MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND CITIZENSHIP: ARAB IRAQI WOMEN

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines Arab Iraqi refugee women’s experiences of the “war on terror” from a gendered historical perspective within the contemporary structural violence of state policies and practices in the Canadian context. Drawing on critical anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist theoretical frameworks, I argue that Iraqi refugee women experience the “war on terror” as both a historical and contemporary phenomenon. Historical ideological constructions of Arab Muslim women as terrorists, unsuitable for integration into Canadian society, facilitate their current social exclusion and eviction from civil society. Examining the trauma of the “war on terror” and Iraqi women’s everyday experiences in this light shifts the focus away from disease focused psychiatric conceptualizations of trauma while centering the participants’ experiences and varied responses to their circumstances in the Canadian context. Using a historically-based multi-level trauma framework of the “war on terror” enables us to move away from artificial binaries of “us” and “them” and facilitate a better understanding of the structural dynamics of our interconnected world in order to foster alliances across transnational borders and boundaries aimed at developing multi-level transformative interventions.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother, Saleemeh Salman Mohammed Al-Imrani (1926-2008), who continues to be a source of love and inspiration long after she is gone.

It still pains me deeply when I think of how colonial wars, border controls and state patriarchal violence forced her to live her life in exile and prevented us from accompanying her body to be buried in her sacred homeland as was her wish. November 14, 2013 marked the fifth anniversary of my mother’s death. I was unable to attend her funeral and have never been able to visit her grave. She was simply sent off alone across the Iran-Iraq border to be buried in war-ravaged Karbala and we were left dealing with the pain.

Sharing my mother’s story of pain and suffering brought about by state violence, war, and colonial patriarchal institutions is my way of memorializing her. On the fifth anniversary of her death, I refuse to let her be forgotten or to let her be another nameless, faceless statistic, yet another Iraqi woman who was victimized by war and violence. I want to remember her beyond her pain and suffering. I want to remember her as the beautiful, kind, compassionate and strong generous person that she was. I also want to imagine all the possibilities that she could have had, but never did. Rather than sensationalizing her pain and suffering, I speak out about it in order to expose the state structural violence that altered the course of her life. My mother’s story of pain and suffering is not unique, colonial imperialist patriarchal violence has devastated countless women’s lives around the world. By sharing the particularities of my mother’s life story, I want to show how these structural forces play out in the everyday individual women’s lives. By doing so, I hope to create an alternative vision of a world where women and girls can live out their lives free of patriarchal oppression and all forms of violence. Whether they be living in Iraq, Iran, Canada or anywhere else in the world, our current depressing reality is that violence against women is a universal phenomenon that is yet to be eradicated.

My brother Amir originally wrote the following poem in Arabic as a tribute to my mother shortly following her death in 2008. With Amir’s help, I translated the poem into English in 2009 when I began my journey to tell Iraqi women’s experiences of the “war on terror”, beginning with my mother’s story and discovering my own history in the process. I present this tribute here as an attempt to resist erasures, and keep my mother’s memory alive in the transnational network of
our hearts and minds, while celebrating her strength, faith, resilience, and compassion for humanity.

My Tale

On a pitch dark chilly night
I was born
Whence I collided with
A pale coloured,
Obscure, speechless ghost
What is your name?
I asked, with an innocent smile.
Echo from his silence rebounded:
Alif, Lam, and Meem
It is said to be.
As for me,
I wish I could be
Alif, Meem and Lam.

That’s how my spiritual twin I met
Neither compliments nor arguments exchanged.

Who am I?
I do not know
No one told me
My date of birth, my name, and the end

My father, a fearless man
From the family of toil
Iron willed, knew no despair
A proud soul
Never bowed his head
He gave me roots
The badge of honour and poverty
He taught me about
The grandeur of the palm tree
Love of the land,
Humanity,
The plough,
And dates
Engulfed in his love,
Caresses and affection
I was filled with joy
And security wherever he went

I ran, playfully, in the meadow
Unlike other children
For no reason, nor toys
My brief childhood I wrapped
On the banks of forgetfulness

Slender I grew as a cane
Resilient and strong
My curly hair
Untamed braids flying in the air
The radiance of two hazel eyes
And beautifully trimmed
Like a branch of pine
With the scent of Jasmine and Basil
Hardship glazed me
Solid as granite rock
Then planted me an Oak
For loved ones my shade to share
Confident, determined, strict, honest
With fine demeanor
A lion heart of a man
I wedded
He battled poverty as an orphan
And rose to great heights
Flew like an eagle and
Ascended the summit
The self-made man
Then came the foes
With turbans riding insanity
Forcing names to flee into exiles
Incarcerations and battle fields

No fault of mine it was
Yet, I had to depart
Hence, from one estrangement to another I went
Affection and longing my only sustenance
Treaded barefoot
On a thorny rough terrain

What a time it was?
What a time it was?
Falsehood, hypocrisy, and degradation
Mean coward beings
Goaded by insatiable greed
Warring pseudo men
Racing for corruption
Voluntarily stoop under the boot
Vain souls hanging by a thread of smoke
What a time it was?
What a time it was?
I despise living in this torment
I despise living in the wolves’ den

Kathem Algheyth (conjurer of rage) vanished
In the campaign of beheadings
And on the guillotine of ignorance
They all witnessed slaying of the book
Freedom fighters were executed en mass
Indeed, here lies the debris of a homeland
A waterless desert
Only sand dunes and mirage
I have no choice
I have no choice
But to shed tears on this soil
Take my love
My vineyard
My almonds
And my figs
Donate all things around me
For these never mattered to me
As for me
My mended old garment suffices
A loaf of bread suffices
A breath of fresh air suffices
The morning prayer in the niche suffices
Song of the dove
Dome of the shrine
And a soul filled with longing
The embrace of God suffices
Don’t cry for me
Don’t cry for me
Do you know the meaning of love?
Or that of resistance?
The taste of suffering since infancy
And the myth of existence?
The taste of salt in a mother’s tears
Fighting the brutality of the soldiers
The blood kneaded with stubborn hunger
And debris, barricades, and shackles

Don’t cry for me
Don’t cry for me
In our land
They propagated destruction, corruption, and a fragile peace
So, what in it is left for us?
Except for lashes and graves?
Why, then, shouldn’t we leave?
And to the soil not return?

