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How Does it Feel to Be a Refugee?

Belonging, Precarity, and Cultural Exchange

As a refugee, I'm doing . . . a lot of good things. And I'm doing a great job . . . for the community or for my work, you know? But, sometimes, if you make one single mistake . . . they will forget about all of the good things you have done the past five years.

—Ali, 14 January 2018

Introduction

The preceding chapter explored the ongoing American war against Iraq, the effects that conflict has had on that country's society, and the decisions many Iraqis made to leave their homes and resettle in the United States. This chapter turns to the postresettlement experiences of belonging in American society of those with whom I spoke for this inquiry. To reiterate from the introduction, belonging, as conceptualized here, consists of the informal possibilities for individuals to exercise their rights substantively and to obtain acceptance as full members of American society (Brubaker 2010), should they choose to seek it, as well as the reciprocal feelings of acceptance and processes and possibilities for interviewees to identify and build relationships with members and institutions of American society at multiple levels.

Belonging is intertwined and co-constitutive with democratic membership and participation. Each factor can influence the others, and there was necessarily overlap among the feelings of belonging, understandings of democratic membership, and opportunities for participation among interviewees for this study. As a result, while I discuss these factors in separate chapters, I do so to ensure flow and clarity, rather than to indicate a sharp delineation between the concepts or how interviewees experienced them.

This chapter first briefly elaborates the process of resettling in the United States and interviewees' experiences with that process. It then explores interviewees' sense of belonging in their local communities and in the United States more broadly. Those with whom I spoke suggested that such attachments can be partial or unresolved in various ways. The chapter then focuses on the recurring theme of, as W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) framed it, the "strange experience" of being seen as a problem by many in society. For some interviewees, this strangeness was informed in no small part by widely circulating anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and anti-refugee discourses and discriminatory policies in the United States. Thereafter, the chapter considers the precarity expressed by some interviewees, both long-standing and increased following the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency. Trump ran an overtly racist and xenophobic campaign and pursued and enacted policies aimed at making resettlement more difficult during his tenure (Johnson 2015; Newkirk II 2018).

The chapter concludes by exploring the role of diversity in interviewees' communities and cultural exchange between resettled Iraqis and their neighbors and friends in building and galvanizing a sense of belonging for them. Importantly, many of the individuals with whom I spoke cited perceptions of widespread resistance to newcomers from some native-born Americans even as they were able to create positive relationships with other neighbors and colleagues and develop possibilities for mutual exchange. I argue in this and the following chapters that a positive welcoming by American citizens in general—and in response to negative rhetoric and governmental policies—not only facilitated the resettlement process for those I interviewed, but also widened informal spaces for belonging and participation at all levels of society.

Refugee Resettlement in the United States

As described in the previous chapter, the individuals who participated in this research sought refuge in the United States through different programs and paths. Seven interviewees arrived in the United States through the United States Refugee Admissions Program. Established by the United States Refugee Act of 1980, this program systematized US policy related to refugee resettlement, which had until then been ad hoc. For Iraqis, resettlement through the USRAP involves leaving Iraq for a second country such as Jordan or Syria, registering with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as a refugee, and then applying for resettlement in a third country. Qualifying for refugee status requires that those applying demonstrate a "well-founded fear of persecution" because of their membership in a particular "race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular

social group, or political opinion” (Bruno 2019, 9). This process involves extensive background checks and verification processes. The US government coordinates with UNHCR to process resettlement applications. The US government also contracts with nine nonprofit resettlement agencies, which provide support services to newly arriving refugees.

I also interviewed five Special Immigrant Visa recipients. The 2006 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) created a program to allow Afghans and Iraqis who worked with the United States military as translators and interpreters to apply for SIVs to resettle in the United States. This program was later expanded to include Afghans and Iraqis who worked in other capacities for the US government during the US wars in their countries (Bruno 2019, 9). There is significant overlap between refugee status and an SIV, and many individuals qualify for both programs. A major difference is that receiving an SIV does not require demonstrating persecution as does refugee status; however, the SIV program does require applicants to show they have experienced “ongoing serious threat” because of their work for the US government (Bruno 2019, 9).

In addition to resettling via the USRAP and SIV programs, two interviewees came to the United States and claimed asylum. Refugee status, SIV, and asylum also have some overlap. Unlike the USRAP or SIV program, asylum-seekers arrive in the United States through multiple means—for example, a tourist or student visa. They must apply for asylum within one year of arriving in the United States. Asylum status provides many of the same rights and protections as refugee status. Like refugee status, a successful asylum claim requires applicants to demonstrate that they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country. Like successfully receiving refugee status or an SIV, successfully receiving asylum often requires those seeking safety to narrate and reiterate the details of often-traumatic events that caused them to flee their home country (Bohmer and Shuman 2008).

In the United States, newly resettled refugees, Special Immigrant Visa recipients, and those granted asylum are eligible for public support directly through state and federal government programs and government-contracted, nonprofit resettlement agencies (Nelson et al. 2016). Nada related, “In the beginning, in the first six months, when we came here, of course, [the refugee resettlement agency] helped us with food stamps and health insurance until we got good jobs” (1 November 2017). Ahmed, too, spoke about his interaction with the resettlement agency in Chicago, saying it assisted him and his daughter for a short time:

You need to be signed up to a resettlement agency . . . and I met the worker in the beginning. They gave me access to my first apartment. And, of course, they furnished the apartment a bit. And they helped with the registration of my daughter in the school. Also, they were very welcoming. They said: “Do you need us to help you go to the social security?” I said, “No, I want to try it

myself.” “So, do you want help getting a driving license?” I said, “No, I want to try it myself.” But they helped with the school registration. They also gave me an appointment to do the health screening and stuff. (2 October 2017)

Some individuals who resettle may also find an individual sponsor in the United States who agrees to assist them when they arrive. Kasim, said, for example: “I was living with the sponsor, but [the refugee resettlement agency] helped me with the food supplement program, and medical program for the few months. And then . . . I started working and I was able to work within my field of experience at the time. And, I was able to support myself and pay the rent and all that” (27 February 2018).

Although not officially sponsors of Marwa’s resettlement, another Iraqi family that her husband knew provided support upon her arrival in the United States; she explained:

I’m lucky I have this family here. They are a nice family, they are big family. They consider themselves like a family for my husband because my husband, he grew up with their kids. And, I didn’t know them, but they heard about me from my husband or from my husband’s family. I didn’t meet them before. But they are so nice. They helped me. The [resettlement] agency they rented, an apartment for me but this family they took care of everything. Because when you came here, it’s okay the agency they help you with something. But, the big [things], you need family. You need friends here. (2 October 2017)

The need for additional help in the resettlement process is due, in part, to the reality that much of the assistance provided by resettlement agencies is time-limited and means-tested, leaving those unable to find adequate employment quickly in difficult circumstances. Because cash assistance is time-limited and relatively small, many resettled refugees face economic hardship (Inhorn 2018). As Mohammed explained, the resettlement agency provided services for ninety days. “After three months you have to be responsible for yourself. Okay, I didn’t speak English, how can I be responsible for myself? I didn’t [even] know how to go shopping” (Mohammed 2 November 2017). Echoing Mohammed, Walid said: “When refugees arrive in the United States, there’s a funding program, which is 90 days, three months. After 90 days the funding is stopped. And if they are eligible for social services they get the services, it depends on their medical, mental problems. If they are not, they have to find work. So, after three months just imagine yourself, you don’t speak the language, you moved to another country, you don’t know their culture, you don’t know the mail that came to you, you have a family, it’s very overwhelming” (27 September 2017).

Marwa said that the resettlement agency helped her with “basic things” but that in her experience resettled refugees need more support than the resettlement agencies provide. Refugees are expected to be “self-sufficient” within a few months of their arrival. Marwa explained:

[The resettlement agencies] are not a big help. I want to be honest. I had a bad experience with them. They didn't help that much. . . . When I called them, they didn't answer: "Oh we are busy like that. We've been busy like that." Yeah, they did for me the basic things. They help you with basics. They took me to the welfare [office]. They applied for food stamps for me and cash [assistance] because I was considered a single mom when I came. I was considered single with the three kids. And, they helped me with that. (25 November 2017)

However, Marwa implied that when the resettlement agency found out about the support she received from her husband's family friends, they stepped back from assisting her.

In addition to the nine resettlement agencies the US government contracts with, nonprofit and community organizations provide essential services to supplement those limited supports offered by publicly funded institutions and contracted resettlement agencies. These organizations may be formal or informal and include mutual aid societies and religious organizations. Some such organizations are dedicated to assisting particular immigrant groups, immigrants in general, or refugees. As explored in more detail in later chapters, several of the individuals I spoke with had volunteered with and, in some cases, founded community organizations dedicated to supporting immigrants in their areas.

Resettlement can be a difficult process. Interviewees discussed specific challenges they faced after arriving in the United States such as inadequate housing, the high cost of living, and frustration with the limits of the resettlement agencies charged with supporting them. Mohammed said: "The big thing in America [that makes] life difficult: the economy. Oh my god, it is really difficult. Not just for me, for all the people" (2 November 2017). Even with two incomes, his and his wife's, Mohammed said that paying the bills was a challenge. Paying everything every month left nothing extra to save. As he put it with a laugh: "You can take a breath for free. But nothing is free for you" (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

Sarah was surprised that the resettlement agency in Arizona, where she first arrived, placed many newly arrived refugees, even those with degrees from their home countries, in jobs in places such as warehouses. She said, "Me and my sister, we completed our education in Iraq. When you come here to start work, we were surprised [by] the kind of work here. In the beginning, it's not good actually. And some refugees suffered from this part" (Sarah 30 November 2017). Hashim discussed this issue as well, saying of his experience: "When I first arrived, I had my expectations regarding [my] career. I was expecting to find something that can serve my background, serve my experience, to continue this career. And then when I first came the only jobs being offered to me were only like survival jobs working in stores, working in department stores or warehouses and all of that. Facto-

ries” (1 October 2017). It took time for Hashim to find employment that he found fulfilling: “I would say we started to think more seriously about life and about establishing ourselves in the country. So, I’d say that happened a year after I arrived. Actually, no, like a year and a half maybe. I would say that the first year was the hardest for us. After that, we were able to fit in. Because during the first year, during the whole first year we both had the same idea of traveling back to Iraq. To leave everything and travel back to Iraq because it was very hard. It was very difficult” (1 October 2017).

Only after he and his wife secured full-time work did Hashim begin to feel settled. He went on to describe feeling that he had adjusted to life in the United States relatively quickly compared to other Iraqis he knew. Nonetheless, he explained:

It’s been hard. It’s been very long [and] difficult. We had many difficult days at the beginning. It was really hard to adjust with the community, to adjust with my career. For me being a graduate from Iraq with a master’s degree and I used to work for, like, 10 years in Iraq with experience working with many healthcare organizations, many nonprofit organizations. I worked for the United Nations in Iraq. I worked for the USAID. It’s one of the biggest nonprofit agencies working in Iraq. So, when I first arrived I had so many expectations about life in the United States, which turned out that it’s not really that easy. (Hashim 1 October 2017)

Hashim and several others said that knowing English had made their transition easier. Those who had worked with the United States in Iraq as translators and interpreters, for example, could engage more quickly with the day-to-day aspects of life after resettling such as completing government paperwork, applying for jobs, and meeting new people. Others, like Nada, endeavored to become proficient in English as soon as they could. She said:

I started to learn English after just one month. When I finished all my paperwork. So, I started to learn English [at a nonprofit] and I took two levels at the same time. I started from literacy. And then my teacher really saw I can do something because I learned very quickly. So, they encouraged me to take more classes in college. And I took evening classes, at [a local college] at the same time. I studied in the morning at the [nonprofit] and I took an evening class [at the college]. I finished all these classes during about 9 months. . . . Then my teacher encouraged me to help them in summer classes [at the nonprofit], to teach the students. (Nada 1 November 2017)

Resettling requires navigating new economic, social, cultural, and political structures and processes. As a result, interviewees’ experiences with resettlement are further explored and woven throughout the rest of the text. The next section begins to examine resettled Iraqis’ perceptions of belonging and engagement in American society and politics.

Between Here and There: Complexities of Belonging in American Society

The interviews were in-depth explorations of individuals' experiences of belonging in their local resettlement contexts—Upstate New York, New York City, Chicagoland, the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and the Washington, DC, metro area—as well as in broader American society. Overwhelmingly, individuals with whom I spoke envisioned remaining in the United States to live, work, and raise their families. Some were certain, while others expressed a lack of control concerning whether they would—or could—stay. Both Ahmed and Tariq said, “I hope so” about the possibility of remaining permanently in the United States. Some with whom I spoke, including Omar and Ali, attributed their intention to stay to the roots they had put down and the opportunities available for themselves, their children, and their families in the United States.

