November 2012

Iraqi Refugees: Desperately in Search of Leonor

Siraj Davis

Fair Observer°
make sense of the world

Cover Photo: A young boy watches as U.S. Marines from 2nd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment and Iraqi policemen distribute clothes and toys to Iraqi refugees at a humanitarian aid compound in Fallujah, Iraq, Dec. 10, 2007. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Neill A. Sevelius.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my late mother Kimiko Uno Nomura for implanting the seed of humanity in me at an early age. I also thank all of my brothers and sisters who walk the prophets' steps, such as Imam Mustafa Khattab. All of you helped to water the seed in order to allow me to grow into who I am today. I would also like to dedicate this to Aziz Hassan Buhaisi and Tawfik Alasadi Davis. They inspired me on a path towards justice which allowed me to encounter the refugees in my life, including in this report, and to give them a voice.

About the Author

Siraj Davis has a Master of Arts in History and is currently a teacher with a command of six languages, and a freelance journalist for human rights issues. He has spent eight years researching examples of violent and non-violent insurgencies and counterinsurgencies or Low Intensity Conflicts across the world, in various contexts and backgrounds. His first book was "Religious Fanaticism and Abolition: Early 19th Century Marginalization of David Walker and Nat Turner" and he is currently working on his second book "The Pursuit of Love Against the War on Terrorism." He has also published various academic journal and newspaper articles.

He has organized and lobbied for human rights and immigration reform with organizations such as Amnesty International, American Families United, SOA Watch, US Campaign for Burma, the American Association for Palestinian Equal Rights, and more. Davis is president of the Collective Consciousness human rights organization and a constituent of the Truth Justice and Peace Movement. He is currently focused on the Free Ziyad Yaghi Campaign, Peace in Palestine/Israel Conflict, and all refugees.

Davis is also a former pugilist and 1991 AAU/JKA National Shotokan Karate Champion.

Executive Summary

The following is an executive summary from a report involving interviews with Iraqi refugees in Jaramana, Syria and Hashemi Shemali, Jordan. It is not inundated with data but instead presents personal insight into the real-life stories behind the didactic statistics that are normally accumulated to depict lives of refugees. The investigation provides a few personal accounts of the ineffable tragedy Iraqi refugees have endured while simultaneously providing a conduit for all refugees' complaints from Syria and Jordan.

There are a few imperious cases in Syria and Jordan which caught my attention. These examples represent what I found to be severe exemplifications of the harsh tribulations of Iraqi refugee life. I admit there are other cases which are worse but they were ignored because the pathway of their files seemed positive; the time length of waiting for relocation was not as considerable; the procedures and the conditions they endured did not seem as antagonizing; their stories were already published by other media; it was not easy to verify their stories; or they chose not to participate. Nevertheless, the ensuing examples allow enough detail to accomplish the objective of illustrating some of the major concerns regarding displaced Iraqis' lives.

Case Studies in Syria and Jordan

In Jaramana, Syria, a single woman by the name of Umm Sandra Alan struggles to hold together a family comprising of an elderly sick aunt and her cat Sherry. She receives only 5,000 Liras from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to pay a monthly apartment rent of 10,000 Liras**.** After her father recently died, she has no reason to return to Iraq and is inhibited to visit her aunt in Egypt by the Egyptian government. She works tirelessly at a salon for a mere 3 Liras per day. Her sick aunt comments about Umm Sandra Alan's future, while being interrupted by her niece's infuriated, yet innocuous, demands for her to be silent: "I want her to go, to be happy. I don't want her [to] stay for me. Sometimes [I think it] is better if I died." Umm Sandra Alan feels the UNHCR does not consider single females' tribulations in the allocation of aid to Iraqi refugees.

In Jaramana, the kind and intelligent Iraqi refugee, Abu Adezar, struggles against severely deteriorating health while simultaneously waiting for his and his wife's American visa. They had already been approved for travel to the US three years ago. A former oil engineer in Iraq under US occupation, he fears his return to the country will mark certain death by malevolent groups who may target him for perceived collaboration with the American forces. Abu Adezar's mother, who is a US citizen, calls often, waiting to be reunited with him. When asked what he

wants to say to the audience, he replies, "I want rights and a decent life. I can't get it in my own country or here. I am not sure I will get them before I die. Do you want me to live without having what was taken from me? Is this the promise Americans told me of in Iraq before I had to run away for my life?"

In Jordan, Abu Omar resides, having fled Iraq in 1997 before the war. He waited until 2006 to finally be approved for relocation to another country; his total length of time residing in Jordan is 15 years. He lives on a limited income of 160 Jordanian Dinars with his wife and daughter, yet his medication costs 90 Jordanian Dinars. Abu Omar is lucky that a grassroots organization called Women's Federation for World Peace has been helping him to pay for his medication and his daughter's school expenses. His return to Iraq seems a dismal hope as his brother was kidnapped in Baghdad and is still missing, his aunt's two sons have been killed, and his brother's son was assumed dead for three years until appearing one day with both hands broken. This torment over the loss of family does not only affect him, but his wife too. His wife's aunt and her aunt's cousin and son were murdered in Baghdad. While waiting longer for relocation to a western country, his most apparent pain is the hardships his daughter has to endure. In regards to returning to Iraq, he retorts with a quick "no."

Another refugee named Abu Saad, shares the life in Hashemi Shemali with Abu Omar. He has a son, a daughter, and wife who live with him. He left Iraq after his brother was kidnapped and his son threatened by affiliates of Al-Qaeda. His application for relocation to another country was accepted for consideration by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2006. Despite having family members who are citizens in America, the UK, Australia, and Sweden, Abu Saad was unfortunately rejected by the IOM and UNHCR for resettlement in all western countries on October 6, 2011. After asking what to do next, he was told by a representative at the IOM to apply for a visa at any embassy in Jordan. He has no aid nor hope for relocation so he lingers with his family in Jordan, terrified of what will happen if they are deported back to Iraq.

Abu Amer is an Iraqi refugee in Hashemi Shemali that has been through trauma with the UNHCR in his process of awaiting relocation to the UK. He and his sick wife left Iraq after being threatened by the armed militias: the Sunni Jihad Army and the Shi’a Al-Mahdi army. His two sons, his daughter, and seven nephews are citizens of the UK. He registered with the UNHCR on August 26, 2007 and since then has been told several times by the UN agency that he would travel in a short time (such as within fifteen days). Each time has turned into a nightmare of waiting longer. His twenty filed complaints to the UNHCR including a sixteen page diatribe to the manager, have been answered with no responses — only a verbal altercation with a clerk at the agency. He is now still waiting for the elusive UK visa by the UNHCR.

There are other cases worth mentioning. One Iraqi refugee named Ali, was falsely accused of a

lewd act against a minor and incarcerated. He used his passport for collateral in order to secure bail money. When he went to trial, he was found not guilty. The National Center of Human Rights and an independent lawyer in Jordan confirmed that the courts revealed that the plaintiff had used a false testimony against Ali. He is still without the financial means to ascertain his passport.

Another Iraqi refugee by the name of Raja was sent to the US to live in Boston, Massachusetts only to be returned to Hashemi Shemali, Jordan because it was discovered on her records that she was listed as a man.

Common Complaints

Traveling and residing with Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan provokes a plethora of testimonies that share synonymous problems which aggravate their lives. There are slight, but insignificant differences. It is important to consider the similarities in order to understand this social issue, consequently improving these lives.

The complaints by Iraqi refugees indicate that they feel the application process is flawed or corrupt. For example, Umm Sandra Alan asserts that her interviewer at the IOM hinted or suggested to her answers that seemed to imply Muslim against Christian violence or to purport that Saddam Hussein was a tyrant. When questioned repeatedly over a long duration of time about her certainty in regards to her negative responses to questions, Umm Sandra Alan replied "I am not going to lie." Her interviewer retorted, "I am trying to help you go to America."

Umm Sandra Alan, an Iraqi Christian refugee, stands by her testimony that she chose to be without guile instead of sacrificing her principles for fabricated freedom. Nevertheless, from Syria to Jordan there is a prevalent adage amongst Iraqi refugees that "those who lie, go... [and those] that tell the truth, stay."