Don’t cry for me
Don’t cry for me
If the horizon tapers
And my veins collapse
Don’t cry for me
If my vision blurs
Or to mud I return
Don’t cry for me
Don’t get teary eyed

Frigidity of the earth
Cry of the crow
Throbbing of the heart
Essence of the soul
Death of a spike
Scattering of wheat grains
Showers of rain
A journey to eternity
A journey to eternity
A journey to eternity

Amir Zahraei,
November 2008, Toronto
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As the old saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child. I would add it takes a community to complete a PhD. I have been extremely blessed with the presence of a strong community of support who saw me through this long, at many times painful and incredibly rewarding journey.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon sparked the declaration of a National Emergency by George W. Bush that called for the implementation of extraordinary measures to protect the nation from further terrorist attacks. Since then, this state of exception has become a permanent feature of governments around the world establishing a new global narrative of the “war on terror” legitimizing wars and authorizing the use of exemplary legalized violence against those who are deemed as threatening Others (Agamben, 2005, Gregory, 2004). As many critical scholars have argued, the “war on terror” represents a colonial present with a complex genealogy deeply rooted in a colonial past based on the notion of a “clash of civilizations” and hegemonic Western dominance over Islam and the Middle-East (Gregory, 2004; Said, 2003). The “war on terror” has been produced as a boundless and timeless war that transcends boundaries through a complex network of alliances between states, military apparatuses, transnational industrial complexes, security companies and surveillance technologies. Furthermore, the limits of the “war on terror” have been extended into the everyday fabric of urban infrastructure and cultural practices normalizing the use of political violence by both state and non-state actors implicating us all in its horrors (Graham, 2009; Gregory, 2004). The “war on terror” as an ideological practice and enactor of state policies has become a powerful organizing force in people’s everyday lives. Drawing on this conceptualization of the “war on terror”, I aim to examine its material consequences and manifestations in the lives of Arab Iraqi refugee women in the Canadian context. In the following sections, I provide an overview of Canada’s involvement in the “war on terror” to provide the context for my study focus then present the specific objectives and research questions, outline the rationale, theoretical framework, research methods, and potential contributions of this study.

In this dissertation, I draw on critical anti-racist and anti-colonial theoretical frameworks to advance the thesis that Iraqi refugee women experience the “war on terror” as both a historical and contemporary phenomenon. I argue that historical ideological constructions of Arab Muslim women as terrorists, continue to operate in the contemporary Canadian context to facilitate their social exclusion and further complicate their historical trauma. Consistent with my feminist standpoint epistemology, I integrate my own personal experiences, critical reflections, and the
voices of study participants to advance my key arguments throughout this dissertation. The specific research questions and objectives of this study are outlined below:

**Research Questions**

1. How does the “war on terror” manifest in the daily lives of Arab Iraqi refugee women in Canada?

2. What are the impacts of state policies emanating from the “war on terror” on Arab Iraqi refugee women?

3. How do Arab Iraqi refugee women respond to the consequences of the “war on terror” in their lives?

**Study Objectives**

1. To examine Arab Iraqi refugee women’s experiences of the “war on terror” from a gendered historical perspective.

2. To theorize the relationship between structural violence and the historical and contemporary trauma experienced by Arab Iraqi refugee women.

3. To illustrate Canada’s complicit role in Iraq’s 2003 Occupation and challenge the national mythology of Canada as a benevolent humanitarian state.

This study aims to show the circulation of power and interconnected nature of women’s oppression in Iraq, Syria, and Canada, in order to challenge the stereotypical Orientalized constructions of Iraqi women as helpless victims in need of “saving” and “liberation” by Western colonial occupation. Despite Iraqi women’s activism and involvement in the public sphere since the 1930’s their access to substantive citizenship rights and gender equality in the public and private sphere has fluctuated as a function of the interplay between colonialist, nationalist, patriarchal and religious forces shaping their lives. Iraqi women’s lives and bodies have been used as the battle ground for the assertion of imperialist patriarchal power and greed. Over the past 35 years, women’s status in Iraq has significantly deteriorated as a result of wars, thirteen years of comprehensive UN economic sanctions regime against Iraq, the U.S.- U.K.’s historical
and ongoing intervention and 2003 occupation of Iraq and the failure and complicity of the international community to protect the most basic human rights of women and children in Iraq.

Iraqi women’s loss of status and human rights violations in Iraq continue with their displacement to neighbouring countries such as Syria and Jordan, and into their resettlement in Western countries. The structural violence of state policies morphs into different forms and follows them as they traverse the different borders and interact with different state actors. The violence of war and occupation is replaced with the violence of displacement, precarious status, fear of deportation, and lack of access to basic needs and protections in Syria. The structural violence and lack of access to basic needs and social rights takes on additional flavors under the banners of exclusionary refugee policies aimed at “Protecting Canada’s Immigration System”, securitization, border controls, racial profiling, Islamophobia and everyday micro-aggressions and symbolic acts of violence. In this dissertation, I aim to advance three key arguments: 1) Despite national narratives of peacekeeping, humanitarianism and official Canadian government’s refusal to participate in the 2003 U.S.-U.K. led invasion of Iraq, Canada is deeply implicated in the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the evasion of its responsibilities to respond to the ensuing humanitarian disaster and Iraqi refugee crisis. 2) Historical Orientalist binary constructions of “us” – “them” at the root of the theory of clash of civilizations, enable and maintain the continuum of structural violence in Arab Iraqi refugee women’s lives. 3) Iraqi refugee women’s historical and contemporary trauma is part of their experience of structural violence. Theorizing Iraqi refugee women’s trauma in this way, contributes to broadening and deepening our understanding and conceptualization of trauma to move beyond narrow disease focused psychiatric conceptualizations and facilitate the exploration of alternative multi-level understandings and interventions. These arguments taken together, challenge national narratives of Canada’s benevolence; expose the silences, complacencies, and processes that help create and maintain a continuum of violence that contributes to Iraqi refugee women’s transnational colonial trauma. An examination of social work’s predominant silence and lack of engagement with the “war on terror” and its consequences for Arabs/Muslims and for Iraqi refugee women in particular, will be a key focus of discussion on the implications for policy and social work practice on multiple levels.
My Epistemology and Situated Knowing

My interest in this research project grew out of my own history and personal experiences as an Arab diasporic woman living in Canada. My entry point to this topic was my daily experiences with racism and racialization within the post 9/11 Canadian context. Living in this context over the past several years, I was acutely aware of how the environment of securitization, fear, Islamophobia, racial hatred and distrust had permeated my everyday existence. As I began exploring my research topic about four years ago, I was interested in learning more about how the “war on terror” had impacted Arabs and Muslims living in Canada. As I began reviewing the vast body of literature on the topic, I found different aspects of the topic such as the increased racism and discrimination, racial profiling, human rights violations, citizenship and belonging, were extensively researched and written about. However, as I progressed deeper into the literature, I did not find my particular experiences and concerns reflected in the literature.

From my subjective, historical location as a first generation Arab-Iranian immigrant woman living in Canada, I was experiencing the “war on terror” on multiple levels and in different ways. I was experiencing the post 9/11 Canadian context as both a contemporary and historical phenomenon. I was experiencing the everyday trauma of racism and what Sherene Razack (2008), drawing on Agamben (2005), has aptly coined as “eviction from civil society”, as an Arab diasporic woman. But I was also simultaneously traumatized by witnessing the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I was born in Southern Iran, in Khorramshahr, a town bordering Basra, Iraq, where my mother was born and raised. My family, like many families in this region of the world, had shared historical roots, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and close family ties with Iraqi families in Basra. As Shi’a Arabs, we also shared histories of marginalization, oppression, family separations and exiles imposed by the colonial violence that created artificial borders, political violence, and wars over the past several decades. From the vantage point of an Arab-Iranian diasporic woman of Iraqi heritage, I experienced the “war on terror” and the subsequent 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq as the latest assault in a long history of colonial imperial conquests in the region. I approach my research topic from this situated historical knowing and embodied colonial trauma.