Omar explained this process in the following way: “This question [Do you plan on staying in the United States permanently?], if you asked me when I came here, I would say no. But now, every year, my roots in this country become stronger and stronger. So, imagine, 9 years. The roots are now bigger. Because we went back [to Iraq] this year in August. . . . I missed all the places, I missed everything. But still, the country was not ready to welcome us. Still, it's in chaos” (14 December 2017). Others, such as Nora and Zaid, 35, now living in the Washington, DC, area, indicated they would likely remain. However, if they could not, they would not return to Iraq because of the ongoing danger and instability in their home country.

Interviewees often described their feelings of belonging in the United States, the society in which they were rebuilding their lives. Many of those with whom I spoke were “claiming and creating the social spaces of belonging” (Crane 2021, 56). For some, including Ahmed, a sense of attachment began to develop immediately upon arrival, while for others, including Nora and Marwa, becoming comfortable in their new home was still an unfolding process. Similarly, for Tariq, that evolution remained unfinished or constrained. As I elaborate below, some of those with whom I spoke articulated a sense of being “betwixt and between” Iraqi and American cultures and societies (Campbell 2016). For some, this feeling meant “keeping certain stuff” (Crane 2021, 45) from their Iraqi heritage and background and amalgamating it with elements of American cultural practices. As multiple interviewees explained, Americans' reactions to them, positive and negative, played a substantial role in this evolution of attachment and belonging.

Ahmed explained that he immediately had a sense of connection to the United States. As he described it: “I always say, if asked by any of my American friends, actually it started from the moment I arrived. The first words I heard here in the US were: ‘Welcome Home’ from the immigration officer,

right before any other word she said. She just said, ‘Welcome home,’ and at that moment I really felt connected” (Ahmed 2 October 2017). Despite what he called Chicago’s “bad reputation,” he had been comfortable upon his arrival. In his experience, “People here are really friendly, supportive. They care for the community. Everyone was supportive around me. So yeah, I feel connected, and I think there was not really a process” (Ahmed 2 October 2017). He gave the example of an interaction he had on the first day his daughter started at her new school. According to Ahmed, staff members “immediately came and asked me if there is any religion or anything related to your tradition, we want to include that in her teaching. I said no, let her be like other kids. . . . So, from that moment on, I think we were really connected” (2 October 2017).

For his part, Hashim explained that in Chicago, he was able to live with diverse members of the community: “I am not feeling in any way that I am different here. And this is what I like about Chicago, especially. So many communities, everybody’s living together peacefully without any problems or conflicts . . . like what we had in the Middle East. So, that’s why I really love this place and this city” (1 October 2017). Hashim’s in-laws had also moved to Chicago and two of his brothers now live in Texas. As a result, he said, “I feel like we have been building community, building connections, building everything. At the same time, we are receiving the same rights, we are following the same policies and rules as US citizens, so I feel . . . 100 percent comfortable with being a US resident” (Hashim 1 October 2017).

Nada said, “*in sha’ Allah* [God willing], why not?” (1 November 2017) about the possibilities of belonging in American society. She continued, “Because, after one year, we will be citizens. . . . When we came here, after five years, we can become a citizen” (Nada 1 November 2017). Nada and her family’s arrival in the United States via the Special Immigrant Visa program provided them with a path from legal residence to citizenship. She said of her feelings when she first arrived in New York: “Really, I was afraid. Because, the first thing, we are old, me and my husband. We built everything in our country. We studied there. We worked there. . . . So, when we decided to come here, I felt at that time—of course now, I’m comfortable—but, that means I will face many challenges. I will face a new life. I don’t know about the people there. But, *khalas* [enough], this is our decision. . . . And when we came here, really, all the people were very, very nice” (Nada 1 November 2017).

Nora expressed a strong sense of belonging in her city in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, saying, “I do feel very, very strong belonging to this community, this society. . . . It’s very local” (6 February 2018). She explained that meeting others and volunteering with local organizations had been integral to her development of belonging:

It was a process. The first year I was like: “No, I don’t belong here. I don’t have friends, I don’t know how they make friends, everyone is living by himself. There are no family bonds.” And I was like, “No, this is not what I am used to, so I cannot do it.” But then, I tried volunteering. . . . When we came to the Shenandoah Valley Region, the man who rented us the house became very close to us. So, he brought his wife, we asked them to come for dinner. And his wife met me and said: “I know a lady in the community, she is very nice, and she always tries to meet new people.” So, I met her. (Nora 6 February 2018)

The woman Nora met served as the chair of an activist coalition with branches throughout Virginia. Nora began volunteering with the organization’s Shenandoah Valley Region group and met many other community members through that work. She also learned about and became active with, refugee-serving organizations in the Shenandoah Valley Region. She described this experience and the individuals she met and with whom she became friends: “I met two women that have changed my outlook about the United States. . . . It’s like, they were the turning point in my life and I’m not alone in this” (Nora 6 February 2018).

Using an example, Nora illustrated the process of increasingly perceiving herself as a member of the community. Nora’s city holds an international festival that Nora has attended every year since she arrived. As she explained:

The first year we came to the Shenandoah Valley, and I came to this festival, I felt so, so down that I didn’t know anybody. I’m just walking and seeing booths and stuff. The second year, when I walked [through the festival] I was like: “Hi! Hi!” People started to know me. The third year . . . people knew me all the way down. This year, I was standing in the refugee office booth and then I went to another booth, and I was like, people know me, and I’ve been talking and talking, and this made me feel very, very connected to this place. Like, I know everyone here. Like I am from here. I feel that. Like I belong. (Nora 6 February 2018)

Similarly, Walid observed, “I feel that this is my country now, because it is the place that gives you respect, love and probably support. I consider this my country now” (September 17, 2017). Importantly, for Walid, this feeling of belonging meant learning about and incorporating aspects of American culture into his life while retaining his Iraqi heritage—a dynamic I explore in more detail below. Abdullah, likewise, indicated that he felt a sense of belonging in US society, yet was still Iraqi: “I feel that I’m both in between, you know? I still am proud of my Iraqi heritage, my Iraqi culture and that is part of me that never changed. Since I was born, I am always proud of that” (14 January 2018). Later in our conversation, he said:

I think the USA is a great country. I really believe that. I just don't like some of the regimes that come here, and they affect other people's lives. You know? But as a country, as an idea, the USA is a very interesting and unique country. . . . I don't feel it's just a country. It's basically, I don't know what to call it. . . . I feel it's like an organization or a club. Really, it could feel that way, people from everywhere in the world they come here and try to contribute to make it more successful. So, I really don't think these people who are coming here are causing problems. If you look at it most of these people are actually helping the country. (Abdullah 14 January 2018)

Also speaking to the complexity of belonging, Zaid said: "I came from a Sunni/Shi'ite family. So, I'm neither Sunni nor Shi'ite. I'm just a typical Iraqi citizen. I used to be. Now I'm American. . . . I'm still both" (27 February 2018). Despite retaining his Iraqi identity, Zaid said there was "no way" he would return to Iraq. He left the country in 2007 and spent three years in Jordan before coming to the United States. He had returned to Iraq in the summer of 2017 to visit his family still living in Baghdad. He said, "It was really hard for me. I couldn't even recognize anything when I went back. . . . I mean, it was really bad when I left the country. . . . When I came back last summer, it was even worse. . . . It was really bad. But, for some reason, people are just adapting to that way of life" (27 February 2018).

Like Ahmed, Zaid described the point at which he viewed himself as an American. He explained: "The day that I really felt that I was an American citizen is the day when I came back from Iraq [after a recent trip] and the border agent officer told me: 'Welcome home.' I really felt that, yes, this is my home now and I really felt that I just wanted to come back, even though I only spent about a week outside this country" (Zaid 27 February 2018). However, Zaid continued, "to be completely honest with you, I still feel that I am Iraqi because I cannot deny that even talking to you now, I know that you're looking at me thinking: 'You have citizenship, you . . . speak good English . . . but he is not from here'" (27 February 2018). He apologized to me for saying this and added: "I see this like in every, in most, of the people that I interact with. Although no one has, almost no one, has ever shown me this kind of feeling. But, maybe it's just the way I feel" (Zaid 27 February 2018). Despite the perception that many native-born Americans with whom he interacts view him as an outsider even though he is a citizen, Zaid explained: "But, still, it's much better than the way that I felt in my home country, Iraq. At least, I'm dealing with people who respect me, just because of me . . . not because of my background. . . . Maybe I'm . . . giving you mixed information, but it's . . . the way I feel. It's complicated. It's really complicated" (27 February 2018).

Mohammed offered that the question of belonging for him was unresolved as well. He remarked, "I have good communication with the American people. . . . The people in Upstate New York are really friendly" (Mohammed

2 November 2017). However, when I asked him “do you feel like the US is your country?” he said, “Right now, yeah. Like 75 percent, yes. But you know, if you go to Iraq right now, you will miss your country. It’s difficult, do you know what I mean? I was born there. All my life was there. Yeah. So, yeah. But it’s not 100 percent” (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

For Marwa, belonging was a process. The “first time is hard,” she said, “I came here and already I knew English. But, the accent, the dialect, it’s different. But let me tell you: it depends on your personality; if you accept it or if you adapt. I feel I am flexible, I adapted” (Marwa 25 November 2017). She attributed this successful outcome to her outgoing personality. In her words: “I like to talk with the people. I like to ask a lot of questions. I didn’t feel shy” (Marwa 25 November 2017). Now a US citizen, Marwa considered herself both American and Iraqi, “I love my country [Iraq] because my family is there,” she said (25 November 2017). The week after our interview, Marwa traveled to visit her family in Baghdad for the first time since 2011.

Unlike Marwa, “I’m a citizen, but I don’t feel I’m a citizen,” Tariq said. He continued: “It’s hard because . . . some groups, you will see yourself as a member, based on them and how they treat you. When you go to other groups, you can tell, you’re not part of it. You can’t be part of it. So, it’s difficult. Maybe in the future, this is what we hope. . . . So, unfortunately, I don’t want to lie, I am not a member [of American society]. But we hope in the future, maybe” (Tariq 2 November 2017).

Finally, Kasim was the only individual with whom I spoke to pointedly say no, belonging in American society was not fully open to him. “There will be barriers,” he said. He continued: “I tried, but I felt some kind of prejudice especially when I apply to jobs. When I go to places where the employers mostly are white, they think I’m different. When I go places where employers mostly are black Americans, they think I’m different. So, it’s always this problem, that’s what I felt. I don’t know to what degree it’s correct, but that’s what I felt” (Kasim 27 February 2018). Despite this feeling, Kasim said it was not difficult to “assimilate” into American culture. He continued: “I know what the Americans want. And, probably that’s part of me, I cannot give it” (Kasim 27 February 2018). By way of example, he explained, “I’m not an American football fan. If I was, it would be different. Yeah. Like, my brother, he’s a fan, so he was able to communicate more. My other brother, he drinks alcohol. . . . Also, his wife is American, so he doesn’t have a problem. He’s very much into the culture. Whereas I’m different, I stopped drinking two years ago. . . . So, I feel like I’m more distant, like there’s some kind of barrier” (Kasim 27 February 2018). Moreover, Kasim argued that the United States is a “very much divided society. . . . Each community has their own, basically their own micro-culture. . . . Here, everybody has their own ways of adjusting to society. So, they create their own communities . . . as they obey the law and go by the rules. . . . There are shared aspects, but

generally, it all depends. . . . But, American culture, it's a big word. It can accommodate or incorporate any culture, that's the beauty of it. As long as you just go by the rules . . . you can make it (Kasim 27 February 2018).

Within this context, Kasim described the levels of what he called “assimilation” for himself and other Iraqis he knew. In his words:

From my interactions with Iraqis . . . they range differently in terms of assimilating to the culture, the American culture. Some of them are very well attached or connected to the American culture. And some of them are more distant. I would put myself at out of ten, I would put myself at six in terms of assimilation to the culture. I know people who are way further into that process. Like my brother, he got married to an American girl and he's, he cannot be ten out of ten, he's like nine or eight out of ten. My other brother is probably seven. So, I would consider myself five or six. (Kasim 27 February 2018)

Beyond himself and his family members, Kasim said, “I've seen some people, some of them . . . cannot integrate with the culture. They still have this barrier. Some of them, they went back home. . . . They couldn't take it” (27 February 2018).

Kasim also linked these experiences in the United States to his native country of Iraq, saying “We want to be seen just like how the US is. You know, everybody lives happily, doing their own thing. Nobody's restricting them . . . as long as they don't affect anybody adversely. . . . This nation, it wasn't a nation. It just came from different people who came from different places in the world, and they created a big society, a very tolerant society” (27 February 2018). He reiterated his argument that “each community operates separately but at the same time they follow the rules . . . and that's fine. It's a nice thing to see how people [Iraqis] have changed, but hopefully they will be able to go back, and in a way that they can educate others” (Kasim 27 February 2018).

