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How political migrants' networks differ from those of economic migrants: 'strategic anonymity' among Iraqi refugees in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

The study of migrant networks has led scholars to believe that political migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, utilise social networks in similar ways to economic migrants. This assumption is based on empirical investigations of South–North migration in which the Western receiving context is held constant. I argue that the utility of social networks is influenced by the reason for displacement and regional geopolitical frameworks. Like economic migrants, political migrants believe that they would benefit from networks; however, some political migrants must exercise caution in the face of potentially harmful new relationships in receiving countries. These political migrants practise *strategic anonymity* to navigate social networks. This refers to proactive acts of withholding personal information to maintain security for oneself and one's family. I rely on 30 interviews conducted between 2009 and 2010 with Iraqi refugees in Jordan displaced after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

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Introduction

Migration scholars have explained that immigrants gain access to resources through social networks, usually kinship ties, as they track patterns of labour migration and family reunification (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Ritchey 1976; Tilly and Brown 1967; Massey 1990; Gurak and Caces 1992). According to Richmond (1994) and Wahlbeck (2002), the larger empirical and theoretical emphasis on economic migrants is often transposed onto political migrants without careful consideration of the distinction between the two. When studies do investigate the social networks of political migrants, the focus remains primarily on empirical observations of South–North migration that holds the Western context constant (Valtonen 1998; Griffiths, Sigona, and Zetter 2005; Williams 2006; Larsen 2011). However, most political migration takes place between countries in the global South, referred to as South–South migration. Notably, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (the UN's leading refugee management organisation) only resettles about 1 per cent of refugees, primarily in the USA, Australia, Canada, and Nordic countries. Meanwhile, as of 2013, developing countries host 86 per cent of the world's refugees

displaced to neighbouring countries in the global South—mainly in Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey (Sherwood 2014).

In this paper, I ask: How do political migrants' networks differ from the established assumptions about economic migrants' social networks in the context of South–South migration? How do regional geopolitical frameworks influence the utility of political migrant networks? Based on interviews conducted between 2009 and 2010 with 30 Iraqi refugees displaced to Jordan following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, I find that some political migrants must exercise caution in the face of potentially dangerous new relationships in receiving countries. I argue that regional geopolitical frameworks in conjunction with the reason for displacement influence the utility of social networks. To navigate social networks, some political migrants practise what I call *strategic anonymity*, which refers to proactive acts of withholding personal information to maintain security for oneself and one's family. The reliance on strategic anonymity has a myriad of potential consequences enumerated throughout the paper that may influence theory and practice.

For some Iraqi refugees in Jordan between 2009 and 2010, social networks were a matter of life and death. Fear of harmful social network ties proved to be an important and unacknowledged factor in refugee settlement and integration. Iraqi refugees employed strategic anonymity by withholding personal information to carefully navigate social networks in order to protect themselves against the threat of refoulement (forcible return to country of origin) and threats of sectarian violence. As compared to unauthorised immigrants living in the West who may be fearful of deportation, these refugees experienced exacerbated consequences as a result of war and militia groups. For many Iraqis, sectarian threats of murder, kidnap, and maim provoked their departure and became the primary reason for displacement.

It was not only the ubiquitous conflict that has catalysed Iraqi migration, but also sectarian threats that were geared towards individuals and families by name. The personalised threats of violence made settlement and potential refoulement dangerous. As one interviewee put it, he feared that militia members would be 'waiting at the border' if he were to return to Iraq. Anonymity became a pervasive strategy for survival against the perceived negative consequences of network ties that resulted from a shared political, structural, and geographic context among Arab states. In the case of Iraqi refugees, geographic proximity contributed to an explanation of how political upheaval, a shared language, and shared cultural fluency lead to refugee isolation instead of integration.

The utility of social networks

Migration scholars have written extensively about the beneficial potential of social network ties. Starting with MacDonald and MacDonald's (1964) characterisation of chain migration, scholars argue that immigrant communities often rely on their friends and kin to gain access to resources and useful information. The pursuit of economic capital is followed by family reunification and increased migration of co-nationals (Smith 2006). Massey et al. (1998, 43) write, 'Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to various kinds of financial capital.' Migration scholars have also relied on social networks to describe several aspects of the migration process: decision to migrate, direction of migration flows, and settlement patterns (Massey et al. 1987; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hagan 1994; Koser 1997). Co-national and co-ethnic ties in addition to transnational networks have been

largely lauded as potential support systems for individual migrants (Glick Schiller 1999). Meanwhile, migrant networks and ethnic niches are said to provide social capital during the initial stages of settlement (Browning and Rodriguez 1985; Waldinger 1996).