My postionality and personal history have fundamentally shaped the way I approach my dissertation research on multiple levels which I will briefly explore here and will revisit at
various points in my dissertation. First and foremost, I see my exploration of this research topic, not just as an academic exercise aimed at the partial fulfillment of my PhD, but as a meaningful personal journey and a political anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist project with ethical and moral responsibilities aimed at social justice and social change. My personal history and lived experiences as an Arab diasporic woman living in Canada have informed not only my choice of research topic, but my choice of research questions, theoretical framework, methodological approach, and the way in which I relate to my research participants and how I approach my interpretation and analysis.

My fluid identity as an Arab-Iranian diasporic woman whose life has been shaped by a history of Western colonial conquests, wars, and political violence in the Middle East has provided me an embodied understanding of colonial trauma, loss, dislocation, exile, transnational ties and intersectionality of structural systems of oppression. This positionality informs my understanding of the topic in important ways. My history and personal experiences enable me to talk about the “war on terror” from a historicized point of view that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the histories of the West and the Middle East. This kind of perspective resists de-historicized, de-contextualized notions of the war and terror and simultaneously disrupts the us/them binaries that render war, violence and torture against whole groups of people acceptable and desirable in the name of democracy and civilizing missions. I draw on Edward Said’s seminal work on Orientalism and his concept of imaginative geographies to historicize the “war on terror” and highlight the ideological constructions and discursive practices of power that authorized the war in Iraq and rendered the ongoing violence and human rights violations against Arabs and Muslims acceptable.

My location as an Arab diasporic woman brings me to a feminist intersectional analysis. Theories of intersectionality developed by feminist anti-racist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Donna Haraway (1988) inform and deepen my analysis of Iraqi women’s situated meanings of the “war on terror” and sheds light on the way in which my positionality influences the local context of the interviews and shapes my interpretation of their narratives.

During the interviews, I was fully aware of my privileged status as a naturalized Canadian citizen who has lived most of her life in Canada and a doctoral student at the University of Toronto, steeped in my Western Eurocentric academic training, conducting research on a very vulnerable
group of Arab Iraqi refugee women who have recently escaped war, gender-based violence, religious persecution, and experienced long histories of political oppression. Yet at the same time, I was aware of my insider status and my parallel history with experiencing the same wars and political upheaval from my own vantage point.

My ability to speak Arabic and my shared history and heritage enabled me to establish a certain level of trust with the women I was interviewing. This was evident in the ways in which the women related to me and some of the comments they made. The interviews usually started out with me telling the women about the study, why I was interested in the topic and sharing with them a bit about my personal background. Once I shared with them that I was from Southern Iran and my mother was from Basra, they usually nodded and said so “you know what it’s like, you’ve been through it like us”. At times during the interviews, they would make particular references to a specific local neighbourhood, a street, or a bridge in Iraq, thinking that it would be familiar to me, although I had told them that I had never been to Iraq. There was a sense of connection and a comfort level in the interview that enabled this kind of interaction. But at the same time, there was a certain level of guardedness and a need for a certain level of personal protection. I knew that only certain versions of the stories were being told and a lot was being left unsaid. This was a necessary condition of the context of the research interviews that certain stories are shared in particular ways and for particular ends. I am fully aware that the stories, experiences, and their meanings that I share through this study are co-constructed narratives, heavily influenced not only by the context of the interview, but also by the overall political environment of precariousness, fear, and lack of trust. However, one important point to keep in mind is that these stories of experience should not be seen as a truth telling exercise (Bhuyan, Personal Communication, 2012; Allen and Cloyes, 2005) but as performative aspects of subjectivities produced through the situated knowings of the researcher and the researched as informed by our historical and context-specific experiences. Seeing the stories in this light resists ahistorical, stereotypical, and sensationalized representations of Arab Iraqi women’s experiences.

As I was engaging in the different phases of my research, particularly in the writing and analysis of my own positionality and the stories of the Iraqi women I interviewed, concerns about representational politics were foremost in my mind. I was concerned about how descriptive accounts of our stories as Arab women would be read by different audiences in the West. As several post-colonial feminist scholars (Spivak, 1988; Mohanty, 1991; Khan, 2005; Yegenoglu,
1998) have argued, these stories could easily be used to feed into the stereotypical representations of third-world women as victims in need of rescuing from their oppressive men and backward, uncivilized cultures, further justifying Western civilizational missions. This was clearly evident in the justifications for the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, whereby calls to bring democracy and freedom to Afghan and Iraqi women were supported by many Western feminists and so-called Muslim liberated-liberal feminists in the West.

As I will discuss later in more detail, in the case of Iraqi women, these discourses become more evident in multiple arenas. Iraqi women have generally been portrayed as nameless, faceless victims of war and gender-based violence by the media in the West. Images of Iraqi women wearing their black Abayas escaping bomb explosions or crying over the injured or dead bodies of their relatives get flashed on the screen momentarily while the headlines are flashing, while stories of honour-based killings get sensationalized and discussed in details over and over again. Iraqi women appear as voiceless victims with no agency or will to resist the violence that is brought upon them, waiting to be rescued by Western benevolent forces and their diaspora Iraqi allies. Occasionally, a diaspora activist Iraqi woman gets interviewed by the media and gets hailed as a hero for risking her life, leaving her comfortable life of freedom and democracy in North America, to go over to Iraq and help rescue the less fortunate Iraqi women suffering poverty and gender-based violence and oppression at the hands of their male relatives. The brutality of rape, violence and torture of Iraqi women and girls by occupying military forces and their allied Iraqi police and private security forces are never mentioned or hinted at so as not to disturb the imaginary favored narrative of peacekeeping, liberation and imported Western democracy promising freedom and equality for Iraqi women. Simultaneously, images and videos of Iraqi women’s rape and torture circulating on YouTube as symbols of white superiority, Western military might and power go ignored and unnoticed by the mainstream media and the North American public at large. As if the lives, dignity, and honour of Iraqi women and girls never mattered. In fact, as Judith Butler has argued, they are seen as non-living objects so there is no violence being committed in the first place (Butler, 2010). This violence gets erased and quickly forgotten so we can go on with our rescue mission bringing civilization and democracy to Iraq.