Kasim's explanation of the challenges he encountered to “assimilation” was emblematic of several interviewees' nuanced feelings of belonging. The following section elaborates on the sense for individuals, including Ali, Hashim, Omar, Tariq, and Zaid, of the otherness that can simultaneously exist with a sense of belonging.

The “Strange Experience” of Being a Problem

This chapter's title paraphrases W. E. B. Du Bois's famous formulation of the implicit, hesitant, and unasked question on the lips of many white Americans toward African Americans: “How does it feel to be a problem?” Describing this experience at the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois (1903) offered the trenchant observation that it entails a “double consciousness”

of always comprehending oneself through the eyes of another who looks at you with pity and contempt. For some African Americans, addressing this tension meant accommodating the society that scorned them, while for others it entailed rejecting that society. Du Bois argued that African Americans wanted simply to “make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (1903, 2). As I examine below, Tariq explicitly compared the experiences of Iraqis in 2017 to the historical experience of African Americans and described his own desire to belong to the society in starkly similar terms to those articulated by Du Bois.

The historical and contemporary contexts and experiences of African Americans and Iraqi refugees are not completely analogous; however, members of both groups experience the intersecting effects of prejudice, discrimination, and negative stereotyping (Inhorn 2018). Both groups have attempted to enact belonging in the face of active hostility (Crane 2021). There is a long history of arbitrary exclusions targeting Arabs and Muslims in US institutions and culture. Khaled Beydoun argues that “The Orientalist views of Arabs as inassimilable people who would threaten Christianity and undermine American civilization were firmly established before the first immigrant from the Arab World petitioned for citizenship” (2013, 48).

Moreover, Arabs (individuals who claim membership in an ethnolinguistic group originating in the Arabian Peninsula) and Muslims (adherents from myriad cultural, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds to Islam, a heterogeneous set of religious traditions and practices) have long been conflated in American discourses and law. The two groups have often been treated as a single, racialized amalgam Arab/Muslim, even though the population of Arabs and later Arab Americans living in the United States has always been overwhelmingly Christian, and most Muslims living in the country are non-Arab. Muslims of any background were legally barred from gaining US citizenship until 1944, and Arabs could only overcome their racialized exclusion as “nonwhite” by demonstrating the sincerity of their Christian faith to naturalization judges (Beydoun 2013, 48). Therefore, even though in the early twentieth century Christian Arab immigrants in the United States opened a path to gain citizenship, and thereby status as “marginally white” (Cainkar 2008), the “conflation of Arabs as inassimilable Muslims continues to limit the ‘substantive citizenship’ held by Arab American Muslims today” (Beydoun 2013, 36–37).

With this in mind, strangeness and apartness pervaded the experiences of living in the United States described by some interviewees, including Hashim, Ali, and Tariq. The construction of the “Oriental” other as inherently different from “the Westerner” is deeply rooted (Said 2003), as is the reductive and ahistorical notion of an unbroken and ongoing “clash of civ-

ilizations” between monolithic formations of Islam and Christianity (Kumar 2012). Moreover, negative portrayals of Arabs, Muslims, and refugees as incompatible with American society have long been staples in US media, government propaganda (Beydoun 2013), popular culture (Shaheen 2003, 1984), and political discourse (Muslim Advocates 2018). The particular stereotyped image of the Middle East has evolved with time and changing historical and economic contexts. Common stereotypes of Arabs and Arab Americans may rely on assumptions of difference and alienness while others are premised on the notion that Arabs are inherently violent and dangerous (Mango 2012).

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terror attacks, for example, US president George W. Bush declared that a “war on terrorism” that targeted multiple Arab and/or Muslim majority countries was a “crusade” against “evil-doers” (Bush 2001), a rhetorical construction that draws on deep historical assumptions of a fundamental conflict between the so-called East and West (Kumar 2012). More recently, former president Donald Trump and other Republican Party (especially but not exclusively) elected leaders have promoted discourses of danger and otherness regarding individuals from many other parts of the world, particularly the Middle East (Johnson 2015; Muslim Advocates 2018).

As noted in the introduction, nativist and xenophobic discourses circulate alongside the grand narrative within the American popular imagination that the United States is an “immigrant country” that has been exceptionally welcoming of immigrants (Alba and Foner 2015). This trope was familiar to several of the individuals I spoke with. Echoing the immigrant country narrative, Abdullah commented that “a lot of people, including myself, we came here to follow our dreams and to contribute to [the United States]” (14 January 2018). Mohammed, too, said, “When I came to the United States, I thought that it was a big dream, really. Because I see the United States on the TV so, I’m always hearing United States, United States” (2 November 2017). However, he soon discovered many challenges related to life in America: “When I came here [to Upstate New York], I came in February so there was a lot of snow. . . . The weather was very bad. . . . The apartment I lived there in, it’s a very bad area. So, I just sat in my apartment, I don’t know where I’m going for three months. I said: ‘What is going on here?’ I can’t go outside, I don’t know how I can use the bus, everything is difficult. Everything is difficult. So, I decided to come back to Iraq” (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

Mohammed did not go back to Iraq and eventually built a social network and found fulfilling employment. However, his experience speaks to the reality that neither a completely negative nor fully positive grand narrative describes or accounts for the experiences interviewees shared. This section continues to illustrate both the nuances and subtleties of participants’ experiences as refugees and former refugees.

Some interlocutors, including Ali and Tariq, expressed a sense of irreconcilability with American society and a conviction that no matter how hard they tried, they would remain, as Tariq phrased it, “second class” residents or citizens, or in a precarious position. This sense of uncertainty led Nada and Zaid to suggest that even with legal rights as residents or citizens, they might still face potential penalties for exercising them. Hashim and Tariq expressed a desire to live and be treated like everyone else, something that they did not perceive they were fully experiencing at the time of their interviews. Finally, during our conversations, Tariq and Kasim pushed back against the notion that Islamic religious commitments or a culturally transferred Muslim background were inherently dangerous and violent, and Omar and Nora discussed their fear that speaking their first language, or a language other than English, publicly would put them at risk of opprobrium or worse.

As Ali explained in his observation cited for the epigraph to this chapter, he perceived a stringent standard to which he and other resettled refugees were held. And, as he argued, if someone like himself makes one mistake, or if others perceive his actions as wrong, the work he had done to live up to that standard would be erased. “As a refugee, I’m doing . . . a lot of good things. And I’m doing a great job . . . for the community or for my work, you know? But, sometimes, if you make one single mistake—if it was a mistake, sometimes it was interpreted like a mistake—they will forget about all of the good things you have done the past five years. And they will catch only these single things” (Ali 14 January 2018).

Tariq contextualized his comments about his life in Upstate New York by describing his expectations of the United States before he left Iraq. Because of the new and often expensive equipment that the American occupation forces brought to Iraq during the war, Tariq assumed that life in the United States would be materially comfortable and that everyone would “live in peace,” which he desired for himself and his family. As he put it:

So, I was thinking when I moved to the US, it’s the homeland for them. If . . . people overseas have the offices, the lifestyle everything, that means the US will be better. Right? This is what you think. If you see me overseas with all the fancy stuff and all the degrees that I have, the lifestyle that I have. You think: “Oh, what about his home country? Probably it will be better then.” . . . And when you go to the US embassy in Iraq, it’s heaven. You walk the gardens, and the landscaping is beautiful. . . . If you go there, you don’t want to come back. It’s beautiful. So, we think, people like me: “Oh my god, if it’s overseas and they have all that beautiful stuff, so definitely in the US it will be better.” So, I was thinking we will be better. And we will live in peace. This is what I want. So, we moved. (Tariq 2 November 2017)

However, when he arrived in the United States, the reality did not meet his expectations. “I was surprised by all the nonsense. Like, there is still

[racism between] white and black. And [it is assumed] immigrants and refugees, they don't work or whatever. They all moved here for benefits. All nonsense. And I said, 'Oh my god, really?' And then drugs, a lot of issues. A lot of poverty. A lot of poverty. So, this is what surprised us" (Tariq 2 November 2017).

Consequently, Tariq suggested that he must work twice as hard as Americans do to prove that he has the right to be in the United States: "We work double. So, we want to work and show them that we are just normal people and . . . you made the right decision by letting us in" (2 November 2017). As noted, he compared his experience as an Iraqi, a refugee, and a Muslim to the historical experience of African Americans: "Now, it's our era, unfortunately. It used to be black Americans before and now it's Muslims. . . . This is what I think. It's my opinion" (Tariq 2 November 2017). Moreover, he pointed out that despite centuries of struggle, there are still significant unresolved issues between black and white Americans: "For us, it will be tough too" (Tariq 2 November 2017). Tariq regarded his social position as one of living with a feeling of persistent suspicion, a sense that he was viewed by many as untrustworthy and somehow guilty of an unstated transgression. Tariq attributed this perception to his background as a refugee from the Middle East. As he put it, "Because if you are a refugee from Europe, who cares? Probably they . . . are white, who cares? They don't know you. Even if you have an accent, if you say I'm Italian, you're good. If you say I'm from England, you're fine. You're white, you're fine. But, when they know you are from the Middle East, they are a little bit concerned. . . . It's profiling" (Tariq 2 November 2017). "You're not trusted," he continued, and "If some Muslim did something, it's all over the news for the next month" (Tariq 2 November 2017). Indeed, Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux (2018) have found that terrorist attacks committed by individuals identified as Muslims receive between 1.81 to 4.93 times more media coverage than those perpetrated by those of other backgrounds.

Tariq argued as well that such reports emphasize the perpetrator's Muslim background, even if tenuous, and that the complexity of identities is flattened with anyone from the Middle East or with an Arab background assumed to be Muslim, an identification believed to be dangerous and violent. He pointed to the inconsistency or double standard in the way media have often portrayed crimes committed by white Americans and Muslims. When a "white guy" commits murder, he is portrayed as mentally ill. "When we do it, we're terrorists" (Tariq 2 November 2017). He mentioned several examples—including the 2015 murder of three Muslim students in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, by their white neighbor (Blanford 2017)—in which white Americans shot and killed multiple people, and many media outlets attributed the shooter's motive to mental health issues with no mention of terrorism. A 2019 YouGov poll found a similar double standard among

respondents' interpretations of such events. In general, respondents labeled violent attacks committed by Muslims as terrorism and similar violent acts committed by white Americans as hate crimes (Frankovic 2019).

Considering this inconsistency, when he learns of a mass shooting or bombing, Tariq's first reaction is to hope the perpetrator is not a Muslim:

Every time when I hear somebody [committed a shooting], really, I say: 'Oh my god, I don't want to know if it's a Muslim.' This is reality for a lot of us. When I hear about a shooting, mass shooting and bombing. . . . Don't say . . . Muslims did it because this is what is killing us. Like, oh my god, then it will be on the news, and you go to the store. Boom! And his face is looking at my face. . . . People see us as a terrorist. They don't see us as people. (2 November 2017)

Terror attacks committed in the United States are exceedingly rare compared to other violent crimes, and Muslim perpetrators have been responsible for a minority of this small number of incidents (Neiwert et al. 2017). However, despite this reality, the fear that Muslims will face backlash if an attacker is identified as Muslim is both well-founded and persistent (All Things Considered 2013).

In less stark terms than Tariq, Zaid experienced a sense of difference "because I am a foreigner" (27 February 2018). As he put it, "I am not an American citizen, I am a *naturalized* citizen. . . . Not an American-born citizen" (Zaid 27 February 2018). Elaborating, he indicated that he especially had this sense when he visited the state of Kentucky with a friend. "It was like everyone was just staring at you" (Zaid 27 February 2018). As Zaid recounted, his friend, who is white but originally from Russia, shared this perception: "She's Russian. I mean, she's white. But you can tell that she's not from here. And she got the same feeling. You know?" (27 February 2018). I asked Zaid whether he believed that this feeling would change in the future, to which he said: "No, I think not. With everything going on now, with unfortunately having a racist president [Donald Trump]. This is my feeling. This is the way I feel now" (27 February 2018).

Nora, too, speculated that perhaps she had had interpersonal issues in the Shenandoah Valley Region of Virginia because she was "different." I asked her whether her background as an Iraqi had created any challenges for her in the United States. She responded: "No. I think people have challenges, no matter where they are from. It depends on the person that you're dealing with, right? I don't think it is because I am from Iraq. I don't look at it this way. But I think because, I don't know, maybe because I'm different than [other city residents]. Like, I don't have the southern accent, with the blonde hair" (Nora 6 February 2018). She asserted that some Americans would always treat her differently based on her country of origin: "No matter what your language is, even if you don't have an accent but, people always treat

you as where you're from, even if you get citizenship" (Nora 6 February 2018). However, she continued with a laugh, only a minority might treat her that way: "Not all of them, but one in twenty will. So, it's okay, it's only one. You have nineteen more that welcome you and that's okay" (Nora 6 February 2018).