Koser (1997) addresses the traditional distinction that categorically separates political and economic migrants. He concludes that like economic migrants, political migrants rely on their social networks when deciding to migrate, choosing their destination, and adapting to their host country. Koser's argument may apply to Iraqi refugees who hope to follow their family members to liberal Western states as explored by Griffiths, Sigona, and Zetter (2005); however, his conclusions may not apply to South–South migration. Meanwhile, Akcapar (2010) explores networks in Turkey through the experiences of Iranian immigrants and asylum seekers. Looking at Turkey as a transit country, Akcapar concludes that Iranian immigrant networks are equally important in a transit country as the literature suggests they would be in countries of final destination. However, like Koser, Akcapar takes for granted the geopolitical instability that can cross state borders between neighbouring countries in the global South. Turkey may be a distinct case from other receiving states in the global South as a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Nevertheless, the general consensus is that social networks are beneficial because they can connect people with resources.

The potential disadvantages of social networks have been largely neglected, but not completely ignored. Hagan (1998) moves beyond the short-term positive effects of social networks to understand how immigrants' social networks change over time. Hagan describes how gender becomes a primary marker that leads to disparate opportunities for incorporation. Menjivar (2000) also discusses the limitations of social networks in her study of kinship ties among Salvadorans in San Francisco. While some immigrant newcomers receive sustained assistance, other immigrants are left without support. Mahler (1995) explains the mechanisms in which competition, jealousy, and egotism shape social networks among undocumented immigrants in Long Island and Rosales (2014) discusses stagnation and exploitation between migrants and their sending community in Mexico. Most arguments that discuss the disadvantages of social networks hinge upon lost opportunities. Diminished or obstructed access to social networks characterises the disadvantages associated with network ties, but does not touch on the negative consequences that social network ties can invite.

Portes (1998, 15) famously outlined four negative consequences of social capital that apply to immigrant social networks: 'exclusion of outsiders, excess claim on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms'. For Portes, the negative aspects of social networks apply to bonding social capital associated with strong network ties or a community. The shortcomings of bridging social capital, associated with weak social ties and the creation of new social ties, remain largely unexamined with few exceptions such as Moroşanu (2013).

The limited investigation into the negative consequences of social networks may be due to the primary focus on economic migrants that overshadows the experiences of political immigrants. Theories have developed in relation to empirical observations of economic migrants and are then expanded to describe the experiences political migrants. While the designation between economic and political migration can be arbitrary if not misguided in some cases, 'there is still a need for clearly defined concepts and adequate theories that could describe the specific experiences of displacement and transnational social

relations of refugees' (Wahlbeck 2002, 222). The experiences of political migrants—refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs)—are distinctly informed by reasons of displacement, obstructed access to resources in receiving contexts, and legal or bodily insecurity characterised by the larger political situation.

Conflict-specific and receiving-specific structures

According to 2014 figures from the UNHCR, over 59.5 million people are forcibly displaced. Most forced migration affects IDPs, while 19.5 million people have become refugees (UNHCR 2015). The legal definition of a refugee is set by the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, which was updated by the 1967 Protocol that removed the geographic and temporal limitation assigned to the initial definition. A refugee is a person who

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country ... (Article 1 [A]2)

An asylum seeker is a person who is seeking refugee status. Refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs are political migrants. The term *political migrant* is often characterised by forced migration and refers to an individual who is motivated to leave his or her place of residence for political rather than economic reasons although the distinction is often convoluted (see Richmond 1993).

Refugees and IDPs face many of the same challenges, but IDPs are left without the support of most international intervention that is made available to refugees. For Barutciski (1998, 12), the critical distinction between refugees and IDPs, despite similarities in human rights abuses, is that 'being outside their country, refugees are in a fundamentally different situation according to the international legal order'. The legal definition differentiates between these two groups, but it is important to recognise that refugees and IDPs often share network ties. The connection between refugees and IDPs became a salient consideration as Iraqi refugees in Jordan, with whom I conducted interviews, often remarked about their relationships with family members who were IDPs in Iraq at the time.

To manage the global refugee crisis, the UNHCR advocates for the following durable solutions, presented in order of priority: (1) refugee repatriation to post-conflict country of origin; (2) local integration in host country; and (3) resettlement in third country, usually in the West. The experiences of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, studied between 2009 and 2010, suggest that unique case-specific particularises must be taken into consideration when analysing refugee displacement and settlement. When refugees are characterised by general descriptions of violence and displacement, scholars and practitioners neglect tailored interventions and risk depending on faulty assumptions established through interactions with prior refugee groups. Displacement and settlement can be described through *conflict-specific* and *receiving-specific structures*.