On the other hand, Iraqi diaspora communities, human rights advocates, activists, and civil society NGOs also get recruited in reinforcing these dominant narratives and imaginaries of
rescuing Iraqi women. In their advocacy efforts and attempts to shed light on the impact of war and violence on Iraqi women and girls, they get drawn into portraying Iraqi women as helpless victims in need of rescuing and assistance by Western governments and international aid through the United Nations and NGOs. Human rights advocates and activists get positioned into pleading with the same governments that have contributed to the Iraq war, ongoing occupation and destruction that have killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and displaced millions of others, to provide them with a safe haven and refuge. They appeal to the colonizers’ benevolence and humanitarian values to provide safety and asylum to Iraqi refugees, promising that they will be productive tax-paying citizens, protecting the interests of the nation state, contributing to its growth by producing good, obedient citizens that fully assimilate Western cultural norms and values. True to neoliberal market values of profit and self-sufficiency, they even promise they will look after their own; the government need not worry about supporting them. We will bring them under the private sponsorship program and look after all their needs; you just raise your quotas and let us bring them in. The Canadian government then, embodied in the person of the Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, Jason Kenney, gets to proudly announce they are committed to helping Iraqi refugees by bringing several thousand Iraqi refugees to Canada over the next few years. This dynamic places advocates and human rights activists in what Khan (2005) calls a double bind, where they are “damned if [they] do and damned if [they] don’t” (p. 2023). On the one hand, their advocacy efforts raise awareness of the issues and play a key role in helping shape policies to improve the situation of Iraqi refugees displaced by war and violence. On the other hand, they are recruited into reinforcing the grand narratives of the benevolent, peacekeeping, humanitarian Canadian foreign policies.

As the researcher in this study, I too risk getting recruited into this complacency to reinforce the very narratives and policies I set out to resist and transform. To guard against this complacency, I insist on historicizing and contextualizing the stories of Iraqi women to expose the neocolonial, neoliberal structural forces that have disrupted their lives and resulted in their displacement. Resisting complacency also necessitates a feminist transnational analysis and activism that disrupts the binaries of the East/West, Us/Them, to highlight the interconnectedness of our histories and our collective ethical and moral responsibilities to transform the globalized patriarchal neocolonial, neoliberal structures of oppression (Khan, 2005). Historicizing and contextualizing the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi women living in Canada, and integrating my
own experiences of racialization both as an Arab diaspora woman and as a researcher examining this subject from the margins allows me to draw linkages across borders and boundaries to form transnational alliances troubling artificial separations and compartmentalization of our struggles. As Donna Haraway (1988) emphasizes from a feminist perspective, objectivity is about partial perspective and situated knowing. As Haraway (1988) argues, situated and embodied knowledges resist relativism and unlocateable, irresponsible knowledge claims with a view from nowhere. Feminist standpoint epistemology privileges subjugated knowledges recognizing that the standpoints of the subjugated “are least likely to allow denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts…subjugated standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). From this perspective, such situated knowledges are seen as communities connected through “solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” which allow “the joining of partial views into a collective subject position” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584) that promises an alternative transformative vision. Donna Haraway’s notions of preferred subjugated knowledges and situated knowledges as collective subject positions, not isolated individuals, connect my located subjectivity to the stories of the Iraqi women who participated in this study to form a community of meanings and shared gendered understandings that resist erasures, silences, and dehistoricized analyses of the “war on terror”.

Feminist standpoint epistemology simultaneously emphasizes the use of self-reflection to counter the reproduction of inequalities in research investigations acknowledging that researcher’s social position shapes research questions, the research process, and analysis (Collins, 1990; Haraway, 1988; Mohanty, 1991; Naples and Sachs, 2000). Feminist standpoint theories offer different strategies for research investigations that explore the standpoints of the researcher and the researched paying attention to the ways in which standpoints are embodied in experiences and are constructed in relationships and communities. Locating standpoints in the context of relationships and communities enables researchers to examine power differentials and multiplicities of perspectives, taking into account the multiple dimensions of social, political, and economic environments (Naples and Sachs, 2000).
Mapping the Dissertation Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the main research questions, study objectives, rationale and background of the study. I elaborate on my epistemology and situate myself in relation to the research. I also introduce four study participants that will be used through the rest of the chapters for further analysis and to illustrate diverse experiences and understandings of the “war on terror” and their varied responses to it within the Canadian context.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework and provides a review of the relevant empirical literature that I draw on in this study. I use an intersectional anti-racist, anti-colonial feminist theoretical framework that incorporates theories of structural violence and historical colonial trauma. This theoretical framework helps situate Iraqi women’s experiences of the “war on terror” and their meaning making in historical and contemporary context. It also informs the understanding of their everyday experiences within the Canadian policy and socio-political context while allowing space to explore the range of experiences, meaning making, subjectivity and agency. The empirical literature reviewed in this study focuses on the literature examining the impact and consequences of the “war on terror” on Arabs and Muslims in Canada more broadly and on Iraqi diaspora communities in North American and European countries with a particular focus on Canada and the U.S. The literature review also focuses on examining the structural violence of more restrictive immigration policies, border controls and securitization post 9/11.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology and methods used in this study. The chapter includes a discussion of interpretive methodology and interpretive policy analysis methods. I draw on theories of discourse analysis to examine how Iraqi refugee women are constructed in the Canadian policy context and how they construct themselves through discourse to enact different subjectivities. The chapter also provides a description of various data sources and data collection methods used in this study. Throughout this dissertation, I use the following terms to distinguish between different individuals I interviewed in the course of this study: “community participants” to refer to Arab Iraqi refugee women; “key informants” to refer to service providers and community members with knowledge and experience in working with Iraqi refugees in Canada; “older Iraqi women” to refer to five middle-class Iraqi women in their 60s-70s who had come to Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s following the Iran-Iraq war, who participated
in a group meeting as key informants to the study. It is important to highlight that the distinctions between younger women versus older women I make in my analysis of the stories of study participants are not intended as age specific markers, but rather are used as historical markers to emphasize their different lived experiences as cohorts during Saddam’s regime, pre-war/pre-occupation and post-war/post-occupation. Chapter 4 is divided into two parts contextualizing the study. The first part provides a brief historical sketch of Iraq with a particular focus on state policies that have impacted Iraqi women’s status and citizenship over the past 35 years, during periods of war, economic sanctions, and occupation, beginning with the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the 1991 Gulf War, the United Nations imposed economic sanctions (1990-2003) against Iraq, and the 2003 U.S.-U.K. Occupation of Iraq up to the present. The primary focus will be on examining the gendered impacts of these events on Iraqi women. This historical overview contextualizes Iraqi women’s historical and contemporary colonial trauma while highlighting the interconnected and intersecting links between the various forces of imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy and fundamentalist religious forces in their lives.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the Canadian policy context reviewing Canada’s anti-terrorism measures as well as immigration, refugee, and citizenship policies enacted in recent years within the post 9/11 context and informed by ideologies of the “war on terror”, securitization, and border controls. This section focuses on situating Canada’s “war on terror” through a review of Canada’s anti-terrorism measures and involvement in Afghan and Iraq wars. The discussion in this chapter explores the role of state policies in creating and maintaining the racialized gendered violence that contributes to their historical and contemporary transnational trauma.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of three main areas of findings: 1) Violence; 2) Citizenship; and 3) Trauma. The discussion of these main thematic areas draws on interviews with Iraqi refugee women, key informant interviews, and document reviews conducted for this study.