I asked Omar the same question concerning whether his background as an Iraqi had created any challenges for him. He argued that rather than proving a hindrance, his Iraqi origin provided a justification for his presence in the United States: "If you are being asked 'why are you here?', for example, I would definitely say: 'I came here because of the war that I didn't create.' So, it's kind of a justification to help me justify my presence here" (Omar 14 December 2017). He explained how this aspect of his background could be used to assert his right to live in the United States: "As an aid, I would use it, definitely. . . . Because I worked as an interpreter for the US troops. And for that reason, my father was killed. And, I have sacrificed a lot for the US, more than anyone who's asking this question or other citizens. Easily I can ask him: 'What did you give to your country, other than the taxes that you are giving? Did you give your son? Your father?' So, the war actually it's not challenging here for me. But, I mean, challenging back home" (Omar 14 December 2017).

As a follow-up, I asked Omar whether he felt the need to justify himself to Americans or whether anyone had asked him to do so: "The problem is because they think that they have the right. And to be honest with you: They don't because they are immigrants like us. And, we all should justify our presence here to the Native Americans" (14 December 2017). In his view, Americans who asked him to explain his presence would do so because they had been affected by propaganda: "To justify, I mean, it's something that has propaganda for it, everywhere. So, people believe it" (Omar 14 December 2017).

More explicitly than asking why he was in the United States, individuals told Mohammed to leave the country. At one point, he held a job at a local airport that involved enforcing traffic and parking rules and preventing cars from approaching the security entrance. Occasionally, while enforcing the rules, individuals had yelled at him, "Go back to your country!" He noted that he laughs this sort of remark off and observed, "I don't care about it. I just told them: 'I respect that, just move your car'" (Mohammed 2 November 2017). He interpreted this aggression as a type of interaction that could occur in any society. As he explained: "I think this is normal and happens in each country . . . they have bad and good people. But 75 percent of the people are good. So, this does not mean . . . this country is not good. . . . Anywhere you can find good people and bad people, but I think the people here are really good people, really friendly. Yeah. No issues from racists" (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

However, Mohammed had encountered the opinion that he should accept his circumstances without question. Soon after arriving, his resettlement organization caseworker told him the only available employment involved cleaning cages at the local zoo. As Mohammed narrated:

I told them: “I don’t have any issue with this job. But I can’t do that. I worked with the government in Iraq. So how can I go to the Zoo? I’m sorry, I graduated with a [technical degree] in Iraq.” So, he told me: “Okay go back to your country if you want to.” This made me very, very, very upset. . . . I told him: “Okay, you can fix up my country and I will go back tomorrow morning. You brought me here. I had a civil war.” . . . So, I told him I don’t need cash, I don’t need food stamps. I decided to work. (2 November 2017)

Thereafter, Mohammed declined any further services from the resettlement agency and set out to find employment on his own. He first found employment delivering pizza and then at a Walmart before securing the job in airport security. At the time of our interview, he was working as a caseworker at a social services organization.

In addition to markers of difference like those noted by Nora above, such as speaking English with an accent, physical features or hair color, a particularly visible sign of Islamic faith are the various head coverings some Muslim women wear. Only one of the women I interviewed, Marwa, wore a hijab. The other women with whom I spoke did not. Marwa did not express any concern about covering her hair in Upstate New York. Rather, she said: “Sometimes when I’m at an event with my community, like for a wedding party or funeral, [friends may ask]: ‘You wear a scarf, you are *muhajiba* [a woman who wears hijab]. Do you find a hard time?’ I say: ‘No, absolutely no.’ . . . They respect that. I didn’t find any disrespect. From my experience, no” (Marwa 25 November 2017).

However, several men with whom I spoke discussed women they know who, they believed, were facing prejudice or harassment, or may in the future. Tariq, for example, expressed fear of walking in public and a particular concern for his wife because she covers her hair and therefore is visibly Muslim. He said: “My wife wears a headscarf, and I am afraid somebody will kill her or hit her. This is a big mess. You know, this is what we think all the time about. . . . You can identify [Muslim women] easily” (Tariq 2 November 2017).

Ali worried as well about incidents targeting women who cover their hair, including his mother. “What I am hearing from friends,” he said, is “if they wear hijab, they pull the hijab from them, they spit on them. They curse them. . . . I have my mother, she wears a hijab and I’m afraid for her when she goes out. She doesn’t speak the language. So, maybe she doesn’t understand when someone curses at her . . . or someone spits on her” (Ali 14 January 2018).

At the time of our interview, such an incident had not occurred to Ali's mother. However, a 2018 New York City Commission on Human Rights report found that similar incidents are common in New York City, where Ali lives. In a survey of more than three thousand Muslim, Arab, South Asian, Jewish, and Sikh New Yorkers, the Commission found that 38.7 percent had experienced "verbal harassment, threats or taunting referring to race, ethnicity or religion" (The New York City Commission on Human Rights, Frazer, and Howe 2018, 9), and 27.4 percent of Muslim Arab women wearing a hijab reporting being intentionally pushed or shoved on a subway platform.

Ali continued, arguing that members of the government had failed to speak against such actions: "In the past, you used to hear of one, two [such incidents] in different states. Some happened here. . . . Now, it's increasing a lot . . . and increasing in a dangerous path.¹ No one is doing anything. No one [such as President Trump] is going out and speaking saying: 'This is not acceptable. This is not what we do. This is not what the Constitution says.' These are my fears, you know? These are what I'm thinking of" (Ali 14 January 2018).

Walid, who has founded and leads several organizations serving refugees, used a part of his interview to share his experience working with the Iraqi and Muslim communities in Upstate New York. Drawing from these interactions, he spoke about women encountering problems because they cover their hair: "Others don't know I'm a Muslim from my face, probably. But they know the woman with her scarf. These women [pointing to two women wearing brightly colored headscarves sitting on a nearby park bench], I know are probably from Somalia or Sudan. Having this scarf, my perception, they are Muslim. . . . I have had some families mention they use the metro, and somebody tried to say bad words about that and make these women feel unsafe and uncomfortable" (Walid 27 September 2017).

Walid and fellow organization members encouraged women to voice safety concerns to the police: "We told them if something like this happens call 911 [the US emergency services phone number] and tell them I'm not feeling safe somebody is saying something. Also, we try to educate and tell them what they are supposed to do if something like this happens. Some women start to think about taking off the hijab because they are not feeling safe. I found this concerning. It's kind of a shame the society [is not educated about practices such as wearing a head covering]" (27 September 2017).

We Want to Be Like Everyone Else

Echoing findings from earlier studies of resettled Iraqis (Inhorn and Volk 2021; Crane 2021; Campbell 2016), Hashim and Tariq stressed that they had resettled in the United States to pursue building lives exactly as native-born

Americans do. They desired safety from conflict for themselves and their families, economic opportunities, and engagement in their communities. In this way, they desired to live like “everyone else.” Both Hashim and Tariq put it in the same language, saying resettled Iraqis are not “aliens.” At the end of our interview, Hashim emphasized his shared humanity with Americans, laughingly saying: “We are not coming from a different world. . . . We are not aliens” (1 October 2017). In remarkably similar language Tariq said: “We’re not aliens . . . from a different universe. We’re just people” (2 November 2017).

Hashim argued, “We are here because we escaped from there. We escaped from everything happening there. . . . We are not going to do anything bad in this country” (1 October 2017). Reacting to the rhetoric and policies originating in the Trump White House, he observed, “Maybe I agree . . . with setting stricter rules on people that did bad things, . . . let’s say the bad people. I really agree on that, to go after them. To try to set stricter rules on them. But, not on everyone. This is very unacceptable” (Hashim 1 October 2017). He continued, rejecting the idea of barring Muslims or other groups from entering the United States:

You cannot just say that we ban Muslims from entering the country. This is completely not fair, you know? The Muslim community or the Iraqi community or any other community, they have been here for many years, and they did something. They participated in the community. . . . Many of them, I am not saying that everyone is bad, or everyone is good, but many they have been here for many years and all of them they have their goals in life. They want to just be safe, to just get a good education, to just get good healthcare for their families. We are just trying to be safe here and plan for our future. . . . The majority of immigrants, 90 percent of them, are here for a better life. (Hashim 1 October 2017)

Later in our conversation, Hashim reiterated this point, saying: “I’m not asking for us to be treated differently, I’m just asking for us to be treated just like everyone else. . . . Everything now is against Muslims, Arabs, and Iraqis, all the media and all of the officials. I think this is very wrong. . . . We’re just like Europeans here. Just like Chinese here. Just like everyone else in this world. So . . . it’s just difficult for us to be treated this way. We’re not asking to be treated in a different way” (1 October 2017).

Tariq also indicated that he wants to “live like anybody else” as a member of the community: “Me and my family, and I have a lot of friends who all come with degrees. And we want to . . . live in the US, be part of the US community and live like anybody else. You know, live next to everybody and you wake up in the morning, say hi to everybody, live in peace” (2 November 2017). He reiterated this point later in our conversation, saying, “We came here to be like anybody else. We work and we want to be like

anybody . . . and we live our lives. We love the US, that's why we moved here" (Tariq 2 November 2017). Moreover, like Omar, Ali, and others, Tariq worked with the US military after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As in Omar's account, he noted his service with the American Marines as a justification for having the opportunity to live like others in the United States. He explained:

I put my life in danger, probably a lot of people they didn't do anything, even here. I served with the Marines. Probably, there's a lot of people, they served. But there is still a huge number, they didn't even serve. . . . So, this should really demonstrate to people that: Come on, people they put their life at risk, they helped you see your father back home safe, see your son, see your wife, see your daughter back safe and he's never been to the US before. So why did they do that? For fun? Nobody joins the Marines or army in general for fun. There's no fun there. And then, so they just want [Americans to] give us an opportunity. (Tariq 2 November 2017)

Assumptions of Islam and Muslims as Uniquely Violent

The portrayal of Islam as essentially irrational, violent, and dangerous is pervasive in American cultural (Shaheen 2003, 1984) and political discourse. For example, Michael Flynn, retired US Army Lt. General, former Defense Intelligence Agency director under President Barack Obama, and former National Security Advisor to Donald Trump, has a long history of inflammatory rhetoric about Islam. Flynn is an advisor to the board of directors for the anti-Muslim group ACT for America (SPLC n.d.). In a 2016 speech, he declared "We are facing another 'ism,' just like we faced Nazism, and fascism. . . . This is Islamism, it is a vicious cancer inside the body of 1.7 billion people on this planet and it has to be excised" (Kaczynski 2016). In the mid-2000s, the term "Islamofascism" came into vogue among some cultural commentators, liberal and conservative, to describe America's supposed enemies in "The War on Terror" (Judt 2006; Hitchens 2007).

The endurance of such discourses led Ahmed, for example, to say, "You get accustomed, especially after all the events in the last twenty years that have happened, you get a certain stereotyped image about the Middle East" (2 October 2017). Abdullah similarly argued that it is important to be willing to recognize and encourage nuance "because there are a lot of people from the West who [assert that] all Arabs and Muslims are attacking everybody" (14 January 2018).

It was important to Nada to preface our conversation by stating: "Of course, my religion is Muslim and really, I am proud of this. I want to show everyone here what it means to be Muslim. I know they have the wrong idea about Muslims. But I'm a Muslim and I love all the religions here, . . . everyone here, really because they respect me, so I respect them. And

when I came here, they helped me so much and helped my family. So, I love all the people here. Everyone here. . . . Just, I want to say that” (1 November 2017). I understood Nada’s insistence as pushing back against the widespread trope in this country that Islam is inherently and uniquely violent among religions and cultures of the world and that she was taking the opportunity of our interview to voice an alternative, more accurate, understanding.

Other participants also pushed back, arguing that groups such as ISIS claiming to act in the name of Islam were violating, rather than upholding, Islamic principles. Unlike some American commentators or politicians who assert the uniquely violent character of Islam, but who have little knowledge of its tenets or traditions, these interviewees rejected that claim from within the faith. In this way, they set and (re)interpreted boundaries around what qualifies as authentic and inauthentic Islam. In characterizing the intercommunal violence in Iraq after 2003, for example, Sarah said that Sunni would kill Shi’a and Shi’a would kill Sunni. However, those who killed based upon this division within Islam were not genuine Muslims, in her view: “These people, we think, they are not Muslims. . . . Bad people, yes, that’s why so many people from Iraq escaped” (Sarah 30 November 2017). Like Nada, Sarah emphasized that she respected everyone, regardless of their religion or race. She too stressed that “Muslim people, in general, are peaceful people. . . . In general, the Muslim people don’t . . . hurt others. I think that and I see all the Muslim people like that. And, I respect my religion and I don’t have any problem with any other religion” (Sarah 30 November 2017).

Walid put it in similar terms: “In every religion, in every society, there are good people and bad people, and some of these bad people, they use religion as a tool to justify their criminal acts. And they are not Muslim. . . . I consider them criminal people because Islam teaches me how to love people, how to help. . . . We give to charity, the same as Christianity. There is no difference. We never heard about these bad people who attacked the United States on 9/11 and it’s all related to politics. They use religion to justify their political opinions” (27 September 2017).

