have become the land between warring factions and land of death? What has happened to the land that was known for its flourishing civilizations – the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians? What has become of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the original Seven Wonders of the World?

Just as it was believed that King Nebuchadnezzar II had built these “Gardens” for his ill wife and her longing for her home of Persia (Foster, 1998), I too have dreamt of building a garden for my ailing Iraq. I hope that this work will provide opportunities for people to marvel at the rich stories of Iraqis and their ability to adapt. It is my way of building a small humble garden that
honors the story of Iraq. I hope that the reader gains a new perspective on Iraqis, one that counteracts the stereotypical views. While doing my best to remain objective, I moved forward with the intention to honor the voices of my participants, and to shed light on humanity—the awe-inspiring resilient life-force within all of us and the unbreakable will of the human spirit. Despite this intention, I would like to offer my heartfelt apologies for any shortcomings.

### 4.1.1 Demographics

Each participant was given a pseudo name to protect their anonymity and identity. Certain information was concealed since it had the risk of revealing their identity, such as specific reference to cities, names, and other identifying information. Each of the ten narratives will be examined next. This includes the narrative of Mr. Jasim, Mr. Jamaal, Mr. Nidal, Mr. Ahmed, Mr. Abbaas, Mr. Ziad, Mr. Mohamed, Mr. Omar, Mr. Yoniss, and Mr. Hassan. But first, some demographic information is provided (see Table 4.1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Highest degree</th>
<th>Pervious work in Iraq</th>
<th>Current work</th>
<th>Year left Iraq</th>
<th>Est. # of new social contacts in Jordan</th>
<th># of family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim</td>
<td>B.Ed</td>
<td>Teacher-realtor</td>
<td>Realtor</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>“Good amount”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4th year Pharmacy</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Unemployed/student</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>“Good”</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim</td>
<td>Technical college/diploma</td>
<td>Self-employed: import/export store</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Medical school</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim</td>
<td>Current university student</td>
<td>Full time student</td>
<td>Database management/student</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Medical school</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Judicial system</td>
<td>Judicial system</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Medical school</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Shiiate Muslim</td>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>Self-employed: retail store owner</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Unemployed/student</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As discussed in chapter three, the original goal was to interview Iraqis from both genders. However, only men were interviewed as this was culturally appropriate given my gender. The
ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 51 years old. Six out of the ten participants self-identified as Muslims, but did not express allegiance to a specific Muslim sect (i.e. Sunni or Shi'ite). Three participants self-identified as Sunni Muslims and one as Shi'ite Muslim. The sectarian violence in Iraq has created unnatural tensions between Iraqis from different Muslim sects. The majority of the participants in the study expressed their disdain for the political divide and separation, while several shared their embarrassment and shame in watching the divisions and fighting unfold in Iraq. This may have led the majority of the participants to self-identify as “Muslim” only. This gesture may articulate their unspoken attempts to create unity and solidarity amongst Iraqis.

Two of the participants were university and college students. All remaining eight participants had a university degree. Four out of the ten participants were unemployed (40%). The remaining six participants were employed and had found work in their own professions.

The mode year in which participants left Iraq was 2006. Most of them have developed new social contacts and networks since arriving in Jordan, with the exception of one participant who reported knowing just one other person in Amman. The majority have developed social networks, ranging from one new contact to around five thousand contacts. Also, the mode number of family members that migrated with them to Amman was four. Only one participant left Iraq alone without any accompanying family members.

Now that the demographics of the ten participants have been covered I will turn my focus to examining each individual narrative. It should be pointed out here that it was determined a priori that three themes will be identified within each narrative. The first theme provided contextual information while both the second and third themes in each narrative captured the participants’ experiences of coping. This helped maintain the focus of analysis.
4.2 Mr. Jasim’s narrative

4.2.1 Theme #1: Parachuting out - leaving an unbearable homeland and repeatedly walking into the unknown at any cost

Mr. Jasim’s story of adaptation to war and migration began in the early 1980s. During that time he began contemplating the idea of leaving Iraq. Shortly after his graduation from medical school, Mr. Jasim was drafted to serve as a military doctor during the gruesome and bloody eight year war with neighboring Iran. He served in military hospitals and on the frontlines of the battlefields throughout most of the 1980’s. In the late 1980’s, soon after he was released from mandatory army service, Mr. Jasim finally had a chance to seriously reflect upon his future in Iraq. Unfortunately, stability and peace did not last long enough to provide him with the opportunity to pursue the future he longed for in Iraq.

Mr. Jasim was once again drafted to serve in the army. This time he was called to serve for the 1990 Persian Gulf War, otherwise known as “Operation Desert Storm.” The lull between wars in Iraq was far too short for anyone. Mr. Jasim and his family lived through this debilitating war. They experienced the relentless air and ground attacks, unleashed by the United States and coalition forces, whose aim had been to punish Saddam Hussein for his invasion of Kuwait. The rationale behind the massive destruction was to weaken Saddam, with the notion that a more vulnerable Saddam would encourage an uprising by the people to overthrow his regime. The uprising was successful at first, with Saddam losing grip of 15 out of 18 provinces to rebel forces. Unfortunately, the United States and coalition forces then watched as Saddam flexed his military might and massacred the rebels using his entire ground and air arsenal, despite this being in violation of the ceasefire agreements that were signed in early 1991 and of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 686 and 687.
I chose to risk breaking the flow of Mr. Jasim’s story by providing the background information above. Since his narrative was the first one in my analysis, I wanted to bring to the forefront an unavoidable bias: my passion for bringing awareness to the injustices committed against Iraq. It is an inner battle that I, as the researcher, continued to face as I wrote this first narrative. By bringing my voice into the analysis, I am able to remain authentic. It freed me to fully focus on Mr. Jasim’s story, which I will return to next.

Within a few months of being released from the army, Mr. Jasim was called back to duty where he served another seven months as a military doctor. Being called back to duty clashed with Mr. Jasim’s great aspirations to advance his profession. He had hoped to leave the country to pursue further studies toward becoming a surgeon. However, he watched his dreams slowly vanish. Mr. Jasim shared that being drafted again meant that Iraq now “entered new tragedies.” Even though he gained “incredible” experience working as a military doctor, he considered that part of his life “wasted”:

I am a doctor that has spent a long period of his life, which I consider was wasted and gone, because I was in the army, as a doctor. I did not progress or advance in my work life when I was in the army. I mean a doctor, yes, it is true, I gained incredible experiences from a practical sense. I worked on everything. I saw and experienced everything that a doctor could possibly come across. I even saw and experienced more things than any doctor working in civilian life, in a civilian hospital would see…They would have to work 200 years to come across the cases that I worked with.

Unfortunately, with all the work experiences that Mr. Jasim gained, his chances for advancing his career after the war were limited. He explained the degree to which the 1990 war made an impact on his dreams: “[it] just destroyed my motive and drive that I had to continue
working as a doctor and continue my studies.” He was also faced with endless closed doors and felt that he was suffocating while dealing with the bureaucracies set up by Saddam’s regime:

Doctors weren’t allowed to leave no matter what the reason was, even if I was going on a government scholarship or going to study and personally pay for it, all of this was forbidden. To have any chance of getting a scholarship anywhere, you had to be involved in the Baath party. I was not a Baathist. The government had various requirements that were meant to create barriers to stop people from leaving Iraq.

One of the main themes that emerged in Mr. Jasim’s narrative was his deep desire to leave the country at any cost. He described the manner in which living in Iraq became unbearable over the years. This stretched over decades beginning from the Iraq-Iran war, to the Persian Gulf War, and finally to the decade of brutal sanctions that were imposed on the country during the 1990s. The increasingly unbearable situation had a profound impact on him both professionally and personally. He lost the passion and love for his profession and began pursuing work outside of medicine. This was a significant transition as being doctor in Iraq has significant cultural benefits.

Socially and culturally speaking, entering the field of medicine in Iraq carries a level of prestige. A highly respected profession, becoming a medical doctor offers a high social status. It is one of the few professions in Iraq that families strongly encourage and pressure their children to enter. Mr. Jasim elaborated on this, “I had imagined myself to have this great prestige for completing medicine and being a doctor and all the perks of being the doctor, all of these were destroyed by Iraq.” Unfortunately, Iraq for Mr. Jasim became a jail that stripped away his love for his own profession: “Look, that is what the impact of Iraq had on me and the reaction that Iraq created in me, made me hate my own profession; I hated my primary profession, hated
medicine.” His love for medicine transformed into a sense of burden for holding those credentials. In fact, he felt that medicine became a liability, “Just like how oil in Iraq became a liability for the country, medicine became a liability for me.” He was not allowed to leave the country even after the end of each of the wars. There were tight regulations in Iraq which did not even permit doctors to leave the country in order to travel, not even for a temporary vacation.

Over the years Mr. Jasim felt that the words “Iraq”, “Saddam”, and “medicine” became interchangeable. He shared that it was one person who destroyed his love for his profession: Saddam Hussein. Since Saddam was in Iraq, his distain for him became reflected in his growing contempt for Iraq and his own profession. This led him to leave his profession behind. He opened a supermarket with a friend. It was during that time that it became clear to him how “Iraq for me became a jail,” and he elaborated, “You can’t do or participate in the freedoms that those outside of prison can take part in.” The unbearable jail in Iraq led Mr. Jasim over the next eight years to work in several other areas outside of medicine. He also made numerous attempts to create life outside of Iraq by forging exit documents and leaving the country. These attempts unfortunately were unfruitful as he was forced several times to return to Iraq with his family. He returned with even larger financial problems and challenges.

Mr. Jasim’s first attempt to permanently leave Iraq with his wife and children occurred shortly after the 1990 Persian Gulf War. He managed to first obtain temporary paperwork to leave Iraq and visited Jordan without his wife and children. He tried to find work in hospitals there. His hopes dwindled as he continued to be turned away by potential employers. He was further discouraged after meeting other Iraqis who had been living illegally in Jordan for months. They had been given promises of possible work opportunities but had nothing to show for their efforts. He shared that it was virtually impossible for Iraqis at that time to get work in Jordan,
especially if they did not have any official paperwork or visa status. After a chance meeting with some Iraqi friends in Amman, a glimpse of hope was sparked. His friends introduced him to another Iraqi that was visiting Jordan from a third world country. Their conversation led to a work offer in that country which shall remain unnamed to maintain confidentiality. Reinvigorated with the good news, Mr. Jasim returned to Iraq and convinced his wife to take a chance and leave the country.

Mr. Jasim’s deep distain for the situation in Iraq and for his profession led him to take a leap into the unknown. He moved to a country with a culture that was foreign to him, and worked at a job that was completely unrelated to his profession. He became a business executive. Being out of Iraq, and “out of jail,” gave Mr. Jasim the drive and motivation to excel once again. Within six months, he became well known in his industry and gained many clients. He then took the risk of opening his own business, which required him to invest over $90,000 USD in capital. This meant investing all the money he had saved over the years. However, an unexpected turn of events changed things once again. The country in which he lived in then was undergoing reforms and making changes to its business-related bylaws. He was forced to halt his company’s operations and was unable to recover his capital. Since he had been staying in that country under an investor visa and no longer had an investment, Mr. Jasim was forced to leave and return to Iraq.

En route, Mr. Jasim and his family had to land in Jordan because they could not fly directly back to Iraq. During the mid-1990’s, Iraq still had sanctions imposed on it, so no passenger airlines were allowed in or out of the country. Driving to Iraq was the only option. Jordan became a popular country of transit for Iraqis. In fact, a whole industry of ground transportation sprung up between Jordan and Iraq, including buses and cross border taxi services. After landing in Jordan, Mr. Jasim decided to stay for a couple of days. He decided to try his luck once again
and apply for work in Amman. This was his final attempt at staying out of Iraq. Unable to secure any work during those few days, Mr. Jasim was deeply disheartened and faced the grim reality of having to return to Iraq. After all, he could not stay in Jordan with a visitor visa. The living expenses were also high and unsustainable.

Mr. Jasim found himself back in Iraq. Once again this flared the painful feelings he had associated with being in Iraq: “Instead of just being in a jail, the feeling was like being given a life sentence, being in a jail and being given a death sentence, it was a deadly feeling, it butchered me.” He regretted returning to Iraq and wished that he had stayed in Jordan at any cost. He wished that he had grabbed on to any work opportunity, “Even if I had worked as an ironsmith, as a carpenter.” These jobs in Iraq are normally sought after by the less educated social class in the country. He was willing to give up medicine and work in Jordan in jobs that were culturally beneath his social status.

At that point in the story, Mr. Jasim shared two words in Arabic that describe his internal state. These words are difficult to translate literally. The first word is “jenoon.” Jin in Arabic means spirit. Jenoon means being possessed by the spirit and “going crazy.” It is a word that is used in Iraq to describe a state of distress. The other word is “nafseean,” which refers to a person’s inner world/psyche/soul. Mr. Jasim elaborated on the unbearable situation back in Iraq by using these words:

It made me feel like I was in a state of jenoon, loosing my mind and being depressed. I had this feeling, this unbelievable depression that was strange. I had no mood or interest to do anything, even the work that I did, which of course was not related to being a doctor in 1995. I worked in business, worked in currency exchange selling and buying US dollars. I mean, I would make some money, then lose some money. Life kinda went on, but nafseean I felt
devastated and destroyed. This even impacted my, I mean I had another child, so now I had two children….and my responsibilities grew. And my kids were growing up. And even the depression that I had impacted my relationship with my family. I mean, at times I could care less about them, and at other times, I felt like my family become a burden on me. I felt that these poor innocent ones, what I am going to do with them. [Italics added]

The unbearable situation had propelled him to find a way out of the country, and once again he felt the need to leave Iraq at any cost. Mr. Jasim parachuted himself out of Iraq and into the unknown without an exact sense of where he was going to land. Mr. Jasim had to leave everything behind. He spent substantial sums of money paying bribes to obtain fake paperwork and passports. This allowed him and his family to leave Iraq. Mr. Jasim left Iraq with two children, his wife, and only $1,500 USD in his pocket.

4.2.2 Theme # 2: Building a better life - making sense of the struggles in the new country

The next theme that emerged from Mr. Jasim’s story sheds light on the main question of interest behind this research project. Namely, his ability to adapt, cope, and make sense of his own experiences. It is a theme that can be summarized by his drive for wanting to secure a better life for his family. He recounted the worries he had in Iraq about the future of his children. He was frightened that staying in Iraq would have led his children to relive the same challenges he went through: being drafted into the army, witnessing wars and tragedies, living a life of restriction, and having limited opportunities to grow in a profession of choice. Mr. Jasim’s eldest son was reaching the age of eleven during the time Mr. Jasim and his family left Iraq for good in 1999. He explained:

I began imagining that the day would come in the very near future that Saddam would come and say ‘where is your son? We need him for the army.’ And then he would have to go
through this same, this dark journey. This is bad, he would have to go through the same hardship and suffering. The main reason then is my fear about the well being of my children. This was my main motive for leaving.

His premonition would have come true had he stayed in Iraq. A few years after they left Iraq, the 2003 “Operation Iraqi Freedom” war brought with it another dark chapter in Iraq’s history. His children would have probably been recruited to serve in the People’s Army of Iraq. At the very best, his children would have had to live through the hardship of the most devastating war in Iraq’s recent history.

Mr. Jasim described his final attempt to leave Iraq as a major “u-turn.” It was a change that seemed to require divine intervention at first, “It was not until Allah all mighty opened his doors for us and we were able to leave.” Later in the interview he describes how the door of opportunity opened by the grace of God: “Allah the all Mighty had wanted to reward me, he wanted to make my life easier.” The hardships that he endured throughout his life were not in vain. It was as if his pains did not go unnoticed by Allah, which is the Arabic word for God. For the sake of clarification, Allah is not the name of a Muslim deity, a common misconception. If that was the case then it would be equivalent to proclaiming that the French believe in a God called Dieu when in fact it is a word that means God in French.

Mr. Jasim believed that it was Allah who eventually rewarded him with a small window of opportunity to leave for Jordan. He grabbed onto this opportunity and decided to endure and accept all the challenges of a new life with open arms. He viewed any obstacles and future challenges as better alternatives than staying in Iraq. He wanted stability and peace of mind: “I wanted my children and wife to live in a place that is secure and safe, and not have anyone question them and tell them what they can or can’t do.”
After enduring countless years of hardship in the jail that had become Iraq, Mr. Jasim began adapting to this new life in Jordan by enjoying its freedom. A new found strength and energy emerged within him despite the challenges. After all, he had no job, no legal paperwork, and he hardly had any money to sustain his family. Yet, a sense of being rewarded with a new life by Allah birthed in him a desire to work to succeed at all costs. He elaborated:

So now, the result of this feeling that I had that I left Iraq, that I was out of prison, that out of the sanctions, out of the constrictions, out of the hands of Saddam, out of that dirty life we were living, out of slavery, out of the life that was filled with humiliations, out of a life that you feel your hands are tied, out, out to a place, Jordan for me at the time was this place like freedom with no ends.

Experiencing newfound freedoms was a rewarding outcome. This by itself helped him adapt to his new life. He further explained: “Any human being, in my opinion, who feels that his efforts and hard work will bring about a good and rewarding outcome for him, his family, they would gain this persistence, will, and conviction” and that in turn gave him “energy to keep going, to endure, to easily forget that you are getting tired and working hard, all of this because the outcome is good.” The rewards of the new life seem to have overshadowed its challenges.

With freedom came another pleasant surprise. Mr. Jasim regained his love for his profession as a doctor. He became tirelessly persistent in his pursuit of a position at local hospitals. As he didn’t have any legal paperwork in Jordan, he had to compete with local Jordanian doctors to secure a position. However, numerous hospitals began hiring Iraqi doctors because of the high standard of training that doctors go through in Iraq. Furthermore, Iraqi doctors were accepting lower salaries as they rarely had any work permits. Thus, Iraqi doctors became of interest to Jordanian hospital administrators as they brought with them substantial cost savings.
After Mr. Jasim secured a job at a local hospital, he seized the opportunity to engage in the profession he had once loved. His passion, love, and talent began to emerge once again. Like the phoenix rising from the ashes, Mr. Jasim took his life forward. He quickly gained the respect of many at his work. However, not everyone liked him. Some people at the hospital were trying to get rid of him since he was an Iraqi who held a position that could be filled by locals.

There was another key way in which Mr. Jasim made sense of his struggles while creating a better life in Jordan. He remembered the horrors he witnessed in Iraq and attributed his ability to adapt and cope in Jordan to the difficult life he had in Iraq. A clear thread emerged within his story, using the past as a reality check. Mr. Jasim shared an Iraqi proverb that captured his story: “If someone sees the grim reaper in front of them, then they accept severe fever as an alternative.” Mr. Jasim shared that he would not have developed the strength to endure the hardships in Jordan had he lived a good and stable life in Iraq, and he elaborated: “It is because of what I went through in Iraq, the tragedies that I experienced and saw, all of these allowed me to just jump and hang on to anything that I could.” This helped him develop the ability to be patient and withstand any pressures. He felt great pride in sharing that no one will hear him complain at work about the workload or about any work-related problems. Mr. Jasim had gained confidence in his ability to adapt by remembering the past. He felt that the hardships of life in Jordan were like “delightful sweets” in comparison to life in Iraq.

Mr. Jasim also shared a great deal of gratitude for the lessons he learned from being in the battlefield in Iraq. As much as he shared his disdain for the horrors of war that he experienced as an army doctor, it had anchored within him the ability to withstand challenges and developed a keen ability to be patient. He felt that there were perks in witnessing death, as he explained: “When you see death, you begin to appreciate life, you learn to adapt to life so that you can stay
alive.” He took great pride in sharing how he was able to learn this lesson without letting the war severely impact his mental health. Even though the situation in Iraq did make him feel depressed and affected his relationship with his wife, he felt strongly about the fact that the war did not cause him a mental breakdown or cause him to become a disturbed person. He spoke with great pride while explaining that the war “did not make me sick, it did not [actually] make me majnoon [crazy and possessed by spirit], it did not make me a person that is ill nafseean [i.e. psychologically/emotionally/spiritually].” Interestingly, at this point of the narrative Mr. Jasim dismisses the impact that the war had on him. Earlier in the narrative, however, he spoke about his feelings of depression and the impact that the experience had on his nafis (i.e. psyche/spirit/self). It is possible that the way we remember and the how we construct or memories are shaped through conversations. In other words, Mr. Jasim could have constructed a new memory based on my questions.

Mr. Jasim also shared other lessons from the battlefield. These lessons played a role in helping him adapt better to the challenges of life as a new migrant in Jordan. For instance, he shared the many discomforts associated with sleeping on the ground of a dugout bunker in the desert, which was crammed and shared with other soldiers. He also shared many other discomforts, such as not having washroom facilities, and eating out of the same plate with six other people. He also recalled several close calls with death as the deafening sounds of mortars landed meters away from him.

Mr. Jasim had learned a great deal about his capacity to deal with the daily challenges of life. Experiencing the war on the frontline became what he described as the “main pillar” behind his capacity to adapt to hardships and endure challenges. In short, Mr. Jasim’s ability to adapt to life
in Jordan was driven by the theme of remembering the hardships of the past and wanting a better life for his family.

4.2.3 Theme # 3: Hope amidst the unpaved road - a call for humanity

Lastly, throughout Mr. Jasim’s story themes around hope and humanity were evident. Hope was both implicitly and explicitly present in Mr. Jasim’s story. Implicitly, hope was the unspoken fuel behind most of his story. His pursuit of a better life was anchored in the idea of hope. One can imagine that it would be difficult for anyone to leap into an unknown future without having any hope. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Jasim was driven to search for and find a better life for his family. He wanted a life that could offer stability, a country that would be safe and secure, and he wanted an employer who would give him the opportunity to excel in his work and get financially established.