Iraqi conflict-specific structures

Since the start of the Iraq war in 2003, the country has become increasingly destabilised. Haddad (2011) faulted the fall of the Ba'ath regime as one of the major turning points for

sectarianism in Iraq, which has a long legacy of furthering political and economic disparities in the country. Writing after the 2006 bombing of the Askariya shrine that greatly accelerated sectarian violence, Kaufmann (2006, 157) stated, 'Today, no Iraqi Sunni is safe anywhere within the reach of Shiite militias or Shiite-controlled police force, and no Shiite whom Sunni suicide bombers or assassination squads can get to is safe either'. Nickerson et al. (2009, 228) characterise the situation in Iraq as a campaign of ethnic cleansing against non-Muslim groups in which 'Mandaeans [an ethno-religious minority group] have been systematically persecuted ... [victims of] murder, kidnapping, forced conversion, and forced circumcision'. Christians too faced kidnapping and murder; their congregations shrunk as churches were bombed; and, Christian-run businesses were closed when their owners were targeted and persecuted. The Iraqi ambassador to the Vatican stated, 'Christians are fearing for their lives like other minorities trapped in this policy of ethnic cleansing' (Hanish 2009, 4). In northern Iraq, the Kurds also faced devastating violence rooted in their historical mistreatment. Even after the declared end of the war in 2011, sectarian violence continues to play a pervasive role in refugee and IDP displacement. In 2014 alone, 2.1 million Iraqis became internally displaced, many as a result of sectarian and paramilitary violence (International Organization for Migration 2014).

Recognising that the term sectarianism has the tendency to collapse dynamics and divisions throughout Iraqi history, I rely on the phrase sectarian violence to relate interview-based descriptions of displacement and conflict. After the start of the war and the breakdown of governing institutions, local sectarian governance came into power and resorted to violence and death threats to exert authority. Kaufmann (2006, 157) writes,

... no institution in Iraq is capable of guaranteeing anything to anyone. Worse, the level of violence has passed the threshold where the communities can safely live together ... all members of both the Sunni and the Shiite communities face real security threats.

The trepidation that characterised the displacement and settlement of many Iraqi refugees is prevalent throughout the literature (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Ellis 2009; Amos 2010; Chatelard 2010; Sassoon 2009; Bjawi-Levine 2009). It is clear that sectarian violence and the threat of violence often initiated Iraqi displacement although the causal connection is rarely articulated.

Most of the refugees I interviewed claimed to have left Iraq not because of the war, the bombings, or the occupation, but because of the sectarian violence that resulted from the invasion of Iraq that led to personal threats. While the war was all encompassing, sectarian violence was personalised. Scholars have yet to investigate how reasons beyond a general acknowledgement of violence influenced the settlement process for this particular wave of Iraqi refugees. Methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) further distracts scholars from recognising the relationship between conflict country and country of refuge. In fact, the provision of non-refoulement suggests that the threat of violence and the capability to exert violence does not cross borders beyond the conflict country.

Jordanian receiving-specific structures

At the start of my fieldwork in 2009, the UNHCR estimated that more than 4.7 million Iraqis, of Iraq's 30 million people, had left their homes since the beginning of the Iraq

War in 2003. While nearly half of these people were displaced within Iraq, the others became refugees. Jordan hosted between an estimated 700,000 and 800,000 Iraqi refugees in 2009 (Fagen 2009). Once in Jordan, Iraqi refugees faced several country-specific obstacles that put them at risk for refoulement including unauthorised status, lack of legal employment, and the isolation of urban settlement that left many Iraqis without access to an established network of available resources usually dispensed through refugee camps.

Jordan's refugee-saturated milieu shapes the sociopolitical environment that continues to receive waves of refugees through contemporary 2015. Jordan has become a safe haven for several refugee populations despite its limited natural resources and weak economy. Sixty-seven years after the Palestinian *Nakba* or exodus in 1948, Palestinian refugee camps continue to exist in Jordan. Palestinians are generally well integrated and many carry Jordanian citizenship. Meanwhile, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which is the UN organisation dedicated specifically to Palestinian refugees, plays an important role in continuing to provide aid to Palestinians.

Differences between the Iraqi and Palestinian refugee populations were routinely minimised by aid organisations and neglected by scholars (Zaiotti 2006; Crisp et al. 2009). The consequences of conflating Iraqi and Palestinian experiences negatively affected policy-making and Iraqi refugee management. First, the Iraqi refugee population was received by a state whose social institutions were already constrained due to the Palestinian refugee population (Crisp et al. 2009). The Palestinian camp-model informed the UNHCR's best practices as the stencil upon which to develop mechanisms to manage Iraqi refugee movement and provide aid (Crisp et al. 2009). However, unlike the quintessential representation of refugees in refugee camps, Iraqi refugees settled in urban areas of Jordan, mainly in Amman. In 2009, the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) remarked in a presentation to Cities Alliance that,

Too many of the underlying assumptions ... that guide our work are based on the outmoded notion that refugees and displaced people belong in camps ... We have not yet thought through the full challenge of operating in cities ... (Crisp et al. 2009, 4)

Urban settlement promoted Iraqi isolation that obstructed access to co-ethnics and aid organisations through diminished network ties.

Urban isolation also greatly contributed to the 'invisibility' of some Iraqi refugees, predominantly of the poorer class, because individuals chose to isolate themselves as a means of protection against refoulement and unauthorised status. Jordanian policy labelled, and treated, refugees fleeing Iraq as 'temporary visitors'—not as Convention refugees (Human Rights Watch 2006). Temporary visitors were granted 60-day visas that could be renewed for an additional three months upon expiration, which became increasingly difficult given the financial requirement necessary for renewal and access to renewal agencies.