He framed the motivations for such acts as reacting to US violence in the Middle East. In his estimation, the perpetrators followed the logic, “Why did you attack the Middle East? We want to attack you” (Walid 27 September 2017).² He continued: “And this is not about religion. This is a war between countries, not religion” (Walid 27 September 2017). In Walid’s view, and as polling data suggest (Poushter 2015), “many people disagree about this kind of criminal behavior of some people who consider themselves . . . Muslim” (27 September 2017). Indeed, a 2011 Gallup poll of 131 countries found no correlation between religiosity and support for attacking civilians, and that respondents living in Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states were less likely to justify military attacks on civilians (18

percent) than non-OIC member state respondents (24 percent). Americans were the most likely to justify violence against civilians (49 percent) of any country surveyed. Only 8 percent of Iraqis said targeting and killing civilians is sometimes justified (Gallup 2011). Finally, as explained in more detail in the following chapter, Wissam highlighted the Islamic injunction to protect Christian and Jewish houses of worship, arguing, “What they’re doing is all false” (22 October 2017), when ISIS and similar groups that claim to act in the name of religion attack such sites in Iraq.

In strikingly similar language, Kasim and Tariq pushed back at the persistent stereotype of Islam as inherently violent. Tariq strongly refuted the notion that Islam is “bad,” and that Muslims are raised to hate and kill. One example of such a stereotype emerged in 2015, when Donald Trump declared that “Without looking at the various polling data, it is obvious to anybody the [Muslim] hatred is beyond comprehension” and that the United States should not allow Muslims who “have no sense of reason or respect for human life” to enter this country (Johnson 2015).

Reacting to rhetoric like this, Tariq explained:

You have to understand that when somebody shoots, it doesn’t mean all of us want to shoot. I keep telling them, if it’s our religion that’s bad, we are a billion and a half. So, if we are raised to kill people, a billion and a half, . . . we will fight everybody. Probably there will be war, from a long time ago, because we’re raised to kill people, right? So, why if I was raised to kill people, I’m here and we should fight all the time. . . . Fighting everybody because we hate everybody. This is what you guys think. No! If we were raised to kill everyone, I told you, we are a billion and a half! We are going to have a Third World War . . . or . . . you know, the First World War would have been us against everybody. (2 November 2017)

Tariq continued by saying that if these assumptions were true, he and I would not have been sitting in his living room and talking. In similar terms, Kasim articulated the view that many Americans already know this, and that they understand that the problem is not Islam, *per se*. As he argued: “I remember when 9/11 happened, there were a lot of incidents against Muslims. . . . When we came here, we didn’t find that. That sentiment was gone already. And, people have come to realize after all these years that the problem is not Muslims. The problem is . . . terrorists.³ If you think it’s the Muslims, there are over a billion Muslims in this world. If they do the same thing [commit acts of terrorism], the world would be like hell for everybody. So that’s not the case” (Kasim 27 February 2018). He went on to attribute the notion that all Muslims are violent to “propaganda.” He said: “This is propaganda some people use against Muslims, and we know who they are. But the general public has now come to its senses: ‘These people are just like us.’ You know? And we find terrorists everywhere, in every culture,

in every time. You find sick people anywhere, everywhere in any community. So . . . it's a good thing, I think society probably realized that to a big extent" (Kasim 27 February 2018). Kasim did not clarify whom he meant when he said that "some people" use propaganda against Muslims. However, even though he is a Donald Trump supporter, later in our discussion, Kasim called Trump's rhetoric racist and characterized it as propaganda.

Arabic as Dangerous Speech

Not only did some of those with whom I spoke perceive their religious background, or that attributed to them, as problematic in terms of how they were viewed by other Americans, but several interviewees also shared that they were sometimes uncomfortable speaking their native language, Arabic, in public spaces. Tariq said, for example, "At the airport, if I speak my language, they could kick me out easily" (2 November 2017). Although he did not reference any incidents of this happening to himself or others, there have been multiple cases in recent years of individuals interrogated by airport security for carrying Arabic flashcards (N. George 2015), detained before boarding a flight after passengers complained about overhearing Arabic (CBS News 2015), and removed from flights for speaking Arabic on the plane (Hassan and Shoichet 2016).⁴ Moreover, various agencies such as the NYPD and FBI have targeted and profiled those of Arab descent or Muslim religious background for increased surveillance and scrutiny in airports, Mosques, and community organizations for many years (Kumar 2012).

The experience of airports as a site of discrimination against Arabs, Muslims, and those assumed to fall into such categories is widespread. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has called the phenomenon "Flying while Muslim" (CAIR 2017). A play on the term "Driving while Black," which describes increased police suspicion and racial profiling of African American motorists, Flying while Muslim highlights the analogous situation in which those outwardly appearing Muslim and/or of Middle Eastern origin are targeted and assumed to be dangerous. In the years since the 11 September 2001 attacks, airlines have subjected such passengers to discrimination, profiling, and arbitrary denial of access to, and removal from, flights (CAIR 2017). Speaking Arabic is one marker used by fearful travelers and airport security to profile individuals arbitrarily as threatening to the safety of other travelers.

Omar suggested that those overhearing Arabic spoken in public spaces might deem it inappropriate and that he might be disliked simply for speaking it. As he explained: "In a public café, we do not try to speak Arabic loudly. . . . You know, it's also not appropriate in terms of being liked by others. They may think, 'Oh hey, these people are speaking Arabic? Oh man, we'd rather not have this.' Usually, if you are going for enjoyment or

entertainment . . . we'd rather not. Sometimes, we socialize in an Arabic café. But other places, no. Yeah, we'd rather not [speak Arabic]" (Omar 14 December 2017).

Nora, too, perceived spaces in which speaking her native Arabic had proven problematic: "Sometimes just people look at you [for speaking Arabic], but I don't care. If this is the way my mom [who does not speak English] will understand me, no, my mom is way more important than the public" (6 February 2018).

Unease and Uncertainty: Long-Standing and Newly Piqued

In addition to the tensions between belonging and strangeness, and othering by some members of American society, various interviewees indicated that they or others they knew experienced a sense of precarity living in the United States. For Nada, this was a long-standing sense, while for others, like Abdullah, Omar, and Nora, it first arose within the context of the 2016 election and Donald Trump's xenophobic and anti-refugee election campaign. Multiple interviewees identified a sense of growing unease since the 2016 presidential election and executive actions such as the 2017 travel ban, which sought to bar refugees from seven countries, including Iraq, initially, from entering the United States: "I don't know what he's going to do or what his next step will be," Ali said, for example (14 January 2018). Although not everyone indicated that they opposed the Trump administration's policies, Nada, Abdullah, and Omar, for example, discussed how executive actions and immigration policies had contributed to a sense of foreboding for themselves or for others they knew.

Nada discussed how, as a Green Card holder, she knew she had a legal right to travel within the United States as well as outside of the country. Nevertheless, she was afraid to exercise that right. She said: "I want to visit some other countries. Really, but I am afraid. I want to visit Canada. I want to see it. . . . But, I am afraid, because I have a Green Card, just a Green Card. I know I can do it. The rules allow me to do that. But, I am scared, because sometimes, for example, Trump . . . decided the rules, I can't come back again. Because I have just the Green Card. This is my fear" (Nada 1 November 2017).

Although Nada did not directly connect this fear to the travel ban, when it initially went into effect, thousands of individuals were detained at airports, some for multiple days (Cheng 2017). Media reports indicate that, in some cases, legal permanent residents were among those detained, including Iraqi SIV recipients (Macguire, Gostanian, and Ortiz 2017; Darweesh 2017). Hundreds of others with "legal visas or refugee status" were pre-

vented from boarding flights bound for the United States at foreign points of origin (Gomez 2017). Nada's fear increased under Trump, but she was also nervous to travel under his predecessor, Barack Obama. As an SIV recipient, she said "I know that Iraq compared with another country, they give us more chances to come [to the United States]. But I am afraid. I want to protect myself and my family" (Nada 1 November 2017). Fortunately, at the time of our interview, Nada had only one more year until she could apply for citizenship, after which time, she believed, this concern would dissipate.

Abdullah also expressed an increased feeling of uncertainty: "I feel less protected. Any decision that president [Trump] might make could directly affect me. And, I'm living on the edge right now" (14 January 2018). As he continued to explain: "Honestly, since he got elected until now, every day he comes up with some order and I'm basically freaking out. Am I staying here or not?" (Abdullah 14 January 2018). At the time of our interview, Abdullah had been granted Optional Practical Training (OPT) status, which allowed him to remain temporarily in the United States for up to three years to work after he had concluded his studies in engineering. This program was among the immigration policies that Trump said he would seek to reduce or eliminate (Fu 2018). As Abdullah put it, "I'm on OPT status and he is pushing to change that. So . . . basically, I have a right [to live in the United States], he might basically be able to take it, to take my right" (14 January 2018).

Abdullah suggested that this insecurity was the primary challenge he faced in his daily life: "So that part is the main thing that is annoying me right now. If you asked me: 'What is the biggest struggle right now?' It would be that because I'm going to work and doing everything fine. I'm moving up in the company and all of that could change in one day" (14 January 2018). He continued to explain: "So, right now, I don't feel as protected as before. For sure. It is very stressful . . . because in that case, you feel like you have no rights. Because even if your papers are fine and if you have the right to stay here, you feel, not safe" (Abdullah 14 January 2018).

During our conversation, Omar returned to one of the first questions I asked him; whether he planned to remain in the United States permanently, saying: "Back to your question about if I'm going home or staying, that also has something to do with whether the community will keep accepting me or not. Recently there are some signals that: 'Oh, you guys, you are bad.' Even though we were productive. We were clean. We were educated. We were paying taxes. But still, if someone did something, that will be counted for all people from that country or ethnicity or religion" (14 December 2017).

Omar saw a change in the way he and others like him were being treated in his community since the election of Donald Trump. That shift emanating from Washington would "impact the whole nation, whether it is negative or positive," he said (Omar 14 December 2017). Omar also noted the effects

the president's rhetoric and actions were having on children, including his own, in his community. He related a story about a recent incident in which classmates bullied his fourth-grade son, calling him names such as "terrorist." Despite this episode, and his overall sense that there was less support coming from the national government, he perceived his local context, the city in which he lived in Virginia, as overall supportive of immigrants and refugees: "In [my city] people are, I would say 90 percent of them, very good. Yeah. That is what made me live here nine years. It's a unique city" (Omar 14 December 2017).

Nora described the day after Trump's election in 2016 and the way in which one of her American friends reacted:

When he got elected, I remember the second day, I couldn't sleep, so I woke up at 7 o'clock. I was going to my job and then my friend, she's American, called me and her son was crying, and was like: "Are you going to leave the United States because Trump is going to make you leave?" And I was like: "No, I'm not going to leave. I need you to be there for me. Okay?" And, my friend's like: "I'm sorry, I want to apologize to your mom. I know she's waiting for your brother to come . . . but, we're here for you" (6 February 2018).

Mohammed spoke of others' fear saying "Some people are scared of the president right now. I will be clear with you. . . . We don't know what the government will be deciding in the future" (2 November 2017). "But," he continued, "I'm sure the American Congress and American people, in my small experience, they won't accept anything racist or anything like this. They will support us, and I think that because I read about the American people in history and . . . the American people don't accept racism" (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

Although Trump appeared on TV and threatened refugees with harmful policies that would "push the people outside America," Mohammed was confident Trump would be prevented from enacting them: "It will never happen because the Constitution, I think, the Constitution protects the people. Not just the refugees, all the people in America" (2 November 2017). Mohammed was especially convinced that community members and the local government in his city in Upstate New York would protect the rights of people like himself.

Speaking to the environment in Upstate New York as well, Walid said that Trump's election in 2016 created difficulties for his work with refugee communities in the area. This was particularly true because many of those with whom he interacts have family members abroad awaiting resettlement: "It does create challenges. We still have many families overseas. They are waiting to join their family members here. And all the process is now a mess. They don't know what's going to happen" (Walid 27 September 2017). At the time Walid and I spoke, significant uncertainty remained as to the le-

gality of the travel ban. He received a phone call during our conversation from a Green Card holder living in Upstate New York whose wife was in Lebanon. Her visa application had been pending for three years before the Trump administration entered office, and that process was suspended after Trump's election. According to Walid, the pair was considering divorce because the husband wished to remain in the United States, but after waiting three years without resolution, the wife wanted him to return to Lebanon. Walid said similar uncertainty had created difficulties for other families with which he works: "We see some people waiting for their mom, some people for their daughter and it's causing emotional difficulties for many family members with the new policies of the administration" (27 September 2017).