Corruption within the IOM and UNHCR is also another complaint. An Iraqi refugee in Syria named Abu Sabah provided names of high ranking officials who accept bribes to push their relocation cases. Ironically, Abu Sabah was relocated after our interview much earlier than other refugees who have waited longer and with harsher backgrounds. Many other refugees, from Syria to Jordan, have stated that a couple thousand American dollars can purchase a visa from certain embassies. Moreover, an independent, discreet, and unfinished probe has revealed lower level collaboration in offers of relocation for money. The current status of this probe is that it is extremely difficult to penetrate the top levels of such fraud and also counterproductive to expose by risking splashes in the water from reeling in minnows, consequently scaring off the elusive and larger bass.

The UNHCR monetary aid to Iraqi refugees is also a set allocation despite rising prices. This has

exacerbated the ability of refugees to survive. Worse, it has also augmented the number of refugees working illegally, consequently augmenting cases of abuse by employers. Xenophobia against Iraqi refugees has also proliferated as a result of refugees' rising competition in a floundering job market, positions in schools, and migration into cheaper yet squalid neighborhoods. Ultimately, the limited nature of aid results in the former middle class of Iraq living like beggars.

Refugees also complain that the service and attention to each of their cases by the UNHCR and IOM are deplorable. They assert that both the UNHCR and IOM are lethargic in feedback, inattentive to details that may vet dishonest cases, and slow in processing files. Some refugees in Jordan went to such an extent as to state that if there is an interview with either the IOM or UNHCR on Tuesday, you are likely rejected and if on Saturday, you are accepted. The aforementioned exacerbates the stress refugees live through.

Immigration restrictions by governments where Iraqi refugees reside also prevent them from visiting family in neighboring countries. They are coerced to travel to Baghdad to risk danger and ascertain a visa from an embassy there. The reason for this impediment is countries want to deter growing refugee populations in their country by preventing overstays of visas.

For example, one refugee named Jenan in Jordan has a sister in Syria she has not seen for many years. She points towards her young children during our interview saying, "they have never met their aunt in their lives." The fear of death in Iraq and lack of mobility is the equivalent of making their country of refuge a prison.

Although some scholars have stated that grassroots organizations fail in distributing aid in an egalitarian way because of a lack of resources, Iraqi refugees complain that some grassroots organizations do not distribute aid equally because of favoritism towards a select few that the organization's heads have built close relationships with. From Syria to Jordan, many refugees in worse situations than those refugees intimately involved with grassroots organizations, have never heard of some of these organizations.

I witnessed at the Collateral Repair Project funded party in Jordan with a plethora of food and drinks, a decrepit female Iraqi with two bedraggled children arrive at the front door in a desperate state asking for succor. Yet, she was turned away by the head undeterred by the fact that this family had no food or nowhere to stay that night.

There are exceptions of course. Abu Omar, noted earlier in this article, states that out of all the organizations in Hashemi Shemali, the only one that served him objectively and consistently was the Women's Federation for World Peace. Another refugee named, Abu Ahmad, concurs by dismissing some of the other grassroots organizations as "club house activities and cult like."

Conclusion

The UNHCR, IOM, and grassroots organizations have provided minimal relief that does not suffice in securing the physical and mental welfare of Iraqi refugees. Worse, there are many instances of malpractice by these organizations which have exacerbated the lives of refugees.

Iraqi refugees need more financial aid. The lack of this aid has caused them to risk their own welfare via illegal employment in order to survive. In addition, the Iraqi refugees in Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali are living in penury without the security of affording education for their children.

These refugees also need rights or a status in a country. The lack of rights experienced in Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali compounds the issue of illegal employment by Iraqi refugees and consequent deportation or imprisonment. Finally Iraqi refugees need more efficient and organized aid agencies with more integrity.

Author's Note

The devastation brought to these refugees' nation has created a humanitarian crisis without an adequate response. When I asked Abu Omar about how people can help Iraqi refugees, his terse response was, "feel with us."

I know what he means now after painful reminiscence from the plethora of stories I have collected. These souls sometimes feel they are the walking dead. I also understand their pessimism for every person who attempts to help them.

I am reminded every time I interview these beautiful, proud, resourceful, intelligent, and kind humans, of a famous poem by Edgar Allen Poe. All of the questions by interviewers are nothing more than the same repetitious raven squawking "nevermore" in the ears of an enervated people who languish because they have lost the life they loved in Iraq, their own Leonor.

Background

The following is a report stemming from multiple interviews with Iraqi refugees from Jaramana, Syria to Hashemi Shemali, Jordan. It is not inundated with sacrosanct data, but instead presents more personal insight into the real-life stories behind the didactic statistics that are normally accumulated to depict social phenomena. This study is a quest to give a personal account of Iraqi refugees with details of the ineffable tragedy some have endured, while simultaneously providing a conduit for refugees' complaints and ideas about future changes that could attenuate the tribulations they now face. It is important to descry that this report is a product of their own voice replaced with my own words, yet the thoughts are theirs alone.

The interviews with Iraqi refugees, human rights organizations, and government employees were conducted over a period of three years from Jaramana, Syria to Amman, Jordan. The specific period covered is 2010-2011 in Syria and 2011-2012 in Jordan. This research is still ongoing to date and the next targeted areas are refugee communities in Egypt and Lebanon.

A Comparison of Syria and Jordan

Despite the fact that the overall experiences of Iraqi refugees coalesce to a certain extent, on a macro scale, subtle differences can be observed between the respective environments to which they have fled. Many fled the debacle of Iraq to resettle in Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others. Their intentions were to wait until relocation out of the region was accepted by receiving Western nations. While remaining in stasis, Iraqi refugees have received aid from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and have awaited relocation from the agency and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Here I will give a brief description of the Iraqi refugees' environments and the differences in behavior of the refugees examined in both Syria and Jordan, to provide a context for comparison.

The environments and lives of Iraqi refugees in Jaramana, Syria and Amman, Jordan are synonymous in certain obvious respects. Both cities have a large refugee population crowded in small confines where traffic finds stymied and non-effluent travel, from and to these cities. Both Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali lay on the outskirts of the major cities of Damascus and Amman respectively. Services to the Iraqi refugee communities exist but are limited, sometimes ephemeral, and of lesser quality in comparison to the central areas of urban existence. Although levels of religious toleration vary, the communities of Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali are generally able to function without major religious friction in their daily lives. Both areas are filled with visitors and organizations that travel to visit, evaluate, and/or aid Iraqi refugees. Both areas have national *de jure* laws prohibiting employment of Iraqi refugees, and in both places a *de facto* Iraqi refugee labor market persists. Intelligence organizations conduct surveillance operations in both locations and there are occasional discreet violations of Iraqi refugees' human rights which can escape the eyes of a perfunctory observer.

Furthermore, there are two common concerns among Iraqi *émigrés.* Firstly, a perceived lack of protection, and secondly, a tendency for *émigrés* to be deported for any minor infraction, regardless of whether they are guilty of the charge or not. In both Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali, penury is also a real threat if it were not for an emollient of agencies affiliated with the United Nations (UN) and others to assist them. These areas are also filled with Iraqi refugees restricted from traveling to other countries besides Iraq, to visit family. Moreover, in both areas, the Iraqis largely hold no grudges or antipathy against Americans.

On the contrary, I was humbled to be treated as a guest of honor in some of these Iraqis' tiny

shanties despite the fact that a fraction of the invitations were to houses where the family had suffered American inflicted casualties. Yet, as an American, I was never treated with an ounce of blame or disrespect. The treatment and interviews these refugees, which comprise of the missing middle class of Iraq, gave me was a poignant and life changing lesson. Yet despite these and other similarities, there are notable differences.

In Jaramana, Syria there is a very strong migrant populace with coagulation between Christians, Muslims, Druze, and so on. As one Iraqi refugee from Syria who has recently been living in Jordan said, those canonical differences are barely detectable because of the strength of the community's wholeness and homogeneity. Whatever religious animosities and differences that exist, they are not overtly present. On the contrary, people of all religions alongside Iraqi refugees in Jaramana appear extremely neighborly to each other and foreigners. This amalgamation of religions and ethnicities often takes pride in going above the decorum of showing concern for their neighbors and community.

The Iraqi refugees in Jaramana are also welcoming, polite, and seem to always be busy about their day taking pride with the ardent efforts they put into their jobs, despite the fact that they are not supposed to be working. Others without jobs, which comprise of the vast majority, are admittedly in a worse situation and yet they still remain hopeful. They hope to receive news of relocation to another country or the day when the old Iraq they knew years before the US-led war will resurface.