Human Rights Watch (2006) characterised the Jordanian policy towards Iraqi refugees as 'the silent treatment' because it ignored the needs of Iraqi refugees who were legally not refugees, but visitors. This invisibility heightened Iraqi vulnerability to the consequences of unauthorised status. However, a small percentage of Iraqi refugees were granted some residency rights because they could afford to invest a substantial sum of money in Jordanian banks. These refugees were treated as 'investors' instead of 'visitors', and held 'investor' legal status. Notably, refugee experiences can differ depending on the financial means available, which may mitigate the reliance on strategic anonymity.

Access to the labour market, social institutions, and resources in general was also obstructed by a uniquely distinct relationship between social and economic capital in Jordan known as *wasta*. El Said and Harrigan (2009) explain that *wasta*, which loosely translates into ‘an informal connection’, is a Jordanian system of trust and reciprocity that is most often dependent on familial ties. Directly juxtaposed against a system of meritocracy, *wasta* is unapologetically about ‘who you know’ not ‘what you know’. With scarce resources, high unemployment, and a status quo that put Iraqis at the bottom of the social ladder, Iraqi refugees were at a heightened disadvantage to enter into the *wasta* economy. The fear of sectarian violence and the threat of refoulement exacerbated the difficulty of entry into the *wasta* economy.

Isolation, as opposed to integration, was therefore thrust upon some Iraqi refugees by structural and political factors. However, through strategic anonymity, isolation also developed as a tool used to reduce the risk of sectarian violence and refoulement. For some Iraqi refugees, the chains of interconnectivity became shackles that impeded, or at the very least encumbered, reliance on social networks and consequently access to the potential resources that social networks promised. Some Iraqi refugees strategically navigated their social networks by withholding personal information to avoid identifying themselves to the wrong people. What could have been enthusiasm for a growing social network during the vulnerable time of displacement turned, instead, to apprehension of new social ties.

Methods

Thirty in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Iraqi refugee participants in Jordan who left Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003. I did not interview Iraqi refugees that may have left before 2003 as a result of sanctions or other wars in the region such as the Iran–Iraq War or the First Gulf War. Most of the interviews I conducted were with Iraqi refugees that fled Iraq due to the escalation of the war between 2006 and 2008. My sample included participants from the following sects and ethnic groups: Sunnis, Shiites, Mandaean, and Kurds. Even though I interviewed participants of varying socio-economic status, the majority of my interviews were with poorer Iraqi refugees who did not have substantial financial savings and depended primarily on aid.

My interviews consisted of two meetings: an initial discussion that lasted 15–20 minutes followed by a one to two hour interview. A few of the interviews exceeded two hours. The initial meetings were flexible and in a few cases did not exist at all. I used a general interview guide, which was intended to ensure that the same general areas of information were collected from each respondent. Interviews were recorded onto a digital recorder if participants provided consent. I conducted the interviews in Arabic and translated, partially transcribed, and coded the interviews. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of all participants.

Because Iraqi refugees in Jordan were a ‘hidden population’, I mainly relied on the snowball method for subject recruitment. Most families that I met were unwilling or unable to introduce me to other Iraqi refugees. Some, however, did. One of the first interviews I conducted was with a young Iraqi refugee man. He became my informant and subsequently connected me to other families. Other refugee participants lead me to someone who might know someone and not directly to Iraqi refugees. I also worked with a local NGO to recruit participants.

I lived in Jordan from August 2009 to June 2010. During that time, I engaged with Iraqi refugees outside of my interviews. I drank bottomless cups of tea, taught English language, was invited over for dinner on several occasions, drew pictures, listened to poetry, and went grocery shopping with and for Iraqi refugees. I also interviewed UNHCR employees and NGO volunteers. I confronted anti-Iraqi hostility firsthand. 'Why are you studying Iraqis? You should be studying Palestinian refugees,' I heard repeatedly from members of the Jordanian community, including Palestinian-Jordanians. These remarks were often followed by deep-seated stereotypes of Iraqi refugees as lavish spenders who drove up property costs and brought down the moral standard of the country. I overheard and engaged in several conversations with non-Iraqi refugees about the refugee situation in Jordan.

As an Arab-American female researcher of Palestinian descent and Jordanian citizenship, my positionality greatly affected my access to Iraqi refugees in Jordan and my analysis of the data. My knowledge of the Arabic language provided me with the technical skills and cultural competency to conduct interviews with Iraqi refugees. However, my experience in the field suggested that my foreignness as an Arab-American was equally, if not more, significant in opening doors. I found that although my Arabic language skills and sympathies with the Iraqi refugee experiences conveyed solidarity, my foreignness allowed me to build trust because sharing information with me was believed to be less risky. I was not expected to be proficient in the language of Arab social networks and ancestral ties that are easily navigated through names. Many Arabs are able to decipher the country, region, ethnicity, and religion of another Arab by learning his or her surname. Because I grew up in the USA, I had not developed these skills that are indispensable to the *wasta* economy and Arab social capital. My positionality as both an insider and an outsider allowed me to develop trust with my participants and immensely shaped this project.