Because of a profound sense of insecurity, Tariq said many individuals from the Middle East would avoid confrontation, even if they believe they are in the right because they are afraid that American society and government are predisposed against them. He said, "This is the toughest part. And this is what the people are living with now in the Trump era. . . . [Trump] said it: 'If you do anything, you're out!'" (Tariq 2 November 2017). With such constraints, he questioned what he should or could do. As a hypothetical example, Tariq said that even if he were physically assaulted, he felt he could not assert his right to safety: "If I walk in the alley and somebody hits me, I can't say anything, you know?" (2 November 2017).

He went on to suggest that as someone in a precarious position, he empathized with those individuals affected by Hurricane Harvey, a severe storm that struck the state of Texas in the months before our interview: "I was really touched," he said, "if you are in my position, probably you feel this situation a little bit" (Tariq 2 November 2017). As he explained, and media reported at the time, many of the people displaced by the storm were undocumented migrants who were afraid of calling the police or emergency services for help or seeking recovery assistance after the storm because they could be arrested and/or deported (Capps and Soto 2018). As a result, they faced danger and even risked death. Police representatives and officials in some areas made public calls that those affected could seek help without fear of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but many storm victims remained fearful (Owen 2018).

Tariq said that this situation was the same for him:

I am legally here, but I'm scared to do it because no matter what . . . I'm not from here. I don't speak the language fluently that they speak. Maybe they [police or judges] would use a term I don't understand . . . against me. And he [Trump] makes this one [police and judges] very strong now. If you hit somebody, immigrants, they just walk away. So, he is going to create a massive . . . disaster. It's a dictatorship. This is how they built a dictatorship in Iraq. This is how we had Saddam Hussein. If you say something: Boom! Done, you're gone. And your family. (2 November 2017)

He then described what he viewed as the process by which government can move toward authoritarianism and highlighted signs in American society that such a shift was occurring. As he argued:

This is how it starts. You say something, you get kicked. Or they put [a negative mark] on you when you apply for a job. They know you are bad; you are from this family, you are done. And then day after day, he has more power because people gave him power. Nobody says no to him. So, he gains more power, starting now. Not kick you from the house or deny you a job; now he can kill you. He killed one, two, and everybody. Oh, it's fine. Nobody says anything, okay let me take his family. Then you say something, and they take your family. This is how life in Iraq was. (Tariq 2 November 2017)

Although Tariq's fears luckily did not come to pass and the Trump administration was voted out of office in 2020, his concerns were well founded. Trump, members of his government, and some of his supporters did attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. These actions culminated on 6 January 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol building, breached its security, and barricaded themselves inside in an effort to disrupt the final electoral vote count confirming Joe Biden's victory over Trump (Blake 2021).

Consequences of Demonization

Tariq, Nora, Ali, and Zaid all discussed the potential ramifications for individuals when the president and other elected and appointed officials rhetorically attack Muslims, refugees, and other immigrants, and enact restrictive policies. Such actions by government officials intersect with disproportionate media coverage of acts of terrorism committed by Muslims compared to those perpetrated by others and narratives in popular culture that portray Islam as dangerous and violent, as described above. Tariq and Nora spoke of the radicalizing effects this scenario can have on those so targeted. Ali and Zaid suggested that perceived government support for demonization gives license to racists to act in aggressive and violent ways toward refugees.

In Tariq's experience, many immigrants believed they did not need to worry about policies that would make it more difficult for others to enter the United States because they had already successfully immigrated: "A lot of people think: 'Oh yeah, because I'm here, I'm good'" (2 November 2017). In fact, Kasim, expressed this exact view, as I describe in more detail in the discussion of the travel ban in Chapter 4. This was a mistaken understanding, according to Tariq, because such policies can radicalize those targeted:

Because there are a lot of people who want to be here. What about if I'm there, and I'm waiting desperately to move. And I have a death threat. And

now, for example, I believe a lot of people have the same thing. Like I have a death threat and now Trump banned me from going. What should I do? Get killed? And that's it? What are you going to do when you have this situation? Probably, you will join ISIS and fight the US. Why did they do that? I helped you and now you kick me out? You don't want to have my family and me. So, we shouldn't underestimate these things. (2 November 2017)

Tariq argued that Trump does not care about the long-term consequences of his actions. "How long are you going to be president?" he asked, "Four more years? And then what? You're gone. You are going to create something, a massive problem elsewhere, they are going to fight" (Tariq 2 November 2017). Conversely, he said this situation could change "if we had support from people, from the White House, from Washington and the news stopped [perpetuating anti-Muslim discourses]" (Tariq 2 November 2017). He hoped to see less division in the future in the United States.

The assumption of danger targeting those already in the United States has far-reaching ramifications, Tariq argued. "It's not going to affect me," he said, "because of how I was born and raised, I'm strong. I know that's not us" (2 November 2017). However, the danger, according to Tariq, is that children of Muslim backgrounds born in the United States will "grow up on hate. Watch the news: 'Muslim, Muslim, Muslim.' And he's Muslim and he's a kid. And he's not going to understand. So, you created that beast and then he grows up a little bit, he now wanted to be a Muslim. But he went to the wrong side. People like ISIS, they say: 'We are Muslims'" (2 November 2017).

As Tariq pointed out, reviewing the small number of terrorist plots or attacks in the United States involving Muslims, the overwhelming majority involved American-born, rather than foreign-born, individuals (Neiwert 2017). Despite this reality, as noted above, in the United States, news media disproportionately cover terrorism committed by Muslims compared to attacks perpetrated by those of other backgrounds. Moreover, Islam, particularly as represented by predominately Arab societies in the Middle East, has long been conflated with terrorism in popular culture (Shaheen 2003, 1984). Tariq observed that this conflation is incorrect: "This is the mistake that people make to consider Muslims terrorists. We're not. . . . One crazy guy gets mad, not because he's a Muslim. He gets mad probably because of the behavior that you guys show him. And that's why I keep telling friends, teachers: 'Don't blame me in the future when one of my kids, because of you, you feed him hate and you tell him you're different.' Because when the kids are born, they don't know black and white. We teach them black and white" (Tariq 2 November 2017).

Forcefully continuing to frame this problem in personal terms, Tariq said: "In our homes, we feed them that stuff. So, don't blame me when he does

something stupid in the future. He was born and raised here [in the United States]” (2 November 2017). Therefore, Tariq argued: “If he did something stupid, don’t say he’s a Muslim, because of his religion. No! Because you made him do that. This is how you do it: ‘You’re green, your black, you have an accent. You are from there.’ This is what makes him angry. This is why he wants his revenge” (2 November 2017).

Nora, too, highlighted the effects of demonization and targeting by the government. For example, policies such as the separation of child migrants from their parents and imprisonment by immigration authorities create anger, she argued.⁵ “Why are you making people angry because when you take somebody’s father, how is his son going to feel? This anger inside of him, how will you deal with that?” she asked rhetorically directed at those who implement such policies, “Because you created that in the first place” (Nora 6 February 2018).

In such a context, the concern for Nora was ensuring that the individual, such as the angry son, does not go in a “bad” or “wrong” direction. As she put it, “I lived in a situation like that. Sometimes people do the wrong stuff by choice. They just think: ‘Okay, I have to do it because I feel I’m not treated fairly.’ . . . And they develop a way of thinking and living that’s some kind of a way that it might end up badly” (Nora 6 February 2018). Nora argued that one way to ameliorate such a situation is to reach out to those who exclude or perpetuate alienation and explain that there are long-lasting effects of exclusionary rhetoric and policies.

Ali and Zaid pointed out that when it is not only members of society who demonize the other, but also the most visible leader of the country, in this case Donald Trump, it gives license to those who would harm targeted groups to carry out discrimination and violence. As Ali explained:

If I am a racist and if I see a lot of people going and . . . protecting other religions, protecting other communities, probably I will change my mind a little bit. [The racist individual will think]: “Hey listen, this is just only me and look how a lot of people, and some of them, this is my cousin, and this is my neighbor,” they will change. But, if you see, like a [person in a position of authority] . . . if I’m a racist I’ll do whatever I want to do. I don’t care. (14 January 2018)

Supporting Ali’s argument, Trump’s words have been cited in multiple incidents of violence since 2015. In August 2015, for example, two men were arrested in Boston for allegedly attacking a man with a pipe and urinating on him. At the time of their arrest, they told police: “Donald Trump was right. All these illegals need to be deported” (Ferrigno 2015). One of the men later told police he had attacked the man because he appeared to be “Hispanic” and an “illegal immigrant.” The influence of Trump’s rhetoric reached far beyond the United States. In November 2018, the Nigerian Army justified the killing of forty protestors, some of whom threw stones

at soldiers, by specifically citing Donald Trump's assertion that US soldiers would shoot migrants who attempted to throw rocks at American military members patrolling the southern US border (Searcey and Akinwotu 2018). The alleged perpetrator of the 14 March 2019 terror attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in which more than fifty people were killed, wrote in a "manifesto" that Donald Trump was a "symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose" (Smith et al. 2019).

Zaid pointed out that Trump, whom he called racist as noted above, received a significant share of votes in 2016. As he argued: "Almost half of the people [who voted], voted for him and I think they voted for him for that reason. I wouldn't blame . . . people for being afraid of change and adapting to new things. Maybe that's why people here are more open-minded because they have seen with their eyes, they have interacted with people from different backgrounds. But to have the head of the country kind of adopting or encouraging this kind of racist behavior, I don't think that these things will fade away any time soon, unfortunately" (Zaid 27 February 2018). Still, Zaid was hopeful that the situation would improve in the future. This was in part because, as he maintained, even though many Americans seemed to support racist views, "there are even more people who are against these ideas, and they are fighting on our behalf" (Zaid 27 February 2018).

Diversity and Cultural Exchange

Strangeness, unease, and uncertainty exist together with many interviewees' experiences of engaging with American friends, neighbors, and coworkers on a daily basis. Multiple individuals described their interactions with acquaintances and colleagues as a positive aspect of life in the United States, particularly when they involved those of diverse backgrounds coming together to exchange points of view and learn from one another. Some likened life in the type of multicultural society they experienced in the United States to their lives in Iraq before 2003. Many interviewees expressed a desire to have opportunities to give opinions about practices in the United States as well as to share their culture with friends, neighbors, and co-workers and to enjoy similar occasions to learn from native-born Americans.

Importantly, routine and mundane contact between members of "different human groups" does not guarantee that they will develop the viewpoint that all human beings are "equally entitled to certain rights" (Benhabib 2006, 153). Those with whom I spoke described both routine interactions with diverse others as well as many experiences of intentionally seeking to build such a cosmopolitan point of view. Fostering such contact requires, as explained by interviewees, purposeful interactions and a willingness on the part of both native-born Americans and newcomers to change, learn, and grow.

Diversity in Daily Life

An important factor in developing a lived experience of inclusion and belonging is the possibility of building relationships across cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds (Crane 2021). Multiple interviewees pointed out that individuals of backgrounds different from their own had assisted them with their resettlement. For example, Nada explained that when she first arrived in New York City, members of the Jewish community helped her and her family to settle into their new surroundings. She elaborated on the diversity she experienced: “New York City has different cultures. So, of course, each culture has many things. Maybe, for me, I don’t like it. And maybe for another, they like it. So, because we have law here, they protect me, and the law protects them. So, for this reason, all the people can live here and feel very comfortable. And, I say it again: I respect them, and they respect me. This is normal” (Nada 1 November 2017). Nada continued, “America has a lot of cultures because we have law. Of course, any law has many mistakes, but we can change that” (1 November 2017). She indicated she believed this situation was better than in Iraq where “we don’t have good government, we don’t have law, we don’t . . . respect each other. This is our problem” (Nada 1 November 2017).

Ali, too, described the everyday diversity he experienced in New York. When he first arrived, a Christian woman living in Manhattan hosted him for several weeks: “She kept me with her for fifteen days with no charge. This is huge. . . . And I don’t know her personally. I know her through Facebook, through a person. The first time we saw her, was when we came from the airport to her place. . . . It’s a big thing, you know?” (Ali 14 January 2018). His host also invited him to parties to meet people. Additionally, a volunteer, whom Ali noted was Jewish, took his daughter to a children’s activity club. He said: “She’s Jewish. Okay. And my host is Christian. And I am Muslim. . . . So, I like that. I like the diversity of people, living together in peace. I love that here. I cannot explain how much I like that” (Ali 14 January 2018). Later in our conversation, Ali said again about New York: “You can practice whatever religion you want. No one will ask you what you’re doing. When the mosque here on the corner has an event for Ramadan or in Eid, three police cars protect them. The same thing when Hindus have an event, three cars to protect them. When a temple, a Jewish temple, [does so], they have protection too” (14 January 2018).

We met in a café in New York City and Ali pointed to the other customers, saying he could see Muslims, non-Muslim Americans, and people of different backgrounds living together and shopping at each other’s businesses. Near to the location of our interview, for example, was a restaurant that advertised halal [prepared in accordance with Islamic prescriptions] Chinese food with signage in English, Arabic, and Chinese. During our in-

terview, I noticed several other patrons speaking Arabic in the café as well. Ali compared this experience to Baghdad's atmosphere before the 2003 war.