Besides the implicit presence of hope in his story, Mr. Jasim also explicitly shared his thoughts about hope. He held high hopes for a better life and continued to believe that Allah would open the right doors for him. He also wanted his story to reach those who are now going through the same challenges he went through during his migration to Jordan. He wanted people to know that if they lose hope, the hardship and circumstances of being a new migrant will break them and leave them, as he explained, “Feeling imprisoned, trapped, feeling hopeless, and it will destroy them.” He was adamant about always hanging on to hope and adamant about never giving up. Mr. Jasim wanted to remind those who are beginning their journey that failure is part of the process. He reminds us that the humans failed regularly before their dream of flying would become possible. He assures us that fulfilling rewards will come to those that maintain hope and persist. This persistence can lead a person’s life to soar to new heights, as did Mr. Jasim’s life. He reminds us that there is brighter light at the end of the tunnel.
Within the seed of hope lies the tree of humanity. If we nurture humanity it has a chance of blossoming. Mr. Jasim shared his thoughts on all of our collective roles in promoting humanity. He first shared his disappointment with the way in which most Iraqis are treated: “There is a large portion of these Iraqis here that no one sees or feels that they are human beings, I swear to Allah, they are not looked at as human beings.” He wanted to remind people that not everyone who came to Jordan has higher education or degrees. Mr. Jasim yearned for people to understand that those who left Iraq after the fall of Saddam, have mostly left due to severe circumstances. These circumstances included having members of their family kidnapped, killed, threatened, or tortured. These were just some of the tragedies that were occurring in Iraq. He reminds us that “all of us are living on this same planet, all human beings.” He spoke about the universality of humanity, about our obligation to each other in the human race. There was no animosity in his story towards other sects within Islam or towards any other religious or spiritual groups. On the contrary, he highlighted the universality of humanity’s obligation to each other:

All the religious, all of Allah’s books, all of them are the same. Even the Buddhist, they are the same, the same values. Even if you go to a person who is living at the end of the earth. Even if you go to the Eskimos. Even they would be moved to do good things for their friends and protect them from bad things…We are obligated to provide, make positive contributions. We must do good deeds in proportion to our capacities, as much as we can. And then minimize misfortune and the bad things from our life and from the lives of others. How do we this? Well, by benefiting from the good things that happened in our lives, regardless of what it is, be it money, education, knowledge, capacities, a voice that reaches out and helps people. And then suffering, the hardship that we encounter, well, we find solutions to them
so that others don’t go through the same things. We try to solve the problems that we are confronted with so that others can benefit from it.

Mr. Jasim hoped that his voice would reach people to help them from going through the “dark road” that he did. He wished that an organization would be formed to help Iraqis who are just beginning the journey of adapting to a new life, as most of them do not have any legal paperwork and only have limited resources in Jordan. Mr. Jasim shared that a simple loan of $10,000 USD would have made his life easier upon arrival in Jordan. He would have been able to maintain a certain standard of living while getting established. Mr. Jasim also shared a revealing metaphor about Iraqis in Jordan. He empathized with fellow Iraqis who have left the “jail of Iraq,” which he described as a place that was filled with “demons and monsters that come at you from nowhere and from any hole in the wall.” He explained that for many Iraqis, they leave the “demons” from the “jail of Iraq” but find themselves in another jail. He described Jordan for some as being a “safe jail” since it does not have demons that jump out on them from nowhere. It is a safe jail that provides shelter. However, many of them still feel confined as they live in uncertainty and fear. Many Iraqis in Jordan are disenfranchised as they don’t have legal status in the country, are unable to find work, and are struggling to survive.

He also expressed another conviction around the role we can play in uplifting humanity. He shared that Allah has created knowledge so that it can be passed on. We can make contributions to others in order “to expand good things.” He hoped that his voice could reach those in authority so that they can help pave the way for Iraqis in Jordan. He described his journey as a treacherous one that forced him to go “off-road” into unpaved, dangerous, and dark experiences that were filled with bumps. He wished that this project would move humanity to action: “I wish that I could pave this road if I had the means. I wish that my voice gets heard by people who are able
to pave the road and add lights to it so that others don’t fall into these holes, these bumps.” His story truly paints a picture of the inextinguishable flame of the human spirit and its ability to adapt and adjust to insurmountable odds.

4.3 Mr. Jamaal’s narrative

4.3.1 Theme #1: Dealing with the fate that has been given - facing the reality you find yourself in

Mr. Jamaal’s story of migration and adaptation was a unique one since his departure was unplanned. He lived through the 2003 war in Iraq and experienced the challenges of living in a war zone until the summer of 2006. Until that time, Mr. Jamaal and his family lived through a chaotic situation filled with hardships, lack of security, and violence. In Canada, we have grown accustomed to the luxury of living in a peaceful country that provides services for its citizens. This was not the case in Iraq. Mr. Jamaal shared the frustrations he faced in dealing with the scarcities of basic life necessities.

Mr. Jamaal lived in a popular district of Baghdad that only received electricity for an average of four hours a day. It should be noted that, at that time, the distribution of electricity to neighborhoods in cities across Iraq—both by amount and length—was mostly controlled by the United States and occupation forces. The rationale behind that strategy is beyond the scope of this paper. Even though it is tempting to veer into a political tangent around the injustices that occurred, I placed a great deal of effort to keep the focus of this chapter on the narratives.

In the summer of 2006 the unexpected migration of Mr. Jamaal occurred. He and his family had no intention of leaving Iraq for good. They had originally planned to visit relatives in Jordan for a month or so. Before leaving, Mr. Jamaal had had a conversation with his father expressing his wish to keep their visit in Jordan short and return to Iraq sooner. Mr. Jamaal had just finished his first year of university, where he was studying civil engineering. Being in university was an
experience he relished. He also cherished the changes that occurred as he transitioned from high school to university life. He expressed this clearly in his story, “Very, very, very happy there, I loved the change to the new life of being in University,” and “I had more friends than you can imagine.” Mr. Jamaal virtually knew everyone at his university and was very social and likeable. Even though a vacation to Jordan did bring some relief from the hardships of life in Iraq, Mr. Jamaal could not wait to get back to his friends. It seemed that his social support network in Iraq and his love for his country outweighed the challenges of living in a war zone. However, unforeseen circumstances occurred that changed the course of his life and Mr. Jamaal found himself living in exile.

While visiting Jordan in 2006, the situation in Iraq became significantly worse. Mr. Jamaal described his horror as he heard the news of the escalation in violence. He described the trigger to this downward spiral as the bombing of Samara’s Golden Mosque, which was one of the most important Shi'ite shrines in Iraq. The sectarian violence in Iraq had escalated that year as car bombings and suicide attacks began occurring. These bombings targeted residential areas heavily populated by either of the two main ethnic groups (i.e. Sunni and Shi'ite). Sunni mosques were also burned in retaliation for the bombing of the Shi'ite Golden Mosque.

As ethnic problems and tensions increased, Mr. Jamaal began witnessing his country head to civil war. However, nowhere in his narrative does Mr. Jamaal put blame on any ethnic group. He did not take sides nor did he announce his own ethnic background. In fact, in the demographic questionnaire, Mr. Jamaal only filled the section that indicated his religion— Muslim. He did not fill the section on the ethnic sect. Interestingly enough, Mr. Jamaal did not use the word Shi'ite or Sunni to describe any group. He only elaborated on the consequence that this escalation of violence had on him and his family:
We had no intention to migrate at the time. We left our house with everything in it. We weren’t planning on leaving that long, so we did not even hire a security guard to watch over the house. My dad’s work and business were just left behind. He was taking his vacation from work, so his work was left hanging. I had school to go back to and continue. I had to go back to start my second year of university in Baghdad. When we came here, I had nothing. I was getting ready to start my second year back home. Came here and had no paperwork, no transcripts, nothing to prove that I was in school. I had no paperwork that could help me get equivalency for courses here in Amman. I had no extra clothes. I had only packed for my visit to Amman, just packed enough for a month. All my clothes were back home. This visit all of a sudden turned into migration, and I have been here for three years now.

All of a sudden Mr. Jamaal found himself facing a new reality. It was a reality that his family was forced to choose. It was a better alternative than going back to the volatile, dangerous, and violent situation in Iraq. There was an undercurrent in his narrative that was edged with the belief that his fate was being orchestrated by a greater intelligence: Allah. He expressed several times in his story that “you just face the reality that you have been given.” Mr. Jamaal felt that the alternative would be to question God or Allah for his circumstances, and even to question the reason behind being birthed in Iraq in the first place. He did not want to have a “poor me” and a “victim mentality.” Instead, Mr. Jamaal invested effort over the years to change his perspective to one of gratitude:

So, I said to myself, no, why I am thinking that way? I said to myself that I have to be grateful for what Allah has given me. I was still alive. Others in Baghdad got killed, and some had to go through other challenges. So, I interpreted things in this new way, in a more positive way. [Italics added]
Mr. Jamaal attributed living in estrangement or ghurba to the downward spiral that he felt during the first year in Jordan. He shared that living in exile and estrangement led at first to his negative perspective on his situation. He began feeling the misfortune for having the “bad luck” that led him out of his country. He also compared his university experience in Jordan to that of Iraq. Since he did not have any paperwork to obtain equivalency for his courses, he had to repeat a year of university in Jordan. His friends back home progressed to their second year in university, which left him feeling as if he was lagging behind. Instead of going back to civil engineering, he decided to pursue pharmacy as he felt it may “suit” him better. However, he became a different person in Jordan. In Iraq, he was incredibly social, loved, and known in his university. That became a sharp contrast to life in Jordan, where he felt isolated. He explained:

I become this loner. I isolated myself. I did not feel like talking to people. I was easily irritated. Assabi tabaana [my nerves were tired]. I would get angry and upset easily. All of this caused an inner buildup, and inner suppression. [Italics added]

Mr. Jamaal shares an idiom above that is often used in Iraq to describe levels of distress. In Iraqi dialect, the word assabi means nerves, and tabaaana means tired. It is used to describe a sense of being burdened by stress and feeling fed up from a situation, and also feeling emotionally drained. His longing for his country and his home kept him from connecting to people at the Jordanian university. He only socialized with a few other Iraqi students who were “in the same boat” as him. He also shared how, when he spoke Arabic with an Iraqi dialect at the university, some Jordanians did not understand him:

When I came across Jordanians who did not understand me, I did not care. I could not be bothered by them. I would just say forget it and move on instead of trying to connect to them and try to explain to them my situation. I just turned my back to people instead of trying to
help them understand me. All of this forced me into a period of my life when I felt very dark and sad. After that I faced reality. I faced what had been dealt to me. I said I can either stay like that for five years - until I finish university and my student visa in Jordan runs out, or try to get rid of that feeling.

Mr. Jamaal reached a point of discomfort that led him to make a conscious decision to change his perspective. He decided to begin accepting his separation from Iraq and his parents. It should be mentioned here that his parents and sibling had been forced to return to Iraq since they hadn’t had any paperwork that would have allowed them to stay. He had been able to remain in Jordan after obtaining a student visa. His family had funded his schooling, which had motivated him to do well in school despite his emotional/mental state. He had also felt an obligation and sense of responsibility to do well in school to make his family’s investment worthwhile.

Mr. Jamaal admitted several times throughout the interview that changing his outlook to a more positive one did not occur overnight. It was a gradual process. Little by little, he began expanding his social network and connecting with people, especially Arabs from other nationalities. He began to embrace the change that he had been forced to face. He elaborated:

A person without experiences stays static, unchanged, won’t learn much. I really always like to go places and go through experiences. It is these life experiences that teach a person lessons. So, coming here, and facing all these challenges, I feel that it also benefited me. I learned new customs and norms of Jordanians. I learned about these new things in university here. My university has over twelve Arab nationalities. You learn from different people.
Mr. Jamaal’s interpretation of his circumstances and his migration to Jordan shifted over time. This allowed him to both face and embrace his new life in Jordan, and helped him to better cope with the feelings of ghurba or living in estrangement.

4.3.2 Theme #2: Being an Iraqi - a double-edged sword

A great sense of pride in the Iraqi identity emerged from Mr. Jamaal’s narrative. He made sense of his ability to adjust and cope by connecting to the collective adaptive traits of Iraqis. He did not take personal credit for having distinct strengths. Instead, he spoke indirectly about his strengths by elaborating on the traits of Iraqis in general, which he took great pride in expressing.

Mr. Jamaal described the ability of Iraqis to face the unimaginable struggles imposed on them. Iraqis were forced to face political, ecological, and economical hardships. He elaborated by giving a brief historic account of the circumstances in Iraq over the past decades: revolutions, political turmoil, coup d’etat, economic scarcities, political persecution, wars, debilitating sanctions, and endless hardships in daily life. Mr. Jamaal felt that Iraqis were able to face endless changes as a result. Regardless of the circumstances, Iraqis have the ability to rise above it all. He explained, “I give full credit and give the winning prize to Iraqis for their ability to withstand and endure so much that they are able to adapt to anywhere you put them.”

He also suggested that these factors have shaped the personality of an Iraqi. Looking at the weather alone, Mr. Jamaal explained that one can easily see its influence on the traits of Iraqis. Iraq’s weather ranges from an unforgiving heat that averages in the mid 50C in the summer, to below freezing temperatures in the winter. Mr. Jamaal summarized his perspective:

I want a message to be sent to them in Canada, let me vouch for the fact that Iraqis are able to adapt to anywhere and anything. And if they ask you how about planet Mars? The
environment there is harsh, but I am certain that if you put an Iraqi there they will be able to adapt.

Strong identification with his Iraqi identity gave him a way to make sense of his ability to adapt. However, being an Iraqi comes with a high price. He shared his disappointment in the way in which Iraqis were viewed in the “West.” It is an image that is tarnished. He felt the injustice arising from labeling Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. Mr. Jamaal shared his agony for the stereotypes he feels many people hold about Iraqis, stereotypes that minimize the value of an Iraqi life. He especially rejected the stereotype of Iraqis as backward people that are looters, as in the story of “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.” Part of his narrative reflects his desire to counteract these stereotypes. He took time during the interview to share the contributions made by Muslim and Arab giants, such as scholars, philosophers, scientist, poets, musicians, as well as those from various other disciplines. He wished that those contributions were not so easily forgotten by the media in the “West,” who seem swift in stereotyping. He aspired for new images to materialize, ones that are more accurate to the truth. He yearned for a more balanced view to emerge, one that highlights the generosity, kindness, intelligence, and strength of the Iraqi people.

4.3.3 Theme #3: Purpose - finding a place to work and make a contribution

The third theme that surfaced in Mr. Jamaal’s story was his search for a purpose in life. It provided him with both hope and a temporary escape from dealing with the obstacles he faces in Jordan. After all, he lived without his family and with an unknown future. His student visa will expire soon after he graduates from university. At that point, he will be forced to leave Jordan. He expressed concerns in returning to Iraq, where life remains economically, politically and physically unstable. He has contemplated seeking refuge in another country even though it is a
very unlikely possibility. A number of his Iraqi friends, who were also in their twenties, were unsuccessful in getting immigration approval to countries outside of Jordan. This seems to be the norm for many Iraqis. Some are able to successfully establish themselves in Jordan while others see their stay as a temporary place of refuge. They remain there until they get immigration approval to any country in the world. Otherwise, some end up returning to Iraq.

Having an unknown future has left Mr. Jamaal feeling that his fate was beyond his grasp. His future was unpredictable and “only Allah” may know what will happen. He shared the constraints that arise from having limited control over one’s own destiny. He described two characteristics that he felt were lacking in his life: stability and predictability. He explained that these conditions are foundational in helping a person set goals, get financially established, and start a family. He described stability as being “part of our nature as humans,” as it is something that everyone is entitled to and is “given from the Creator of the Universe.”

Predictability was another condition that he valued. He explained that without predictability, a sense of darkness looms. Without it a person’s future becomes unknown. While temporarily living in Jordan, Mr. Jamaal sought to find a purpose in life. For him, purpose and the conditions of predictability and stability are intertwined. To begin feeling a sense of purpose requires that he first had to find work. Mr. Jamaal felt that once a person has secured employment they can begin to fulfill their life’s purpose. Of course, work also brings predictability.

A key part of Mr. Jamaal’s purpose revolved around making a contribution to the world. His wish was humble and simple: find a job after graduation to legally remain in Jordan, and live a purpose driven life that makes a contribution. He aspired to find a workplace where he could feel welcomed, respected, and appreciated. Remaining unemployed was one of his main worries: “I say Allah, I wish that I don’t have the fate of three quarters of the people out there, just sitting
without a job, they are unemployed and have nothing to do. They either work at just anything or sit there and be unemployed.” He also shared a strong desire to make a contribution to the world. He aspired to leave a legacy that benefits society. He strongly felt that he does not want to be “a nobody.” Mr. Jamaal shared both the lyrics of an English song and an Iraqi epic story to illustrate his longing for making a contribution.

The English lyrics, from a song called *Humanity*, revealed his inner psyche: “You sold your soul to feed your vanity and fantasy, you are a drop in the rain, just a number not a name, at the end of the day you are needle in the hay, signed and sealed.” He was motivated to deal with his circumstances in Jordan because he did not want to become “just a rain drop.” Mr. Jamaal’s search for a bigger purpose surpasses the mundane, “I don’t want to just live so that I can get married, and bring up kids, and then die.” He held a grander narrative, one that involves making a contribution. He dreamt about working for the United Nations and doing humanitarian work in countries that he felt need it the most, such as Sudan and Afghanistan.

Mr. Jamaal also shared the story of Gilgamesh to illustrate his aspirations. Gilgamesh was a demigod in ancient Mesopotamian mythology. He was believed to have superhuman powers. Gilgamesh searched for immortality, but his legacy was building the great city wall that defended his people from external threats. Mr. Jamaal shared this story to illustrate that “you can’t really get immortality, but you can be immortal through your work.” Besides the rewards of making contributions, there were also implications for the afterlife. He wanted his work to be witnessed by God, as he elaborated “I want to go to the Creator of the Universe and let the Creator see my work.” He described the similarities between all the main religions in terms of a person’s fate in the afterlife: good work and deeds on earth lead to a good fate in the afterlife.
Besides his views on making a contribution, Mr. Jamaal also spoke about the practicality of accepting any job while in school. Finding a job was vital for securing a work visa in the future, enabling him to remain in Jordan. He also felt that working at any job, regardless of how trivial, will help him “grow, learn, and develop.” Unfortunately, he has faced many frustrations. Several employers had expressed interest in him but turned him away once they discovered that he was Iraqi.

Mr. Jamaal’s narrative seems to highlight the tensions between a person’s future dreams and their current reality. He dealt with his reality by reflecting on the contributions he wanted to make. His story whispers to us the human search for the hero within. Mr. Jamaal searched for a hero that will live through the challenges of life: by overcoming misfortunes, living their purpose, and by leaving an immortal legacy. Even his search for work seems to demonstrate his ability to search for the hero within. He paved the way to his dreams by humbly looking for any type of work where he can feel respected, welcomed, and appreciated.

4.4 Mr. Nidal’s narrative
4.4.1 Theme #1: Accepting fate

Mr. Nidal’s story was a touching one. I was hoping that my voice would become less obvious through this writing process. However, as I listened to him share his story, I found myself wrestling with the injustices that he and his family experienced. As I listened again to the audio recording and the transcribed pages of the interview, I realized the extent of the impact of his story. A rush of anger washed over me as I deeply felt the tragedies that he and Iraq have faced. Coupled with this rush of anger was a feeling of guilt. A deep sense of guilt burdened my chest as I became more aware of the privileges and luxuries of a safe and secure life in Canada.
Millions of Iraqis were not as fortunate as me. I felt further guilt for choosing a research methodology that privileges me with a space to express my views.

I began by letting go of the thoughts that were intruding my brain, thoughts that accused me of abandoning my people and country for a better life. Why was I the fortunate one to escape from the suffering? Would I have felt better had I lived in Iraq and suffered with my Iraqi brothers and sisters? Should researchers leave out their own process from narrative inquiry? Was I being objective? All these questions led me to feel grounded again. I moved forward by counting my blessings and accepting my good fortune. Acceptance is a theme that I seem to share with Mr. Nidal. It helped him make some sense of his own world.

Mr. Nidal began his story of migration by first sharing the initial terrifying experience that led him to leave Iraq. A father of four children, Mr. Nidal had a successful business. At age forty, he owned a profitable supermarket. It allowed him and his family to enjoy a comfortable standard of living, and enabled him to provide them with all their needs. As Mr. Nidal shared, “From the grace of Allah, and thanks to the abundance from Allah, my work was going well.” This good fortune came to a screeching halt at the end of January 2006. Mr. Nidal had just completed his nightly store-closing routines. It was still early in the evening, around five o’clock. Because of the curfews set up by Coalition Forces and the new government in Baghdad, no retail stores were allowed to remain open for business after that time. What Mr. Nidal shared next was a detailed account of the terrifying ordeal he lived through. He was kidnapped for ransom during a ten-day period.

Mr. Nidal’s ordeal began soon after he left his store and began his drive home. He was unexpectedly and abruptly cut off by a car in front of him. Two armed masked men jumped out of the car. Mr. Nidal was dragged out of his car and beaten. They then covered his face and
threw him into the back seat of their car. He could not fight back. As he shared his story, it became easy to sense the helplessness, lack of control, and fear that he felt.

They uncovered his face soon after arriving at the destination. He discovered that his new home consisted of eight to ten other kidnapped Iraqis sharing a similar fate. Mr. Nidal shared the techniques these kidnappers used to break him down physically and emotionally. He was left for the first two days without contact with anyone. No one spoke with him. They only offered him stale bread and some tea, laced with sleeping pills and sedatives. Mr. Nidal slept often and felt sluggish. After two days, the kidnappers wanted to contact his family by phone. They took him to another room and beat him before making the call. They made sure that he was in pain and crying when they called his family. They hoped to drum up money out of his family. Mr. Nidal’s brother answered the phone. They threatened to kill Mr. Nidal if his family did not bring $100,000 USD.

The kidnappers had assumed that Mr. Nidal was a very wealthy man since he owned a store. Mr. Nidal described the initial phone conversation between his brother and the kidnappers:

My brother was very calm on the phone, assaba barda [his nerves were cool]. He did not give the phone to my wife, she was devastated and her nerves were devastated. Her nafis [psyche/spirit/self] was tired. They had no idea what had happened to me, and they were in the house. My brother took charge, and stayed calm and just spoke with them. He told them that we don’t have that sum of money. He told them that I only opened that store less than a year ago, and we don’t have that much money, don’t think we have that kinda money. They said that they did not care, if they don’t get the money then they will kill me. And then they hit me, and I was shouting. [Italics added]
Mr. Nidal used a number of idioms in his description above, which other participants used as well. He described the high degree of distress that his wife felt. He described her nerves as *assab*, meaning devastated. His brother, on the other hand, was effective in conveying to the kidnappers an unshaken demeanor. Mr. Nidal described his brother’s nerves as being cold or *assabah barda*.