Furthermore, the apartments, streets, and sanitation in Jaramana are clean. Transportation is also cheap, convenient, and very efficient. The prices for groceries are also cheap and there is a clear availability and surplus of basic food. However, finding specific or higher quality brands of products and other variety of goods require a trip further than one wishes to travel. In fact, sometimes one may not always get what is desired. It is important t4o mention, however, that this may be from the economic restraints and reprimands which the international community have placed on Syria.

In Jordan, the Iraqi refugees seem to be less hopeful and much more competitive in striving to ascertain more possessions, money, and privileges than the others. Jealousy between Iraqi refugees as a result of this competition is more apparent here than in Syria and is expressed in the form of occasional and discreet complaints of religious discrimination. This is not true of everyone in Hashemi Shemali but the few examples that fit the description are very noticeable. The only reason for this is that penury and a lack of resources in an expensive country like Jordan have exacerbated the lives of Iraqi refugees. Competition and a divisionary social schematic may be a reaction to the need for survival.

In addition, Hashemi Shemali has more diversity of every type of product and much more

availability. It is convenient to travel somewhere close to purchase a different brand of a product or to buy a variety of goods and food. Nevertheless, the key challenge facing many in the area is whether one can afford the high prices. Furthermore, Hashemi Shemali does not have the cheap and efficient transportation that Syria has while the streets and apartments are much dirtier and crowded than the bustling city of Jaramana. Moreover, the sense of community is not apparent in Hashemi Shemali as in Syria, between foreigners and refugees and refugees with one another. However, group cooperation between religious denominations appears to be much stronger and this identity reinforces group cohesion.

Introduction to the Case Studies

There are a few imperious cases in Jordan and Syria which were noticeable. These examples represent what was found to be a combination of severe exemplifications of the current harsh realities of life which provided a closer, more vivid, and more personal look into the inner lives of Iraqi refugees. There are other cases which may be construed as far worse, but they were ignored because the outcome of their files seemed positive; the time length of waiting for relocation was not as considerable; the procedures and the conditions they endured did not seem as antagonizing; their stories were already published by other media; it was not easy to access and verify their stories; or they chose not to participate in the research. Nevertheless, the ensuing examples allow enough detail to accomplish the objective of this report in providing a clearer picture of an Iraqi refugee's life in two different contexts, while illustrating some of the major concerns regarding displaced Iraqis' lives in and out of the mainstream media.

The examples mentioned and categorized in each country are not exclusive problems to that area alone, but represent a glaring example taken out of each case study, (from both Syria and Jordan), to represent dilemmas that are inherent in the broader refugee experience.

Case Studies in Syria

A single female refugee in the Middle East is a difficult challenge. The combination of limited funds, lack of employment, absence of protection, and more leaves such a woman vulnerable for those willing to take advantage of her situation. The traditional Arab family includes male and female members who intercede with protection when an outside male has offended or exposed the female target to an indecent gesture or sexual overture. This extended family also allows a constituent to afford what may seem to be exorbitant prices to a single person, by the pooling together of monetary resources. As an Iraqi female refugee in a foreign country with a traditional extended family and social structure, if she does not have the benefits of close proximity to a family, she only has one other choice, to return to Iraq which some construe as certain death. To many, this is not an option.

As a result of this conundrum, prostitution rates within Syria and elsewhere have climbed as aid agencies are not addressing the numbers of single Iraqi female refugees' ability to survive financially. Those who choose to struggle against impossible odds instead of capitulating to prostitution have a leviathan-sized commitment to their sanctity. However, those who have felt driven to survive by means of prostitution should not be looked upon as morally repugnant (as perhaps are others who have chosen the path in a different setting and circumstance).

The prostitutes in Syria were faced with a harsh decision because war erupted in their country and as a result, this placed them in unforeseen danger and under impecunious tribulations. In addition, those Iraqi refugees who have espoused prostitution as a means of survival are not following a pattern of incorrigible behavior brought from Iraq. On the contrary, a considerable proportion of prostitutes in Syria were former middle class females in Iraq who have been transformed amongst the destitution they live through today. The following is a story of female determination to avoid such an end.

Umm Sandra Alan was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1974. She left Iraq in 2005 because she and her father lost their jobs and were forcibly removed from their homes. She never knew her mother; she died shortly after her birth. In 2005, Umm Sandra Alan travelled to Jordan for a month and then to Egypt in order to join her aunt. Her father remained behind in Iraq, glad his daughter was safely positioned away from the insanity of the country. While in Egypt, she registered with the UNHCR and remained with her aunt for three years. During the last months of this period, her father unexpectedly travelled to Syria in order to receive specialized treatment for an illness. After severe bouts of lugubrious depression over concern for his welfare, she was advised by family and a doctor to leave Egypt. She took this advice hoping she would be reunited with her father and other aunt in Syria. Umm Sandra Alan was tragically too late and

her father died alone in the hospital before she arrived. Her lamentable situation and failed peregrination to visit her father before his death, “nearly broke” her, according to her own description. Nevertheless, she decided to remain with her aunt in Syria and luckily found employment at a salon. She has met with the IOM in Syria twice since that episode. She now waits for a reply to her case, hoping her aunt and her will commute to another abode away from the memories etched in the land her father exhaled his last breath. She has nothing more in her former nation to return to, as her father was the last remaining valuable possession that made Iraq her humble home. She has literally lost everything in Iraq because of the war.

Umm Sandra Alan is not a normal human being; she excels past the normal resilience one witnesses. She is a loquacious, ingenious, and energetic woman whose work ethic stands out. Her energy is vibrant and no doubt a result of the drastic necessities forced upon her as a single female in a male dominated society; to be active in order to support herself with her sick and elderly aunt. Umm Sandra Alan knows she risks deportation by working outside of the home, yet she continues this risk while simultaneously accomplishing domestic chores for her aunt who is on a bed rest. However, the daily schedule of her vigorous lifestyle has taken a toll on her as exhaustion leads to sudden and unavoidable sleep within the first twenty minutes of watching television on the living room couch. She mentions that her health is not the same while smiling and joking, trying to convince everyone her dedication to upholding her small family will persevere. It is clear from close observations that the swollen bags under her eyes, temporary lapses of memory, and the mountain ridges of wrinkles in her hands, which she states did not exist whilst in Iraq, are indications to infer that she has had more than a rough life.

As Umm Sandra Alan feeds her cat calling repetitiously the name, Sherry, her aunt comments with a facetious snicker and smile "every cat is Sherry," referring to niece's previous cat that died, also called Sherry. Glancing at her aunt, who remains in the bed as I interview Umm Sandra Alan, it is of immediate concern as questions arise as to what will happen to Umm Sandra Alan after her aunt's death, what will she become, and how will she react? When asking indirect questions in regards to these apprehensions, her aunt interrupts the queries with the ingenuous comments in English: "I want her to go, to be happy. I don't want her stay for me. Sometimes [I think it] is better if I died," while her later attempts after being heard clearly the first time are silenced and interrupted by Umm Sandra Alan's infuriated yet innocuous demands for her to be silent, while simultaneously showing her consternation and disapproval by holding her hand on her head as if these comments would render her insensible. When asked if she missed her other aunt, Umm Sandra Alan stated that she has tried to get a visa to Egypt just to visit her other aunt, but the Egyptian government continues to refuse and inhibit her attempts.

When I ask in regards to any complaints about her experiences in Syria, Umm Sandra Alan

asserts that the IOM has no concern for female refugees. She reveals that the IOM has made no special considerations for the women who have been in Syria alone with limited money and no family. Moreover, she states that she heard and witnessed the stories of many unfortunate and helpless women with no dependable means of surviving, who embraced prostitution. Although she has refused to take this option, the thoughts of those who have, provokes noticeable sympathy from her.

Umm Sandra Alan claims that survival is more important, an innate and pragmatic instinct than concern over moral turpitude. She asks in English, "how can [a] woman live without family alone here? Impossible. If she cannot, she must go back [to] Iraq. In Iraq, she [will] die or [be] rape[d]. Sex or die." Umm Sandra Alan further explained that the average rent for a small one bedroom apartment in Syria is 10,000 liras but the assistance granted by the UNHCR is a monthly 5,000 liras. She makes only three liras per day at her job and if it had not been for her aunt's monetary assistance, she would have to find another roommate to share the expenses.