Ali explained that, before 2003, Baghdad had been lively with shops open and residents on the streets until 3:00 AM. However, after the invasion, shops closed early in the evening and the city became "dead." The interaction of Iraqis of diverse backgrounds ended as well. After 2003, Shi'a did not enter Sunni districts, and vice versa, for fear of violence. Individuals would be asked to produce identification to prove their group belonging and trust between individuals broke down. Ali suggested that "This was all because of the war. It wasn't like that before. It was just like here [New York City]" (14 January 2018).

Like what he had experienced in Baghdad before the war, Ali said, in New York, "I feel safe and I feel in the United States, people from different backgrounds and religions are living together" (14 January 2018). In his view, protection by the law facilitated this situation: "Why there, do they fight? Outside the United States. This is the question. Because of the law! If the law is gone from any country, it will be chaos. I'm not talking about my country. I'm talking in general" (Ali 14 January 2018).

For Sarah, too, an aspect of life in New York that she liked was that so many people from varied backgrounds lived there: "Many people here live together. Different kinds of people, from the world . . . with different religions, with different citizenships, with different colors. It's good. This part for me, I like that. It's good for America, it's good to live together. . . . And also, they have to respect each other" (30 November 2017). Earlier in our conversation, Sarah said it can be challenging for newcomers like herself to interact with others from so many different backgrounds: "It's really difficult for new people. . . . Iraqis, when you come here to see these people, different cultures, different religions, different traditions or different languages" (30 November 2017). However, in her experience, overall this diversity has been positive.

Walid chose to resettle in the United States specifically because of its diversity. He had the choice to immigrate to Canada or Germany, too, where some of his family members had already settled. Nevertheless, he chose to raise his family in the United States because in his view it is a "country of diversity." "I can raise my family," he said, "In terms of discrimination, I know that country [the United States] has an experience working well with different races (Walid 27 September 2017). He compared the United States to Germany, saying, "When I speak with my sister-in-law, she says there's always only Germans. They don't have this kind of diversity" (Walid 27 September 2017). Moreover, Walid said, the United States is an "immigrant country, so that's why I felt more comfortable" (27 September 2017). Walid also noted that his city in Upstate New York has a significant resettled ref-

ugee population, which creates a diverse community. He said, “We have migration from Europe, from Africa, Asia, so we are a diverse community here in Upstate New York” (Walid 27 September 2017).

Like Walid, Wissam said, “The good thing about the US is the different backgrounds and cultures you have here” (22 October 2017). As he observed, “Even if you have an accent, even if you want to learn, you see lots of people are going through the same thing and you don’t feel different from anybody else, . . . especially in Chicago” (Wissam 22 October 2017). He mentioned that Chicago does not have a dominant group; rather, “It’s very mixed, very culturally welcoming, people are very nice here and I don’t feel singled out,” he said, and “I fit in right away” (Wissam 22 October 2017).

In Wissam’s view, the experience of “people here [in the United States] living in harmony, from all different backgrounds, all different cultures is very big” (22 October 2017) and should be emphasized more. He noted that his own mixed background had created challenges in Iraq: “I’m from Iraq . . . I lived in Baghdad, but originally, I’m from Sulaymaniyah [a city in Iraqi Kurdistan]. So, I have a mixed background . . . Kurdish . . . my grandmother is Turkman, and my mom is Arab” (Wissam 22 October 2017). As a result, “Maybe you’ll find I am the most neutral person because I have all these different backgrounds and so I have cousins from all ethnicities. . . . I have to listen to everybody” (Wissam 22 October 2017). He concluded that Americans “tend to take it for granted” (Wissam 22 October 2017) how relatively well members of distinct groups can live together. For Wissam, focusing on these positive experiences makes people more willing to learn about other cultures and accept other points of view: “After all, we all have the same goal: to improve this country to make it the best country that we can live in. And, in the end, all our lives will be better together” (Wissam 22 October 2017).

Building Community through Exchange

Related to the substantial discussions about the positive role of diversity and difference I had with many interviewees was the notion that individuals from disparate backgrounds could not only live in proximity to different cultures or practices, but also could and should interact, form relationships, and learn from one another. As several interviewees explained, such processes often entailed finding and creating spaces to voice their views concerning social and cultural norms and practices. The experiences and activities described in this section involved the (re)iteration of such norms among newcomers and native-born citizens to ponder, alter and expand their understandings of belonging.

Importantly, and in view of the preceding sections describing widespread assumptions of the fundamental “otherness” of Islam by a significant share

of the American population, I preface this discussion by noting that the distance between cultures is often less wide and the differences less stark than asserted by those opposed to immigration. Monolithic ideological constructs such as “the West” and “the East”—and a supposed intractable conflict between them—present a world of discrete, homogeneous cultures that does not correspond to social reality or history. For example, there are and have been cooperative and conflictual contacts, exchanges, and syncretism among the heterogeneous practices of what we now think of as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam for centuries all over the world (Kumar 2012; Asad 2011). Moreover, as Rogers Brubaker argues, “Migration is as old as human history” (2010, 76). People of diverse and disparate backgrounds, cultures, languages, and so forth have been interacting and influencing each other for millennia. Therefore, it is important to challenge assertions of uncrossed and uncrossable social, cultural, and/or political boundaries among human communities. As multiple interviewees explained, and as noted in the previous chapter, Iraq, like the United States, is a diverse society with many ethnic and religious communities including Muslims, Christians, Jews, Yazidi, Kurds, Arabs, and others. For example, as Nora observed, important Christian figures such as Jesus and Mary are central to Islamic tradition as well. Although she is Muslim, she said in her city in Virginia: “I’ve been invited to go to churches. I’ve been going to lots of Sundays. I’ve also been going to services on Christmas eve” (Nora 6 February 2018). With this in mind, I turn to the issue of exchange among interviewees and their friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

“When I was in Iraq,” Abdullah explained, “we were under sanctions basically all my childhood. And we were not in touch with people from different countries. We were a very closed country. So, my mentality was constrained . . . in that way” (14 January 2018). He continued, “I didn’t have a good image about the USA when I was in Iraq. Because I told you, we had almost zero interaction with people. And, the only interaction we had with foreign people were the American soldiers” (Abdullah 14 January 2018). As he noted, and as Chapter 1 explored in greater detail, when a soldier interacts with civilians, “they are unlikely to act nice” (Abdullah 14 January 2018). However, when Abdullah left Iraq to seek safer conditions abroad, he began to think differently about those of non-Iraqi backgrounds, “Once I went to Syria, I met people from America, from other countries. It changed my view,” he said (14 January 2018). As he detailed: “As soon as I traveled, I came here to one of the most diverse places in the world. My mentality completely changed and even my way of thinking became a combination of American mentality and also my school, engineering. They usually make you think in a logical way, you know? Use more of a problem solving, critical thinking. So, I think a combination of all that affected my mentality” (Abdullah 14 January 2018).

Later in the conversation, he elaborated:

When I came here [to the United States], it completely changed my views. And I was able to distinguish between good people, bad people, government actions, people's actions. So, right now, if I see someone saying something negative about the West, I will try to defend it. Because this is not right, you cannot generalize. Because there are a lot of people from the West who are talking just like that about all Arabs and Muslims, that those groups attack everybody. So, it really goes both ways. . . . I believe if you generalize, religion, countries, race, whatever, I believe this is wrong. (Abdullah 14 January 2018)

Abdullah suggested that he understood learning about difference to be a two-way process. He argued that Iraqis have responsibilities to educate themselves about the United States, and Americans have a responsibility to meet and learn about Iraqis and challenge negative stereotypes concerning them:

When we were back home, we always had a bad image about the West because our media was controlled by the regime and it always [portrayed Americans as] bad. And then when I met other people, that changed my views. So, I think the same thing should happen for Americans. They should go meet other people, they cannot just trust the media because most of the media are controlled by bigger people than us and they have agendas. . . . I think it's 50/50. . . . I think the best way to learn is you actually go there and learn . . . and build human connections. If you are staying far away from a person, you cannot really have that connection with them, even if you hear stories. The extremists are not really helping people from the Middle East, our reputation, but if you actually go there or read more or just interact with people here in the country, I think it would be a surprise how people are different from whatever the media is showing. (Abdullah 14 January 2018)

Hashim, too, viewed deep interaction as essential to changing the views of others: "If someone decided not to think about something, it's very hard to change opinions by going through discussions with them. I don't think that will change that much. Because with all the media, with all the things happening now in Iraq they just think that we are enemies, anyway" (1 October 2017). As noted in the introduction, significant percentages of Americans believe that Iraq is an enemy of the United States. However, Hashim argued that protracted interaction and relationship building between himself and native-born citizens could potentially change such views: "For people that I know, when they know me better, when they see, when I get them to my house and then they see my family, when they see how we are living and how we are hard workers and how we are studying and how we are raising our kids. I think they will change their opinions. So, I will be, just an example of an Iraqi person living and working in the United States to set a good example. That's the only way to maybe participate in changing their opinions" (1 October 2017).

To illustrate this point and process, Hashim discussed several individuals who began as coworkers and whom he now considered friends: “In my work, I have many friends now. But let’s say, last year when we first met them, they had different opinions. So, I think I just set a good example of the Iraqis, that’s the only way, you know? Just to show them that: Hey, we are just like you. We are just doing exactly what you are doing, we don’t hate, we don’t hate you. I don’t know you to hate you. So, it’s just: Try to set a good example I think” (1 October 2017).

Through these efforts, he has constructed friendships, changing his friends’ initially wary perceptions of Iraqis in the process. Describing the challenges and need for such processes as well, Walid related his experience raising children in Upstate New York: “In Iraq, the way of raising children is totally different than here. So, sometimes I’m thinking about how my kids grow up here, and my 15-year-old daughter she has started to tell me: ‘Daddy you are not understanding me.’ Even I’m a social worker, I’m a counselor . . . but, she thinks I’m only from Iraq. So, I told her: ‘Please teach me how this happened’” (27 September 2017).

Walid remarked that teenagers, both newcomers and Americans, face difficulties. Nonetheless, “it’s kind of a challenge raising kids here in both cultures. It’s very difficult. Sometimes people feel that they are losing their culture. . . . They’re becoming more American” (Walid 27 September 2017). He described as well how a friend’s son told his mother he did not want her to go to his school because she wears a hijab, an outward sign of her, and by extension the son’s, “different culture” (Walid 27 September 2017). Walid said about this situation: “We found it very important to address this issue with the school: ‘Why don’t you have an international day? Or have different flags in the school? Or have presentations? Or the students from different countries teach the kids where you come from and show the students about Iraq?’ We have 5,000 years of history and we want to learn about your history. To make these kids feel proud of where they come from, rather than [experience] shame or guilt because of their different culture” (27 September 2017).

In Walid’s view, the negative feelings he noted had led immigrant children to “want to be just American. They want to lose their identity and culture because they want to belong to the community. . . . Many families have a lot of pressure [because of this]” (27 September 2017). Walid also described his own personal experience of belonging to multiple communities, observing “I can’t say I’m only Iraqi. I can’t say I’m only American. I’m Iraqi-American” (27 September 2017). He continued: “So, half of me is Iraqi, half of me is American. Part of why I see this is because I feel this society changed a lot of my views for the future. For example, if I’m in Iraq, maybe my wife will stay home and take care of the kids. Now, my wife she’s working in a chemical dependency program, she’s helping me with the kids.

It's totally different. . . . So, we see many families now they are learning. It depends on if there's enough exposure to US families" (Walid 27 September 2017).

Immediately following these comments, Walid said that local religious organizations had facilitated such processes:

What helped me a lot is when I met with the church, and the church helped me to adjust to the life and also integrate into the society very quickly. I'm a very curious person and to learn I went to a temple, I went to a church, I went to a Hindu temple, to a Jewish temple, I want to learn, understand this society. It is part of my curiosity. Maybe, the other people just want to stay home. . . . I want to make sure I'm raising my family in a healthy way, keep both cultures and try to support them. There's also bad parts of the American culture in terms of drugs, alcohol. . . . But many families learn from this culture, the good part of this culture (27 September 2017).

Finally, Walid described how he has also attended interfaith meetings that engage Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the area in dialogue about their particular experiences:

They come together; they meet monthly. And they have like a conference, invite the community. And they discuss different topics. For example, one of the people said: "I grew up in [a nearby suburb]," which is 45 minutes from here. He said, "All my friends are Yemenis, they are Muslims." . . . The other person, he's Jewish, they started to share their experiences. He said, "I grew up in [another suburb], I never have met a Muslim, but please go and try and do something to teach us. We don't know how to find you." So, you need to raise awareness. (27 September 2017)

Walid said of such programs: "So try these kinds of [activities]. There's a lot of education, interfaith organizations try to invite people to discuss different topics. What are their concerns, what are the most important things?" (27 September 2017).