The kidnappers became more aggressive over the days to come and their threat of killing him became palpable to his family. They negotiated for several days until a settlement was reached for $20,000 USD. Mr. Nidal described the details of his release and the elation he felt upon embracing his family again. His close call with death made him realize that he was a potential target for future kidnapping by this new breed of gangs in Iraq. Fearing for the safety of his children, he made the decision to remove them from school, pulling his two daughters out of high school and his son out of grade five. Over the next month, Mr. Jamaal stayed home with his children and family. It was a difficult time period for him, “My nerves were irritated, I could not take a lot of things, I could not stand things, like talking about things.” He spent most of the month sleeping. He also described experiencing shortness of breath, feeling depressed, and feeling suffocation at times. Unfortunately, matters were about to get worse.

About a month after his kidnapping incident, Mr. Nidal’s received another threat. He provided a disturbing and graphic description of this phone call:

He said do you have a daughter by this name. I said yes. He asked me why I had given her that name. He sounded upset when he asked me that question. I said why are you asking me that? He said because that is not right, the name I have given her is for nonbelievers, and that I am going to go to hell. *Assabi inharet* [my nerves were demolished]. I asked him why he was saying this. He said to me ‘look, if you don’t change her name, we will decapitate her head and decapitate yours, and we will drag your daughter in the streets’. [Italics added]
Unfortunately, such incidences had become a common occurrence in the new Iraq. The objectives of such atrocities were driven by an agenda to create divides between Sunni and Shi’ite. Mr. Nidal was a Sunni Muslim and his daughter’s name was a well known Sunni name. Interestingly, Mr. Nidal never blamed any particular sect nor did he speak about being a Sunni. The only time that he mentioned his sect was in the demographic questionnaire that was administered.

Feeling the horror and shock of that fateful call, Mr. Nidal cut the conversation short by throwing the phone to the wall and watched it shatter into pieces. He made a quick decision: they had to leave Iraq. He gathered all the important documents within hours, such as passports and other identifications. He asked his family to gather some clothes and belongings. He then booked a cross border taxi to take them to the Jordanian border.

So how did Mr. Nidal make sense of his experiences? Before we turn to the theme of acceptance and the role that Allah plays in making sense of life, it is relevant to point out another major heartbreaking blow that he faced in Jordan. As Mr. Nidal put it, “People took advantage of my estrangement (ghurba) here, they took advantage of me since I was a stranger here.” Even though he shared many cultural similarities with Jordanian life that made his adjustment easier, he also felt out of place, like a stranger. He did not know the system and was unfamiliar with the rules and regulations in Jordan. Moreover, he had a naïve trust in people. Within the first three months of his arrival, he was scammed for $15,000 USD. This was a substantial financial loss. He was forced to sell his assets back home, including his car, shop and home. He had given the money in the hopes of creating a better life for his family. He had been promised immigration paperwork to Sweden by a Palestinian acquaintance he had known from Iraq. He confided in this “friend” upon arrival. The man promised him that his money was guaranteed and secure.
Unfortunately, all the money vanished. To make matters worse, the man attempted to scam more money from him. He told Mr. Nidal that they needed a little more to move his case forward.

Despite the extensive financial loss and disappointment he experienced from being taken advantage of, Mr. Nidal arrived at a place of acceptance around his fate, a fate he believed was destined by Allah. He explained, “I guess it was not meant to be, not written for me by Allah, no Kismet to go to Sweden.” Kismet in Arabic means God’s will. Kismet is a derivative of the word kasama, meaning one that divides or allots something. In Muslim cultures, there is a belief that Allah predestines someone a good or bad fate. It is something in His hands. Mr. Nidal referred back to this concept later in the interview and used the word qadar:

We just have to keep believing in Allah and just say it is qadar [it is predestined by our Lord]. It was written ahead of time by Allah. The fact that we had to leave our homes, leave our country, all that was written for us. The Creator of the Universe is all knowing, and Allah knows what is best. It is written. [Italics added]

This belief that God delivers the good or adverse circumstances brought with it a sense of acceptance. It was an unspoken and understood cultural belief that you do not question God’s fate. It seems to bring a sense of acceptance to what is, even if the circumstances are tragic. Mr. Nidal also used this belief to make sense of two recent senseless murders of relatives in Iraq:

It was the Creator of the Two Worlds who had written for him to die as a martyr on that day. He was a martyr. What did he do wrong? And then the older man I told you about, he got the same fate. That is it, what can you do. They say that their good fortune came to see them and then left. They had to leave us, it was written for them.

Dying as a martyr also has cultural implications. Even though his relatives were not armed nor had they chosen to take part in armed fighting, his belief is that they still died for a greater good.
They were martyrs since they were killed by an enemy that was causing destruction to the way of life in Iraq. If they had died in a car accident, for instance, Mr. Nidal would not have viewed them as martyrs. Dying as a martyr meant that their death was not in vain. It also has implications for the afterlife as martyrs are believed to go to heaven. Once again, belief in the role of God in one’s fate brought a level of acceptance and inner peace to Mr. Nidal.

Coupled with this theme of accepting the fate that Allah bestowed was also a level of gratitude. Mr. Nidal expressed gratitude to Allah throughout the interview. He expressed gratitude for what he now has. It is his sense that life is often out of his hands and in Allah’s hands. Thus, an important way of coping and adjusting comes from a peaceful surrender that things are in Allah’s hands. There is an implicit belief that this surrender and regular expressions of gratitude make for better believers in God, and that people will be rewarded for their faith.

4.4.2 Theme #2: Kindness as cure for one’s wounds

Mr. Nidal considered 2006 and 2007 as the worst years in his life. In addition to the ordeals he experienced in Iraq, he also received difficult news while in Jordan. A number of relatives were killed during the ethnic cleansing. The loss of his young nephew had a great impact. His nephew was stopped by a group of armed men. They asked him for identification and discovered his religious sect from his name. He was then taken away, tortured, and killed. The motives were purely sectarian. Mr. Nidal described the many tragedies that his family faced as criminal. He spoke about how far removed these acts were from the very definition of humanity. He pointed out, “It lacks humanity, lacks goodness of heart, and lacks kindness.”

Kindness was a theme that also emerged in his narrative. Mr. Nidal’s challenges of living in estrangement or ghurba were further amplified by the shortage of kindness that he felt in Jordan. He felt unable to find people who he could confide in, which made matters worse. Few people
offered to help him and take away his pain. Mr. Nidal yearned to hear kind words from the
Jordanians he communicated with. He did not feel welcomed in Jordan. Kindness was a way of
being that Mr. Nidal missed from his interactions in Iraq. It was a value that became clear in my
interaction with him during the interview. I interviewed Mr. Nidal in his rented apartment.
Despite his financial hardship, he welcomed me into his house with utmost graciousness and
hospitality. Soon after I began the interview he asked his son to bring me a cold cola beverage.
Simple acts of kindness in his interactions and speech made it clear to me the extent to which he
valued this virtue.

Mr. Nidal shared another story to illustrate the value he places on kindness. His landlord
unexpectedly increased rent while they were in a dire financial hardship. He explained:

All I ask for is kind words, that is all we need. I mean if someone offers us gracious words,
words that mean well, like ‘this is your house, consider this like your country’, that would
make us all feel better. But I got the opposite here.

He shared another story that demonstrates his frustrations. Mr. Nidal and his family were having
dinner at a local pizza restaurant in Amman soon after their arrival. To their surprise, a woman
heard their Iraqi accent and came to speak to them. She first asked them if they were Iraqi. She
then questioned them as to why they were eating pizza. Mr. Nidal was startled and confused by
her question. She spoke in a sarcastic voice explaining that it is nice to see that Iraqis can just eat
pizza instead of depleting the country’s meat supply. Iraqis are viewed by some as a burden on
the system, a system that struggles with water and resource shortages.

Not everyone in Jordan, however, held this view. Mr. Nidal expressed gratitude for having
experienced kindness from other Jordanians. As he explained, “It was something beautiful when
we got it from people, when people sympathized with us.” He had wanted people to validate his
experiences, to acknowledge the tragedies he had gone through, and to make him feel welcomed. He also wanted people to pray for them to gain more strength to deal with their tragedies: “We want someone to say to us that may Allah give us more patience to deal with this.”

Mr. Nidal’s search for kindnesses even stretched beyond Jordan. He expressed his disappointment in that Iraq has become “old news” in the world’s media. Iraqis have become the forgotten ones. Mr. Nidal hoped that people around the world would not forget the tragedies of Iraqis. He wanted people to understand, empathize, and feel their pains. In short, kindness was a clear theme that was woven throughout his story. Kindness and the lack of it have shaped the way in which Mr. Nidal made sense of his experiences.

4.4.3 Theme #3: Hope – a final destination

Related to the first theme of acceptance was the theme of hope. Mr. Nidal repeatedly mentioned throughout his narrative that he had to accept his fate, which was dealt to him by Allah. While being grateful to and accepting of his current circumstances, a glimmer of hope humbly emerged in his narrative. Almost unannounced, Mr. Nidal commented:

You just go with the flow of life. You just have to work with the situation that you have. I give thanks to Allah. I handed over my situation to Allah. [Italics added]

Part of adapting and coping to his situation seemed to rest on his hopes that Allah will open some doors for him. Strong senses of faith in the Almighty eased his pains and gave birth to hope. He hoped that Allah would not forget him and would open doors for his family.

Mr. Nidal’s biggest hope was to find a country in which he can settle. He searched for a place that can offer him stability and security. Mr. Nidal had put in an immigration application through the UNHCR. Even though he had to patiently deal with the bureaucracies of their office in Amman, his hope remained set on finding a place to settle: “I strive to find myself a final
destination, a station that I can head to with my family and get settled there.” He dreamt of seeing his daughters pursue graduate school and follow their chosen path in life. His hopes alleviated some of the pain he felt since his daughter cannot attend university in Jordan. Tuition fees were far too expensive for non residents and he could not afford the cost. He spoke with great pride about his daughters. Mr. Nidal shared stories around how loved they were in Iraq by school administrators. They were valedictorians, demonstrated intelligence, and politeness. He hoped to live in a country where he can see his daughters thrive again, a place that gives them opportunities. Hope gave him a vision of a future, which in turn helped him cope with his war and migration experiences.

4.5 Mr. Ahmed’s narrative
4.5.1 Theme #1: Collective resilience – factors influencing the experiences of coping

Mr. Ahmed’s narrative brought to the forefront an important dimension to understanding the experience of those exposed to war and migration. In our Western notions of mental health, there is often a great amount of emphasis placed on an individual’s ability to cope and their ability to make decisions. However, Mr. Ahmed’s story, and especially the main theme speaks to a complex dimension that forms a person’s meaning-making ability and adaptation to their experiences. I refer to this complex dimension as the “collective resilience.” This dimension introduces a complex interaction of factors including historical, religious, geographical, ideological, and cultural influences. Each of these factors has shaped Mr. Ahmed’s narrative.

Before we examine these factors, it is of relevance to address issues around confidentiality. Prior to answering the specific interview questions, Mr. Ahmed made a few comments about the consent form. He felt that confidentiality may hamper the “good work” that this project was attempting. Mr. Ahmed suggested that the consent form should not be used. He felt that written
consent may raise many questions as most Iraqis were persecuted and developed distrust. As a case in point, he tried to recruit several participants. They all declined to take part in this study once they learned about the recruitment procedures.

Mr. Ahmed began sharing his story of migration and adaption by first providing an extensive background on the historical context of the situation in Iraq. Despite my efforts to redirect him to share the specifics of his story during the interview, he continued focusing on the historical context of the war. He insisted that in order to understand his story the reader needed to have a better understanding of the circumstances that led Iraq to where it is now.

Mr. Ahmed and his wife were school teachers in Iraq. He described his living conditions before and after the invasion to illustrate a historical timeline of changes in Iraq. Despite the grueling sanctions that were imposed on Iraq, Mr. Ahmed’s family made ends meet. He relied on their government salaries. They also received government vouchers that supported their living expenses. This led to slight financial improvements after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as the new government created new compensation scales for government workers. However, things began to worsen economically in Iraq. Living costs increased dramatically as prices jumped to new heights with increases in costs for electricity, natural gas, and gasoline. The majority of Iraqis only had a few hours of daily electricity, which led them to rely heavily on generators. Thus, the cost of running generators increased dramatically after the invasion.

Problems began happening after the first election in Iraq in late 2004. Mr. Ahmed shared his frustrations with the corruption and self-interest of the two leading authorities in Iraq: the new Iraqi government and the occupying army. He was disappointed with the American authorities who he believes had the intention of “demolishing” Iraq for their own interests. Mr. Ahmed also
spoke about the self-interest of the new Iraqi government that was created by the Americans. He explained how Iraqis were left in the wayside:

They said just be patient. Well nothing changed. The situation in Iraq was even better during the sanctions period before the war than it is now. One million Iraqis died, gave their lives in martyrdom. You have four million Iraqis that have migrated and left the country. You have three million orphans. Limited electricity, limited water, we lived with limited health services. Before the 2003 war we did not suffer like that. If you just look at these numbers and facts, you get the picture of how bad things were.

Besides providing a historical context of the situation in Iraq, Mr. Ahmed offered a geographical explanation for the varying responses to the invasion by Iraqis. Geographical location of a population influences their allegiance to certain religious sects and political alignments. Even though Iraq is a diverse and an integrated country, there are concentrations of religious groups in certain areas. Northern Iraq is mostly comprised of Sunni Muslims, the south Shiaa Muslims, and the middle consists of conservative Sunni Muslims. Mr. Ahmed also described the similarities and differences between each geographical region with respect to living under Saddam’s brutal regime. After Saddam was toppled, it created an opportunity for certain regions to regain power, such as regions with Shiiates in the south. He then spoke with great pride about his region. He boasted that it was the last area in the country to “fall” and “give in to the occupiers.”

Mr. Ahmed also provided a description of the degree of fundamentalism based on each geographical region. More fundamentalism was found with Shiiates in the southern regions of Iraq. Narrow minded clergymen contributed to the escalation of violence in Iraq. He explained that in “each area and district, the religious clergy took charge of their own areas and their own
tribal areas,” and that influenced people’s reactions. Mosques from both sects were burned. Churches were also burned and sectarian tensions became palpable.

This climate of tension between religious sects in certain geographical areas reached a turning point in 2006. Mr. Ahmed described the downward spiraling of events in Iraq that occurred after the big Mosque of Samarra was bombed—a Sunni area of the country. It was a mosque that was build over a thousand years ago and contained the tomb of Ali Al Hadi, believed to be the twelfth imam after prophet Mohamed. The mosque became a sacred site for all Iraqis, especially Sunnis. Prior to the bombings, the mosque was visited by both Sunnis and Shiiates. He made it clear in the interview that he did not feel sectarian tensions in Iraq prior to that event. Mr. Ahmed had made visits to Karbala, a city south of Baghdad which was considered to be one of the holiest Shiiate sites. However, the malicious and planned attacks in Samara created rifts in the country. It led to a new form of violence. This played a role in his decision to leave the country and also influenced the way he made sense of his experiences.

After Mr. Ahmed provided an extensive overview of the geographical and sectarian tensions in Iraq, he began sharing the rising tensions that he personally felt. He shared a love for his small town of 12,000 people. Even though the majority of people from his town were Shiiate Muslims, he felt at home there being a Sunni. He shared the similarity of values and customs. He reported feeling “closer to a lot of Shiiates than to my own extended family,” since “people honored the good treatment of all neighbors.” This is a principle that is highlighted in the Quran and is part of the values of the Iraqi culture. He also expressed pride in the role that his father had played as one of the founders of the city. Despite his father’s respected status, he began feeling alienated in his own town. He began noticing changes in the way he was treated, with fewer neighbors
initiating an exchange of greetings. This was contrary to Muslim ideals of demonstrating kindness to one’s neighbors.

Mr. Ahmed also began feeling tensions at his work. He noticed unusual stares and looks from students and faculty. Some of them began indirectly questioning his faith and insulting key Sunni figures in Islam. Mr. Ahmed explained:

Can you image, if I suddenly started saying that the area you are from in Canada and the school there is a failure? No, I can’t just hurt your feelings like that and be insensitive to you. I should only discuss with you and argue something that will lead you to something better, as said in the Quran.

Thus, they were not only insulting him but they were breaching key principles of Islam. These principles were part of the culture and were woven into the way that people made meaning of their experiences. Mr. Ahmed often referred to passages from the Quran while describing his actions. He also quoted the Quran to describe ways in which he coped with his disappointments in people. Religious beliefs play a key role in his ability to cope, and have a foundational influence on collective resilience, a term that was proposed earlier.

Mr. Ahmed also described the specifics of the gradual escalation of violence in his town. The downward spiraling of events further intensified after a suicide bomber detonated himself in the middle of a youth gathering. Both Sunnis and Shiiates were killed. Memorial services were held. These were attended by people from both sects, showing the continuation of respect amongst people. However, the mutual respect came to an end after another bombing attack. It occurred during the memorial service of a Shiiate youth. Anger intensified in his town and Sunnis then became targets of sectarian violence. Mr. Ahmed explained that these violent acts against Sunnis
were not condoned by many Shiites. Nevertheless, the violence fueled further fears. People began leaving his hometown.

Mr. Ahmed had hoped that the escalations would pass. Unfortunately, the violence continued as neighborhood mosques were burned. He described the situation:

They bombed a house of Allah. Qurans got burned. I went there the next day to see it. My heart was broken to see it demolished. I used to pray there. I came back home, and that day I felt that my nafis [psyche/spirit/self], my soul got suffocated. And the strange thing, only Allah knows, I did not even enjoy the world cup games on that day in 2006. I felt restless and bothered. The days before this house got burned, people got killed, bullets were fired left and right, the police tried to control things but they could not. [Italics added]

The sacrilegious act of burning the mosque had a devastating impact on him. His nafis (i.e. psyche/soul/self) suffered. A sense of suffocation illustrates the level of distress he felt. Despite this degree of distress and the violence around him, he had no plans to leave Iraq. His love for his town overshadowed the distress and dangers.

A turning point, however, occurred in 2006. He experienced a direct attack on his family. It occurred during a late night. He noticed a few men walking by his house carrying machine guns. Since he recognized one of them as a student of his, he assumed they were just patrolling the neighborhood. Shortly after noticing them, his house was machine-gunned. Bullets flew into his house and windows shattered. His daughter cried. They all felt terrified. Mr. Ahmed felt trapped. He decided to hide in the house with his family until daylight. The perpetrators returned a few hours later and machine-gunned his house again. He couldn’t believe that he had become a victim of sectarian violence.
They made it through the night. When daylight broke they left their house to stay temporarily with relatives in a safer area, mostly populated by Sunnis. Mr. Ahmed had hoped to return to his house. He explained, “We come from a small village, and it was always understood and expected that if anything goes wrong in the village then it gets corrected and addressed, but nothing got changed.” He waited for three months, hoping for things to get better.

Unfortunately, when he returned to check on his house, he noticed warning signs on his door. The messages threatened to kill his family if they returned. It also forbade them from selling or renting their house, clearly intending to cause them financial hardship. This finally led to his decision to leave Iraq. Until then, he had coped through severe circumstances. Many factors influenced the way he coped and made sense of his experiences. Collective resilience was a term that I introduced to make sense of the multitude of factors that played a role in his meaning-making and coping ability. These factors were postulated to include a complex interaction of historical, religious, geographical, ideological, and cultural influences.

4.5.2 Theme #2: Desire to set roots

Mr. Ahmed chose Jordan to migrate to due to the close proximity of this neighboring Muslim country. He appreciated Jordan because of its closeness to his beloved Iraq, as he proclaimed “you can smell Iraq from here.” He had concerns about leaving Iraq and living in ghurba or living in estrangement, far away from Iraq. He described ghurba as a drought that gets more severe, “The further away you go, the further the drought becomes.”

Jordan was not offering landed immigrant paperwork for Iraqis. Mr. Ahmed lived under a temporary visitor status. He then found some comfort through connecting with the United Nations offices in Amman and obtaining a refugee status. This allowed him to stay in Jordan for six months with the option of submitting an application for renewal.
Mr. Ahmed continued to search for an Arabic country to which he could immigrate, hoping to buffer the impact of ghurba’s drought. Unfortunately, he has been unsuccessful thus far in his endeavor. Prior to the recent war, Iraqis were often welcomed in many Arab countries. This was especially the case for Iraqis with skilled professions. However, the political climate has created many roadblocks for Iraqis. Mr. Ahmed expressed his frustrations with many countries, especially Libya, “They used to kiss our feet to come and teach there, but now they make things difficult because we are Iraqis and that seems to raise a lot of questions.” Ironically, the only country that has offered him the opportunity to immigrate was the United States. He declined the offer:

It is a challenge for many to do it [and go to the United States] because in principle they don’t feel right about migrating to a country that invaded ours. I was one of those people. I was offered immigration to the US, but refused. They asked me what other country I would prefer to go to. I said anywhere in Europe, their economic situation is better, and Germany in particular, I would like to go there because Germany did not get involved in the war in Iraq. I like their foreign policy.

National pride and political views have played a role in his decision making. He had hoped to find a country that was politically aligned with Iraq. Unfortunately, his hopes did not materialize. This unplanned extended stay in Jordan created financial challenges. To start with, his finances were limited when he entered Jordan. He had to sell his wife’s prized wedding jewelry and gold accessories, which had been given to her in traditional ceremonies. This barely afforded him the finances to rent a small, unclean studio with cockroaches running around.

Feeling the disappointments in his circumstances forced Mr. Ahmed to accept his situation and take actions to improve it. He became involved in many organizations and obtained some
financial support and food rations. He began adapting to his new life, “A very basic and simple life.” Despite not having a work permit, he found a job. He accepted a pay that was a fraction of the other Jordanian workers, which he viewed as an opportunity to network and build contacts. This in turn led him to find a better paying job.