Findings

Intersecting disparities including class, gender, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, and the availability of legal protections within the receiving state, can exacerbate the vulnerability of refugees. 'Refuge' is a term that denotes safety; however, the five Iraqi refugee stories below are exemplars of the insecurity that followed some Iraqi refugees across state borders. The strongest thread throughout these experiences describes how loss, violence, and insecurity incentivise strategic anonymity. For many of the refugees I interviewed, poverty heightened the challenges of displacement and the inability to obtain authorised employment compounded the threat of refoulement. These insecurities are not only a result of the Iraq war, but also of the overall political environment of Jordan in which relationships are formed. In social networks characterised by the unequal distribution of the means to impose violence among individuals, some political migrants monitor the dissemination of personal information as a tool to protect themselves and their families against perceived threat.

Amina, Faisal, and their three sons

Six Jordanian dinars (8.50 USD) were enough for a taxi across Amman from Khalda to the souk in al-Hashimi al-Shamali. There, I met Mohammad. He was an Iraqi refugee who

introduced me to his contacts. Finding Iraqi refugees in Jordan willing to be interviewed was a difficult task. Even Mohammad remarked that it was challenging for him to set up interviews for me with people he knew, 'You know, Iraqis don't like to meet new people.' Meeting new people was a risk.

Mohammad relied on Hanny, a friend of his father, to connect me with my interviewees. Hanny then introduced us to Amina, Faisal and their three boys. The family welcomed Mohammad and me into their small apartment, which consisted of a bedroom, kitchen, and entranceway. Mohammad coached me before the interview, 'Don't ask about their religion. Don't ask where they are from. If they tell you, okay. But, don't start by asking these questions.' Mohammad, too, avoided sharing personal information.

Amina and Faisal left their home in Kirkuk because Sami, their six-year-old son, was murdered. Unlike some characterisations of refugee movement that treat ubiquitous violence or broken social institutions as an acceptable rationale that leads to displacement, this family left due to personalised threats and actions. The family escaped to Jordan.

Faisal was a truck driver in Iraq. One day, Faisal was assigned by his employer to drive into the green zone, the militarised centre for international presence in Baghdad. Knowing that such a drive would draw unwanted attention, Faisal initially refused. He was given an ultimatum: drive into the green zone or lose your job. With his family in mind, Faisal decided to take the risk. He knew that employment was scarce. Unbeknownst to him, a militia group (often referred to as 'they') was keeping track of Faisal's movements. 'They' asked Faisal to carry a package into the green zone the next time he was assigned to make the drive. Faisal refused. He explained that his visit to the green zone was a one-time occurrence and that he would not have the opportunity to return.

To his surprise, Faisal was asked to take another trip the next week. Faisal tried to refuse, and shared his concern about the militia group with his employer. 'They are watching me,' Faisal explained as he retold the story. 'I knew it was a bad idea. So many other families have been attacked by these militia groups. I should have known better.' Still, Faisal was offered the same ultimatum by his employer—drive into the green zone or lose your job. He felt he had no choice and hoped that the militia group would not find out.

The next day, Faisal's six-year-old son was kidnapped, murdered, and left on their doorstep with a note that read, 'We will kill each of your sons, one each week, until it's your turn. You should not have disobeyed us.' The note also stated that the militia group would be keeping a close watch on Faisal's movements, and that he was now expected to meet all the militia's demands. The family left Iraq for Jordan that night. It was the first time the family had ever left Iraq.

The family arrived in Jordan with approximately 300 JD (Jordanian Dinars, about 424 USD), which quickly ran out. The family entered into Jordan not as refugees, but as visitors seeking medical treatment for Amina. They soon registered with the UN once in Jordan and received a piece of paper with their pictures on it that read, 'This decree does not entitle the holder to a residency permit or work permit in Jordan.' Unable to work, the family relied on the UNHCR for financial support. The UNHCR processed their file within a few months and allotted the family 220 JD each month. Amina explained to me that 100 JD went to rent and 20JD went to electricity each month. After other financial obligations, only 25 JD (about 35 USD) remained per month to buy food for a family of five, pay for transportation, and make the co-payments for Amina's medication. Amina

and Faisal's eldest son described the family's financial constraints: 'It is like someone is dying and they keep you alive one drop of water at a time.'

I listened to Amina and Faisal relay their story, each interjected to pick up where the other left off. When I asked if the family had considered working in the informal economy, Faisal explained that he was too scared to take the risk. 'If I get caught,' Faisal explained, 'they [Jordanian officials] will leave me at the border [between Iraq and Jordan]. Militia groups will be there waiting for me.' Amina also worried that if they chose to work in the informal economy, her sons too would be 'dropped off at the border'.