She sums up. Unless a woman is willing and able to reside with others in a small decrepit one bedroom apartment and share the expenses for food, electricity, water, and other bills; she cannot survive. Umm Sandra Alan continues in English, "good luck with that. Most women live here in [the] Arab world, with family, so they [have] no need to have roommate. [It is] hard to find one."

As Umm Sandra Alan works to hold together her small family, she finally responds to the question of what will happen if her aunt dies by saying that she will return back to Iraq and maybe die. She does not believe being a single female in Iraq or Syria is plausible for her. Nor does she desire to be alone without a family. Another major problem Iraqi refugees face is their severe and lucid medical conditions. Other problems affecting refugees is that after being accepted for relocation to a western nation, some are forced to wait for the visa only to be confused by the long and insipid years that pass without any feedback on the status or without the materialization of their visa.

Abu Adezar who also lives in Syria’s Jaramana, suffers from both. He was born in Baghdad, Iraq and is a self-proclaimed elderly erudite of many eclectic interests. Abu Adezar has been living in Syria for about six years with his wife, approved for travel to the United States after three years of living in Jaramana, but waiting for a visa until now. He was an oil engineer in Iraq and worked under the occupation forces but soon left. It is clear to anyone the misnomer and reprimand with which certain violent, malevolent groups stigmatized him, and others like him with, for what such groups perceive as treachery . He and others were considered traitors to their country. Living in a small apartment, Abu Adezar has a personality that makes everyone smile and enjoy his presence. His laughter is unique amongst the refugees I met. He has a collection of books in his library which he carried from Iraq with a diversity to make a renaissance man

jealous. One may peer into his library and see a book about biology, several on engineering, a few on mathematics, books on philosophers such as Aristotle, books in different languages, and his favorite hobby now, English. His mother is a citizen of the United States and Abu Adezar waits until the time he may get to see her again. He calls her from time to time, exchanging updates or asking for her to send him a loan. His wife looks after him and is just as pleasurable and entertaining as he is. On the surface, his appearance and lack of words appears to be the behavior of an obdurate misanthrope or stiff introvert, obviating or deterring possible bad intentions against him. However, after becoming familiar with a person, he reveals a magnanimous man of an extroverted personality. Many conversations later, we also find a man who loves America and the American way more than many Iraqi *émigrés*, occasionally giving panegyrics of democracy. The help Abu Adezar gave me was also invaluable. His profound knowledge, good judgment — as seen in his accurate observations of the situation in Iraq and vast connections to the Jaramana Iraqi community — are unobtainable to many other learned scholars. In mitigation of charges by Iraqi insurgent groups against Abu Adezar of having betrayed his country: if he had in fact been helping Americans, his contributions in helping to understand the conflict and people in Iraq would have left a more indelible and positive result than the sad tragedy we see in Iraq today.

Abu Adezar's situation of waiting for a visa is compounded because of his severe deterioration in health. Both he and his wife are elderly, without the healthy bodies to supplement the tiniest of peccadilloes located in the nearby sweet shop. Both of their demeanors are phlegmatic, either from years of enduring hardship or in consequence of their health; possibly a combination of both. Nevertheless, Abu Adezar takes numerous medicines to remain alive. The amount is unbelievable and there are momentary bouts of visible sickness and episodes where he feels dizzy and blood rushing to his face and upper shoulders, which can be seen when he suddenly becomes silent in quiescence to placate the pain. His smile and comment that he is okay is his attempt to dissemble the audience and keep everyone happy, perhaps even diverting the topic of conversation (and his own attention) from his sweats and jerking shakes. The other bouts he has: quick and violent coughs with unexpected and forceful vomiting. It is a difficult feat at the least to suggest he is being adequately treated by doctors and hospitals. If he is, Abu Adezar is on the brink of leaving this world, while it is amazing that he still breathes. What most likely drives his will to continue is the visa he strives to swallow as a panacea for all of his ills and pains, the visa which he wishes to live long enough and receive one day, to join his mother.

When I ask what he wants to say to the audience, he replies in English: "I am a human being first. Land is only a physical idea from rights and freedom inside me. I want rights and a decent life. I can't get it in my own country or here. I am not sure I will get them before I die. Do you want me to live without having what was taken from me? Is this the promise Americans told me

of in Iraq before I had to run away for my life?"

Iraqi Refugees and the Syrian Conflict

It is pertinent to mention that these interviews were recorded before the recent civil war broke out in Syria. The situation there seems worse for Iraqi refugees.

Indeed, the Syrian tragedy is exacerbated by the international community for failing to act with full resources and cooperation in unison to help the innocent civilians there. Instead, attention on politics between outside nations' interests involved in the Syrian conflict has thwarted the preceding effort. It is also the fault of the propaganda of both the Syrian government and opposition's pusillanimous prevarication of what is actually happening to innocent victims in Syria, with a "tit-for-tat" propaganda competition of who is guilty of causing the human rights violations.

One of the forgotten casualties, however, is that the conflict in Syria has coerced many Iraqi refugees to return home; risking death in Iraq by fleeing the risk of death in Syria. Pictures can be seen of a once sanguine people, fleeing the horror in Syria while dragging their belongings and young children behind them, transformed into an unrecognizable saturnine flock, sullenly returning to the turmoil they fled from in Iraq hoping their chances of survival will be better. However, they are trading one danger for another.

Case Studies in Jordan

One of the most physically and psychologically exhausting tribulations for refugees is the duration of waiting for relocation while being stymied by bureaucratic nuisances. Abu Omar's case is an example of a person who has reached the extremities of tolerance due to the long length of time he has been a refugee in Jordan, longer than the majority of his cohorts around him. He has been living in Jordan for fifteen years, after he left Iraq in 1997. He was born in Basra, but remained a resident of Baghdad for most of his life.

When asked how it feels to be one of those who have seniority amongst the majority of the refugees, in Hashemi Shemali, he responds with a laugh and smile in English, "I feel I am Jordanian, not Iraqi."

Although he has had many places of residence all over Jordan, he now resides in a small apartment meant to house a single bachelor, with his wife and seven year old daughter. His daughter is very shy but has a beautiful smile that makes the hearts of all who see her quiver with sympathy and affection. My query for information about his daughter seemed to hit a momentary pause in the line of questioning when one of his responses about her schooling was a sincere wish for her to have access to a better education where her religion, status, and ethnicity would not be so recognizable to her and her peers. It was transparent that he could endure the tribulations, but witnessing his daughter suffer the same afflictions was another perturbing matter.

Abu Omar left Iraq before the beginning of hostilities in the Iraq War, knowing that the conflict would erupt, while disapproving of the situation there at the time. He left behind a job, merchant shop, car, house, and family. His wife was a professor at a technical college and sacrificed as much as him to hold onto the one aspiration all humans share, a family. His carefulness and caution to secure his family's interests and to obviate disaster seemed to pay off with hindsight, but he would eventually find himself bureaucratically reprimanded for following prudence. While in Jordan in 1997, Abu Omar was not granted an extension on his visa nor political asylum to remain, despite his warnings to the Jordanian government that Iraq would become engulfed in a war and that there would be many more refugees fleeing to Jordan in the future. Instead, Abu Omar had to remain in Jordan illegally until he was granted refugee status a decade later. Abu Omar and his family's requests for assistance were also initially rebuked by the UNHCR because of his early departure, in which the agency stated that he was not considered a refugee.

During Abu Omar’s sedulous survival in Jordan, his remaining family in Iraq has suffered

tremendously. His aunt's two sons were murdered in 2007 and his brother's son was kidnapped and assumed dead for three years until he unexpectedly appeared one morning with both of his hands broken. Abu Omar's wife was not an exception, her aunt's son and cousin were murdered. Her aunt followed the same fate shortly afterwards. In 2007, after many years of torturous waiting, his application to be classified as a refugee was finally accepted. This meant he and his family could begin hoping for resettlement to a foreign country and temporary assistance from refugee related agencies. On December 2009, the IOM told him his paperwork was being considered for travel to Australia. It seemed hope was near but then there was a problem. During his many interviews, Abu Omar was asked if he was ever a member of the Iraqi Popular Army. The question itself provoked initial hesitation. His viscous reply was a result of the fear he would be rejected and thus reprimanded because the Popular Army in Iraq was considered the reserves for the military under Saddam Hussein's regime. Abu Omar feared this would create a problem in his application, yet he still told the truth that he as a former member of the Popular Army in Iraq rather than choosing to be deceptive.