He was also deeply relieved to discover the recent changes in Jordanian policy which permitted Iraqi children to attend school regardless of their visa status, and welcomed the opportunity to have his daughters tuition paid for. He greatly valued education and wanted the best for her. He has also found an organization that provided school supplies for those in need.

These developments have helped him to feel more comfortable in Jordan. He continued to be resourceful in connecting with the appropriate agencies. His situation has improved with the passage of time. As Mr. Ahmed felt more established and set down roots in Jordan, he was able to appreciate the country for its safety and stability. Knowing that he had no other options or countries to go to, he invested his time and energy in settling in Amman. This was the case even though he was able to only obtain a refugee status for six months at a time. He also realized that returning to Iraq was a dream that he had to give up. Living in ghurba or estrangement become a reality.

4.5.3 Theme #3: Content and being a good Muslim

Another important theme that emerged in Mr. Ahmed’s story pertains to his capacity to adapt and cope. Throughout his narrative, Mr. Ahmed referred to numerous passages from the Quran and described the values that he believed a good Muslim must ascribe to. He pointed to the importance of feeling content with one’s circumstances. These circumstances are given to a person by Allah. He used his religious beliefs to make sense of the rejections he has received from potential employers and from immigration applications. He was conscious of not
questioning the greater plans set forth by Allah, as doing so would be sacrilegious. When he faced rejections he has made sense of it by saying “it was not meant by Allah, had no naseeb, not my fate.” The word naseeb in Arabic describes one’s share in life as prescribed by God.

Mr. Ahmed quoted passages from Quran. His religious beliefs bring him hope and feelings of contentment. He explained, “It is said in the Quran that ‘those that look to Allah and lean on Him for strength, those are the ones that Allah will find a way out for them, those are the one’s that receive his abundance and good fortune and they won’t be left in constraint.’” He maintained his religious duties in Jordan. He performed the five prescribed daily prayers in Islam. These prayers are performed by Muslims around the world near dawn time, in the early afternoon, in the late afternoon, just after sunset, and at nightfall. He also performed prayers in the local mosques.

Mr. Ahmed also spoke of his religious role models from the dawn of Islam. The Prophet Mohamed faced severe hardships. The Prophet lost his parents at a young age, was forced to flee his home town in adulthood, barely escaped alive, and faced financial losses. Mr. Ahmed referred to his role model, “I was forced out and I had to migrate, well that was nothing compared to what he had to go through.”

Mr. Ahmed has also modeled his patience upon the supporters of Prophet Mohamed from the early days of Islam. He spoke of Ahil Al Bait and Sahabah. Ahil Al Bait is an Arabic word literally meaning those that belong to the “House.” It is a term used to refer to Prophet Mohamed’s family and relatives. Sahabah means friends in Arabic and it refers to Prophet Mohamed’s friends and supporters. They had strong convictions despite the persecutions they faced. They were able to adapt, cope, and triumph. Mr. Ahmed credited them for teaching him to cope.
Mr. Ahmed further credited his faith for maintaining his mental wellness. He explained, “You know we have a belief that the most important thing [in life] is for a person to preserve their nafis [psyche/soul/self], to preserve their faith and religion, so we had to endure.” He also felt a great deal of gratitude. Throughout the interview Mr. Ahmed expressed his gratitude to Allah. He compared his situation to Iraqis who were worse off. Some were still living in makeshift refugee tents near the Iraqi border. He felt fortunate for having a better life.

Another factor has helped him make sense and cope with his experiences. He described the significance of receiving kind words and gestures from people. In Islam, this is referred to as sadaqah. It is described in the Quran as a voluntary charity that comes in the form of a kind word, a smile, or financial support. He shared his gratitude for those who provided him with such support in Jordan. In short, feeling content with his circumstances arose from the value he placed on what it meant to be a good Muslim as well as from emulating the virtues of Islam’s historic role models.

4.6 Mr. Abbaas’ narrative
4.6.1 Theme #1: Journey out of Iraq – through dangers as a matter of fact

Mr. Abbaas shared his story of migration with a degree of calmness and acceptance. His story of migration began shortly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the Unites States. He initially had no intention of leaving Iraq when the war erupted. However, the escalation of events in his hometown in Northern Iraq eventually led to his treacherous escape from Iraq. Problems began as the occupying army established bases in his hometown. To establish control in key locations of the city, the American army took over some residential houses.

As the occupation unfolded, Mr. Abbaas’ family was approached by US army personnel. They knocked on the front door of their house and asked to speak with the head of the family. It
was an unwelcomed visit since they requested to rent their house. They were offered a rental contract and were asked to vacate their house. Doing so would show support to the US army’s efforts in bringing peace to the area. Mr. Abbaas was not willing to entertain this idea and declined the offer. He loved his house. It was the place where he was born and had lived all his life. The soldiers left and Mr. Abbaas thought he had succeeded in bringing the matter to a close. Unfortunately, the story did not end there.

A few days later the US army personnel returned. They asked if the family had further reflected upon the rental offer. The family re-expressed their disinterest but with no avail. The US army personnel came determined on that day to sign a rental contract and take over their house. They were informed that it was an order they had to abide by since the US army represented the authority in the country. His family was begrudgingly forced to comply.

After signing the contract Mr. Abbaas and his family began collecting all their valuables and belongings. They moved into Mr. Abbaas’ grandfather’s house in the same city. Not only did they go through the ordeal of vacating their house, they also faced scrutiny from their neighbors. As neighbors witnessed the US army move into Mr. Abbaas’ home, they became disgruntled with his family. People began complaining about them for allowing the Americans into the neighborhood. News spread through word of mouth, accusing Mr. Abbaa’s family of being supporters of the occupation and collaborators with the enemy. These rumors led to serious safety concerns.

Then Mr. Abbaas’ hometown was infiltrated by organized and armed militias, and his family began receiving direct threats accusing them of treason. The city became a battlefield and lawlessness prevailed. The militias targeted alleged supporters of the occupying army. Mr. Abbaas and his family decided to leave the country and migrate to Jordan. They made the
decision despite not having immigration paperwork nor any guarantees that Jordan would allow them into their borders. They chose Jordan since many Iraqis had fled there.

As Mr. Abbaas shared his story, a frustrating picture emerged. What stood in front of his elusive path to safety were a few pieces of paperwork. His passport had expired. He neither had an exit visa from Iraq nor an entrance visa into Jordan. Since many Iraqis faced a similar fate, a new industry providing expedited and forged travel documents flourished. For a small fee, he was able to obtain the paperwork he needed.

Mr. Abbaas rented a car for his family and traveled on a treacherous sixteen hour journey to the Jordanian border. Before entering the Jordanian border, he had to go through the Iraqi border. Iraqi customs officers noticed he had forged documents and did not allow him out of Iraq. Mr. Abbaas found a quick solution to this obstacle. He explained, “I went back to him and put money this time in my passport, I put $10 inside my passport and handed it to him, I asked him if he could make it work.” It worked! He was out of Iraq heading towards Jordanian customs. His parents were allowed into Jordan. They had legal passports. This was not the case for Mr. Abbaas. Jordanian customs officers detected his forged documents. More importantly, they were not prone to bribery and turned him back. He told his parents of this news and watched the pale looks on their faces. They did not want to proceed without him. He urged them, however, to continue without him, and so they did. He found a truck driver at the border who was heading back to his hometown. It was unsafe to drive at night so he remained with the truck driver at the border. They slept in the truck and at dawn began their journey back.

Mr. Abbaas went back to his grandfather’s home and began the process of applying for legal documents. Waiting over the next few months brought restlessness, “I could not stay still, kept
going in and out of the house.” His parents in Jordan were very concerned about his safety. They were worried from the core of their nafis (i.e. psyche/spirit/self).

Interestingly, Mr. Abbaas often spoke about the concerns that others had for his safety. He rarely spoke about his own fears yet described that period as a difficult one. A few months later he obtained legal Iraqi documents. His second attempt out of Iraq proved to be more dangerous. The fighting had spread in the country, turning the roads into fighting grounds. The drive to Jordan took thirty hours instead of the usual sixteen hours. Again, he did not speak about his fears. He only spoke about the journey itself. He faced many road detours and witnessed explosions. He had car problems, and he escaped from armed bandits on the roads. He described all of these dangers in a factual manner. This was a main theme throughout his story.

### 4.6.2 Theme #2: Inner strength birthed by war

The second theme in Mr. Abbaas’ narrative was the strength that he gained from living through war and migration. In 2003, at the age of sixteen, he took up arms to defend his neighborhood. When Saddam’s regime was toppled, a power vacuum occurred in the country that led to lawlessness and crime. Mr. Abbaas learned to carry a Kalashnikov assault rifle (AK-47). This occurred in Iraq as civilians began policing their own neighborhoods.

Mr. Abbaas also learned to drive a car at the illegal age of sixteen. His parents were in Jordan at the time. He managed his own life from getting groceries to driving to school. The war helped him become self-reliant and he faced the challenges of life. Mr. Abbaas credited the intensity of his war experiences for giving him unbreakable strength. This strength equipped him to cope with the many challenges of migration and living in Jordan.

Among the challenges of living in Jordan was the uncertain future he faced. He obtained a temporary student visa and enrolled in a diploma program. His visa would expire after the
completion of the program. Mr. Abbaas was unfazed by the possibility of not having a country to turn to. He explained, “Nothing really shakes me here.” He found a way to extend his student visa. He continued to postpone the final comprehensive exam required to complete the diploma program, thereby extending his student status. Mr. Abbaas elaborated upon his strength:

I personally have not gone through a breakdown of nafis [psyche/spirit/self]. I don’t think there is anything worse than living under an occupation in a war. This is the worst thing. So, after living through that, everything else becomes easy. Other challenges in life become easy compared to living during times of war.

The challenges of life in Jordan became easy in comparison. This was the case even when he found himself in a Jordanian prison cell after making an illegal traffic turn. He remained calm despite not knowing whether or not this would lead to his deportation. He described his demeanor at the time:

Maybe if that was another person in my place they would have just been crushed and started crying, they would have probably called their family right away. I was in the prison cell and my phone rang, I answered it and it was my grandfather, who was wanting to book a flight. He asked me where I was, I told him I was at work, but I was stuck in this prison cell. He asked me to take care of his flight reservations and keep it as it was. So, I did that, I called the travel agent and did his reservations from jail. I guess I thought to myself that the worst that could happen to me, the worst thing that the Jordanians may do is take me to the Syrian border. I thought if they take me there, well, I will just find a way to live there temporarily until things work out and I get a chance to travel to another country. So, there was nothing that I was afraid of here.
Mr. Abbaas remained calm and unmoved by life’s circumstances. However, not everyone in his family felt a newfound strength within themselves. The 2003 war had affected his younger brother’s *nafis* (i.e. psyche/spirit/self). His brother experienced the war from the age of three. Mr. Abbaas spoke about the nightmares that his brother continued to have five years after leaving Iraq. He continued to awaken Mr. Abbass at night from his screaming nightmares. Mr. Abbaas acknowledged the fears of others while making sense of his experiences from a different lens. It was a lens that credited war for giving birth to his strength.

**4.6.3 Theme #3: Hope in transit – waiting for a better life**

The third theme in Mr. Abbaas’ narrative pertained to his unique way of perceiving situations. He adapted and coped by perceiving the challenges he faced as temporary and passing events. He viewed his circumstances as transitory. This gave him hope. He was content and resigned to the notion that anything can be taken away from him, and at anytime. He viewed his current reality as temporary. He felt a lack of attachment towards Jordan. He compared his six years in the country to prolonged airport delays. Mr. Abbaas continued to wait in Jordan without knowing when or where his next destination would take him. Despite the uncertainty, he placed a substantial amount of hope on starting a new life outside of Jordan:

- I want to go to a country that is stable. I want to be able to get their citizenship. I want to establish myself in some line of work, work that is continuous, steady, and secure. A job that helps me establish myself, build myself and buy a house. That is my hope. Start a family and just live.

His hope for migrating to a developed country propelled him to continue coping with life in Jordan. Meanwhile, he held an image of a fulfilling life. In his vision, employment played a vital role in thriving within a developed country.
Mr. Abbaas mentioned several times his hope for immigrating to a country with a “strong nationality.” As a document, his Iraqi citizenship has provided him with limited opportunities and many closed doors. He contrasted the ill-fated Iraqi nationality with the citizenships of “strong” countries that are stable and secure. He eloquently stated:

I want to get a citizenship that has substance, something that provides me protection. I want a citizenship that allows me to speak my mind and have that nationality back me up. I do not want to be worried about things that I say. So right now my personality is strong, and I have confidence, but my nationality is weak. My nationality is very weak. Because of my Iraqi nationality I may get kicked out of Jordan at any minute.

Mr. Abbaas’ future hopes also motivated him to make the best use of time in Jordan. He continued to build his network of friends. From not knowing anyone in Jordan upon arrival, his circle of friends had grown to about sixty people. He enjoyed the Jordanian culture and credited its similarities to Iraq for his ability to integrate into life.

In addition to his personal hopes, Mr. Abbaas held larger hopes for Iraqis. Iraqis were granted limited opportunities, especially students and aspiring professionals. For instance, due to limited opportunities in Jordan, Mr. Abbaas had to choose a field of study for which he had no interest in. It was a means for getting a student visa. He wished that countries would “open their doors” to Iraqis. He hoped that universities around the world will do the same. Many Iraqis could not safely study nor attend school in their hometowns. As he explained, “I want people to know that Iraqis have abilities, capacities, talents that have been buried, there are so many unused talents.” He hoped that Iraqis will be given a chance to showcase their abilities in their fields of endeavor. He remained hopeful that developed countries will nurture their talents and promote their professional development. Hope was a consistent theme in his narrative. It is an important
factor that shaped the way he perceived his circumstances, the way he copes, and the way he adapts to life in Jordan.

4.7 Mr. Ziad’s narrative
4.7.1 Theme #1: Finding legitimacy – migration as a last resort

Mr. Ziad’s narrative revealed several clear themes. This first theme related to the amount of thought and reflection he placed in making the decision to leave Iraq. His rationale was thorough and he outlined three main reasons. Firstly, he shared the personal impact that the war and ensuing sectarian violence had on his life. Mr. Ziad was a doctor and worked at one of the hospitals in Baghdad. After the occupation, hospitals in the city were controlled by militias. Mr. Ziad described the Mehdi militia, a Shiiate group that controlled and protected most of the hospitals. Unfortunately, his interactions with militia members sparked tensions which eventually led to his life being threatened.

Political correctness seemed to be the norm at hospitals. Few people felt safe to express their opinions about the political situation in Iraq. Mr. Ziad, on the other hand, was not afraid to express his political views around the escalation of violence in the country. This led to one specific incident that proved to be a major turning point in his life. While he took his break at work, Mr. Ziad watched a broadcast of breaking news with other doctors. The news covered the assassination of Sayed Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, a Shiiate leader in Iraq. Mr. Ziad expressed his opinion about the event. It was not consistent with the opinions of the others, “Most of the people said may Allah rest his soul and I said may he go to hell, I was upset because he contributed to the destruction of Iraq after the occupation, played a role in the chaos and disorder that ensued in the area.” This led to a heated debate and insults were made about Mr. Ziad’s
Sunni background. Tensions remained palpable even days after these arguments. He could no longer bear the situation and transferred to another hospital.

It was at this new hospital that the sectarian tensions with others escalated dramatically. It began after a minor interaction with one of the Facilities Protection Security (FPS) officers, a Shi'ite security group hired by the Mehdi militias. Mr. Ziad watched as the officer inspected another doctor entering the hospital. He then approached the officer and questioned his rationale for such an inspection, which he felt was inappropriate and uncalled for given that the doctor was a woman and of Christian background. To Mr. Ziad’s surprise, the officer pulled his gun and pointed it at his face. The officer then expressed obscene words at him. Mr. Ziad was further surprised as the officer brought up the tense conversations he’d had with the doctors at the previous hospital. It became apparent to Mr. Ziad that his personal information was not protected. He was heart broken to discover that he was labeled as an enemy by employees at this new hospital. He worried about the repercussions that may follow and was concerned for his own safety. Mr. Ziad endured these new work tensions because he loved working in a hospital setting in Iraq. However, the situation continued to escalate.

A few days after the incident with the FPS officer, Mr. Ziad faced a terrifying ordeal. A car filled with armed Shi'ite militia stopped in front of him and took him into their car. Mr. Ziad had no choice but to abide with their instructions. He received a “light beating” physically but was verbally and emotionally abused. They pointed their guns at him while they pushed him around and threatened to kill him on the spot. This continued for four hours. They then released him under one condition, he had to leave the country. Otherwise, they promised to find him again and hang him to death using electrical wires.
Interestingly, Mr. Ziad did not speak about the emotional impact that this terrifying experience had on him. He did not cite fear as a factor that drove him out of Iraq. Instead, he blamed lack of accountability in the country for his departure. There was no government agency that could have protected him. As he explained, “Since the occupation, there is no order, anyone can kill anyone and no one would care, killing a person became like killing a chicken, just not a big deal and not worth worrying about.” Mr. Ziad would have stayed in Iraq and endured the hardships had there been a rule of law in the country that protected its citizens.

As he spoke about the rationale for leaving Iraq, Mr. Ziad contrasted the situation in the country to the time when Saddam Hussein was in power. There was order during that time in spite of the hardships and corruptions. Mr. Ziad explained:

There was so much corruption, nothing worked without bribes, but we had order. We had a regime with order. So you learned to live during his time, it was your country after all, so you just endure it and live there. You just lived there no matter how bad the economic situation got. But at least, during Saddam’s time, your *nafis* [psyche/spirit/self] was at peace and at ease. [Italics added]

Mr. Ziad’s loyalty and love for Iraq helped him cope with the challenges of living under an oppressive dictatorship. In fact, his *nafis* was at peace as he lived in his homeland.

Mr. Ziad also shared other factors that played a role in his decision to leave Iraq. While in Iraq he met and fell in love with a Shiiaate woman whom he wanted to marry. Prior to the 2003 war, marriages between people from different Muslim sects were the norm. This changed after the war and with the escalation of sectarian violence. Sadly, tensions were not confined to political and ideological differences. They spilled over to the social fabric of the country. Minor sectarian differences were amplified by fundamental groups that entered the country during the
power vacuum in Iraq, such as al-Qaida and other groups. As Mr. Ziad explained, “During the occupation and the period that ensued, Iraq ended up going back to the Stone Age, we became retarded and backwards.”

His extended family did not support the marriage even though his parents blessed it. Rifts in the family brought problems. In the collective Iraqi culture there are many rituals, social norms, and gatherings that occur with special events. Had he remained in Iraq, these would have been tainted by disputes of his cross-sectarian marriage.

The final reason cited by Mr. Ziad for leaving Iraq pertained to his career aspirations. As a medical doctor, he aspired to further develop in his profession and become an ENT specialist. That was no longer possible in Iraq. His love for the profession was clear. It even led him to accept a position in a Jordanian hospital with a salary far below his Jordanian colleagues. He was not able to pursue further education in Jordan since there were restrictions imposed on Iraqi doctors. These impeded them from pursuing further education. Mr. Ziad remained hopeful that a Western country will one day grant him the opportunity to migrate to and specialize in his field. In other words, career aspirations were a part his decision to leave Iraq.

Even though he outlined a clear rationale for leaving Iraq, it was a difficult decision to make. He had waited until he felt that he had enough legitimate reasons to leave his homeland. His love for Iraq was evident in his narrative. He reminisced about spending time with friends and family on the river banks of the Tigris in Baghdad. The majority of his friends and family are still in Iraq. In fact, the foremost reason for his participation in this study was to help people who are reflecting upon leaving their homeland. He explained:

I want to help people to get a chance to look at all the pros and cons of leaving. I want them to think real hard before they make the decision. I want people to think a hundred times
before they come to a decision, and look at all advantages and disadvantages. I am not suggesting for people to stay in their homeland if they are in danger. But if someone is not living in danger in their homeland, then they should stay.

He recommended that people look for opportunities in their own homeland before leaving it. It is a decision that should be looked at as a last resort.

Mr. Ziad spoke about the most painful aspect of living in Jordan. He heard locals accusing Iraqis of abandoning their homeland and betraying their government. He felt deeply angered by these comments. They put into question his deep love and loyalty for Iraq. He hoped that he can one day return to Iraq and make a contribution. In summary, finding legitimacy in leaving his beloved homeland was a clear theme in his narrative.

4.7.2 Theme #2: Faith in Allah’s will and one’s inner strength

Mr. Ziad made sense of leaving Iraq through his faith. He viewed his departure as part of God’s plan and will. This plan included his witnessing of events in Iraq. He faced personal threats and witnessed the destruction of his country, including the burning of schools. This caused him pain in his nafis (i.e. psyche/spirit/self). The pain then gave birth to a newfound strength within. This in turn equipped him to face migration and resettlement challenges. It helped him put things into perspective. More importantly, all these thoughts were anchored in a core belief: a person becomes stronger when he/she accepts Allah’s will.

His decision to leave Iraq was aligned with Allah’s wishes. Otherwise, a sense of shame would have filled him. Faith helped him make sense of his war and migration experiences. The following poignantly highlighted his beliefs:

I believe that everyone on this planet, regardless of their country of origin, regardless if they are from Canada or New Zealand, or the US, all of us have the right to live anywhere we live.
It is not shameful nor is it against Allah’s will to go and live in a country that is not yours. Stability is really nice, no matter which country has it. So, maybe I decide to live in Canada. Again, it is not shameful nor is it a sin against Allah’s will. The whole earth belongs to Allah, the whole universe belongs to Allah, so no matter where you decide to go, Allah will have written for you your livelihood. So, we think about a better life, for making things better, but it is the Lord of the Worlds that gifts you with a better life. [Italics added]

His decision to leave Iraq did not undermine Allah’s wishes. Allah oversees the entire planet. Hence, leaving one’s birthplace does not contradict God’s wishes. Furthermore, accepting the circumstances that led him to leave Iraq implied accepting the better livelihood that is “written” for him by Allah.