Chapter 6 provides a further discussion of the study findings and their implications for social work on multiple levels of micro, mezzo, and macro practice. The chapter ends with offering conclusions and implications for further research and education.
Introducing Study Participants

In this section I briefly introduce four Iraqi refugee women that I interviewed in the course of this study. I will be discussing their experiences in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Several reasons informed my choice of focusing on these four particular women. Although each story is unique and represents the specific personal history and context of the women, their experiences could be seen as typical of other Iraqi women who share similar socio-demographic characteristics. All four women identified themselves as Arab Iraqi women and they have all come to Canada as refugees. Three of the four women sought asylum in Syria and lived there for a few years prior to coming to Canada. The selected four participants represent a range of socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education level, socio-economic status, marital status, religion, life circumstances in Iraq, and length of stay in Canada.

Since the focus of the study was on Iraqi women’s life experiences in Canada, I did not conduct detailed life histories of the women. I developed these descriptions using the women’s responses to the interview questions covering socio-demographics and three general areas (see Appendix C – Interview Guide for Community Participants), following key transition points in their journey to Canada: life circumstances prior to leaving Iraq; life circumstances in Syria, and their life circumstances in Canada. The descriptions are also informed by my field notes taken immediately following each interview recording my reflections and observations on the interview. Three of the interviews were conducted in Arabic and one was conducted in English (due to participant’s preference). All four interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in English. All women have been assigned pseudonyms and some facts have been altered or withheld in order to protect their anonymity.

Ahlam

Ahlam is a 35 year old Mandaean married woman with three young children ranging in age from six to ten years old. Both she and her husband hold professional university degrees from Baghdad University. Following graduation, they both struggled to find employment due to the tough economic situation in Iraq under the UN imposed sanctions during the 1990s. She never managed to work in her field since she got married and had a child shortly after graduation. Her husband was able to get short term contracts working in the construction industry and they
managed barely to get by. Things became much more difficult for them after the start of the 2003 Iraq Occupation. Since they belonged to a small religious minority, they felt more threatened as members of their community were targeted for kidnapping and murder by extremist militia groups. The generalized violence of war, daily bombings and explosions, were further intensified by the increasing sectarian violence and targeted killings. Ahlam was pregnant with her second child at the time and lived in constant fear for her safety and the safety of her family. As her physical and psychological condition deteriorated, Ahlam and her husband feared that they would lose the baby. She and her family fled to Syria in 2005 and lived there for two years prior to coming to Canada.

As Ahlam puts it, life in Syria was comfortable for them as compared to other Iraqi refugees. She felt comfortable that she was living in a safe neighbourhood and was pleased to regain some of her personal freedom back, to be able to choose what to wear. While in Syria, she and her husband were able to find jobs, working under the table and managed to get by financially with their employment incomes, the supplemental UN food rations, and the relatively low cost of rent in Syria. The main problem they faced was the lack of permanent residency status and not having work permits. They lived with the constant fear of being deported back to Iraq. They were required to leave the country every three months to renew their visa, which meant crossing the border back to Iraq or to Jordan, then circle around and come back to Syria. After two years of waiting, their case was accepted under the private sponsorship program with the support of her relatives who were living in Canada.

Ahlam describes the time when one of her sons developed a problem with his immune system and was very sick in Syria. After many medical appointments and diagnostic tests, doctors suspected he might have cancer. This had a severe impact on her. She used to tell her relatives that "if anything happens to my son, I will kill myself, that's it". She describes this experience as a turning point in her life that changed her and her personality. She became more pessimistic and developed a dark outlook, “Nathra Sowdawieh”, on life. She developed a sense of fear, fear of everything. Up until now she thinks about it and keeps trying to get rid of it but she can't, this experience is staying with her.

Shortly after coming to Canada, Ahlam, her husband and three children moved into a one-bedroom apartment. They supported themselves financially through their own savings and things
they had brought with them from Syria. As with other recent immigrants and refugees, their biggest challenge at the beginning was how to integrate into their new society. As Ahlam describes it, she and her husband had expected to be able to learn English within three months, and find jobs within six months but they soon discovered that “these are pink dreams. They do not exist in reality!” Ahlam acknowledges that this is not a unique situation to Iraqis in Canada, many recent immigrants face these kinds of challenges, but what is unique about Iraqis is that “they have essentially arrived here tired. And they don’t really have the option of going back to their country if they don’t like the situation here. They have to stay and struggle”.

As she looks back at their first few years in Canada, she reflects that things are much better for them now as compared to when they first came. Her husband was able to find a job in his field and they are starting to think about moving into a bigger apartment. The biggest challenge for her continues to be her unemployment despite her completing ESL classes, attending a job search program for foreign-trained professionals, and her many attempts to find a job in her field. She talks about her unemployment and her inability to get a job in her field, as a major contributing factor to keeping her depressed and keeping her past negative experiences present in her everyday life. She continually struggles between her efforts of motivating herself to be positive, to develop a more optimistic view of life, and the day-to-day routine of housework, demands of everyday parenting, and life events that drag her down and fuel her fears, negative memories, and dark outlook on life.

Samar

Samar is a 62 year old retired professional of Mandaean faith. She lived in Baghdad with her husband and four children. Her husband is a retired professional who held a senior position in his career. Samar and her family had a high-middle class living standard and had travelled and lived in different countries because of her husband’s work. Her husband was threatened due to his high middle class social status. While she and her daughters felt increasingly under threat due to the gender-based violence of Islamic militias. Even though they were Christian, they began wearing the hijab for their own safety. Her son was also endangered due to increased kidnapping and murder of young men in his community. His closest friend was kidnapped in front of him while they were walking together. Samar and her family felt their lives were increasingly endangered
by the sectarian and gender-based violence so they had to leave Iraq and go to Syria to ensure their safety.

The family registered with the UN and waited for their case to be processed for six years prior to coming to Canada. While they lived in Syria, only one of their daughters was able to work with the UN, providing support to other Iraqi refugees living in Syria. This provided some financial support to the family in addition to their savings and the UN food rations that they received while living in Syria. The children were teenagers at the time but they were unable to attend school while in Syria so they were held back from their education for several years. This was a major source of stress for them as the family placed a high value on education and the children were very smart and aspired to higher education. The family’s case was finally accepted as UN convention refugees and they came to Canada as Government Assisted Refugees about three years ago.

During the first year of their arrival they received financial and settlement supports funded by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. They were able to make ends meet on the financial support that they received during the first year of arrival but this support was drastically reduced once they had to transfer to welfare assistance at the end of that period. Suddenly they were faced with the situation of not being able to cover their rent and the rest of their expenses and the children had to go out and find jobs in order to support the family. This meant that they had to struggle to balance the pressures of work, adjusting to a new society, education system, language, and cultural norms. This placed a particular strain on the whole family, it was particularly difficult for Samar and her husband to see their children struggling to support the family at the expense of their educational aspirations. As middle-class parents who were used to supporting their own children, it was difficult for them to accept the role reversal of being supported by their children and felt helpless that they could not do anything to help them.