He quickly explains to me in defense that many people at the universities in Iraq joined the Iraqi Popular Army not because they supported the reigning ruler, but because choosing the contrary would result in the tacit omission of education and job opportunities for anyone not willing to demonstrate their dedication to the Saddam Hussein government via army service To Abu Omar, the decision he made was not a choice, but exigent for his family. Nevertheless, the numerous interviews resulted in his application for Australia being rejected. He is now waiting for the reply for his application to America.

While Abu Omar awaits the results of his application, his life is just as challenging a struggle. His largest problem at present is the cost of living in Jordan. Abu Omar suffers from chronic back problems and takes three kinds of medicine for his back pain, high blood pressure, and heart. He says without them, he would not enjoy another day with his daughter. His United Nations salary, and it is very close or tantamount to a salary since all Iraqi refuges cannot work legally in the country of their refuge without being exploited by employers or risking deportation, is around 160 Jordanian Dinars a month, the equivalent to USD200. Abu Omar argues that in the past the amount was sufficient, but not anymore with the peak in prices all over Jordan as a result of various catalysts. He spends 90 Jordanian Dinars on his medicine and has to skip his routine schedule for taking them often or ration the amount by cutting the pills in half, counting half of a pill as the equivalent to one. He has visited many organizations to request financial assistance, but the only one that has shown sincere concern and cogent help has been the Women's Federation for World Peace which has paid for his daughter's schooling and books, while also continuously helping with his medicine. Abu Omar will continue to wait, and hopes he will not become the sole veteran outlasting the others who chance and risk specious hope in Hashemi Shemali, Jordan.

The lack of direction for refugees in regards to their future is another challenge. Worse, some are left without a status or hope. One refugee, a Christian by the name of Abu Saad shares life in Hashemi Shemali with Abu Omar. He joined this community on August 20, 2004 and his immediate responsibilities comprise of a wife and two children, a fourteen year old daughter and his sixteen year old son. Abu Saad's chances of return to Iraq are abysmally impossible because he left his job at a car dealership and sold all of his possessions. His brother, a veteran of the Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s, was also kidnapped inside Iraq and is still missing. Furthermore, his son's life was threatened by entities identifying themselves as affiliates of Al-Qaeda. These reasons were the impetus behind his departure from Iraq.

It was not until 2006 that Abu Saad's request of consideration for relocation to America was approved. However, on July 7, 2009 he was rebuffed and after expressing his desire to re-apply for America, a clerk at the IOM told him not to submit any more paperwork for the US because there would be a 90% chance of rejection again. It took him a few years and a dearth in frequency of three long-drawn-out interviews lasting one hour each and the third for three hours, until the IOM told him Australia or England would be the new destination.

To compound his situation further, Abu Saad receives 195 Jordanian Dinars (USD275) a month for his wife and two children while his monthly rent is 120 Jordanian Dinars (USD170)

On October 26, 2011, after many interviews and the endemic run around of the IOM and UNHCR bureaucracy, his search for safety ended in no chance for relocation to Australia or England. It was a heartbreaker for him because miscommunication immediately before this decision, between him and a representative of the IOM, led him to believe he was accepted only to be shocked with the contrary. Worse, when Abu Saad humbly begged for an answer as to his family's next step after this final abscission, he was advised to go to any embassy in Jordan and apply for a visa. This was advice that was incredulous, non-normative, and unconscionable to the point it could be construed as emotionless sarcasm. Nevertheless, despite having family members who are citizens in America, England, Australia, and Sweden, he is now not allowed to rejoin any of them. Abu Saad and his family are stuck in an ironic limbo without any paperwork on their behalf for relocation nor cash assistance, until someone decides to move his family back into Iraq and near certain death.

The mounting stressful accretion of adversities for displaced Iraqis is sometimes tempered by the irascible treatment they receive by agencies relevant to aiding them. The final case involves a refugee who has been through a labyrinth of confusing twists and turns via the bureaucratic maze of the UNHCR and IOM. Abu Amer has a memoir to tell and this is a condensed version to the stack of evidence entailing his documentation of every little detail he hopes will give him justice one day when his torment may become public. What holds him back from revealing his real identity and story publicly are the same determinants that threaten others, the fear of

reprisal by employees of the UNHCR and IOM, in addition to possible retribution by the armed groups in Iraq who could easily travel to Jordan to seek out their own justice. Nevertheless, Abu Amer's story is a very interesting one that illuminates Hashemi Shemali.

Abu Amer registered with the UNHCR in Amman on August 26, 2007. He has two daughters, one son, and seven nephews who are citizens of the United Kingdom and currently residing there. None of them received this citizenship by means of refugee to citizen transition. He resides in Hashemi Shemali with his elderly wife waiting impatiently to be rejoined with their immediate family instead of enduring extreme hardship. His wife suffers with him. According to a medical report, his wife languishes in agony from the diagnosis of "joint pain and lower back pain... recurrent abdominal pain due to spastic colon... [as well as a] known case of hypothyroid [and] VIT D3 deficiency."

In addition to him and his wife's medical ailments, the danger to Abu Amer and his family are part of a religiously dichotomous threat from the predominant Muslim groups in Iraq. In the police report he shows me, the Sunni Jihad Army threatened him in an acrimonious note on his door that if he continued to work for the Iraqi government (the Ministry of Commerce), which was supervised by the US at that time, he would end up deceased for betrayal to his nation. In addition, the Shi'a Al-Mahdi Army approached him and demanded he allow them to steal from his employer. Death would be the reprimand for non-compliance by the former and latter groups.

What makes Abu Amer's experience worth telling is the long and dramatic process he has undergone that appears to have caused him serious trauma. Why am I inclined to believe this from such a cursory diagnosis without a thorough evaluation? When he begins recollecting the trial he went through with the UNHCR, his voice shakes with fervid anger while standing to attention with hands shaking and animated facial movements to express this emotion. This behavior is intermingled with momentary bouts of despair which on a few occasions nearly result in tears and twitches of the lips, as if his words become lost. He has documented every bit of his torment with dates, names, and other information. While looking at his hands filled with what on the surface looks like a thesis or book rather than the expectation of a few notes, I also see his wife looking occasionally at him with concern in case he faints. It is clear that his case is noteworthy from his aberrant behavior.

Abu Amer was accepted on August 26, 2007 to be relocated in the UK. He describes with vivid detail, the smile and emotional exhilaration he had when he met a kind British lady on May11, 2008. This woman was the adventitious answer to his prayers when she told him he would travel in approximately one week. His dreams and aspirations were fulfilled and he felt he would receive a zephyr after reaching the pinnacle of this mountainous ordeal. However, this expectation began tumbling down into an avalanche of a conundrum. The first augury was a

delay of a month and fifteen days for that visa to the UK. Then on June 26, 2008 a private number called him and a gentleman named Ghazwan informed him he would be leaving with his wife in fifteen days. Between June 26, 2008 and October 20, 2008, a debacle emerged. When he attempted to contact the UNHCR on numerous occasions, they made it very clear to him, without sympathy and with a modicum of details that he was not to ask for information; instead he was told he must wait for them to contact him. The plot begins to thicken further when in the course of a hospital visit at the behest of his wife on July 19, 2009, the doctor inquired, "why is your file ignored [inactive]?" Abu Amer was addled and clueless, yet was relieved when the female doctor took the initiative to reinstate the file to an active condition. On October 1, 2009, Abu Amer inspected his file again in a personal visit and the UNHCR stated he was approved again. After being told twice he was admitted for travel to the UK with no avail, Abu Amer opted that remaining tractable or complaisant was an unproductive approach. Therefore, he filed ten appeals asking his case be expedited. On October 22, 2009 he met a new female clerk at the UNHCR to peruse why the agency did not address his appeals or furnish his visa. This time, Abu Amer's persistence for his demand of an explanation and his garrulous demeanor, resulted in the female representative shouting that he was rejected. Abu Amer countered by insisting that he be given an official report of the verdict in which the female clerk replied that the government in the UK phoned her to reveal this outcome. There was no report. She also informed him no one reviewed his appeals.