Besides his faith, Mr. Ziad also spoke about his innate strengths. He had a natural ability to adjust to the challenging circumstances of life. Particularly, he felt able to live anywhere he may be placed. He went as far as saying that he can adjust, hypothetically speaking, on a deserted island located in the furthest point on this planet. However, he did not take full credit for his ability. He credited Allah for giving him innate strength to endure hardships.

He continued to tap into his innate strength and faith in Allah to cope with the hardships in Jordan. He faced financial challenges there. He accepted an underpaid job knowing he would be “taken advantage of” and work long hours. His employer sensed his dire need to find work. Despite all of this, Mr. Ziad continued to express gratitude for the fate handed to him by Allah. His faith in God and his innate strength helped him cope with war and migration.

4.7.3 Theme #3: Integrating to the new life as a way of coping

The third theme in Mr. Ziad’s narrative related to his ability to cope and integrate into a new life. He cited the similarities between Iraqi and Jordanian cultures as key facilitators for his
integration. Particularly, he spoke about the similarities in the tribal values and principles of honor, respect, and integrity. These similarities helped him make a smooth transition to Jordan. The cultural similarities have helped many Iraqis with their integration. Mr. Ziad explained that despite the many restrictions placed on them in Jordan, such as work and visa related issues, Iraqis have found ways to enjoy life there. Mr. Ziad explained further, “You would see us live, go for day trips, you would see us laugh, and socialize, go to restaurants.” This occurred with Iraqis from various social status and economic standings.

Mr. Ziad also spoke about the role employment played in his integration to life in Jordan. Work had allowed him to continue practicing medicine, a profession he loved. He hoped to secure landed immigrant status in a country that would grant him opportunities to demonstrate his skills. He felt that many Iraqis shared his sentiment: “We have the brainpower, we are filled with smart people.” Many Iraqis in Jordan do not get employment opportunities. Coping with life’s circumstances for Mr. Ziad meant working and being productive. Work also served another function. Working long hours in a hospital acted as a distraction from thinking about the difficulties of living in ghurba or estrangement.

Work also allowed Mr. Ziad to express a part of himself that he valued. Working as a doctor gave him a chance to practice an “upbeat” approach to life. A central aspect of having this “upbeat” approach is being kind to people. It is an approach that he used while visiting patients in the hospital. He believed that speaking kindly uplifts people and leaves them feeling happy.

Mr. Ziad’s focus on the virtue of kindness at work also compensated for the disappointments he faced in Jordan. He spoke about several incidents where he was treated negatively and unkindly by locals in the city. This “rudeness” often gets demonstrated after people discover that he is from Iraq. Their reactions have often left him feeling judged. This was a source of
discomfort. Many Jordanians also inquired about his religious affiliation, which he felt was irrelevant. What matters is how people treated each other, “It matters whether someone is speaking with you kindly, in a good natured way, with an open heart.” Employment granted him the opportunity to engage in the kind interactions that he valued.

There was another way in which employment helped Mr. Ziad cope with life in Jordan. After experiencing the war, he began having sleep problems. He often slept for a few hours a night. Long hours of sleep also did not leave him feeling rested. This sleep pattern sharply contrasted to the restful sleep he’d had before the war. His sleep problems have continued. However, his employment in Jordan has played a role in improving his sleep.

He found a way to manage his sleep problems. He worked long hours during the week to deplete his mind. He then arranged an enjoyable evening with friends at the end of his work week. This formula prepared him to sleep long hours on his day off. Interestingly, he believed that long hours of sleep in Jordan served another function, “It feels like escapism, maybe I am sleeping to forget about the experiences that I went through, or maybe I now sleep so much so that I forget that I had to flee from Iraq.”

There was one other component that promoted his integration to life in Jordan. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Ziad often expressed gratitude to Allah. He felt grateful for being given a chance to leave Iraq. He also felt grateful that his son was born in Jordan. Mr. Ziad spoke about the impact that the war had on Iraqi children. Many developed a rough and harsh demeanor as a way to cope with their terrifying circumstances. He particularly spoke about his nephew in Iraq. He described the gradual changes he witnessed this thirteen year old boy go through since the 2003 war. He became rude in his mannerisms. He rarely appeared scared by any noises of explosions. He was often angry, had a serious look on his face, and rarely smiled. Mr. Ziad also noticed how he
would belittle anyone that showed any signs of fear. These gradual changes concerned Mr. Ziad. He did not want his child to experience war and go through such negative transformations. Mr. Ziad felt grateful that Allah gave him a chance to provide his child with a better life. This in turn inspired him to further cope with his experiences and integrate into life in Jordan.

4.8 Mr. Mohamed’s narrative
4.8.1 Theme #1: Coping in war until the breaking point of humiliation

Mr. Mohamed’s decision to leave Iraq came after years of coping and adapting to war. He was tenacious and resourceful in adjusting to war time conditions. Mr. Mohamed and his family lived through the initial wrath and onslaught of “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” The terror and chaos of the war still hadn’t given him thoughts of finding refuge in another country. He witnessed missile bombardments and lived through the deafening sound explosions. He managed with the general paralysis and immobility that blanketed Baghdad. Daily life was filled with safety concerns and lacked the basic necessities of life such as water and electricity. Mortar attacks occurred regularly in his neighborhood with many landing on his property. Death became a normal part of life. He contrasted that with life in Jordan: “One person dying because of one bullet has no value for us, here in Jordan though it is big news for them if someone gets murdered; there it is normal for us.”

None of these factors played a role in his decision to leave Iraq. He remained in Baghdad for two years after the start of war. He then witnessed the escalation of events and the start of sectarian violence. He explained:

At that time there weren’t killings and murders, there were just kidnappings. I mean not many people got killed, but many people did get kidnapped for a ransom. Things in the
country began to escalate. This was when the beginning of the sectarian violence and fighting began. Truthfully, I hesitated leaving Iraq with all of this.

Mr. Mohamed’s love for his homeland overpowered all the dangers that he lived with there. However, a drastic change in his thinking occurred after a critical incident impacted him deeply. As he explained, “An incident happened, which in a split second changed my mind about everything.”

Mr. Mohamed was summoned to appear in court for a complaint that was filed on his business. A woman filed the complaint with the Iraqi police. Initially he was not worried. He felt confident in his legal and moral business practices. He was also savvy with business bylaws and regulations. Mr. Mohamed went to the Iraqi police station in his area with confidence and was prepared to present his case. He had nothing to hide and knew that the complaint was fabricated. A police officer took his testimony then presented it to an Iraqi judge. A verdict was reached. The judgment came in his favor and the charges were dropped.

Mr. Mohamed then proceeded to the administration office of the courthouse to finish his paperwork. That was when an unexpected turn of events occurred and led to a drastic change in Mr. Mohamed’s life. When he approached a courthouse officer to obtain final release signatures he was oddly asked to wait outside one of the courtrooms. The officer entered the courtroom alone. Mr. Mohamed waited for twenty minutes. Mr. Mohamed was perplexed by this unusual delay and wondered who the officer went to see behind the closed doors. The officer finally came out of the courtroom and asked Mr. Mohamed to go inside. This further puzzled Mr. Mohamed. He reassured himself that he was safe since he was entering an Iraqi courtroom.

He was stunned to see who was inside. The courtroom was filled with American soldiers and the woman who had filed the complaint! Mr. Mohamed was further astonished by the mannerism
of the US soldiers. One of the soldiers acted out the role of an Iraqi judge and the others were laughing at the comic scenario. The US soldier then told him that he had to pay the plaintiff $3,000 US. He could not believe his own eyes, especially since he was acquitted of the charges. To bring this situation to a safe end he agreed to pay the money. Being astute, however, he requested a receipt of such a payment. His request initiated fiasco and humor among the soldiers. This eventually led to his release without making any payment.

The impact that this event had on Mr. Mohamed was profound. Before this incident, he felt appreciative that the Americans had “liberated us from the nightmare of Saddam.” However, after the event he no longer felt any remorse for the deaths of US soldiers. The incident changed everything, as he elaborated:

Saddam was a real nightmare, but at that moment in the courthouse I felt most humiliated. I felt how humiliating it is that in my own country I have Iraqi police that are scared of US soldiers and they salute the US soldiers, and then I get humiliated in the courthouse of the Iraqi police by Americans!

It was this deep sense of humiliation that led him to the decision to methodically plan and organize his migration to Jordan. Humiliation was the trigger behind his decision. He’d had no intention of leaving Iraq until then. The impact of humiliation was more severe than living through all his war experiences.

4.8.2 Theme #2: Coping in war - the actions of learned adaptation

Mr. Mohamed had coped with severe war conditions in Iraq for two years. He described many situations in which he faced problems but focused his attention on finding solutions. In his narrative, he often referred to things he did instead of how he felt. He faced his reality and dealt with it by taking action. This way of coping seemed to pave the way for his successful adaptation
to Jordan. His narrative led me to propose a term to capture his ability to cope: “learned adaptation.” I will be elaborating on this shortly.

One of the many realities that Mr. Mohamed faced in Iraq were regular mortar attacks in his area. He estimated that over five hundred mortars fell in and around his property. Despite the severity of this reality he only briefly stated his fears, “Allah is my witness, the main fear was during the actual bombings or landing of mortars and shooting.” After that brief statement he elaborated on the ways in which he adapted to this reality. Mr. Mohamed turned his house into a well protected bunker. He bought and placed large metal sheets on the windows of their main living room. He also placed mattresses along the walls to catch any shrapnel that would cut through. His family learned to pay attention to the sounds of danger outside, to determine its proximity to them, and to plan their next action. He further elaborated:

We can tell from the sound of the mortars if the fighting is close or far away from our area. When the sound gets closer we know that the fighting is heading towards our area. When that happens we go and hide in the basement shelter. We also would go there when machine gun fighting happened. Since the location of our house was in between the Americans and the insurgents attack, we got caught in the middle of many fights. We used to get a big portion of the machine gun bullets coming into our house. We used to have to crawl on the ground and be fully flat on the ground to make sure nothing hit us. Even my youngest son had to do that, lay flat on the ground. That was also how we moved between rooms when there was fighting, just crawled on the ground. Then when you crawl and get close to a window you have to think a hundred times at what moment you can go underneath it, otherwise, if the window shattered it would butcher you.
The impact of the war on the physical structure of his house became obvious to anyone walking in the area. He spoke with humor about the hundreds of holes in his garage area and how strange it looked at night when light came through them.

The mortar attacks brought with them other problems. Not all mortar shells exploded on impact. He learned to pay attention to the location of the falling mortars and to wait for a sound of explosion. Undetonated mortars were extremely dangerous. Walking in his backyard became a life threatening event. Undetonated mortars also landed on his rooftop. These caused him great grief. His challenge then was to find someone who could help him. He often approached the American troops in the area, but they never helped him. They always suggested that he contact the Iraqi police. They in turn would then suggest that he contact the Iraqi Civil Defense. No one had the time to help him. His problem was too common to obtain any prompt attention. Nevertheless, Mr. Mohamed’s resourcefulness led him to a solution. He offered bribes to Iraqi police officers who then came to help him. He learned to cope with inefficient and corrupt agencies that were originally intended to assist people.

Mr. Mohamed also learned to live with the increasing inconveniences of life during the war. He was forced to work from his home due to the dangers of kidnappings. His successful business left him vulnerable for such threats. When he had to go to his office, he was escorted by two bodyguards. He also made an effort to appear in financial crisis to lessen the dangers on his life. He often spoke about financial hardships with friends, family, and business clients. He even had to creatively justify renovations inside his house. He decided to build a new fortified unit to store their belongings prior to leaving Iraq. Since he did not want anyone to know that he was leaving the country, nor that he had the finances to afford such a project, he had to bend the truth. He informed the contractor and his construction workers that he was building the unit in an attempt
to deal with his financial problems. He told them that he was building the unit so he could rent it out. All of these “white lies” bothered Mr. Mohamed as it was not in his nature to lie. Nevertheless, he learned to adapt his personality to cope with the war conditions.

Mr. Mohamed also faced increasing challenges from the US Armed Forces stationed near his home. Tensions began building between them. This occurred after fifty soldiers from the US Armed Forces raided and inspected his house. His movements after the raid became closely watched. Mr. Mohamed was even scrutinized by US soldiers patrolling the area anytime he went to his attic to adjust the Satellite antennas.

All these war realities became a way of life for Mr. Mohamed and his family. He explained that they had no alternative but to cope: “You have no choice, where can you go, we had no alternative.” He learned to adapt to life in Iraq. This in turn helped him adapt to his migration experience and to life in Jordan. The term “learned adaptation” captures the actions that people engage in while dealing with and making sense of life in a war zone. Learned adaption could also be a psychological muscle that develops in adverse conditions such as war. It may contribute to the successful adjustment to a post-war life.

4.8.3 Theme #3: Social support – a foundation for rebuilding what was lost

The third theme in Mr. Mohamed’s narrative highlights the role that social support played in buffering the psychological impact of war. Despite the dangers associated with transportation around Baghdad during the war, many Iraqis remained mobile and continued to commute in and around the city. Many traveled across town to visit people. Some even spent the nights with family or friends, and others had secondary homes outside of the city. This occurred despite the dangers and security risks involved in transportation.
As a case in point, Mr. Mohamed shared a story about one of his friends who came to visit him. Mr. Mohamed’s friend was astounded at the intensity of violent clashes in the area. During the visit, fighting erupted. They had to rush and hide inside Mr. Mohamed’s house until the clashes subsided. No civilians were injured at that time. However, the visitor’s car was damaged by several pieces of shrapnel. With humor and guilt Mr. Mohamed spoke about the extent of the unexpected damage. Since no insurance companies were operating during the war, Mr. Mohamed’s friend had to cover the cost of the repairs.

There were many benefits from having an extensive social support network. Mr. Mohamed often felt relieved when family and friends visited him, which occurred regularly. These visits also took place shortly after mortar attacks and violent clashes occurred in his area. The visits were “very uplifting.” They offered his family morale support and “supported our nafis” (i.e. psyche/spirit/self). They eased each other’s suffering through their interactions.

After leaving Iraq, Mr. Mohamed initially did not have any social network to rely on in Jordan. This was a drastic shift from the extensive social support he had in Iraq. He estimated that it took him about six months in Jordan until “everything came into place,” this included registering his children in schools and obtaining legal immigration paperwork. His description of the early days in Jordan was very poignant, “everyday in ghurba is like a month” (i.e. in estrangement). Mr. Mohamed felt that an important way to deal with ghurba was to build a new life in Jordan, one filled with significant social support.

Mr. Mohamed remained persistent and proactive in building his new social support network. He also contacted the appropriate governmental offices in Amman and overcame any obstacles he faced. Many Iraqis in Jordan would normally get frustrated when facing difficulties with Jordanian bureaucracies. Mr. Mohamed, on the other hand, was determined to make things work.
Anytime he went to a government office he would ask to speak to a supervisor, “I would not waste my time with pencil pushing staff that did not make the final decision on my paperwork. I would go straight to the sources and find out from the horse’s mouth.” His goal was to get settled in the new country. Failure was not an option.

Mr. Mohamed’s goal for building a social support network and connections in Jordan took shape even before leaving Iraq. He contacted a number of people while in Iraq by using the internet. He communicated with professionals in his field and made other new contacts. Through these contacts he discovered housing options in Jordan and located appropriate schools for his children. He accomplished all of this during the time when his movements in Iraq were confined to his home (i.e. when threats of kidnappings intensified). He also studied maps of Jordan and searched for the addresses of all the government and business offices that he was about to visit. His goal was to get established in this new country. This required him, as he puts it, “to figure out what my responsibilities were, what I had to do, and who I had to report to.”

Getting established in Jordan was one of Mr. Mohamed’s greatest hopes. He aspired to build what he had lost socially and financially in Iraq. He no longer held the thought of returning to Iraq. He enjoyed the secure life that Jordan had to offer and placed all his efforts to establish himself there. I should point out here that he maintained his motivation and aspiration to build a new life in Jordan even though he felt that the country will not offer him or his children “a good future” over the long run. While he placed all his efforts to get established in Jordan he also began working on his immigration application to Canada.

Mr. Mohamed and his wife had been socially active in Iraq. They had often held social gatherings at their home, including large barbeque-like gatherings every other week, along with regular visits to family and friends. After four years in Jordan, their efforts to get established
helped them to build an extensive social support network. Mr. Mohamed estimated that he knew about five thousand people in Jordan, including personal and professional contacts. All this was helping him to regain the “social standing” he’d had in Iraq.

He also aspired to rebuild himself financially in Jordan. Mr. Mohamed was driven to regain the standard of living he used to live by. Most Iraqis lived in houses in Iraq and they go through a major adjustment living in apartments in Jordan. Mr. Mohamed used to live in a large home with a swimming pool, so living in Jordan was also a drastic change for him. He was working in his profession in Amman and building a successful practice. He was able to buy a car quickly and now aspires to buy a house. In short, Mr. Mohamed’s hope for regaining what he lost in Iraq has helped him adapt to life in Jordan. He has consciously worked at rebuilding a new social support and professional network. This was a paramount factor in his ability to adapt to life in Jordan.

4.9 Mr. Omar’s narrative
4.9.1 Theme #1: Social support – a double-edged sword

The first theme in Mr. Omar’s narrative captured the way he made sense of his experiences. His story of migration began shortly after the start of the 2003 “Operation Iraqi Freedom” war. He didn’t have any intention to leave Iraq at that time. This changed a year and a half later. He received death threats. These serious threats continued and forced him to make the inevitable decision to leave Iraq.

Mr. Omar was a target for kidnapping and death threats because of his family name. His father was an influential lawyer in their hometown and had a visible “social standing” in the community. Prior to the war people from a higher “social standing” were highly respected and had an influence on the social fabric. Unfortunately, the war transformed them into clear targets
of kidnapping and violent attacks. Since Mr. Omar was the son of a highly respected member of
the community, he became a target too. The privileged life he once enjoyed became the very
reason he had to leave the country.

Even though Mr. Omar was born into a privileged family, he aspired to build his own
identity. He pursued medical school in order to make a contribution to his community and build
his social standing. He finished his final year of medical school shortly before the war began in
Iraq. He then completed his residency during the war and worked there for a year and a half. As
the personal threats intensified, Mr. Omar’s family decided that it would be best that he leave
Iraq. They remained in Iraq and supported his pursuit of a better life in a safe country. Mr.
Omar’s social standing enriched his life with social support and privileges. It also brought
unwanted attention that led to a major life transition. He fled to Jordan.

Mr. Omar’s life changed from one that was richly filled with social support to one filled with
isolation and struggles. The presence and absence of social support had a drastic impact on his
well-being. I proposed the term “social nourishment” to capture this phenomenon. During times
of war, social nourishment may describe the powerful impact that social support plays in helping
people cope with their terrifying and challenging experiences. Social support becomes the
lifeline and vitamin that nourishes peoples’ well-being. In Mr. Omar’s case, he felt at a loss in
Jordan without the social nourishment he used to receive from his support network. Mr. Omar
elaborated:

Well, I am stranger here and living alone. I lost the family support and the emotional and
psychological support that a family provides, the daam nafsee. That is a key part of
anyone’s life. [Italics added]
The words *daaam nafsee* have a unique meaning in Iraqi dialect. The word “daaam” means reliable and strong support from others. The word *nafsee* refers to the psychological, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of a person. Thus, the words *daaam* and *nafsee* combined imply receiving psychological/spiritual/emotional comfort through social support. It is a type of support that used to leave him feeling rested. This was no longer the case in Jordan.

Lack of social nourishment in Jordan took a toll on his life. He explained, “You feel all alone, you have no brother, father or friend to turn to.” He described social support as one of the “basic things” or necessities in life that he lost. The greatest impact of the war was that it stripped Iraqis from their families and social support. Living in *ghurba* or in estrangement was the source of greatest suffering. He explained:

In my opinion the hardships and suffering of Iraqis from being in *ghurba* has even had a greater impact on Iraqis than the pressures of war. So the impact on the *nafis* [i.e. psyche/spirit/self] from being estranged is not less than the psychological impact of being in the war in Iraq. [Italics added]

Living in *ghurba* left Mr. Omar without social nourishment. The presence and absence of social support played a key role in how he made sense of his experiences.

4.9.2 Theme #2: Personal traits and Allah’s role in making sense of injustices

Mr. Omar shared several stories of hardship and injustices. Amongst these experiences were his financial challenges. The money he brought with him to Jordan “vanished” quickly on living expenses such as rent. He was forced to contact his father in Iraq for financial support. He needed money to survive in Jordan until he found work. His father sent him money with an acquaintance that was visiting Jordan, as there were no money wiring services during the war. He had to patiently wait until the money arrived.
Mr. Omar was prepared to do and work at anything to survive in Jordan. Unfortunately, this left him vulnerable for mistreatment. He was taken advantage of by some employers. At his first job in Amman he was only paid half of what he was worth. He did not have any legal paperwork and had to accept the pay. He also accepted a GP position where he only earned five Jordanian Dollars a day, which is about $7 CDN. His financial situation continued to worsen.

Mr. Omar had another disappointment at a medical clinic which left him heartbroken. He worked diligently for a month and was anticipating his paycheck. The owner of the clinic did not compensate him on payday. Mr. Omar approached him to discuss this matter. The owner asked Mr. Omar to surrender his passport before any payment was made. He did not want to lose Mr. Omar to a better paying job. Mr. Omar assured him of his loyalty and explained that he could not surrender his passport. He explained, “My passport is all that I have.” The owner held his ground and refused to pay the month’s wages, leaving Mr. Omar without a job and in a financial crisis.

This incident impacted Mr. Omar greatly. He described that day as “a black day” in his life. That was the day in which he truly understood the meaning of injustice. He could not file a complaint anywhere since he did not have a work permit. He felt helpless:

The only paperwork that I did have were my degrees and official papers from my school in Iraq. So, I could not fight for my right or even get it. I lost my right. You can’t imagine the feeling of being wronged, of duulm, and persecution, and the feeling of sadness that you feel when someone just takes your rights from you. [Italics added]

He used the word duulm to describe his experience. In Arabic, duulm is a word that describes the bleakness and injustice that is imposed on someone. So how did he make sense of this duulm? How did he survive financially? And how was he able to cope?
Mr. Omar spoke about two personal traits that helped him deal with duulm. First, he credited growing up in Iraq. It developed his patience. He withstood the hardship of living under an oppressive regime for decades. He also lived under the severe economic sanctions imposed on Iraq. His patience was further developed by his chosen profession, which he described as having many demands, such that “you have to put up with lots of things as a doctor.” Lastly, Mr. Omar spoke about the role of acceptance in his ability to deal with duulm. He accepted the reality that led him to leave Iraq. He also accepted his current life as it was in Jordan, even though it paled in comparison to the life he used to have in Iraq.