Samar and her husband had a certain level of English proficiency and they were accustomed to travel and had expected a certain degree of struggle in adjusting to a new society but they still felt unprepared for the difficulties they encountered while trying to settle in Canada. Despite their educational level, work experience, and English proficiency, they knew their age would work against them in trying to get jobs. Samar had the added complication of having physical injuries to her neck and back which made her suffer from chronic pain and unable to do much
physical work. So she tries to help her husband and children in adjusting to their difficult circumstances by maintaining a positive environment at home, providing ongoing encouragement, psychological, emotional, and physical supports. In order to minimize the financial strain on the family, she cooks all the meals and bakes different pastries, pizza, and breads which exacerbate her chronic pain. She also tries hard to balance supporting her children in adjusting to the new social and cultural norms and figuring out how to fit in, while trying to maintain their own cultural norms, gender role expectations, and intimate relationships. This is further complicated by the delicate dynamics of adjusting to a significant drop in their social status; living in poverty, while “maintaining face” among her extended family and the larger Mandaean Iraqi community. Samar has siblings who have lived in Canada for over twenty years and have managed to establish themselves well with their professional careers but they have a tendency to look down on Samar’s family and their financial struggles. This drop in social status also has implications for her children’s relationships and marriage prospects in their close knit community. So Samar has to manage the social stigma and shame of living in poverty and being on welfare in addition to all her other stresses. She deals with this by keeping it all to herself and not talking to anyone about her issues and struggles. She has a supportive relationship with her husband, but she does not discuss her emotional distress with him so as to protect him from getting further stressed. She copes with her stress by keeping her strong faith, hanging on to her pride and dignity, and by taking the antidepressants and painkillers prescribed by her doctor.

Amani

Amani is a 24 year old Muslim married woman who came to Canada in the 1990s as a young child with her mother and younger brother to join her father who had sponsored them. Her father had come about a couple of years before, as a Government Assisted Refugee, after having lived in the Rafha Refugee Camp in Saudi Arabia following the 1991 Gulf War. Amani’s father was one of the drafted soldiers who defected from Saddam’s army at the time of the invasion of Kuwait, and went to Saudi Arabia. Amani’s young mother was left on her own to support her two young children and not knowing whether her husband was dead or alive. One of Amani’s earliest childhood memories is of herself being strapped on her mother’s back and looking up at the war planes flying over their heads bombing the city. Amani’s mother was carrying her bother
while Amani was strapped on her back, running to safety with her children. This image still comes up clearly for Amani every now and again. She recalls her mother struggling to find ways to feed her children, relying on family and friends for support while her husband was missing. After a few years of struggling, they received a letter from her father telling them that he was in Canada and he was sponsoring them to go live with him.

Amani was eight years old when she came to Canada. She remembers how difficult it was for her and her family to be rejoined with their father who was separated from them for a few years. The children did not really know him and he had gone through so many difficult experiences in the army and living at the camp, experiences of trauma that he continues to struggle with today. Her parents did not speak any English and had a really hard time adjusting in Canada. Amani herself was having difficulties adjusting to school in a new country, new system, and a new language; to the extent that she failed grade two. She pauses and asks, “Who fails grade two? Can you believe it?” Her parents did not know what was going on and she was afraid to tell them. The school had labeled her as learning disabled, not knowing or not taking into account that not only she did not speak English, she had not been attending school in Iraq because of the war and the poverty that they were forced into. She struggled with this label and lack of support all through her school years.

While growing up she also had to act as an interpreter and support person for her parents who still continue to struggle with language barriers, isolation, trauma, and depression. She had to attend her mother’s medical appointments with her family doctor or psychiatrist and translate the details of her mother’s past experiences and current stresses to the doctors who only prescribed anti-depressant medications in response. Having to act as an interpreter for her mother and listening to the intimate details of her troubles was a difficult experience for Amani, as she put it, it took away her childhood and forced her to grow up. She felt like she was caught between two worlds, she was labeled and isolated at school while her parents were labeled and isolated from mainstream society. Her parents did not understand her struggles and in their attempt to protect her, they held on to what they knew best, their own traditional beliefs and values. They kept reinforcing to her that she should not forget her roots, cultural, and religious beliefs and wanted her to start wearing the hijab, which she refused to do.
Following the events of 9/11 in 2001, Amani became the subject of harassment and discrimination in high school. She recalls various incidents where she was called a terrorist by her classmates. She was seen as being responsible for the events of 9/11 and was told to go back home. One day she was even beaten up by a group of girls after school. All through these experiences she felt unsupported by her teachers and the school. The teacher pretended she did not hear the racist comments that were made in the classroom. Amani felt that the school did not care much for what happened after school, she did not think they would believe her or feel compelled to do anything if she told them she was beaten up for being Muslim. She continues to run up against these kinds of racist incidents and keeps trying to stand up for herself. About four years ago, she decided to start wearing the hijab as a way of affirming her own identity. She believes that it gives her the strength and confidence to stand up for herself and her faith. Her faith has become the most important factor in helping her face her daily difficulties and encounters with racism and discrimination. Amani has recently obtained her college diploma and has been working in social services. She is determined to use her education and her personal experiences towards advocacy and public education, to bring about social change by being herself and believing in her own faith and identity.

Sundus

Sundus is a 30 year old Muslim married woman who was trained in Iraq as a computer scientist and worked for one of the universities in Iraq. She and her three sisters were highly educated and grew up in a high middle class family. Both her parents were working professionals and held moderate views with respect to religion and the expectations they held for their daughters. Sundus was used to enjoying a certain level of personal freedom and loved her job. However, all of this changed after the 2003 Iraq Occupation and the rise in sectarian violence, and targeting of female professionals by fundamentalist militia groups. She was increasingly under pressure to start wearing the hijab, quit her job and stay at home. She felt threatened on a daily basis when she went to work, she did not know whether she would make it there safely and back. Women working in various professions were threatened and kidnapped on a daily basis. These conditions of violence, harassment and fear forced her and her family to leave Iraq and go to Syria in 2006.

While in Syria, she managed to find part-time employment as an office assistant. This helped her cover her personal expenses while her parents covered the living expenses from their savings.
Her older sisters had already left Iraq and were living in various countries in Europe. Life in Syria offered a certain level of safety but was still insecure due to their lack of immigration status there. Sundus did not see a future for herself in Syria even though she had met her Syrian fiancé there and had intended to marry him. She and her parents had applied for asylum through the UN and had been accepted as convention refugees. After a few years of waiting, her file was processed and she was accepted to move to Canada as a Government Assisted Refugee, but her parents were not accepted and had to remain there.