Faisal was not opposed to work, but wanted to protect himself and his family from refolement and sectarian violence. 'We would love it if we could work at home,' Faisal told me.

We would love it for someone to say come work in our house, but there isn't anyone like that. If someone brought us work, and said 'do it here, at home' and then that person picked up the work, we could do that. Even simple things like crafts or sewing.

It became clear throughout our interview that Faisal and Amina did not have strong relationships with other people.

I asked, 'What are your social lives like?' Amina responded, 'We talk to the neighbors here, next door. Not always, but my son plays with their son. But that's it. That's all.'

Author: Do you have anyone to talk to about what you are going through? Other Iraqis?

Amina: There is a family but they live far away. (*Pause.*) We aren't close to them, we just say hello. They aren't Iraqi, though. I don't engage with others. I just say hello. Even Jordanians or Palestinians. I just say hello and that's it.

Author: Why don't you get to know people better?

Faisal: We are Iraqi. Even if we engage with other people ... we are afraid now, like they say, afraid that some person will ask questions.

(*Faisal looks at Mohammad, my informant, who is also Iraqi and asks, 'Am I right?'*)

Ask [questions like], 'Where do you live?' 'Where are you from?' 'What's your origin?' You are scared people will ask questions like that.

(*Again, Faisal turns to Mohammad and says, 'When someone asks you these questions, aren't you struck with fear?'*)

If you are Iraqi and you are here to ask me, from what area are you from? [*sic*] How many children do you have? Why did you leave? You are Iraqi like I am Iraqi. There is no need for questions like that. For that reason, we try to avoid Iraqi people. It's a pity; they are our people.

Faisal went on to explain that after the incident with the militia group, he has always been afraid. He describes 'freezing' when anyone on the street stops him and worries that 'everyone is coming to threaten him'.

As I was getting ready to leave, Amina said, 'I'm going to show you something.' She left to the entranceway and pulled out a piece of paper. When she brought the paper to me, I

noticed it was written in English. 'What is this?' I asked. Amina told me that she had discovered a strategy for making extra money that kept her and her family safe:

Reporters are always interested in interviewing Iraqi refugees. I had my story written out when we got here. One of the reporters wrote it for me. I find that if I give a written account of our story, people are more likely to be generous with aid. Also, they tell their other reporter friends about us. Then they will come visit and often bring food, candy, or fruits for the kids. Sometimes they give us some money.

Amina discovered a way to avoid risky ties with Arabs who may expose the family to sectarian violence and was instead relying on *ajanib*, non-Arab foreigners, for resources. The reporter network, she assured me, was not connected with the Iraqi network. 'Although the UNHCR might be co-opted', Amina mentioned that she had heard rumours, 'the reporters just want a story'. She went on to say that the reporters will provide aid in return for a story and then she will never hear from them again.

Amina, Faisal, and their three sons fled Iraq due to sectarian violence. The fear of refoulement, the continued threat of sectarian violence, and lack of legal employment have culminated in the monitoring of identifying information as a tactic to keep the family safe. While they recognise that maintaining anonymity excludes their family from access to resources, Amina, Faisal, and their three sons employ this tactic as they wait to be resettled to the West. The promise of resettlement makes the lack of integration more bearable because their stay in Jordan is expected to be temporary. Three years after I conducted this interview with Amina and her family, I was able to get in contact with the family again. They were still in Jordan, awaiting resettlement.

Fadi

Fadi also fled to Jordan after being threatened by militia groups. I met Fadi while I was volunteering with a local NGO. Sally, the NGO director, called Fadi their 'handyman' and he was a permanent fixture when I was around. Fadi could not have been more than 35 years old and smiled often. He was always ready to help with any task. The NGO provided Fadi with some of his basic necessities in return; Fadi was unwilling to accept a 'handout', as he called it. 'I want to work for what they give me,' he told me, 'It is only right.'

Fadi came to Jordan in 2005. When I interviewed him, Fadi had already lived in Jordan for five years. Once in Jordan, Fadi met a generous Jordanian man who used his *wasta* to help Fadi find housing. Fadi settled in *Wast-Al-Balad* or downtown. His apartment came furnished with a television and bed. One day, a Jordanian neighbour walked in and demanded Fadi's television. Fadi refused. 'If I give my television this time,' Fadi said, 'tomorrow he'll come asking for my bed.' Fadi decided to stand up for himself, which led to a series of catastrophic events.

The neighbour was angered by Fadi's resistance, swore revenge, and began to spread rumours about Fadi. The neighbour first claimed that Fadi had attempted to sexually assault the neighbour's sister. When Fadi refused to give over the television once more, the neighbour revised his story and claimed that Fadi had engaged in homosexual behaviour, attempting to sexually assault the neighbour himself. This claim was made outside and out loud where the rest of the community could overhear. A fight ensued and both men threw punches. Fadi was jailed as a result of the conflict.