She then proceeded to tell him, as Abu Amer recollects, "you will never go to the UK. I will send you to another country. If you do not agree [with the agency's decision], I will close your file." Abu Amer shaken and in shock, then asked how long ago was he rejected and by who. The response sank the knife deeper into his heart, while expecting her to reply that the decision arose an hour ago, a day ago, a month ago, or some short time from the present. Instead his heart beat faster and rushing blood from anticipation was aggrandized by the confirmation that the rejection came around the end of 2008 or beginning of 2009.

On November 28, 2009 he returned to the UNHCR to re-evaluate his file and also to lodge another complaint. Despite asking for this female clerk's name, it appears the UNHCR assuaged the verbal altercation by not permitting him to know this employee’s name in order to submit this grievance. Without a name, perhaps he would surrender that ambition. On January 22, 2010, he was told he would have further interviews. On January 31, 2010 his story was verified by the UNHCR several times more. Recently, he has periodically checked his file while simultaneously accumulating a total of twenty appeals beseeching the UNHCR to speed up his process and respond to his complaints about his treatment from an irate employee. None of his twenty appeals were answered. On July 15, 2012 the apogee of his appeals and complaints was the introduction of a sixteen page diatribe submitted directly to the manager of the UNHCR in Jordan. When this was not answered, he filed a letter of complaint with the National Center of

Human Rights who sent a letter of request for further information.

Abu Amer still waits for one of the few possessions he owns to be returned; his pride. He also waits for the promised reunion with his family in the UK after following several mirages of accepted visas by the UNHCR. In the end, after chasing these illusions, he feels that in lieu of the warmth of his family in the UK and the norm of the security within the confines of an elderly home most his age end up, he is ultimately being left in the desert with his wife, in cruel desolation.

End of Case Studies

These case studies are supplemented by concerns not expounded upon in detail within this report, in regards to the rigors of Iraqi refugee life. Some of the case examples pertain to the non-violent victimization of these refugees while living as a "guest" in their country of refuge.

One interviewee named Ali, whose story has been publicized in the media, was incarcerated on a false charge of a lewd act against a minor from a plaintiff who had a personal grudge against him. He exchanged his passport as collateral for the bail money to secure his release from jail. Later he was found not guilty by the courts, but he remains without the means to return to his homeland. The National Center for Human Rights in Jordan and a private lawyer associated with my own student human rights organizations verified that his imprisonment was based on fraudulent testimonies which consequently meant that he had the right to pursue civil litigation. However, he has no resources to embark on that vindication. Even criminals, when under this duress, have a right to redress in many countries, but not him.

Sometimes, the anguish Iraqi refugees suffer also results from clerical mistakes on the part of those responsible for relocation. According to another interviewee's testimony which was also published elsewhere, she traveled to America and lived in Massachusetts for a while only to be deported back to Jordan after the omnipotent authorities discovered her application had listed her as a man. She now resides in her new hometown of Hashemi Shemali, Jordan. There are many more disturbing stories similar to the highlighted case studies. Yet, the underlying theme is that these Iraqi refugees often feel that in addition to having no country or family, they are fluctuating from balancing on a thin tightrope between possessing and being stripped of their fundamental human rights.

Common Refugee Complaints

Traveling and residing with Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan provokes a plethora of testimonies that share synonymous roots of problems which aggravate their lives. There are slight differences but these are not significant or anomalous enough in comparing both areas. It is important to consider the similarities in order to understand the Iraqi refugee issue, consequently improving these lives. The following commentary aims to provide an insight into the questionable intentions of those helping Iraqi refugees.

A familiar complaint by refugees is that some applicants for relocation are accepted via deception and those who are honest, remain behind. Perhaps this opinion is a result of a slow and ineffective bureaucracy or an absence of communication between the Iraqis and the IOM and UNHCR.

One witness testimony, Umm Sandra Alan in Syria, provided details, dates, and the name of one of the IOM representatives who interviewed her and who attempted to influence or lead her to the answers this employee thought would proliferate her chances of acceptance. The interviewer wanted her to give responses to questions that would suggest Muslim against Christian violence or questions implicating Saddam Hussein as a tyrant. When Umm Sandra Alan stated, "I am not going to lie," the IOM employee repeated in a stern manner with a stiff stare, “I am trying to help you go to America.” The emphasis was felt by Umm Sandra Alan as the representative repeated this same sentence verbatim several times with emotionless and steady eye contact.

Umm Sandra Alan, an Iraqi Christian refugee, stands by her testimony that she chose to be without guile instead of sacrificing her principles for fabricated freedom. Regardless if this freedom would have materialized into a significant, desirable, and corporeal result. Such plots saturate the storylines of these Iraqi refugees to the point it is undeniable that there is at least some truth to the claims made in the overwhelming number of testimonies. On numerous occasions, from Syria to Jordan, many refugees expressed this prevalent complaint with similar wording which some may construe as the possible birth of an adage: "those who lie, go... [and those] that tell the truth, stay."

Corruption is another obstacle for refugees who claim that some of the lower ranking IOM and UNHCR officials accept bribes to get refugees' applications pushed further or accepted. Or sometimes even taking money from the refugees for the endeavor alone without any promise of results. One source, Abu Sabah, named a high ranking official of an agency that met this sketch. Although there was no concrete evidence to prove this allegation, I became increasingly

suspicious as it was brought to my attention by other refugees that Abu Sabah, whose application had lesser criteria of urgency, was later accepted faster than usual and over those whose cases were worse and who have waited considerably longer. It is interesting to point out that those who came forward to corroborate this story had no knowledge of my previous conversation about Abu Sabah and the high-ranking employee in question. Furthermore, these specific refugees did not live in close proximity, have any consistent contact with, nor knew the source of my information. This charge also extends away from the UNHCR and the IOM. There are allegations by various refugees, that a payment of a couple thousand dollars to cadge certain embassy officials would ascertain a visa to a country. Moreover, an independent, discreet, and unfinished probe has revealed lower level collaboration in offers of relocation for money, coalescing with Iraqi accusations. The current status of this probe is that it is extremely difficult to penetrate the top levels of such fraud. Despite discovering chicanery or fraud of purchasing a visa on a much smaller scale than originally led to believe, it is more than apparent now that there is some truth in these indictments.

A dearth of aid by the UNHCR with rising and fluctuating prices in an economy is a perceived danger as well. Although more prevalent in Jordan than in Syria, both Hashemi Shemali and Jaramana are full of Iraqi refugees who often mention, with an unflinching stance, that the financial aid is not enough. The monetary contributions by the UNHCR remain a stagnant and set allocation regardless if food, education, and living costs rise. Many refugees are often living life on dependency from family members in other countries, therefore placing a heavy burden on their loved ones. Worse, some refugees risk incarceration or deportation to Iraq by engaging in employment for lower wages. This absence of aid also aggravates the protection and safety of these refugees. Their employment puts them in a potentially dangerous predicament, wherein employers may take advantage of or defraud these Iraqis. Significantly, employers feel safe in the knowledge that the refugee’s guilt in violating the labor law makes them less likely to employ instruments of the government in their defense when targeted. Furthermore, sometimes xenophobic reactions by natives of a guest country against Iraqi refugees materialize. Iraqi refugees' introduction into the competitive job market, and access to squalid and limited residential areas, is often perceived by natives as encroachment on their community and a danger to their livelihoods. This fear is transferred into discrimination and occasional moments of violence on Iraqi refugees, not excluding their children either.

In fact, at a particular school which I was employed at, one administrator and a teacher warned me that the Iraqi students were the most troublesome and less intelligent than the overall student population. I felt it was pertinent to reply that this was "not true" based on my own observations at the end of my contract at the school.

Another popular myth in Jordan that demonstrates this xenophobia is the repetitive belief by

some Jordanians, that Iraqi refugees are rich and have money but feign poverty. Moreover and of much larger consequence, the insufficient aid transforms Iraqis from the educated middle strata of Iraqi society into the equivalent of beggars. There were many times when I witnessed incidents of Iraqi families struggling to afford medicine, and wondering where their next meal would come from. Iraqi refugee families would try to ascertain the timing of the next food sale or discount, worrying whether they would have to live in the streets for a short period of time until next month when they could afford rent. Many obsessed over whether there was second-hand or used clothing available, brooded over whether they would buy candles for next month or collect water in buckets for future use, and agonize over whether their children would be able to attend a full semester of school or which books they needed to purchase. Iraqis complain, reinforced by evidence, that the inadequate response to the economic environment surrounding them by the UNHCR monetary program has forced refugees' living standards to deteriorate to the level of living below the poverty line.