However, patience and acceptance have their limits. When these traits were unable to soothe his distress and worries in Jordan, he turned to Allah for guidance. Interestingly, he was not a practicing Muslim as he did not perform many of the rituals, such as the five daily prayers. He believed, however, that Allah did play a role in his life. This was evident in his linguistic expressions:

I keep telling myself that I have to keep going until Allah opens the doors for something better, until Allah yufridgeha and unknots things for me. Hoping that Allah will give me an opportunity with traveling to somewhere, with pursuing further studies. So based on these I have made things work. [Italics added]

He held the belief that Allah will eventually reward him for his suffering. The word yufridge is used in the Quran. It describes the way in which God rewards those who have suffered and relied on Him for refuge. The virtue of patience is also praised in the Quran. Patient believers are not forgotten by Him. It is a culturally prized virtue in Iraqis’ culture. Mr. Omar explained, “I forced myself to remain patient and forced myself to endure and put up with things here.” Mr. Omar
made sense of his experiences by crediting both his personal traits and God for his ability to deal with the injustices of life.

4.9.3 Theme #3: Stability – the panacea for fear

Another theme that consistently appeared in Mr. Omar’s narrative related to the lack of stability he felt. He entered Jordan with a visitor’s visa. He tried for years to change it to a work visa. He approached all the official agencies in Amman but continued to get the “run around” from them. He felt discouraged by the various and never ending requirements that he had to fulfill. For instance, in order to obtain a legal work-visa, the immigration office required that he present an approved GP license from the Jordanians Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health, in turn, did not issue him any paperwork without proof of legal immigration.

Mr. Omar felt a sense of instability without a legal status in Jordan. This was a major source of discomfort and fear in his life. Mr. Omar explained:

When you live without any visa or legal document, you live in fear. You fear getting deported at any moment. God forbid if I get in trouble here or face a challenge, well, I have no legal status here. So, I am living here in fear, living in constant stress and worry.

Mr. Omar used the word “istikrar” throughout his narrative to describe this experience. In Arabic, istikrar means getting established and having a feeling of stability. It also means feeling grounded or rooted. One of his greatest hopes was to find istikrar and get settled in a country.

Lack of istikrar or feeling unsettled caused him distress. He also used the words “thagid nafsee,” which translates to internal pressures. He further described his experience:

I am not settled here in the country, don’t feel settled on a nafsee level [psychologically/emotionally/spiritually], I am not settled with any visa paperwork, don’t feel settled with this life here. Fear. Living in fear. I tell you, it is an unbelievable amount and
level of fear and worries that I live with. And I am living with a high level of stress because of this.

Mr. Omar coped with this distress in various ways. He met some people in Amman whose company he enjoyed. He also kept contact with family in Iraq. The social support he felt from family and friends alleviated the thagid nafsee or internal pressures he felt. He also coped by connecting with his interests, such as reading. He tried to manage his worries: “I try not to think about it even if just a little less, that helps, because the stress is just living with me so you can’t just forget about the stress and get it out of your mind.” He shifted his perspective from one that focused on eliminating the stress to a perspective that focused on minimizing its impact on him.

There was one more way in which Mr. Omar dealt with the challenges of feeling unsettled in Jordan. Finding work was at the forefront of his focus as soon as he arrived in Amman. Searching for employment was his way to find stability in the new country. Mr. Omar relied on acquaintances in Amman to help him find work. He wanted to work in his profession at any cost. As mentioned earlier, he even accepted unjust working conditions and minimal salaries. This was the case since the benefits of employment outweighed its costs. Ultimately, work gave him the sense of continuity and stability which he lacked in Jordan. It also offered him means to hang on to life in Jordan. He poignantly stated, “I just keep working right now so that I can survive, do you understand?”

Mr. Omar also wanted istkrar or stability to keep his dreams alive. He hoped to pursue further studies and specialization. He yearned for opportunities to further his profession. To do so, he needed to obtain legal status. In summary, Mr. Omar coped and made sense of his experiences by maintaining his hopes for securing a work visa in Jordan or a landed immigrant status in another country. Stability was the panacea for his distress.
Mr. Yoniss’ narrative

Theme #1: Leaving Iraq only as the final resort

Mr. Yoniss lived in Iraq with his parents during “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” His family struggled with the idea of leaving Iraq despite the dangerous conditions which they lived under, including the escalation of sectarian violence and bloodshed. Mr. Yoniss witnessed graphic deaths and other acts of brutality; however, he only began to seriously contemplate leaving Iraq after he had received personal death threats.

His parents received their first death threat in 2005. The threat came from an unknown source. As mentioned before, some of the death threats in Iraq were financially motivated while others were purely sectarian in nature. Despite the seriousness of the threat, they decided to temporarily leave their house but remain in Iraq. They found refuge in another district of their city and eventually were able to return to their house.

A turning point occurred in 2006 which made the decision to leave Iraq inevitable. Mr. Yoniss endured the worsening living conditions and escalation of violence. He described 2006 as the “worst year in Iraq, in every way.” Every aspect of life was a grueling struggle. Basic necessities became luxuries. At best, they lived with minimal and intermittent electricity. This occurred during the cold winter days as well as the excruciating summer heat, both trademarks of Iraqi weather. Even access to a gas station was out of the ordinary. He explained:

Two days. Your other option was to buy gas from the black market, but it was too expensive to do that….Having sleepovers in your car while lining up for gas was very normal. This was very normal. People started turning these line ups into social gatherings, as people would share stories and talk, it would get lively waiting there. The situation was really miserable. There was no life. People started leaving, and finding ways to leave Iraq, they would leave
by any means. It became unbearable. You could see a worsening of things. Things got dim and worse.

The worsening living conditions were also paralleled with the gradual elimination of what Mr. Yoniss called “outlets or fun things to do.” There were no forms of entertainment and nothing to do as people became prisoners in their own homes. Mr. Yoniss felt a gradual suffocation.

Matters then worsened. His family received an imminent death threat on Mr. Yoniss’ cell phone. The text message originated from the internet and did not have a return number. In the text message, his family was told to contact them via a provided e-mail address. They asked for money. It had to be delivered to a specific location within 48 hours. Otherwise, Mr. Yoniss’ family would be killed. Their message ended with more threats, “We will show you and your family hell.” Mr. Yoniss’ father followed the precise instructions and delivered the money.

A few days later Mr. Yoniss was contacted again by the same group. They claimed that they did not receive the money. Mr. Yoniss and his family were horrified by this. This time, the group requested that both Mr. Yoniss and his father deliver the money. They threatened to kill the entire family if there were any deviations from the plan. They pledged to attack their home with shoulder launched missiles. The seriousness of this threat led the family to make the decision that they had avoided for years. They had to escape from Iraq. His family hired a few armed bodyguards and left their house the next day. They left for Jordan. They stayed there for two months under visitor visas and then returned to Iraq. They did not have the legal paperwork to remain in Jordan.

These events had a great impact on his family. He described it as a “big blow”, and as “something that buries you.” Mr. Yoniss used the words “thagit nafsee,” referring to an increasing buildup of inner tension. The term refers to distress and pressure that occur in one’s
psyche, spirit, and self. This psychological pressure was visible in his family interactions. They were easily irritated and angry at each other. These expressions provided temporary relief from the thagid nafsee they felt.

After returning to Iraq, their situation further escalated. They did not return to their home. Instead they lived in an apartment complex, which was a major transition for the family, especially since they had never lived in an apartment before. They chose an apartment complex for safety concerns. It was located in a safer district. It was also fenced and had underground parking. Unfortunately, this apartment complex was an even more dangerous ground than their neighborhood. The area in front of the apartment turned into a battleground for two warring groups. They had regular clashes with machine guns and shoulder propelled missile launchers. It was “normal” for his family to witness intense bloody clashes in front of their building. They were surrounded by death, as he explained, “Seeing people dying in front of you was very normal.”

Life also became very restricted for Mr. Yoniss at that time. It was a six month period filled with agony. Mr. Yoniss wasn't able to go anywhere so he spent most of the time in the apartment. He made some friends in the apartment complex but that was the extent of his social interactions. His father was the only one who left the apartment daily, continuing to work in his profession as a doctor. However, this almost cost him his life.

Mr. Yoniss described a painful incident that occurred while he lived with his family at the apartment complex. The incident led them to leave Iraq again. It occurred as he was helping his father unload groceries in the underground parking of the building. They suddenly heard gun shots, but were not concerned at first, as it was “very normal” to hear these sounds. What finally caught their attention were the screaming sounds of the groundskeeper’s wife. They ran to the
entrance of the apartment building and realized that she was trying to get her husband to close
the main building gate and return to safety. He had opened the gate to throw out the collected
garbage. Mr. Yoniss’ father went to help the groundskeeper when an intruder unexpectedly
pushed through the gates and fired three shots at the groundskeeper. This occurred only three
meters away from Mr. Yoniss’ father. The groundskeeper immediately fell to the ground. Mr.
Yoniss’ father yelled at his children to go inside, while he dragged the groundskeeper to safety.

This was not the first time that Mr. Yoniss saw his father in danger. Since they moved to the
7th floor of this apartment complex, Mr. Yoniss had become used to watching his father return
from work daily. One time he watched a full confrontation and shooting take place between two
groups while his father was returning home. His father had to run between the warring groups
and was almost killed. Another man a few meters away from Mr. Yoniss’ father attempted to do
the same thing, but he was not so fortunate. He was killed.

Escaping death was a part of his father’s daily commute to work. In Canada, our main
commuting challenges relate to rush hour traffic. For Mr. Yoniss’ father, the challenge of his
daily commute was remaining alive. Returning to the incident with the groundskeeper, Mr.
Yoniss explained how that situation had been different from all others in the past. When he and
his siblings ran to their apartment, they became aware of the crying and screaming of their
youngest sister, who was six years old at the time. Mr. Yoniss explained:

I took her to my mom. She kept crying. She did not stop. We would try talking to her and
asking what was the matter, but she did not talk back to us, she just kept on crying. We really
got worried about her. We worried if she had some sort of psychological shock. Then, she
slowly calmed down, but then started pointing with her feet. We had no idea what was going
on. We then looked and noticed that she [had been] hit with the ricochet of one of the bullets.
Oddly enough, the crying of a six year old child was viewed as an unusual event at the time. It did not make sense to them that she kept crying since she had witnessed clashes and people dying. However, her injury led the family to make the decision to leave Iraq for good. They left Iraq as a last resort to protect the family. They made the decision after years of contemplation and living through the escalation of events. It was a decision that was not reached easily.

4.10.2 Theme #2: Coping as an Iraqi - attachment to the homeland

The second theme in Mr. Yoniss’ narrative highlighted the connection between a person’s identification with a national identity to his/her ability to cope. In his narrative, Mr. Yoniss described the strength needed to cope with war experiences by using a particular Arabic word. The word he used was *samdeen*, a plural form of the word *samid*. In Arabic, *samid* powerfully describes a unique form of inner strength.

*Samid* is the type of strength that is unbreakable. For a person to feel *samid* he/she needs to have a strong conviction, a feeling of nationalism, and a strong patriotic sense. Mr. Yoniss had a love for his homeland that helped him cope. He explained:

The truth is that what kept us going was our very strong attachment to the country. We could not imagine living anywhere else. These were our people, our families, this was the place where you grew up and were raised. I tell you, when we left for Jordan, I missed and longed for our house, the place where I was born [in] and grew up in.

He also used the word *haneen* to describe the type of love he has for Iraq. *Haneen* is a word that describes a tender yearning. It is also a yearning that includes the pain of missing a beloved when they are far away. It was his love and yearning to remain in Iraq that gave him the strength to cope. This *haneen* helped him endure the severe living conditions and remain “unbreakable”
when faced with the tragedies of war. His *haneen* was further strengthened by faith in Allah, “With gratitude and thanks to Allah, we learned to push through things.”

Mr. Yoniss also used another term that was of relevance. He described the exodus and migration of Iraqis as *zahif*. The word means a slow and unbearable crawl on one’s stomach, similar to an army training exercise of crawling under barb wires. *Zahif* describes a painstaking slow movement. The word *zahif* also implies heaviness, like a person dragging himself/herself to a certain destination. Mr. Yoniss’ used the word eloquently to illustrate his love for Iraq and the pain associated with leaving it. In summary, a strong attachment to his country provided impetus to cope with the horrors of war and remain in Iraq. His nationalism gave him inner strength to cope and adapt to horrific war circumstances and redefine them as “normal.”

4.10.3 Theme #3: Finding purpose and making contributions

There was one more theme that emerged from Mr. Yoniss’ narrative. It pertained to his desire for making a contribution. From an early age, he aspired to study dentistry or medicine. He envisioned completing his studies in Iraq and working there after. The war caused many delays in his pursuits. Since his family had relocated various times in Iraq for safety concerns, he hadn’t been able to maintain his school work. He’d also had to decline his admission to a medical school in Iraq due to their constant moves in the country and outside of it. Mr. Yoniss and his family drove to various countries in search of a better life including Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. The delays caused by these moves and safety problems led him to make a career change.

After they returned to Iraq from one of their migration attempts he enrolled in an engineering program. Mr. Yoniss made the decision to study an area that was of little interest to him. He did not want to wait another year before he could reapply to medical school. He didn’t want to “lose
a year of studies.” In other words, he coped with the war by keeping himself engaged in his studies even though it was not an area he was most passionate about.

Mr. Yoniss’ aspiration for pursuing his dreams played a role in his family’s choices about migrating. After arriving in Jordan with their temporary visas, Mr. Yoniss and his father travelled by car to Syria and explored the universities there. They also travelled to Egypt in the hopes of securing entrance into medical school. His family placed a significance on providing him with an education. Mr. Yoniss was able to obtain a student visa in Jordan and he pursued a dentistry program. This allowed him to remain in Jordan. His parents and siblings, however, had to return to Iraq.

Living without his immediate family in Jordan has been challenging. However, it also gave him a newfound strength: “Ghurba [being estranged] makes you stronger, I learned patience, I learned many things, I gained many life experiences.” Ultimately, the main factor that continued to give him patience and strength was his long term vision for making a contribution in an area of study.

Succeeding in school was his foremost focus. Mr. Yoniss remained focused on his “main goal in life.” His “mission” in Jordan was to complete his studies there and find work in his field. He hoped that such a mission would lead him to a settled and established life. He used the word “istikrar,” which means stability or feeling settled in Arabic. He did not enjoy such a feeling in Jordan. There was no guarantee that his student visa would be extended.

Lacking stability has also impacted him on a practical level. He did not bring all his personal belongings to Jordan. His personal belongings were scattered in different countries: some were still in Iraq, other items were with him, and others were shipped to relatives living in the Gulf
States. He coped with these frustrations and challenges by maintaining his focus on his life’s purpose:

No one really knows what will happen. But I have to keep on marching. The most important thing is my dream to go back to Iraq, to go back and serve my country… I wish that something good happens for Iraq, and hope that I continue with my schooling. And I wish that I can go back and contribute to my country. I hope that something really good happens for Iraq. That is a big wish for me. I want things to happen to Iraq so it becomes even better than before. I want Iraq to become even stronger. Inshallah [God willing]. [Italics added]

His determination to continue “marching on” and adapting to life in Jordan was part of his bigger vision of making contributions in life.

Mr. Yoniss continued to focus his attention on his schooling in Jordan. This also helped him deal with living in estrangement or ghurba. He wished that Iraqis would regain the normal life they had prior to the war. Mr. Yoniss wanted people around the world to know that Iraqis “did not ask” for the war. He refutes the idea that the war “saved” Iraqis. This was the case despite living under the dictatorship of Saddam. The injustice he felt from the fate that Iraqis faced strengthened his conviction for finding his purpose in life, hoping to one day make a contribution in Iraq. This continued to propel him to adapt to life in Jordan.

4.11 Mr. Hassan’s narrative

4.11.1 Theme #1: Leaving the motherland

A main theme in Mr. Hassan’s story of war and migration revolved around his deep connection to Iraq. He described Iraq as a mother that “feels you” and “takes care of you.” Even though this mother caused him pain, he held an unwavering love for her. His love for mother Iraq helped him cope with the onslaught of the 2003 war. His attachment to and love for Iraq led
him to continually postpone the decision to leave the country. Mr. Hassan lived through the escalation of the war for four years before leaving.

Mr. Hassan described his experience of the escalations in the motherland with metaphors. One metaphor he used described Iraqis as “trapped rats.” When a rat is trapped in a cage it looks for any opening from which to escape. After escaping, however, the rat may experience confusion and disorientation and this may eventually lead to its death. At best, Mr. Hassan felt that the newfound freedom may lead it to “fall into something unpleasant.” Iraqis were trapped under Saddam Hussein’s regime. After his oppressive reign was toppled, Iraqis found themselves living in greater danger and restriction. Mr. Hassan explained, “It is true that we got rid of the oppression and injustices of Saddam, but we gained people who are going to repeat the injustices we suffered for thirty-five years.”

Mr. Hassan coped with the conditions in Iraq by feeling his loyalty to the country and facing his reality. He came to terms with the possibility of getting killed. He anticipated either dying a sudden death from a bombing or “dying a slow death” from the harsh realities in Iraq. Life there created anxiety and tensions, “Something was tightening and suffocating you in Iraq with the passing of every day.” He regularly witnessed bloodshed: “Imagine that it is you, and I bring you to a place that has an explosion and you see corpses flying everywhere, do you think you will be able to sleep at night and put up with it?” He barely felt alive in Iraq. Mr. Hassan lost his joy and motivation, “You stop thinking about living for anything.” However, that wasn’t a strong enough impetus to leave Iraq.

Mr. Hassan kept coping with the horrors of the new Iraq because of his patriotic love. Interestingly, his political views were intertwined with his narrative. He kept in mind the malicious plans that were set to harm Iraq. The war was part of a deliberate plan to kill the Iraqi
“rooh” or spirit. Remaining in Iraq and coping with the war was his way to fight back against the malicious intents unleashed on his beloved motherland.

Unfortunately, his intent to remain in Iraq was brought to a screeching halt. His family was harmed. His mother was purposefully run over by a car near her home. His sister’s fate was even worse. She survived a bombing explosion but then faced an ill fate: “She got robbed, she got kidnapped on a bike and she got dragged in the streets.” His sister suffered severe injuries. These were amongst the barbaric scenes that Mr. Hassan witnessed in Iraq.

Mr. Hassan decided to leave after his family was directly harmed. He brought them to safety in Jordan and found appropriate medical attention for his sister. Mr. Hassan funneled all his finances into her medical treatment, which cost him over $60,000 USD during a six month period. He sold everything he had in Iraq to finance her medical treatment including his house, his store, and his car. Unfortunately, his sister died in Jordan from the severe injuries she had sustained in Iraq. Mr. Hassan made sense of her death through his religious beliefs. He accepted it as God’s will. He used the term *ajil* to describe it. *Ajil* in Islam means the fate that is written by Allah. He elaborated, “It was not written for her by Allah to live.” Mr. Hassan’s patriotic love for Iraq helped him make sense and cope with the war. However, his love for his family took precedence over his wish to remain in Iraq.

4.11.2 Theme #2: Virtues and social support protects against death by estrangement

Throughout his narrative Mr. Hassan referred to his experience of living in estrangement or *ghurba*. He used various Iraqi idioms and proverbs to describe it. These linguistic expressions helped him make sense of his experiences. One of the idioms he used was, “You give up a thousand eyes sometimes to save one.” It is a cultural idiom that makes sense of loss.
Implicit within this idiom is the notion of acceptance. Mr. Hassan suffered many losses as a result of the war including the loss of his sister, his house, his business, as well as endless financial losses. Mr. Hassan elaborated on his biggest loss after leaving Iraq:

The first loss is that you lose yourself, your soul, your naﬁs or spirit. The person who is born in a country and goes to another one, they leave their soul in their country. Your body comes to the new country, just physical body. Your soul stays in the country you are from. He was able to cope with these losses by accepting them as part of his life and choices. He also described acceptance as the precursor to another virtue that helped him deal with hardships: patience. It helped him adapt to living in estrangement or ghurba and not “collapse” from the distress he went through. Patience, then in turn, fueled his ability to further accept his reality.

Acceptance also played a role in facing his mortality. He accepted the fact that he may not make it out of Iraq alive. Acceptance helped him overcome the fears associated with living in a war zone. Confronting his own mortality gave him new convictions and inner strength to continue journeying through life and adapt to its changes.

Mr. Hassan used another idiom to express his perspective on life. It was an idiom that compared his current demanding situation to the more difficult past, “What brings you something bitter is more bitter than the new situation.” In other words, the bitter tragedies that happened to him in Iraq brought him to a new life in Jordan. His bitter war experiences far exceeded any bitter experiences related to his migration and resettlement in a new country.

Mr. Hassan felt that some readers may not fully understand his perspective. Our Western understanding of mental health does not take into account Iraqis ability to adapt and cope. He felt that in the West we easily resort to psychiatry for medication to try to alleviate suffering and emotional pain, and that people in the West have a different threshold for pain. He also believed
that most people in developed countries have enjoyed a life that is peaceful, comfortable, just, safe, and secure. On the other hand, Iraqis have experienced over three decades of war and hardships. Mr. Hassan felt that this gave Iraqis an advantage. It honed their ability to deal with life’s catastrophes.

Mr. Hassan used the metaphor of an architect to further illustrate his thoughts. Unlike people in the developed world, Iraqis have had limited opportunities to create their own future. In the West, on the other hand, people have more prospects to build their dreams. They have the freedom and opportunity to plan their life, “Their life is exactly like how an architect draws out plans for a building, a building for fifty floors has to have a certain foundation.” Iraqis have lacked the foundation on which to build their dreams. Individuals in developed countries also have privileges that many Iraqis can only wish for. Mr. Hassan dreamt of having a passport from a nationality that would allow him to travel anywhere. Unfortunately, most Iraqis only experienced hardships in their life’s journeys.