Mohammed, too, occasionally attends church services in Upstate New York, even though he is Muslim. A good friend attends this church, and he enjoys the company of the other parishioners. As he put it, "I like the people there. I have a friend in the church and so, I like to mix with another religion to [have a] good experience, to see what's going on" (Mohammed 2 November 2017). "But," he said, "I never go to the Mosque [in my city]. Maybe one time" (Mohammed 2 November 2017). Mohammed went on to describe the process of cultural exchange, comparing life in Upstate New York to his life in Iraq: "I feel the people are not very social. It's difficult to know your neighbor. . . . But in our country, we have good social ties with the community. All your neighbors, when they cook, they bring the food for your house. When you cook, you send the food to your neighbor. But here,

no. You don't know the name of your neighbors, so . . . it's difficult a little bit" (2 November 2017).

Mohammed had worked against this insularity, attempting to build community with friends. He spoke about an American family, friends of his family with whom he "mixed" cultures:

We have two families, [mine and an] American family. We mix the cultures between us. My friend . . . and his family [come to] our house. We stay together, eat together and we go to his house . . . he has been my friend for three or four years. And I asked him: "Why do you like our culture?" He said: "Mohammed, actually, in America, we are losing the culture." . . . So, he said: "I need to mix with your family." And I told him, "I need to mix with your family to understand the American culture." So, we work together and sometimes we discuss together how we can, like, help my daughter and his daughter because they are teenagers. (2 November 2017)

In general, however, Mohammed indicated that he perceived crosscultural communication as difficult. In his view, connecting on a personal level can be challenging: "If you ask him [an American] about his job, it's difficult. If you ask him about his family, it's difficult. If you ask him, everything is difficult here. It's difficult to make communication with the people a little bit. He's your friend, it's difficult to enter his life, or to discuss with him about anything personal with him. It's very difficult" (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

In an early attempt to break through what he felt was a barrier, and move beyond pleasantries, Mohammed began bringing coffee and Iraqi food to his coworkers at the airport. He told his colleagues that in Iraq it was a normal part of social interaction and that he enjoyed doing so. After he began this practice, his relations with his fellow employees started to change. His coworkers, who became friends, also began to bring food to share: "So, I changed it a little bit. My friends, they do the same thing. They go to Tim Hortons [a Canadian coffee and donut chain commonly found in Upstate New York], they bring you food, share with us. . . . They change it a little bit. It's not a hundred percent, but they change it" (Mohammed 2 November 2017).

Mohammed also explained that he had incorporated aspects of American culture into his daily life. "The American culture changed something good for me," he said (Mohammed 2 November 2017). As he explained, "In our culture, when I go to your house, I didn't call you first. . . . I just knock on your door" (2 November 2017). However, Americans, in his experience, approach such a visit differently and are more likely to ask before arriving. "Because maybe you're busy," Mohammed said, and he appreciated this norm. Americans have "borders" in their social interactions, he said, which Mohammed also liked: "So, I learned some culture and . . . I give the people some of our culture. . . . A little bit" (2 November 2017).

Marwa explained that in Upstate New York she now has a diverse social network: “I have a lot of friends who are Nepali, Burmese and Somali. . . . It’s nice in the United States . . . it’s mixed. I like it. . . . I have a lot of friends from different countries. Yes. That’s so great” (25 November 2017). Marwa said that when she first arrived in the United States, she and her husband often discussed issues she felt should change in American society: “They should change that, no I don’t like that. . . . But now . . . I accept it more when I became involved with the people . . . and after learning more” (25 November 2017). She went on to say: “Some families, they didn’t adapt to the culture here. They still want their kids to keep, like it’s okay, it’s nice to keep your culture. . . . It’s okay, I have now, I keep some. But I want my kids to be involved. Some families, they didn’t become involved with the community here and they want their kids the same. . . . They didn’t know how to mix” (Marwa 25 November 2017).

Moreover, Marwa explained how drawing on her own background and parenting accordingly, she could lead by example and influence American culture and the actions of those around her indirectly. She said: “They are going to see a successful family, what they do with their kids. They are going to see. First, they are going to say: ‘No, no, no.’ But after when they are in trouble or have problems with their kids, they are going to say: ‘Oh, you are right’” (Marwa 25 November 2017). I asked the clarifying question: “So you’re setting an example?” to which Marwa replied: “Living an example” (25 November 2017).

Exchange and cooperation are not only a function of newcomers and Americans interacting as individuals, but also occur among members of various communities and representatives of institutions within American society. For example, as Sarah told me, it was the responsibility of both the American people and government to create welcoming feelings and environments for newcomers. Hashim too argued that the government had a responsibility to unite and not divide different communities. This role was important for Hashim, because, he said, “The job of the government is to keep the communities united, to keep them more united, not to divide people because once you have this division . . . you might start seeing some communities hate other communities and problems will happen. They will always happen. So, the government’s job is . . . to help or to set rules: ‘Hey these people are just like you or just like other people’” (1 October 2017).

On this topic, Omar said, “In our city [in Shenandoah Valley], everything looks good” (14 December 2017). The local Islamic center has close cooperation with area churches and works to demonstrate its willingness to assist the entire community. For example, the Islamic center opens space to shelter members of the city’s homeless population during Christmas because the churches that typically do so are unable to on that day.

Omar is personally involved with several projects aimed at creating a welcoming and multicultural atmosphere in his city and, those, he observed,

“Are a lot of work. But, for the long run. I think we will see something different. Different than other places” (14 December 2017). Indeed, “We can feel that,” he said, adding, “We see new people all the time, and especially the businesses, they were very grateful that we are here. Very grateful. And they are enjoying the food, they are enjoying the culture. So, it’s different. The city is different also. . . . It is developing faster and faster in just five years” (Omar 14 December 2017). Omar continued to elaborate that the effects of immigration on the city were not only economic, but also attitudinal: “The impact was not only on us but on the city itself in economic terms and in terms of the attitudes of people towards others. When they are introduced to the families, the refugees, they hear more stories, and everyone was impacted” (14 December 2017).

He saw the recent approval by the city council of his city as a “Welcoming City” as a sign of that fact. Such a designation is a project of the non-profit organization Welcoming America, which indicates a commitment to working, “across multiple sectors, such as government, business, and non-profit, to create inclusive policies and practices. . . . Welcoming Cities are guided by the principles of inclusion and creating communities that prosper because everyone feels welcome, including immigrants and refugees” (Welcoming America 2019). Over the course of several years, Omar worked with a community group to garner support and convince the city council to seek this designation. I examine the role of activist, nonprofit, and community organizations in fostering exchange among individuals of different backgrounds and advocating for the rights of refugees for which Omar and others have volunteered and worked in more detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, the processes of interpersonal exchange and communication can move in many directions. As Kasim explained in detail, he believed that the Iraqis who learned how to interact with diverse others in the United States could bring what he saw as newly developed openness and tolerance back to Iraq if they decide to return. Kasim first described his experiences living in Iraq:

It was hard for me back home. . . . I didn’t feel the freedom to say whatever I wanted. Not politically, even culturally. . . . When I was there, there was no cultural openness. If you believed in something, you will find somebody who really aggressively wants to deny your beliefs. In that way, there’s no freedom. It’s not because of government, it’s because of the culture. There’s no tolerance. . . . And it has nothing to do with the religion, it’s just to do with the culture. It became so backward that they don’t tolerate anything. (27 February 2018)

With this background established, Kasim went on to say of the experience of Iraqis interacting with diverse cultures after resettling in the United States: “So, now the Iraqis here [in the United States] know how societies work. How culture works. They have a bigger picture now. They’re more tolerant,

they're more open-minded. I wouldn't say they're Americanized, but they know how the world works now. . . . And, everybody here . . . they're an asset if they go back home or try to teach people. This is how societies work. If you want to move to the next step, you have to be tolerant to everybody" (27 February 2018).

Conclusion

The experiences shared by interviewees in this chapter challenge assertions that refugee resettlement poses a threat to the United States and that Muslim refugees, in particular, present a special danger because Islam is irreconcilable with so-called Western culture and societies. Culture is not a static object that is passively transmitted; it is actively created by people (Crane 2021). The individuals with whom I spoke sought to engage with their neighbors, coworkers, and fellow community members. Many of them desired both to learn about American society and to share their Iraqi culture with others. As these interviewees' experiences demonstrate, processes of engagement and exchange between newcomers and the native-born population are an empirical reality and a normative good. Mutual commitment to reasonable adjustment in practices and views is required for people of diverse backgrounds to live together in the same place (Carens 2013).

Overall, interviewee experiences point to three interconnected insights about resettlement processes. First, belonging is not necessarily a binary state that one experiences or does not. For some interviewees, it was a strong feeling, while, for others, it was partial or constrained, at least at the time of their interview. Others expressed a sense that they could never fully belong to American society. Importantly, these interviews suggest that it is possible to develop an attachment to a community even as challenges and barriers complicate that connection. These processes require an attitude of openness and welcoming on the part of both native-born Americans and newcomers.

Second, the anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and anti-refugee discourses that circulate in American society can negatively affect members of those populations. Members of targeted groups are acutely aware of prejudices held by segments of American society, and this knowledge can create feelings of precarity and unease. Moreover, the existence of a national leader, in this case Donald Trump, who espouses such views and attacks newcomers in his rhetoric and policies can threaten individuals' safety and shape their perceptions of belonging.

Third, contact, exchange, and finding opportunities to share views and judgments on norms and practices among those of different backgrounds can be a fruitful process of building bonds and community among newcomers and the native members of their host society. Results require inten-

tional exchange and are not guaranteed. As interviewees described them, these processes are multidirectional, and their character is the shared responsibility of immigrants, host society members, community initiatives, and governments at all scales. Individuals, religious groups, other nonprofit organizations, and government institutions and programs all have roles to play in these processes.

Finally, resettlement processes can be difficult, but the fact that they are challenging is not a reason not to attempt them. The alternative—as interviewees suggested has been true in their native Iraq after 2003—is social mistrust, fragmentation, and violence. The discussion in this chapter concerning perceptions of belonging flows into the following two chapters, which delve into democratic membership in the United States and the practices and engagement interviewees witnessed, participated in, and in some cases led, even as they encountered social, economic, and political barriers to doing so.

Notes

1. FBI hate crime data, likely an undercount of such incidents, show an uptick in reported incidents in 2015, the year the 2016 presidential election campaign began, from 154 in 2014 to 257. Reported hate crimes increased again in 2016 to 307 before falling to 273 in 2017. Despite the drop in such incidents in the most recent available data, the 2017 number remains significantly higher than that for 2014 (FBI 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018).
2. Indeed, Osama bin Laden, who claimed responsibility for the 11 September 2001 attacks, justified them in part on these grounds. In his “Letter to America,” he answered the question “why are we fighting and opposing you” directly: “Because you attacked us and continue to attack us” in Palestine, Somalia, and Kashmir and elsewhere. In his letter, he specifically mentioned the starving of 1.5 million Muslim children in Iraq under sanctions to justify the attacks (bin Laden 2002).
3. Interestingly, Pew Research Center polling indicated that, in March 2002, six months after the 11 September 2001 attacks, only 25 percent of respondents reported believing that Islam encouraged violence among its adherents (Pew 2017b). That figure peaked at 50 percent in 2014 and fell to 41 percent in 2017—still significantly higher than in the aftermath of 9/11.
4. Similarly, in January 2019, two women, both American citizens, were detained for forty minutes by a United States Customs and Border Protection agent simply for speaking Spanish. The women recorded the agent saying, “The reason I asked you for your ID is because I came in here and I saw that you guys are speaking Spanish, which is very unheard of up here” (Chappell 2019a).
5. In 2017, the Trump administration implemented a policy of separating families who crossed the southern US border without a visa, including those seeking asylum, detaining parents and children in different locations (Seville and

Rappleye 2018). The policy was designed to “deter” mothers from migrating with their children (Ainsley 2017). Reports indicated that at least 2,737 children were separated from their parents in 2017 and 2018, but the actual number is likely significantly higher (Long and Alonso-Zaldivar 2019). Children who were separated from their parents and children who arrived alone, so-called unaccompanied minors, are typically placed in foster homes or shelters. Reports emerged throughout 2018 that the Trump administration was detaining separated children in cages in makeshift facilities (BBC 2018). In late 2018, the Trump administration began removing children from shelters around the country and concentrating them in tent camps in Texas near the Mexico/US border (Dickerson 2018). Importantly, the policy of child separation was met with significant public outrage as photographs of children in cages appeared in news reports. Trump took limited steps to end and reverse the policy after the backlash and the Biden administration has worked to reunite children with their parents. However, in some cases, the new administration has found it difficult to do so due to poor and incomplete record keeping during the Trump years.