Sundus moved to Canada about three years ago. She went back to Syria to marry her fiancé about two years ago and has been trying to sponsor her husband since. As with other Government Assisted Refugees, Sundus had received a loan from the Canadian government to help cover her travel expenses to Canada. The agreement was that she would pay off the loan on monthly installments. During the first year of her arrival, Sundus received financial assistance from the government but the monthly payments she received were barely enough to cover the rent for her small basement apartment. She found part-time employment in customer service within the first three months of her arrival so she can supplement her income. She was also making regular monthly payments to pay back her loan. By the time she went back to Syria to get married, she had made all the loan payments on time but had missed the last payment because she had gone away and had forgotten to mail it. While she was away, Canadian immigration had sent her a letter about the late payment but it had gone to her previous address and she never received it. As a result of the missed payment of $104, the sponsorship application for her husband was cancelled. She had made the last payment upon her return but this was not communicated to the Canadian consulate in Syria where her husband was following up on his application. Shortly after, the political situation in Syria had deteriorated and the Canadian consulate was shut down. All Iraqi refugee files were transferred to Jordan for processing. At the time when I met with Sundus, she was desperately trying to find out where her husband’s sponsorship application stood. She had faxed proof of the last loan payment to the immigration processing office here in Canada several times and had provided a copy to her husband to show the Canadian consulate in Syria. She had got her local MP and engaged a lawyer to see if they could get answers on her behalf, but all her efforts were unsuccessful. Her husband and her parents remained trapped in Syria amidst deteriorating political conflicts and increasing violence.
By this time, Sundus was working full-time in customer service. About six months ago, she decided to start wearing the hijab as her way of protecting herself. Although she had resisted wearing the hijab in Iraq, she felt this was necessary now. She felt vulnerable as a young woman living alone and working as a waitress in a restaurant. She wanted to avoid any potential problems with men who frequented the restaurant. She thought she would wear the hijab temporarily for a few months until her husband came to Canada. However, once she started wearing the hijab, she began receiving different treatments from other people she encountered. She was no longer able to work downtown, where she used to work before. She felt she became confined to working in Middle-Eastern restaurants, in neighbourhoods that were predominantly Arab and Muslim. She noticed even the bus driver refused to stop for her when she was running to catch the bus. She had started out wearing the hijab as a means of self-protection, but now it was working to her detriment. She was still weighing whether to keep wearing the hijab or not. She wanted to keep wearing it until her husband came to Canada but she did not want the hijab to turn into another obstacle for her preventing her from moving ahead in her future career goals. Although she had had some positive experiences with some service providers and a few others she had encountered, she felt alone and isolated overall. Her main supports were her sisters, each of whom lived in a different country, and her husband who was stuck in Syria.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Critical Review of Empirical Literature

Theoretical Framework

Overview

In this chapter I outline the theoretical framework that informs my understanding and analysis of the gendered impacts of the “war on terror” on Iraqi women. Following this discussion, I apply the theoretical framework to a critical review of the relevant empirical literature examining the multiple consequences of the “war on terror” for Arabs/Muslims in general and for Iraqi refugees in particular. My analysis integrates a number of feminist anti-racist, anti-colonial theoretical frameworks offering a feminist intersectional critique of gender and imperialism. As I will discuss in further details later on, a number of feminist anti-capitalist, anti-colonial scholars have argued, gender has always been a central organizing force in imperialist conquests and colonial rule (El Saadawi, 1997; Razack, 2008; Tetreault, 1994). As we have seen in the recent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, gender was used as a justification for war and occupation in the name of “liberation” and “democracy”. A historicized analysis enables us to examine the root causes of women’s oppression and exploitation from a world historical perspective that resists de-contextualized cultural explanations of issues facing Muslim women and exposes the structural forces and historical social relations of domination shaping their lives (Abdo, 2011; Bannerji, Mojab, & Whitehead, 2010; Mohanty, 2003). Therefore, I draw on excerpts from my interviews with study participants in order to illustrate the material consequences of structural violence in Iraqi refugee women’s lives and centre their specific lived experiences. As Mohanty (2003) states:

Women and girls are still 70 percent of the world’s poor and the majority of the world’s refugees. Girls and women comprise almost 80 percent of displaced persons of the Third World/South in Africa, Asia, and Latin America….It is then the lives, experiences and struggles of women and girls of the Two-Thirds world that demystify capitalism in its racial and sexual dimensions – and provide productive and necessary avenues of theorizing and enacting anticapitalist resistance (p. 515).
Moreover, Bannerji, Mojab, and Whitehead (2010) offer an essential critique of the exclusive turn to language and culture in women’s studies, social sciences, and history that “render invisible the connections between historical-social relations and their forms of mediating culture along with their aspects as ideology and politics”, arguing that this linguistic/cultural turn erases “the complexity and material aspects of nationalism and imperialism” (Bannerji, Mojab, and Whitehead, 2010, p. 262). Therefore, I argue a proper understanding of the impact of the “war on terror” on Iraqi women’s lives must be historically based and situated within the specific context of their lives both in Iraq and in Canada. As Nahla Abdo (2011) illustrates in her examination of gender, state, and citizenship in contexts of settler-colonial regimes, “women’s experiences of subjugation in such contexts must be captured as they actually are, namely representing their lived reality, and not as constructed or imagined phenomenon” (Abdo, 2011, p. 62).

My analysis also draws on theories of structural violence to further explore the dynamics of power and their underlying ideological constructions that legitimate the use of violence and facilitate processes of social exclusion (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1990) in Arab Iraqi women’s everyday lives in Canada. Finally, I also draw on theories of historical trauma and transnational colonial trauma to historicize and contextualize Iraqi women’s experiences and varied responses to the continuum of structural violence in their lives (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Evans-Campbell and Walters, 2006). Drawing on theories of historical trauma allows us to analyze the multi-level impacts of war and violence as manifestations of power dynamics and structural inequalities as opposed to individualized pathologies drawn from Eurocentric models of psychiatric disorders. This is particularly relevant for social work as a profession and an academic discipline that has mainly maintained a code of silence on issues facing Arabs/Muslim communities in the context of the “war on terror” but who are likely to encounter these populations in a variety of health care and social service settings. Using this theoretical framework for analysis exposes the historical structural dynamics at play while also centering Iraqi women’s agency and resilience in response to these oppressive structures. Moreover, this frame of analysis provides opportunities for our own critical self-reflection as academics, social workers, activists and advocates to explore our own complicities and aim to build transformative alliances and effective interventions.
Anti-colonial/Post-colonial Theories

Anti-colonial and post-colonial theories, particularly Edward Said’s influential works on *Orientalism* (1979); and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) provide the foundational theoretical framework for understanding the history of Orientalism and the relationship between “the Orient” and “the Occident”. My discussion of Said’s work will primarily focus on historicizing the “war on terror”; ideological constructions and cultural representations of Arabs and Muslims that legitimate violence and colonial rule. I also use Said’s (1979, 1994) concepts of imaginative geographies and overlapping territories to emphasize our interconnected histories and transnational identities of diasporic Arab/Muslim communities in the West. By doing this, I aim to incorporate a discussion of the spatialized nature of the “war on terror” which is simultaneously racialized, gendered, and classed. Said defines Orientalism as a system of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinctions between “the West” and “the East”, “Us” and “them”, which has historical and material consequences. As Said (1979) puts it:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (p. 3).