He used another metaphor to further demonstrate his point. It was the metaphor of living in a jungle. Iraqis were afraid of wildlife and tried to stay away from all jungles. However, the war parachuted them down into a jungle infested with all forms of deadly and predatory animals. Once Iraqis found themselves in it, their survival instincts kicked in: “At any moment a lion may jump at you but you find it in yourself to deal with it and overcome it, the lion would either eat you or you get out of it.” Mr. Hassan felt that these tragic experiences of Iraqis gave rise to their coping ability and that differentiates them from other nationalities in the developed world. As a point of clarity, Mr. Hassan may come across to the reader as stereotyping people in the West. However, his intent was to illustrate the extent to which Iraqis have suffered and how that in turn fostered in them their ability to cope.
Living in estrangement or *ghurba* also presented Iraqis with challenges. Mr. Hassan felt restricted in Jordan. He had an interest to travel in Jordan and explore the country. However, he feared coming across police check points while driving in the country’s highways. His visitor visa had expired and he did not have any legal status. His fears also influenced the way he interacted with people in Jordan, especially with women. He worried that interactions may bring him unwanted attention. Some Jordanians viewed Iraqis negatively. They saw them as the “swine flu,” draining the country’s resources and threatening their livelihood.

How did Mr. Hassan deal with these circumstances? He relied on a commonly used adage from the Quran, “Oh you stranger be polite.” He explained:

I am forced to respect them here, even if they wrong me, and press into my guts, I still have to respect them. Why? Well, because if I respond back, then they ask me to leave their country. And that will force me to go back to Iraq, and going back to Iraq will just destroy my life.

He coped with his circumstances by accepting them and remaining “polite” regardless of how unjust they were. For instance, he was afraid of questioning the quality of medical attention his sister received. Mr. Hassan held himself back from arguing and expressing his thoughts with one of the doctors. He reminded himself that he was a stranger who had to be polite. In other words, cultural and religious values influenced his ability to cope and make sense of his experiences in Jordan.

Mr. Hassan also managed the challenges of living in estrangement or *ghurba* through social support. He credited family and friends for their help in nurturing his patience. As mentioned earlier, patience was viewed as a virtue that eases stress and suffering. It was nurtured through conversations he had with other Iraqis about their situations. Specifically, patience was
exchanged by intentionally offering kind words, listening to each others’ stories, and bearing witness to their suffering. These conversations left them feeling supported. He elaborated:

…it is not just me, I have many friends that complain of their problems but what can we do, we just have to offer patience to them, not because I am stronger than them. It is just because we have all tasted the sting of life. If I don’t offer comfort and patience to someone and help ease their heart, then they will explode, they won’t be able to put up with their situation. And there is a problem when you reach a point of exploding internally.

Mr. Hassan developed his patience through social interactions. He actively engaged in conversations with other Iraqis in Jordan. That supported him in honing his ability to cope and construct his new reality.

However, Mr. Hassan admitted that not all Iraqis developed their patience to cope with living in estrangement or ghurba in Jordan. As a case in point, he described the peculiar situation that many Iraqis found themselves in after hearing about a recent initiative from the Iraqi government. Due to the mass exodus of Iraqis starting in 2006, the new Iraqi government developed a plan that would encourage their return to the war torn country. The Iraqi government began offering a reward worth $800 US to every Iraqi who returned to his/her hometown. Mr. Hassan explained that many Iraqis jumped at that opportunity. They lost their ability to remain patient and could no longer live in estrangement, “ghurba was just killing them.” He described many Iraqis in Jordan as slowly withering away, they were “barely alive but just breathing” in Jordan.

Mr. Hassan pronounced many Iraqis in Jordan as the living dead. Many were lifeless while living in estrangement and facing an unknown future. However, Mr. Hassan was able to cope and make sense of his circumstances. He relied on two traits, patience and acceptance. These
were honed through social interactions with other Iraqis. He also relied on cultural idioms and religious values to enhance his ability to cope and make sense of his life.

4.11.3 Theme #3: Hope

Hope was the third theme in Mr. Hassan’s story of war and migration. Some of his hopes were clearly stated while others were more subtle. He hoped for a better future. He remained optimistic that a country from the Western world would grant him immigration, a country where he could live without fears of interrogation and deportation. He hoped to find a country in which he could enjoy its opportunities and freedoms.

Mr. Hassan made an application to the United Nations offices in Amman. As with many Iraqis, he went through the application process and waited for a better life. Mr. Hassan explained:

The day will come when I can go to a place that I want. That is why you see so many Iraqis just hanging on to the UN. They hang on to the UN because there will come a day that they will help you get to another country, from one that does not have freedoms to one that has freedoms.

Hope rejuvenated his ability to cope with his circumstances in Jordan.

Mr. Hassan also made a call to the humanity in us all to remember the story of Iraq. Iraq was one of the richest countries in the world which became an epicenter of restriction and distress. The plight and persecution of Iraqis should not be forgotten by humanity. Mr. Hassan poetically stated that Iraqis “are not persecuted by people, not persecuted by police, Iraqis are persecuted by humanity.” They have become the forgotten ones. He hoped that the voices of Iraqis will be heard and their stories honored. In fact, this was his main motivation for participating in this
At the end of the interview, Mr. Hassan stated, “This is the most important thing that you are working for the sake of humanity, regardless of whether you are Iraqi or Canadian.”

There was universality in his narrative around the human condition. He called for our awakening to this universality. He poignantly reminds us, “As a human you have the seed of love inside of you.” The seed of his love was not shattered by the crushing realities of war and migration. On the contrary, he hoped that his story would inspire future generations, who in turn could make contributions to the world.

He particularly hoped that his choices would lead his children to a better life. Mr. Hassan continued to make sacrifices for them. He aspired to maintain his heritage and pass on its wisdom and knowledge to his children, which he acquired from his parents. His vision for providing a better life was based on his hope to secure a country they can immigrate to. He spoke about the significance of this through his use of the Arabic word *istikrar*, meaning feeling settled and established. Once *istikrar* occurs, a new chapter can begin. The value he placed on getting established was so immense that he would even accept migration to the United States, the country that brought on the onslaught of war:

…no one knows how long we will each live, no one knows that, but if you can at least live for a year or two in peace, safety and security, then this would make it all worthwhile. And maybe you can pass this on to the next generation. You can tell the next generation that I came to America and made it there, that America gave me everything, America respected me, America embraced me, America gave me everything.

Humanity can even be found with the enemy. Hope for a better future overshadowed the past and it brought humanity to the forefront.
The final hope that Mr. Hassan shared was related to his extended family. While most of them were still in Iraq, some were scattered around the world as they took the first immigration opportunity they received. He hoped to reunite with all his extended family and live again in the same country. Family unity was part of his definition of happiness, “happiness comes from being able to live amongst your family.”

In summary, there were various hopes in Mr. Hassan’s narrative. Despite living without legal visa documents in Jordan, his hopes kept him ahead of the stressors of life. It eased his distress and helped him cope with life in Jordan. The devastating impact of war and migration did not crush his faith in humanity. He invited us all to awaken to the universality of the human experience.

4.12 Summary

Providing a summary of the findings from all the narratives is one way to close this chapter. However, no summary can truly be elegant enough to capture the stories of these courageous people. No summary can be written with enough profoundness to honor their voices. Therefore, this chapter will conclude with some of my personal hopes and prayers.
May humanity grant all the participants in this research their dreams and hearts’ wishes.

May their suffering and sacrifices not be in vain.

May they find a better life.

May Iraqis feel seen, witnessed, and heard.

May we all be left with a new awareness, appreciation, respect, and perspective on the Iraqi story.

May the immigration policies of countries open their gates for those who have lost their homelands.

May all who have suffered from wars find a resting ground.

May new immigrants flourish in their new homes.

May they make the contributions that they aspire for.

May safety and comfort blanket those who are still living in war zones and with violence.

May hope give them strength and inspiration to carry on.

May humanity face the horrors of all who have suffered.

May the seed of love permeate through the rigid boundaries that exist between people, nations, races, religions, and cultures.

May we all find peace within ourselves and nurture those who are less fortunate.
5 Chapter: Discussion

This study investigates the research question “what are the experiences of coping and adaptation of Iraqi refugees and exiles living in Jordan.” Now that I have shared and examined the narratives of the ten participants, my focus will turn towards a discussion of these findings. This discussion will commence by exploring those findings that fit with the literature discussed in chapter two. I will follow this with a discussion of the limitations in this study. Then, I will provide implications for counselling psychology and future research. Finally, I will end this chapter by re-examining the role of the researcher and will offer final remarks.

5.1 Fit with the literature

In chapter two, I cited a number of theoretical models and research studies. In chapter four, I examined the narratives of the participants by using a thematic analysis and capturing three themes within each individual participant story. In this chapter I will be examining how these findings fit with the literature by looking at the common themes amongst all ten participants. Before these common themes are provided, I would like to comment on the methodology used in this study

I used narrative inquiry as a means to give voice to Iraqis who have lived through war and migrated to Jordan. By giving voice to their experiences, this method became collaborative in nature. Indeed, narrative methodology is “collaborative research,” as feminist scholars propose (Overcach, 2003). It attempts to create equal power distribution between the researcher and participants. Participants in this study felt a sense of empowerment from sharing their stories and having their voices heard. Most of the participants expressed feeling uplifted at the end of the research interview. They felt heard. They felt that their story mattered. Mattering is a concept
that addresses the issue of exclusion (Poehnell & Amundson, 2011). Many Iraqis in Jordan feel excluded in *ghurba* or estrangement. Mattering, on the other hand, helps people feel connected. It helps them feel better about themselves and their own sense of agency (Amundson, 2009).

Through the use of narrative inquiry the participants felt that someone was interested in their lives. Several participants also expressed their surprise at the usefulness they felt in telling their story. It helped them make some sense of their tragedies and experiences. They felt validated. This was a key objective in this research: giving voice and honoring the participants’ stories. Therefore, the findings indicate that narrative inquiry served its function in this project.

I will now turn to the themes that were woven amongst all the narratives. I have identified three common themes between the ten narratives, which I will use as the foundation for discussing their fit with the literature. The three themes are: 1) the role of religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions; 2) strength that is born out of war and from being an Iraqi; and 3) finding purpose and making a contribution.

### 5.1.1 Role of religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions

Religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions permeated the narratives of the participants. They played a key role in the participants’ ability to make sense of their experiences and to continue to endure the challenges of life in Jordan. Firstly, I would like to discuss a brief summary of their current challenges. This will be helpful in understanding the significance that religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions played in managing these challenges.

Only one of the ten participants had enough capital to obtain a business visa in Jordan. All of the remaining participants lived with an unknown future. They lacked *istkrar* or stability. They felt unsettled. Their future was uncertain and murky. Some feared getting caught by authorities without any paperwork, others worried that their temporary visas would no longer be extended.
They constantly faced fears of having to return to their war torn country. Most of them left Iraq due to personal threats to their safety.

Jordan has become a safe shelter for many of the participants as they await a better life. They hope to secure immigration to a country that can harbor them. Particularly, they hope to migrate to a developed country in the Western world. Until then however, they are left with a deep sense of uncertainty. This has been shown in the literature to impact people’s lives. Schlossberg (1981) describes the impact that uncertainty has on people’s adaptation to transition. She argues that uncertainty causes the highest degree of distress and negative emotions while in transition. This was certainly the case with the participants in this study.

Lacking certainty held some participants back from going through the transition of leaving their country. Considering Bridges (2001) model of transition, the majority of Iraqis are in the “neutral zone.” They began letting go of their country but their future still remains unforeseeable. Bridges describes this stage as the wilderness. Interestingly, one of the participants described living in ghurba or estrangement using the metaphor of a jungle. He felt thrown into a jungle filled with predatory animals lurking about. What then gave Iraqis the strength to cope and adapt to their transition?

Religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions played a vital role in their meaning-making and coping capacity. These helped the participants make sense of their struggles, both in Iraq and with the current challenges in Jordan. Religious beliefs permeated their mental schema and offered them linguistic tools for coping with their struggles. Most participants referred to the role that God or Allah played in their current state. Various words were used to describe their belief that the trials and tribulations of life were handed to them by the Almighty, such as kismet,
qadar, and naseeb. All of these words describe the fate that Allah bestows on people. A good Muslim, then, is someone who doesn’t question his/her fate.

Religious beliefs led most participants to a degree of acceptance. Acceptance gave them the strength to adapt to their current life. It helped them cope with their losses and with their horrific war experiences, whether kidnapping or the witnessing of brutalities. Kubler-Ross (1969) suggests that acceptance is the last stage in grieving a loss. This might be the case with some Iraqis. However, most of the participants felt acceptance while continuing to mourn and grieve their losses. In other words, acceptance was not the final stage of their grieving process. They continued to grieve and mourn their biggest loss, the loss of their motherland.

Despite their losses, many found ways to remain grateful. They expressed deep gratitude to Allah or God. They felt fortunate that their lives were spared by Him while others died or did not get a chance to leave Iraq. Gratitude brought them comfort and acceptance. Many of the participants remained grateful as they expressed in one way or another how their suffering will not go unnoticed by Allah. Their suffering will either be rewarded in this life by “opening doors” for migration and work opportunities, or at worst, they will be rewarded in the afterlife.

Bridges (2001) argues that transition does play a spiritual function in people’s lives. However, he encourages the reader to think beyond religion. His use of “spirituality and the Sacred” may be useful in a Western context. However, it did not necessarily apply to the Iraqi participants, as religious beliefs are part of their language and linguistic expressions. In this study, religion played a key role in participants’ ability to manage their transition and make sense of their new reality.

Religion and its linguistic influences on Iraqi dialect were even present in participants who did not practice the daily rituals of Islam. Religious beliefs have permeated the Iraqi culture and
become intertwined with language. From a social constructionist perspective, it is language that has given people the tools for creating and making sense of their war and migration realities. In order to make sense of their reality, participants in the study tapped into their belief systems through language. These religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions served the function of giving them tools for making meaning out of their experiences.

Carver et al. (1989) suggest that individuals turn to religion as a coping response to stressful events. They also acknowledge the role that acceptance of one’s reality plays on the ability to cope with stressful situations. However, in the coping literature, religious coping has received little attention until recently. Religious coping is now becoming an area of interest in the literature, even to the extent of becoming “one of the most fertile areas for theoretical consideration and empirical research” (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 759). Nevertheless, the field of coping could benefit from exploring a wider phenomenon: the influence that religion plays on the linguistic expression and cultural beliefs of a people. This phenomenon extends beyond the active form of coping by including religion, such as performing prayer during a missile bombardment. It also extends beyond regular involvement in religious practices, such as attending mosques even before the stressful events of war occurred.

Religious beliefs and their linguistic expression are part of the Iraqi culture. Thus, Iraqi culture equipped the participants with certain tools for coping with life’s challenges. This is similar to Ryan et al.’s (2008) description of the cultural resource in their Resource-Based Model for understanding refugees’ well-being and adaptation. Ryan et al. consider culture as an internal resource or toolkit. For the Iraqi participants in this study, their cultural resources were the greatest contributors to their ability to cope with war and migration. In other words, individuals
that are able to access and use these resources to make sense of their war experiences may adjust better to life in transition.

5.1.2 Strength born out of war and from being an Iraqi

Another theme that permeated the narratives of most participants was the strength that they gained from their experiences. Living through horrific war experiences gave rise to a newfound strength. Having survived those experiences gave them a sense of agency and self-control over their lives. As Herman (1992) suggests, trauma overwhelms people’s adaptation to life as they lose a sense of control.

The work of Kira et al. (2006b) with Iraqi refugees in Michigan suggests that regaining a sense of control is a key part of recovery and healing from war experiences. This was consistent with the findings in this study. Many of the participants in this study described a greater sense of responsibility and accountability since going through their war and migration experiences. Many of the participants felt a sense of urgency in making their lives work while in transition. This was the case regardless of whether or not they had children to take care of. Waxman (2001) proposes that the sheer survival from war trauma, as he witnessed with refugees in Australia, brought them a new source of confidence-building and self-reliance. Iraqis in this study gained a greater sense of agency and self-reliance as a result of their experiences.

Kira et al. (2006b) also found an association between regaining self-control and posttraumatic growth. They found that regaining control was a predictive factor for positive attitudes leading to posttraumatic growth. Many factors could support people in regaining control and enhancing their self-reliance. The findings from this study suggest that one of the ways in which the participants regained a sense of control was by recounting the momentous challenges they had experienced. Through trials and tribulations they managed to find their way out of the
blood-filled furnace that was Iraq. They faced death and confronted their own mortality. They witnessed horrors, brutality, and savagery. They also managed to cope on a daily basis while living under extreme war conditions. Life was full of hardships and void of any enjoyment. Living through these hardships gave birth to a new level of inner strength, confidence, and self-reliance. Their strength was “battle tested,” as one of the participants stated.

Recounting their experiences helped Iraqis cope and manage with their experiences. This research offered them the opportunity to share their stories. However, this was not the only venue that Iraqis had for telling their stories. Social support while in Iraq and then in Jordan was the main venue in which they exchanged their stories and recounted their experiences. For instance, many participants spoke about the strength they felt from visiting family or being visited by them after violent clashes in their areas.

Having social networks and social support was part of the Iraqi cultural fabric. Many of the participants also focused on rebuilding their social support after arriving in Jordan. Since Jordan had a large Iraqi community, they had many opportunities to build new contacts. This helped them cope better with their transition. In other words, social support provided a “buffering” effect to the experience of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In chapter four, I proposed the term “social nourishment” to describe the role that social support played for Iraqis.

Social nourishment was a powerful effect of social support. It nourished the participants’ well-being and psychological health. Social nourishment was transmitted through the social and linguistic interactions between people. Social nourishment also inspired their hopes. Hope was present in all their stories.

Amundson (2003) indicates that hope brings people a willingness to look beyond their current circumstances. He suggests that is not static, but “it is a call to action, to go forward even
in times when the outcome is not certain” (p. 154). Most of the participants lived in uncertainty but took action in the hopes for creating a better life. Social support provided them with the opportunity to nurture their hope and gain strength in coping with their lives.

The findings from this study also fit with the concepts of posttraumatic growth and adversarial growth. Both Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998) and Joseph and Linley (2006) argue that people who face traumatic experiences undergo a change in the way they perceive themselves and their philosophy in life. Having experienced war and hardship in Iraq, most participants expressed gaining new perspective on life and death, with a greater sense of appreciation for what they have. They gained new perspectives that helped them to deal with the challenges of their current circumstances.

Many of the participants spoke about being unfazed by their circumstances in Jordan. Despite the high levels of distress and frustrations associated with their uncertain future, most participants resorted to comparing their current life to the hardships in Iraq. This continues to be a source of comfort. They often explained that the witnessing of death made them appreciate life. They learned to manage through the most extenuating circumstances in Iraq, which paled in comparison to the problems they had in Jordan. This gave them further strength to cope.

The term “learned adaptation” may be a way to describe this inner strength that develops in those who survive their experiences of war and migration. Participants learned to adapt to the most trying circumstances in Iraq. Learned adaptation may be viewed as an inner psychological muscle that develops during times of war. This psychological muscle can then be used adapt to the challenges of migration and resettlement. In other words, learning to adapt to life in a war zone may pave the way for adapting to a postwar life.
Learned adaptation is a concept that may be useful to describe the various forms of coping behaviors and processes which individuals engage in. As Skinner et al. (2003) suggest, coping goes beyond specific observable behaviors. Instead, coping can be better understood as an “organizational construct” that encompasses various variables (p. 217). Therefore, learned adaptation is an organizational construct that can help us understand the way people make meaning and cope with their war experiences.

Another term introduced earlier to describe the strength that many participants alluded to was the notion of “collective resilience”, which described the associations that participants made with their national identity. Collective resilience may encapsulate the various complex dimensions that make up this identity including historical, religious, geographical, ideological, and cultural influences.

The participants spoke of the uniqueness of their national identity. They associated it with strength and an indomitable spirit. In recent history, it is a nationality that has evolved through decades of war, hardships, and dictatorship. The reality of modern day Iraq has given birth to a sturdy national identity that the participants associated with. This helped them cope and make sense of their experiences. Thus, their Iraqi identity has served as a psychological shield for coping with their traumatic experiences of war and migration.

5.1.3 Finding purpose and making a contribution

A third common theme amongst most participants pertained to finding their purpose and making a contribution. This was associated with finding work for most of them. It reconnected them with their chosen professions, leading some to rediscover the purpose they had lost in life. Some viewed employment as critical for creating a better life for their families. Employment brought sources of income. This allowed them to give their children a better life and provided
them opportunities to enjoy the newfound freedoms in Jordan. Some cherished their capacity to buy toys or sweets for their children. Employment also meant they could support their children in pursuing higher education. Education was highly valued by all the participants.

In addition, some participants viewed employment as a means for surviving their current stay in Jordan. The money generated from work allowed them to cover their living expenses. This also allowed them to extend their stay in Jordan, especially since most of the participants did not have any long term visa arrangements. Prolonging their stay in Jordan meant buying time for extending their hopes of finding immigration opportunities to a developed Western country.

Employment also served other functions. It supported them in rebuilding their lives from the losses they had suffered. Some lost loved ones while all of the participants suffered financial losses. They also experienced the loss of their homeland. However, as indicated by Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe (2007), bereavement literature suggests that people have the capacity to recover from their losses. The Iraqi participants in this study were not an exception to that research as they exhibited this capacity as well. The participants looked for employment as a means for overcoming their losses.

One participant stated clearly that he was working towards regaining the life he had in Iraq. He specifically mentioned his goal of rebuilding the conveniences he had lost, including affording a car and beginning to save money to buy a house in the future. Employment also played a role in the grieving process of Iraqi refugees and exiles in Jordan. It offered them a venue to engage in “restoration-orientation” (Stroebe and Schut, 1999). While Stroebe and Schut use the term to describe the tasks that a person engages in during the days after the deceased has passed, it can be used here to describe how Iraqis engaged in the restoration of life during their postwar migration. The participants engaged in restoration-orientation tasks to deal with the
losses inherent in living in estrangement or *ghurba*. They made arrangements to organize their life, such as finding appropriate housing. They also dealt with social interactions, legal issues, and developed a new perspective of life outside of their country and without most of their families.