Fadi spent several months in jail. He was given bail by the same kind Jordanian man who initially found an apartment for him. As collateral, the Jordanian man held Fadi's passport. The passport would be returned when Fadi could repay the Jordanian man. Years after receiving bail, Fadi was still working illegally to earn enough money.

The series of events left Fadi unwilling to forge new relationships with Arabs in Jordan. As an Iraqi refugee, he recognised that he was vulnerable not only to refoulement but to exploitation and harassment.

I don't try to make friends anymore. You cannot trust anyone. Everyone is poor in this economy, and the easiest way to get money or things is to take things from an Iraqi. I don't trust Jordanians or Iraqis. The only people I can rely on are Sally's people.

Ambiguous legal status has left Fadi vulnerable to exploitation, imprisonment and poor treatment. He has decided to avoid social ties and withhold personal information for fear that relationships with Arabs will make him more vulnerable to the risks of unauthorised residence. Fadi was also afraid of refoulement because he initially fled Iraq due to threats from sectarian groups. In his daily interaction, Fadi avoided getting to know the neighbours in his new complex. 'I wave when I see them, but that's about it,' Fadi explained his relationship with the downstairs neighbours, whose kids we could hear playing outside. 'Sometimes I want to play with the kids, kick a soccer ball with them, but I stay in my room instead. I don't want to open doors like last time,' Fadi said.

The neighbour's kids began making loud noises and continuously interrupting our interview. I suggested that I ask the kids to stop blowing their whistles and yelling. 'Don't make trouble for me,' Fadi joked. 'Even the kids can get me in trouble.' In Fadi's case, remaining anonymous meant avoiding confrontation even with children. Power dynamics were not dictated by age in this scenario, but instead by assumed citizenship status and the security that citizenship bestows.

Dara

I met Dara on a house visit with Sally, the woman who ran the NGO I volunteered with. Dara was squatting with her two sons and two daughters in the basement of an apartment complex. She looked to be in her mid to late 40s. She invited me to spend time with her daughters who were drawing in a back room. The family's home consisted of two small bedrooms, a living room, and a small kitchen: the girls stayed in one room, the boys in the other, and Dara slept on the couch. On the wall hung an Iraqi flag and next to it a poem that one of her sons wrote. Dara read it to me and her eyes welled up as she remembered her country with pride.

Dara's husband, Sulaiman, 'disappeared' one day, three months before my visit. The interview led me to believe that Sulaiman had simply left his family. Dara was unwilling to accept this speculation. She refused to leave the apartment in the hopes that her husband would know where to find her when he returned. I also learned throughout the interview that Sulaiman was a batterer and abusive to his wife. Dara worried that Sulaiman was suffering mental delusions introduced by the violence in Iraq and the experience of displacement.

Dara described a feeling of being stuck. She and her children had overstayed their visas. Dara could not return to Iraq even if she had wanted to. The Jordanian government had

placed a tax on overstayed visas at that time. Her husband was gone and she had no way of contacting him. Dara had no plan beyond what the family might eat for the day, and even food was not a certainty.

When I asked about financial support from friends or family, Dara explained to me that she 'didn't know anyone' in Jordan and did not rely on social network ties. Like Faisal and Amina, Dara was unwilling to risk informal work. To make extra money, Dara's son attended an English language class hosted by an international NGO. Class met once a week for three months, and the organisation offered each student 2JD (less than 4 USD) for carfare. Dara's son would walk for three hours to attend the class. By then he was tired, hungry, and unmotivated to learn, but he endured the class to earn the carfare. After class was over, he would then walk home. Carfare was usually enough to buy pita bread and hummus for the family. In their kitchen I saw onions, olive oil, salt and pepper, tea, and bread. Dara told me that, 'sometimes we buy tomatoes' and opened up her pantry to show me what was in it. She asked if I was hungry, and graciously suggested that she make me an onion and tomato dish.

For Dara, selectively communicating with international NGOs allowed her and her family to avoid the risk of refolement, especially as she waited for Sulaiman to return. She did not mention that she was explicitly afraid of sectarian violence, but the threat of being sent back to Iraq for residing in Jordan illegally was enough for Dara to avoid engaging co-ethnic ties.

Nour and Aboud

Nour barely escaped with her life as she was fleeing sectarian violence. One day, as she was leaving the grocery store, a car pulled up and attempted to force her inside. Nour's husband, Aboud, described what happened. Nour did not speak during our interview. Her body was clenched tight and her gaze remained fixed forward. At one point I saw tears running down her cheek but she never spoke.

Aboud held a curled piece of paper in his hand that he wrung throughout the interview. He looked to be in his late 40s or early 50s. Nour looked like she was in her early 40s. Aboud explained that the events leading to Nour's near-kidnapping were unclear. Shots were fired as militia members pulled Nour into the car. Nour and Aboud did not know where the shots came from, but in the commotion, Nour was able to free herself from the kidnappers—but not before suffering serious bodily injury and the loss of one of her eyes. At the time, Nour was also four months pregnant with the couple's first child. They had tried for years to get pregnant. But, as a result of the violence, Nour lost the baby.