On the issue of money, it is also the opinion of some refugees that those with larger financial means are accepted swifter than others, rather than strict admission for relocation based on heuristics of financial and life threatening exigency according to each individual refugee's case. It is very unclear to these Iraqi refugees as to what criterion is used to assess their travel authorization. Thus, they perceive that those in more dire and dangerous situations will frequently find themselves passed over in the application process, as a result of commutation by those with higher monetary assets.

The conceptual image of the entire relocation process sometimes seems to be a market gamble of who can be more of an investment for the country that admits a refugee. In other words, the refugee services sometimes appear to refugees to not be altruistic, but a means to expedite and augment the spending of money by potential contributors to the western economy, while being labeled as refugees instead of tourists. Although it is doubtful that there is some significant truth behind this claim, it does appear some Iraqis sincerely feel this is the case. Further analysis and research is needed on this subject instead of relying on conjectures.

Service and attention to detail in each case by the UNHCR and IOM is a formidable and dichotomous enigma as well. Iraqi refugees complain that the agencies doing the interviewing are lethargically slow in replies and notifications, while simultaneously not being meticulous enough to investigate each case in order to vet honest and dishonest applicants. Some may perceive this as latent irony in that while refugees want a faster system, they concurrently want a more meticulous and accurate approach. Why would one possibly construe this as an irony? Some may state the former and latter are an anathema to each other. In other words, to be more meticulous and accurate, one would expect slower processing and feedback whereas one would expect less accuracy with the diametric approach. Nevertheless, the refugees maintain

that the IOM and UNHCR are sluggishly slow in processing their files without quick feedback, and are also inaccurate and unfair in their decisions. The IOM and UNHCR can effectively be described as the worst of both sides for the aforementioned dichotomy.

In addition, the IOM and UNHCR also need more creativity or changes to their monotonous routines and schedules. It is a sad and disappointing, yet farcical claim by Iraqi refugees in Jordan that they know that if either agency calls you for an interview for relocation on Saturday, then you are likely accepted and if on Tuesday, you are likely rejected. If true, this earlier behavior compromises the faith and confidence in the care taken in handling each case file, and also proliferates the psychological stress imposed on those who may attend a Tuesday interview in frightful anticipation of bad news. Regardless of the determinants for the IOM's and UNHCR's behavior, this tribulation for Iraqi refugees takes a toll on their sanity and mental health. Some interviewees mentioned persistent uncivil and malicious arguments with UNHCR and IOM members because of this. They also stated that the combination of a lack of confidence and faith in the decision making of both organizations, the slow feedback and processing of their files, and the strain of their circumstances; exacerbates their lack of hope. This gives them the sensation of being lost in time and space without having a clear and trustworthy pathway to their aspirations.

Immigration restrictions are also a constant dilemma. Many refugees in Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali argue that they are not permitted to visit relatives in other countries such as Egypt and Lebanon. They are told by the governments of the countries they wish to visit, to risk danger via travel from their country of refuge to an embassy in Baghdad for ascertaining a visa, then to their final destination. Some Iraqi refugees have lived in their guest country for many years and have not seen their family. One refugee which I interviewed in Jordan has a sister in Syria and has not seen her for many years as a result of such a policy. She pointed toward her young children during the interview saying that they have never met their aunt in their life. It is no doubt that the inclination of governments to enforce these restrictions to avoid overstays and from fear of adding onto their own refugee populations, has exacerbated the happiness and mental health of these Iraqi *émigrés*.

A complicated and often unnoticed complaint is the lack of personal contact and precise evaluations of the living standards of Iraqi refugees by larger organizations; the lack of objective aid distribution between grassroots organizations and refugees; and the endemic subjective and inauthentic communication between grassroots organizations and the UNHCR and IOM on behest of these stateless Iraqis. Although this affliction is much more apparent and common in Hashemi Shemali than in Jaramana, such a complaint can be found in both locations. A partial reason for this imbalance may result from the tough screening process that the Syrian government puts all grassroots organizations through before allowing them to function within

the Syrian community. The positive aspect of this vetting process is qualitative, objective, and trustworthy aid to refugees. The negative side is that those organizations capable of distributing much more aid to refugees who may be deemed politically volatile, are ostracized and omitted.

Furthermore, an organization's autonomy and freedom to express honest observations in Syria is stymied by the government. Nevertheless, several refugees complain that while the UNHCR is like an invisible entity, absent in their daily lives yet with so much power to change it, some grassroots organizations which are more transparent in their lives fail in upholding objectivity. In other words, sometimes the heads of the small grassroots organizations do not help the worst case scenarios, but use their influence with certain people in the IOM and UNHCR to push relocation cases faster or offer immediate aid to those who they have built a close relationship.

In my own personal testimony, while attending a weekly gathering of refugees in the premises of one of these grassroots organizations, the Collateral Repair Project, the men inside were having a delightful conversation with cheerful games while drinking and eating a vast supply of coffee, nuts, and other victuals. Meanwhile, a decrepit female Iraqi refugee with two bedraggled children arrived at the front door in a desperate state asking for help. Yet, she was turned away by the head of this grassroots organization undeterred by the fact that this family was without a male figure, husband and father, and had no food or housing to stay in that night.

The effect of this relationship between grassroots heads and refugees, is it compels refugees to sacrifice time, favors, and comments of praise, possible deception, and energy, wooing and fawning these heads to become personally close enough with them and thus winning favoritism and assistance in their individual cases. Although not often, this promotes perfidy amongst the refugee community and religious or ethnic hostilities; resulting from competition for affection, laudatory praise, and consequent assistance. One could say this is the nature of the whole process, but it leaves others who have much more severe cases, doing without. Thus, there is a positive and negative aspect of grassroots and larger organizations. Grassroots organizations are more visible to the refugees, and provide social contact, and immediate aid. Whereas larger agencies are much more objective and fair in their decisions, yet slow and less aware of the reality on the ground where Iraqi refugees live.

In addition, as a result of a floundering economy, less allocations for funding to the UNHCR, and the lack of charitable donations to grassroots organizations by philanthropists; the UNHCR, IOM, and grassroots organizations must selectively choose which amongst the refugees need the most financial help or expedited relocation. This increasingly dependent relationship strengthens the reliance upon this skewed and inaccurate dissemination of subjective information from grassroots organizations, which is based on personal discretion instead of the merits of each case. Thus the disgruntled murmurs by Iraqi refugees from Syria and Jordan

entail the facts that they are sometimes alienated from asking for aid from grassroots organizations because of this competition. Some Iraqi refugees' desperate situations are not truly addressed or revealed to larger agencies, and those who may be secondary picks for relocation end up in the primary spot as a result of recommendations by the heuristic of intimate relationships based on blandishments and deceptive cadging.

The above facts were not solely reliant on testimonies from Iraqi refugees; it was a slow development to this realization as other refugees, many in number, indirectly corroborated the testimonies of those above. How did they do this indirectly? There were many Iraqis who were afflicted with far more serious complications and with a longer record of residence, rather than those Iraqis who were closely associated with grassroots organizations. Yet, the former had never heard of nor received help from those grassroots organizations. Abu Omar, mentioned earlier, stated that out of all the organizations in Hashemi Shemali, the only one that served him objectively and consistently while having a recognized presence in the community was the Women's Federation for World Peace. Another refugee named Abu Ahmad, concurred by dismissing other organizations in his own words as "club house activities and cult like."

Suggested Solutions for Iraqi Refugees

Although the aforementioned complaints by refugees seem overwhelming and like an unending collection of demands accumulating into a diatribe, their similarities in two different geographical regions outlines a mirror reflection of how the environment has shaped Iraqi refugees' perceptions and lives. Furthermore, these two microcosms seem to have enough correlation to carefully assume that other refugees have similar experiences. The tribulations and hardships that Iraqi refugees endure make them people of an extraordinary resilience. While awaiting such a blessing, their conditions could be improved by mitigating their complaints. We may also find a possible future resolution to the Iraqi refugee puzzle by considering their following opinions about that route.