Other findings also fit with Strobe and Schut’s (1999) concept of restoration-orientation. In their Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement, they describe the emotions that people often face while engaging in restoration-orientation coping. These fit with the emotions that some participants expressed: sense of pride, relief for mastering new skills, and finding the courage for being in a new space. Strobe and Schut also propose that people feel fears, anxiety, and despair. While fear and anxiety were prevalent, despair was less apparent with the participants. In short, employment provided most of the participants in this study with a platform to mourn and grieve the losses they had endured.

The theme of employment and finding purpose was also expressed in other ways. Some of the participants viewed employment as a venue for personal and professional growth; others viewed it as a tool for leaving a legacy behind. Furthermore, some participants understood employment as an extension of their cultural and religious beliefs of doing good work on earth. Employment allowed them to make a visible contribution. Their good work then had the potential of being rewarded in the afterlife.

Employment also served the function of providing continuity in their lives. It provided them with a sense of stability, which they craved. As mentioned earlier, lack of stability or *istkraa* was a main source of distress for the participants. Employment distracted many from that distress. This was the case even with those working without legal paperwork. Their employment also
distracted them from thinking about Iraq and their losses, which helped them better cope with their experiences.

The theme of finding purpose and making a contribution through employment played a prominent role in helping them navigate through their transitions. This supports Bridges’ argument that transition “renews us” (2001, p. 43). Transition, according to Bridges, “reorients you so that you can mobilize your energy to deal successfully with your new situation – whether it is a ‘good’ one or a ‘bad’ one doesn’t matter” (p. 33). The transition into Jordan gave most participants a newfound energy. For instance, one of the participants was thrilled to rediscover his lost love and passion for medicine. A number of participants also found their way into Jordanian universities. One participant stated that his main objective in life while in Jordan was to complete his studies. In short, finding purpose and making a contribution through employment were common themes that helped participants cope and make sense of their experiences.

5.2 Limitations

This study has provided a rich context for understanding the Iraqi experience of war and migration to Jordan. However, the study is not without its limitations. The reader needs to be aware of these limitations in order to make the best use of the information provided. The first limitation pertains to the selection procedure of participants. Convenient sampling was used due to problems in finding participants that would respond to recruitment flyers. The rationale for the use of convenient sampling was fully outlined in chapter three. The sample was not fully representative of Iraqi refugees and exiles living in Jordan.

This research also did not start with the intention of proving generalizable findings. That is the domain and advantage of quantitative methods that use large random sampling. This was not the case here, as this study was a narrative inquiry involving ten narratives. Often in research the
criteria that were developed for measuring validity and reliability are imposed on qualitative inquiry. Readers are cautioned away from using those criteria in evaluating this research.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us through their work that narrative methods are a fluid kind of inquiry that challenge the usual assumptions of representation. Instead, they propose that narrative inquiry offers authenticity, plausibility, and adequacy.

Instead of generalizability, the notion of transferability is more appropriate for this narrative inquiry. Readers are encouraged to take responsibility in transferring the findings from this study to other settings or context. It may be more appropriate to transfer the general concepts instead of specific findings.

Another limitation relates to the researcher. As indicated before, my background and worldview have influenced the writing of the findings. However, I approached this study with “wakefulness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Wakefulness serves a function, it “allows us to proceed forward with a constant, alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters” (p. 182). I have done my best to remain wakeful in writing this study. As discussed in chapter three, I followed a “case-centered” approach to the analysis process. It guided my attention back to each narrative whenever I began indulging in the expression of my opinions in the narratives. Remaining wakeful allowed me to maintain the voices of each participant at the forefront.

A final limitation in this study pertains to the gender of the participants. The original intent was to interview Iraqis from both genders in order to give voice to men and women. However, only men were interviewed as it was more culturally appropriate given my gender. In other words, an important limitation in this study is that it did not give voice to Iraqi women who
experienced war and migration. The findings may have been different had there been an equal representation of both genders.

5.3 Implications for counselling psychology

What did the Iraqi refugees and exiles in this study need the most for healing and recovery from their experiences? Being a registered counsellor, my initial inclination some years ago would have leaned towards a simple affirmation of the need for therapeutic intervention. Now, however, I realize that I have been influenced by Western paradigms of mental health. These paradigms were mostly developed without taking into account people of non-Western cultures and the ways they make meaning of their experiences.

I am not suggesting here that Iraqi refugees and exiles have not experienced severe PTSD or other challenges. Such a suggestion would be irresponsible. On the contrary, like any human on earth, they have experienced natural reactions to the severe and abnormal conditions of war. What I am proposing here instead is that as professionals we should not jump at the opportunity to superimpose our own relevance and expertise to “fix” and heal people from other cultures. Such a perspective does not honor nor take into account their cultural context. It also does not account for the way in which people make meaning out of their experiences. In fact, one of the participants specifically spoke about the misunderstandings that arise from Western mental health paradigms. He could not relate to the idea of having a psychiatrist prescribe him pills for healing his psychological wounds. There is a large degree of stigma present in Iraqi culture for those who require mental health support. They are viewed as “crazy,” which has endless negative implications on a person’s life in Iraqi culture, such as limiting their chances of marriage.

A different approach may be more useful in helping Iraqi exiles and refugees deal with their experiences. The Iraqis in this study had more pressing needs than counselling or therapy. They
needed resources to support their adaptation and transition. This is what Ryan et al. (2008) refer to as “migrant adaptation” (p. 7). They describe it as a process of satisfying needs, pursuing goals, and managing the demands of life. Iraqis in this study have expressed the greatest degree of distress relating to their unknown future. They need to feel settled in a country. They need a permanent visa status either in Jordan or in another country. They need countries in the developed world to open their doors of immigration. Most Iraqis are yearning to make contributions and excel wherever the opportunity arises. Thus, the field of counselling psychology can take an advocacy role that can provide Iraqis with opportunities.

An important implication for counselling psychology then is to promote social justice. It brings to the forefront the belief that all people have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of societal resources (Vera & Speight, 2003). Social justice brings awareness to the notions of liberty, equality, voice, and sharing power (Toporek et al., 2005). For instance, McInerney and Kaye’s (2006) research with asylum seekers from the Middle East to the Australia is a case in point. Their work advocates for changes in both psychological treatments and governmental policies that are exclusionary and depersonalizing. They conclude their work with telling statements:

Ethical and non-iatrogenic policy demands its replacement by a policy of inclusiveness, acceptance of cultural diversity and social justice. The last word belongs to an asylum seeker: ‘…you take us as a hostage in here…You didn’t kill us with a gun, because you can’t. Now you are killing us with your politics’. (p. 183)

The Iraqi participants in this study suffered the most in Jordan from the instability they felt due to their visa status. We can play an active role in creating systemic change in governmental and organizational domains. As professionals in our countries of practice, we can advocate for
softening of immigration restrictions for Iraqi refugees. We can advocate for the development of programs that assist new immigrants through the transition process by taking into account their cultural context and supporting their communities. We also need to keep in mind the degree in which healing occurs in a community. The participants in this study often spoke about the healing power of being treated as a human being, with kindness, hospitality, and gracious warmth. These values spoke to their cultural and religious beliefs. They also wanted to feel understood and valued.

Programs can also be developed to support Iraqis in finding work. Most of the participants spoke about the relevant role that employment played in their adaptation. Iraqis in Jordan need support in finding work. Career counselling may also be relevant to support people through transitions and assist them in making adjustments to their new countries. This could mean supporting the development of new skills and their return to school. Iraqis may also need support in completing the various applications and navigating various bureaucracies. For instance, some may seek equivalency for their degrees or professional licenses and would need support in locating the appropriate institutions and associations.

Iraqis in Jordan also need financial support. Most of the participants spoke of financial hardships that they suffered. They wished that they had support to help them manage their transitions. They needed an organization that could have provided them with loans to manage daily living expenses until they began rebuilding the lives that they have lost.

Lastly, mental health workers and the field of counselling psychology in general need to keep in mind the significance of hope when working with Iraqi refugees. Most of the participants spoke about hope and the strength that it gave them to march forward in life. Mental health professionals are encouraged to use a counselling model with this population that allows them
space to share their story. The participants in this study spoke about the healing power of telling their story, and the appreciated feeling that they mattered. It may also be vital for mental health professionals to use a counselling model that fosters hope, self-agency, and empowerment. One such model is Solution Focused Brief Therapy (Berg & de Shazer, 1993; de Shazer, 1982, 1985). It is a strength-based model that was founded on the belief that people have the knowledge and resiliency to resolve their own problems (Trepper, Dolan, & McCollum, 2006). It is an approach that explores peoples’ resources and future hopes (Iveson, 2002).

5.4 Future Research

This study only gave voice to Iraqi men. Future research on Iraqi women’s experiences of war and migration can provide a fuller understanding of the Iraqi context. Researchers need to be aware of gender issues when interviewing participants. A female researcher speaking the Iraqi dialect would be most appropriate for working with Iraqi women. A female researcher accompanied by a female translator would be fitting as well.

Future research can also examine the role of employment in the refugee experience. This study did not seek to investigate the specific meaning that people make from their employment experiences. That was not part of the research question. Future research can examine the role that employment plays on the successful transitions of Iraqis in various countries. Qualitative studies may provide a rich context for understanding the cultural meaning that participants make of their employment and its implications for them.

Earlier in this chapter, a discussion was provided around the role of religious beliefs and their linguistic expressions. This phenomenon has received little to no attention in the coping literature. Future research can further investigate this phenomenon. It will offer the field a better
understanding of the collective and cross-cultural implications of coping. This will further shed light on the construction of reality that people engage in through their linguistic interactions.

Finally, future research can broaden the demographics of Iraqi participants interviewed. Perhaps, it would be helpful to hear more stories from people with different economic backgrounds. Their experiences might be different. Their ability to cope and make sense of their lives may be unique. Their voices also need to be heard.

5.5 Role of the researcher and concluding remarks

My personal story and worldview have shaped me as a researcher. They have guided me to select narrative inquiry as my research tool. I attempted to situate myself by providing a brief description of my background in chapter one. After witnessing the 1990 Gulf War on Iraq and the destruction that was unleashed, I became deeply unsettled as the drums of war began beating again more than a decade later. In early 2003 preparations were being made for the next wave of destruction in the form of “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” Even though I migrated to Canada in 1991 with my parents, the umbilical cord to my native land was not severed. My connection and love for Iraq moved me to action. This project became my own way of fighting for the cradle of my soul: Iraq.

I placed my best efforts to write in a “wakeful” way by maintaining my attention on the research question. My own story, however, has undeniably influenced the lens through which I approached this project. The path that I chose here has sought to highlight the indomitable spirit of Iraqis and Iraq.

Perhaps the use of a metaphor can further clarity my role in this research. Any piece of artwork begins before the audience appears. For instance, in theater the story begins with the physical setup of the stage, which prepares the audience for a certain experience. This may
include stage props, background music selection, and lighting effects. These preparations prime
the audience for a certain experience even before the actors appear on stage. Similarly, my own
story and worldview have set the stage for the telling of the narratives even before the
participants entered into play. My story and worldview were the invisible or etheric stage on
which the stories of the participants were set. I propose the term “etheric stage” here to bring to
the forefront the enmeshment that exists between the story of the researcher and their
participants. Narrative inquiry has gifted me with transparency by offering a stage on which I can
share my story. This project was my own way of making sense of the tragedy of Iraq and turning
it into an artful piece for the consumption of inquiring minds. This project re-ignited my dreams
for my native land, the resurrection of ancient Mesopotamia’s hanging gardens out of the ashes
of war torn Iraq.
References


Appendix A

Variables pertaining to refugee mental health
### Table 2.1 Pre-migration variables

- From rural or urban parts of a country
- Level of pre-migration trauma
- Educational background
- Social economic status
- Nature of trauma
- Gender role
- Gender
- Age

### Table 2.2 Post-migration variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-migration variables</th>
<th>Post-migration variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of time since departure from homeland</td>
<td>Nature of current accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of traumatic stress and psychopathology</td>
<td>Beliefs about mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time since resettlement in new country</td>
<td>Fear of forced repatriation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current condition of country of origin</td>
<td>English language ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member mental health status</td>
<td>Family cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of meaningful projects</td>
<td>Sense of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage of resettlement</td>
<td>Cultural values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrival as a family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2.3 Mental health and well being outcomes

- Mental health status: PTSD, Major Depressive Disorder, Anxiety, Somatization, Dissociation
- Cognitive disturbances: memory, concentration, scholastic aptitude
- Social cohesion and sense of social belonging
- Family violence/cohesion
- Level of psychological distress
- Socioeconomic self-efficacy
- Educational self-efficacy
- General health status
- Work self-efficacy
- Social integration

### Table 2.4 Systemic variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host country attitudes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of direct discrimination, exposure to negative attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social inclusion/exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee services:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of educational opportunity (e.g. language education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of psychosocial interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to meaningful employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in processing of applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of visa status and length of detention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Consent Form in English
Consent Form

Dream of the Hanging Gardens: Iraqi refugees and exiles in Jordan, their migration and adaptation experiences

Principal Investigator: Dr. Norm Amundson, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education (Telephone: 604-822-6757)

Co-Investigator: Kasim Al-Mashat, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education. (Telephone: 604-771-0579)

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Kasim Al-Mashat to complete a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the migration experiences of Iraqis who have left or were forced to leave Iraq. The aim is to discover how Iraqis living in Jordan have been surviving and adapting. Particularly, the aim of this study is to understand the adaptation experiences of Iraqis in Amman who have or had a visitor visa status in Jordan.

Study Procedures: If you choose to participate in this study you will be interviewed by the co-investigator, Kasim Al-Mashat, in Arabic about your story of adaptation to your migration experiences. You will be asked about the meaning that these experiences have for you and how you are coping with it. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The information obtained will be analyzed by the co-investigator for patterns and meanings.

The total amount of time that will be required of you to participate fully in the study is approximately 2 hours. A time and place of your convenience will be chosen for the one individual interview. If you choose to participate in this study, a demographic questionnaire will
first be administered for 5-10 minutes. Then, the interview will take about 90 minutes. At the interview, you will be asked by the co-investigator about your stories and experiences.

**Potential benefits or risk:** There are no direct risks associated with this study. Discussion of the migration experiences may cause emotional discomfort or comfort. If warranted, there will be resources and referrals provided. “First aid” counselling will be implemented, and referrals will be made if needed. The potential benefit of the study is that it will allow you to share your experiences, which could be healing and therapeutic. It may allow you to process your feelings and thoughts. This project will allow your voice to be heard and will inform the field of counselling psychology.

**Confidentiality:** Any information you provide, including digital recording and interview transcripts will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Respondents will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. While the transcribed interview data is on computer, they will be password protected. A “firewall” program, designed to prevent unauthorized access, will further add to the protection of the data. The data will be destroyed after five years. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

**Remuneration/Compensation:** In order to compensate for the cost of inconvenience, you will receive remuneration in the form of a gift. At the end of the individual interview a gift for your participation will be given, which will range in value between $10 to $15 US dollars.

**Contact for information about the study:** If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Kasim Al-Mashat at (604) 771-0579, Dr. Norm Amundson at (604) 822-6757, or his associate at Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education, Dr. Marv Westwood at (604) 822-6457.

**Contact for information about the rights of research participant:** If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.
Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your safety nor any jeopardy to access services from the community.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study. By signing below you also acknowledge you have read and understood this consent form, and been provided a copy of this consent form.

I consent/I do not consent (circle one) to participate in this study.

_______________________________________________________
Participant Signature                      Date

_______________________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant            Date
Appendix C

Consent Form in Arabic
استمرار الموافقة

حلم الجنان المعلقة: اللاجئون العراقيون في الأردن والمدنين، والهجرة وتجاربهم للتكيف

الباحث الرئيسي: الدكتور نورم مدنس، قسم التربية والأرشاد النفسي والتربيه الخاصة
(الهاتف: 604-822-6757)

الباحث المشترك: قاسم المشاط قسم التربية والأرشاد النفسي والتربيه الخاصة
(الهاتف: 604-771-0579)

إن القيام بهذا البحث هو احتفال مع معجبي هؤلاء الأشخاص الذين ليسوا بهم الأشخاص الذين تركزوا أو اضطروا على مغادرة العراق. إن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن ما بالتحديد عدد العراقيين في الأردن وتقديرهم على الحياة الجديدة. أي أن الهدف من هذه الدراسة بشكل خاص هو التعرف على خبرات العراقيين المباشرين في عمان سواء كانت لديهم تأثيرات الزوار أو لم تكن لديهم هذه التأثيرات.

إجراءات البحث: إذا تم الموافقة على المشاركة في هذا البحث عند أن سيقوم بمقابلتك قاسم المشاط للتعرف على قصتك في الغربة وتطبيقات على الحياة الجيدة. سيتم سؤالك عن معاناة هذه التجارب بالنسبة لك وكيف تمكنك التعامل معها. هذا سوف تسجل المقابلة باللغة العربية ثم يتم طبعها. أن هذه المعلومات سوف يتم تسجيلها من قبل الباحث المشاركة لمعرفة معانيها وسياقها.

إن الوقت المطلوب للمشاركة في الدراسة هو سأعتين تقريباً. هذا وسوف نختار سوية المكان والوقت المناسب لك. وفي حالة موافقتك على المشاركة، سوف تقوم تلك الأسئلة بمجرد الإجابة عليها التي قد تستغرق 5 إلى 10 دقائق وبعد ذلك تستغرق المقابلة حوالي 90 دقيقة. وفي المقابلة سوف تسائل من قبل الباحث المشاركة عن قصتك وتجاربك.

اللغات والمطارح المحبوبة: ليس هناك مخاطر متعلقة بهذه الدراسة. إن مناقشة تجارب الشخصية في الغربة قد تؤدي إلى ارتفاع نفسي أو عدم. وإذا لم يحصل ارتفاع نفسي في تلك بعض الدورات المدفوعة للاستعدادات الأولية الخاصة بالأرشاد النفسي و التي يمكن الاستعداد منها. كما يمكن أن يعتقد الشخص إلى مصادر أخرى مختلفة. إن الغواند المحبوبة لهذه الدراسة (عندما تعرض الشخص تجارب الأمور التي خاصة) هي من الممكن أن تساعد على الشفاء من المعاناة التي عاشها. و يتم
ذلك خلال عرض افكار الشخص ومشاعره. إن هذه الدراسة ستتمكن الشخص على توصيل رسالته، كما أن هذه الرسالة سوف تساهم بزيادة المعلومات في حقل الأرشاد النفسي.

سرية الدراسة: إن جميع المعلومات التي يتم الحصول عليها خلال المقابلة أو التسجيل العدي سوف تبقى سرية. كما أن جميع المستندات سوف تبين بأرقام سرية وتحفظ في درج خاص مغلق. كما أن إسماء الأشخاص المساهمين ستبقى سرية حتى بعد اتمام هذه الدراسة. وسيشمل هذا المقابلات التي يتم نقلها طباعة إلى الحاسوب والتي ستكون تحت شفرة سرية. كما أن هناك برنامج مصمم لمنع الأشخاص وغير مخولين للوصول إلى المعلومات في هذه الدراسة. هذا وإن هذه المعلومات سوف يتم اتلافها بعد خمس سنوات من انتهاء الدراسة. كما أن هوية الأشخاص المساهمين ستبقى سرية للغاية.

القواعد المالية: سيتم عرض على المشاركين هدية رمزية بمبلغ 10 إلى 15 دولاراً لمكافحتهم على اعتصامهم في الدراسة.


وسائل الأتصال حول حقوق المساهمين في الدراسة: يمكن للأشخاص الذي يشعرون بعدم الرضا حول المعاملة التي تلقاها خلال الدراسة الأتصال بمكتب المعلومات للمشاركين في البحوث في جامعة برتس كولومبيا على الرقم 8598-822 (604).

المواطنة: إن المساهمة بهذه الدراسة اختيارية كلياً. أن يكون الشخص الذي يتم الاتصال به أن يرفض المساهمة أو ينسحب من الدراسة في أي وقت يشاء، وبدون أن يكون هناك أي مس بسماطته أو إمكانية اتصاله بالخدمات المتوفرة في المنطقة. عند موافتك الإيجابية للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة، يجب أن تقوم بالتوقع على الاستمارة الخاصة بذلك أو إعطاء موافقة شفوية بعد أن تكون قد أطلعت وفهمت مضمون استمارة الموافقة.

يرجى وضع قوسين على:

أنا أوافق / أنا لا أوافق في المساهمة بهذه الدراسة.

التاريخ

توقيع المساهم

الاسم الكامل

التاريخ
Appendix D

Demographic Information Question Sheet (English)
Demographic questionnaire

1. Name: ________________________________________________

2. Age: ________________________________________________

3. Gender (male/female) __________________________________

4. Ethnicity: ____________________________________________

5. Highest educational level: ______________________________

6. Previous occupation (s) in Iraq: _________________________
   ______________________________________________________

7. Current occupation: __________________________________

8. Reasons for leaving Iraq: ______________________________
   ______________________________________________________

9. Year in which you left Iraq: __________

10. Length of time that you have been in Jordan: __________________

11. Family members living with you and other family present in Jordan:
    ______________________________________________________
Appendix E

Demographic Information Question Sheet (Arabic)
١. الاسم:__________________________________________________________

٢. العمر:__________________________________________________________

٣. الجنس (ذكر/أنثى):____________________________________________________

٤. الدين والمذهب:____________________________________________________

٥. أعلى مستوى دراسي:____________________________________________________

٦. المهنة (المهن) السابقة في العراق:____________________________________________________

٧. المهنة الحالية:____________________________________________________

٨. أسباب مغادرة العراق:____________________________________________________

٩. سنة مغادرتك من العراق:____________________________________________________

١٠. مدة وقتك في الأردن:____________________________________________________

١١. عدد أفراد العائلة معك في الأردن:____________________________________________________

١٢. عدد الأصدقاء والأقارب في الأردن (ان وجدوا):____________________________________________________