Aboud explained that the couple came to Jordan with money collected from their families in Iraq. Neither Aboud nor his wife was acquainted with anyone in Jordan, he explained. A friend of the family made a phone call from Iraq to an acquaintance in Jordan that helped Aboud and Nour get settled in Amman. After a few months, the friend became unreachable. Aboud did not blame him stating, 'We know life is hard. Praise be to God that he was here to help us when we needed it most.' Aboud and Nour relied on the UNHCR to provide monetary support to pay for rent, utilities, and basic groceries.

I met the couple as their savings from Iraq were dwindling. Compared to the families I met, Aboud and Nour seemed to be in particularly dire circumstances. Aboud cried as he explained that Nour did not talk much anyone after the loss of the baby. He spent much of the interview thanking God for their lives and grieving over the death of their unborn child.

When I asked about the couple's social network or who they could rely on for any kind of support, financial or emotional, Aboud explained that there was no one.

We can't risk them finding us. You never know, this is the world [meaning, things happen]. We've seen what they [militia groups] can do. We cannot risk going back to Iraq. We just wait and hope that we get resettled soon,

Aboud told me.

Aisha

Aisha lived alone. She initially fled to Jordan with her daughter, son-in-law, and young granddaughter. When I met Aisha, however, her daughter's family had already been resettled to Sweden and Aisha was waiting for her chance at resettlement. Aisha was in her late 60s and disabled. She wore a white scarf made of thin fabric that she wrapped loosely over her hair. Aisha lived in a one-room apartment that she financed with support from the UNHCR.

Like many of the families I conducted interviews with, Aisha and her family were internally displaced before they became refugees. At the time of the family's initial displacement, Aisha, her husband, and her two daughters left Baghdad for Kirkuk. In Kirkuk, the family experienced serious violence. Militia groups broke into their home. A struggle ensued and Aisha's younger adult daughter was murdered. After her husband witnessed the murder, he suffered a stroke. Aisha's husband died a few months after the incident. The family then left for Jordan. Aisha told me that the chance to live in Sweden with her daughter was the only thing keeping her from suicide.

As she described a typical day in her life, Aisha mentioned that she makes conscious efforts to avoid engaging with strangers. 'Even when I go to get bread from the man at the bakery,' Aisha said, 'we do not talk much. I get my bread and come home.' Withholding personal information and avoiding relationships with others seemed to be a reasonable strategy due to the promise of resettlement. Aisha believed that her stay in Jordan was temporary. In the meantime, she watched TV, napped, or sat outside under the tree in front of the apartment.

Conclusion

Through the practice of strategic anonymity, some Iraqi refugees in Jordan rely less on social network ties with friends and family than scholars may have expected. The threat of sectarian violence and the fear of refoulement led some Iraqi refugees to withhold personal information in an effort to maintain security for themselves and their families. These Iraqi refugees strategically forfeit what might otherwise be fruitful connections with co-ethnics and other Arabs. This study illustrates that both *the reason for displacement*,

beyond a ubiquitous characterisation of violence, along with *geopolitical considerations specific to South–South migration* are important factors in the settlement process.

Situated within the existing research on migrant social networks, this study illustrates some of the negative consequences of bridging social capital and considers how new ties can produce harmful consequences for immigrants. Political migrant networks can differ from economic migrant networks because displacement, settlement and integration can be affected by an imbalance of the means to impose violence within a social network. In this case, the imbalance of the means to impose violence exists between Iraqi refugees who fled their home country and the militia members that their networks encompass. The particular experience of personalised sectarian violence restricted the utility of these Iraqi social networks and limited access to resources.

In terms of policy implications, strategic anonymity complicates the UNHCR's stated goal to promote local integration. The matter remains that the vast majority of refugees will never be resettled and repatriation is dangerous during times of political upheaval. Understanding the particular reasons for displacement can help to inform NGOs and government institutions regarding the case-specific challenges that particular refugee populations face. This discussion is situated within a shared cultural and political context among neighbouring Arab countries. Geographic proximity in the case of some Iraqi refugees helps explain how political upheaval, a shared language, and shared cultural fluency can surprisingly lead to isolation instead of integration due to power disparities within networks.

Finally, strategic anonymity gives scholars a vocabulary in which to interpret immigrants' agency. Recognising that isolation was thrust upon some Iraqi refugees in Jordan, one can also view self-initiated isolation as a means to push against structural factors. But anonymity came at a high cost. Some Iraqi refugees in Jordan sacrificed the fiscal, social, and emotional benefits of network ties. They forwent opportunities in the unauthorised workplace, renounced public goods like schooling and healthcare, and were unable to create new friendships without calculating potential risk. Taking such precautions was often informed by the notion that resettlement to the West was a viable option. With this realisation, the study gestures to further research that engages the social construction of time and the consequences of waiting in refugee policy-making, policy implementation, and studies of displacement.

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