The commonplace opinion amongst Iraqi *émigrés* in regards to returning to Iraq was expressed when I asked Abu Omar if he had ever contemplated returning to Iraq. His reply was a quick and stern, "no." His reasons coalesced with others. Iraqi refugees are reluctant to return to Iraq because of the ongoing violence. This is very evident in the news today. However, there is something very considerable to add in regards to the apparent lack of the ability of the Iraqi government to protect citizens, which is overlooked on the surface. That omission is that the targets of violence are not just a result of a religious determinant or dependent on the misconstrued actions of the refugees by malevolent groups, but instead there is a tribal conflagration involved which equates into innocent Iraqis being targeted because not of what they do or what their religion is, but who their kin are. This makes it very difficult to provide assurances of safety for these refugees if they were to return to Iraq. It is a problem which needs to be supported by an answer to comfort these people before they return.

There are also further grounds other than just violence which makes Iraqi refugees reluctant to return. In addition to the violence which is a life threatening reality, they have also lost many of their possessions and jobs. Compensation seems to be a necessary bandage for these wounds they sacrificed when fleeing the violence from the subsequent political vacuum.

Furthermore, the communities which displaced Iraqis abandoned have changed dramatically. There is an overlooked primordial and antediluvian cultural characteristic about Iraqis' relationship with their community. The sense of community is of much stronger worth to them than many westerners could surmise. As one refugee in Syria informed me, the community sometimes played a larger role than one's own family. He stated, "you ate with them, visited them, took care of each other, attended each other's weddings and social events, borrowed and loaned money, and much more." Before, the community was an ethnically and religiously diverse amalgamation before the destruction and havoc in Iraq. Now, some of the communities

Iraqi refugees were familiar with have disappeared, replaced by unidentifiable people and divided into predominant Shi'a or Sunni or Christian communes. The question as to how to introduce Iraqi refugees back into unfamiliar communities and replace what they have forfeited is an exigent crisis that no doubt restrains this option for governments and refugees.

The way in which the Iraqi government is attempting to procure peace, safety, and stability in Iraq is also an anxiety. The government's fledgling counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy of fighting insurgents needs to focus more on community development than the application of force. A prominent reason for the qualms of refugees to return back to Iraq is negligence in COIN efforts. Iraqi refugees do not need to live in Iraq to understand the status quo there. They hear witness accounts from their families about the conditions in their homeland. They hear of the fluctuating electrical outages, limited supply of water, and a dearth of other resources for occasional long periods of time, while gunfire and death is a disturbing norm. The often overlooked and more effective measurement of success in COIN is gaining the legitimacy in the people's eyes by providing safety for the Samaritans, elimination of corruption, and the rebuilding of communities to provide a normal and productive life for its citizens. These are the paramount goals of any Low Intensity Conflict; goals which Iraqi refugees are sure have not been achieved yet in Iraq.

While on the topic of the Iraqi government, refugees have a serious problem with its legitimacy. One Iraqi refugee expressed the opinion of many Iraqis in and outside of Iraq when he stated in reference to the Iraqi government, "they care about Iranians, not Iraqis." Others clearly made it aware that they and their families in Iraq, along with the majority of the Iraqi population do not recognize the acting government. Worse, Iraqi refugees feel that the government is a culprit of the violence they have been witnessing. Unless the Iraqi government focuses on the second half of my critique of their COIN efforts, they may continue to be riddled with the same regenerative opposition they are creating while simultaneously seeking to destroy. Moreover, unless refugees receive some assurances that some of their country’s government officials are not acting callously or with malice in augmenting the conflict there, and that their government is a legitimately supported one concerned with the interests of the entire people, Iraqi refugees will not return.

Without accommodating all of the previous observations that Iraqi refugees made in response to why they refuse to return to Iraq, there is no other choice but to proliferate the numbers relocated to western countries. As Abu Omar responded about the future in English: “anything to change our situation but all doors are closed... let us [depart] from Jordan to a better country." If not, the only other alternative is to grant Iraqi refugees exceptional privileges and benefits within their country of refuge. Some refugees desire a status that accord them legal rights, access to the same public resources which others in their country have, and less

restriction in traveling. Abu Saad, noted earlier, demonstrated that he understood quite well something that lingered in the posterior realms of my own subconscious about the Iraqi refugees' lack of status in Jordan and Syria when I was interviewing him. He made the point that without a certain status, there is uncertain humanity. Abu Saad declared that he is more than uncertain that he is a human being.

Although these refugees have explained the deterrence of their return to Iraq, they seek something primary that all humans do: a happy and secure family. As Abu Saad, pleaded to the audience of this report, "help me. I want to live in peace. I want to live free. I want a future for my kids. I want to be with my family." Abu Saad's and Abu Omar's pleas, along with those of others, unfortunately translate during these times into the necessity of having a country of their own. If the complaints above or the primary desire of all refugees for their own country are incorrigible for the future, then it is without doubt that the Iraq War and its humanitarian response was built on a bedrock of calamitous improvidence.

Conclusion

The American-led Iraq War has produced much inhumanity in the lives of Iraqi refugees. If we were to judge the responsibility of the United States for the innocent victims of this war, we as Americans are indeed failing along with other countries who participated in the war.

The UNHCR, IOM, and grassroots organizations have provided minimal relief that does not suffice in securing the physical and mental welfare of Iraqi refugees. Worse, there are many instances of malpractice by these organizations which have exacerbated the lives of refugees. In order for this to be corrected, it is prudent to consider three major points that are the culprits of the tribulations experienced by Iraqi refugees. If these points are not addressed, then expedited relocation or addressing the concerns of Iraqi refugees that prevent them from deciding to return to Iraq, are the only other solutions. Otherwise, responsibility over the Iraq War is disingenuous and clearly absent.

Iraqi refugees need more financial aid. The lack of this aid has caused them to risk their own welfare via illegal employment in order to survive. In addition, the Iraqi refugees in Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali are living in penury without the security of affording education for their children, buying adequate clothes, paying the rent, and purchasing medication for their survival. The quality of life for Iraqi refugees as a result of rising prices and insufficient aid is shocking.

Iraqi refugees also need rights or a status in a country. The lack of rights experienced in Jaramana and Hashemi Shemali compounds the issue of illegal employment by Iraqi refugees and consequent deportation or imprisonment. These rights also should include the right to travel to visit their families, own property and have access to public services, and equal protection under the law. Without these rights, Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan are living like encaged animals in their country of refuge.

Finally Iraqi refugees need more efficient and organized aid agencies with more integrity. These victims of war deserve no less. Iraqi refugees are uninformed of the criteria, steps, and actions involving their cases to the IOM and UNHCR. The refugees do not trust these agencies, as well as grassroots organizations. These organizations are meant to aid the Iraqi refugees, but instead they are indirectly destroying the faith that refugees hold in humanity and justice.

Author's Note

The devastation brought to these refugees' nation has created a humanitarian crisis without a public emergency declaration or adequate response. I have noticed that it takes more tribulations to coerce tears from the eyes of these builders of the first civilization in history than the average human. The many years of torment have numbed the tears of Iraqi refugees. These are the faces, the lives, the humans behind the popular political headlines that we all have become accustomed to reading. While we turn off our laptops, fold our newspapers, or proceed with our daily work routines after short conversations in regards to the above stories; we are missing the challenges to humanity in the world today that these voiceless people struggle through daily.

When I asked Abu Omar about how people can help him and other Iraqi refugees, his terse response was "feel with us."

I now know what he means after painful reminiscences in the plethora of stories I have collected. These souls sometimes feel they are worse than dead, they feel that they simply do not exist. I understand the pessimism of Iraqi refugees for every person that attempts to help them. While they are without their beautiful true love they call Iraq, they entertain many guests who interview them with hopes that this one interviewer will translate their language of tragedy to an audience so the world may understand and feel their pain, thus lifting their albatross, only to be exhaustingly dismayed and frustrated time after time.

I am reminded every time I interview these beautiful, proud, resourceful, intelligent, and kind humans, of a famous poem by Edgar Allen Poe where all of the questions myself and other interviewers asked are nothing more than a part of the same repetitious Raven squawking "nevermore" in the ears of people who sincerely feel that nothing is being done to help them. I am not the only one that reminisces though. These proud Iraqis also reminisce over the closest images of a happy life with their families, a long lost love with the name of Iraq they so desperately need returned or substituted. This physical manifestation of their true love is a country to call their own just as the man in Poe's famous poem who suffered a continuous "nevermore" by a raven to his cries, while languishing over his true love, Leonor.