In a preface to *Orientalism* (1979) which he wrote in May 2003, Said reflects on how much “the book is tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history” and emphasizes the social construction of the terms Orient and Occident as

Supreme fictions [that] lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance – much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, “we” Westerners on the other – are very large-scale enterprises (p. xvii).

As Said explains, without these ideologies, “the war on terror” would not have been possible. Said introduces the concept of *imaginative geographies* in *Orientalism* (1979) highlighting how Orientalism progressed from a scholarly discourse and a *textual attitude* in writings about the Orient to an imperial institution that transformed the *geographical space* of the Orient to a *colonial space* in the 19th and 20th century. This transformation took place through a process that began with “arbitrary” geographical distinctions made in one’s mind between “a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” that is designated “the
land of the barbarians”. Accordingly, these geographical distinctions accompany social, ethnic, and cultural ones and “all kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own” (Said, 1979, p. 54). Building on the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s idea of “Poetics of space”, Said argues that “space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here”. Said further argues that through this process “imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (Said, 1979, p. 55). Said traces the emergence of Orientalist discourse to after the Prophet Mohammed’s death in 632 AD when the military, culture, and religious hegemony of Islam extended from Persia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and North Africa to Spain, Sicily, and parts of France in the eighth and ninth centuries, then as far east as India, Indonesia, and China by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Following this, “Islam came to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians” and “Islam was a lasting trauma” for Europe (Said, 1979, p. 59). Imaginative geography legitimated an Orientalist discourse that evolved into “a system of moral and epistemological rigor” whereby the Orient and Islam in particular were represented by “a set of representative figures or tropes” which came to stand for the actual Orient (Said, 1979, p. 71). By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Orientalists and Orientalism had become more serious entities closely associated with politics and were put to political use making the Orient a privileged terrain for the west. “The scope of Orientalism exactly matched the scope of empire, and it was this absolute unanimity between the two that provoked the only crisis in the history of Western thought about and dealings with the Orient. And this crisis continues now” (Said, 1979, p. 104).

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said (1994) extends his arguments in *Orientalism* to explore the pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories with a particular emphasis on imperial culture and the world-wide historical resistance to empire. He defines culture as follows:

As I use the word, “culture” means two things in particular. First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure.... Second, and almost imperceptibly, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought....In time, culture comes
to be associated, often aggressively with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent “returns” to culture and tradition. These “returns” accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity (Said, 1994, p. xii – xiii).

Said focuses his analysis exclusively on the modern Western empires of France, Britain, and the United States and examines cultural forms like the novel which play a key role in the formation of “imperial attitudes, references, and structures”. As Said emphasizes, narrative, “the power to narrate”, “or to block other narratives from forming and emerging” is crucial in examining culture and imperialism. Narrative and stories are what novelists and explorers use to describe “strange regions of the world”; they are also essential methods used by the colonized “to assert their own identity”, mobilize resistance, and lead the way to emancipation (Said, 1994, p. xiii).

Said’s (1994) notion of “structures of attitudes and reference” is a very useful way of examining dominant colonial discourses as it helps illuminate the process of the production of the other and how this representation of the other is done in a systematic way that builds onto itself and creates a “cultural topography” as he calls it. This cultural topography then justifies domination and colonial rule. Here Said also explores geography, spatiality, and “hierarchy of spaces” in Western literature which gives it a cultural centrality while at the same time “relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, ontological status” which is “essential to the primariness of the European” (Said, 1994, p. 59). As Said acknowledges this is the same paradox explored by Césaire, Fanon, and Memmi.

Said’s (1994) analysis of Culture and Imperialism links the full context of the current situation together, linking its history with the present and future. He challenges us to re-read and re-interpret cultural formations and their role in sustaining the empire and relations of dominance. Once we take on this challenge of critical understanding then we are compelled to challenge our own roles and complicities in maintaining these cultural formations and relationships of domination. Another important aspect Said is emphasizing is the idea of interconnections, the overlapping nature of our histories and contexts across the world and challenges us to understand the whole picture, to get away from the binaries of us and them and the spatial separations and their inherent hierarchies. Said (1994) builds on Gramsci’s geographical model which focuses on the territorial, spatial, and geographical foundations of social life to introduce the concept of
overlapping territories and intertwined histories. Concepts that relate to theories of space and spatiality, as well as studying transnational communities and the trauma of colonialism examined later in this paper. Here is how Said puts it:

We should keep before us the prerogatives of the present as signposts and paradigms for the study of the past. If I have insisted on integration and connections between the past and the present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism, I have done so not to level or reduce differences, but rather to convey a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things. So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole secular human history (Said, 1994, p. 61).

The key element in Said’s argument is that imperialism is global and universal implicating both the colonizer and the colonized together. These ideas of interconnection and integration “reaffirm the historical experience of imperialism as interdependent histories” and as a matter requiring us to make intellectual and political choices and to “consider imperial domination and resistance to it as a dual process evolving toward decolonization” (Said, 1994, p. 259).

Derek Gregory (2004) draws on Said’s critiques of Orientalism in his analysis of the Colonial Present. Using Said’s concept of imaginative geographies, he meticulously illustrates the West’s privileged self-productions which rely on its simultaneous constructions of the Other. Gregory provides a historical analysis of U.S. and U.K.’s colonial involvement in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine to demonstrate the colonial past’s extension into the present drawing linkages to the post 9/11 context and the contemporary “war on terror”. Gregory’s (2004) work integrates Orientalism, post-colonial theories, as well as spatial theory, while historicizing and politicizing the present, all of which are crucial to this study.

Drawing on Foucault’s concept of the order of things, Gregory (2004) describes colonial modernity as a double-headed coin with the one side displaying modernity as the partitioned, hierarchical, highly ordered and standardized space and the reverse side exhibiting modernity’s other as primitive, wild, mysterious, and irregular. In this way, the economy of representation constructs unequal relations whereby the modern is privileged over the non-modern giving colonial modernity its extraordinary power and performative force. This unequal process of the West’s self-construction and production of its others leads to what Edward Said (1979) calls the
production of \textit{imaginative geographies}, of spaces that need to be concurred and civilized. Citing the philosopher Enrique Dussel, Gregory traces the establishment of modernity to 1492 when this process of self-production enabled Europe to centrally position itself by advancing against the Islamic world to the east and “discovering” the Americas to the west. However, as Gregory (2004) highlights colonial modernity is a contemporary formation that requires us to rethink artificial separations of past, present, and future. Viewed from this angle, post-colonialism is seen as a political project committed to a future free of colonialism and dispossession. As Gregory (2004) describes, post-colonialism has a constitutive interest in colonialism and places the central focus on the relationship between culture and power, recognizing their intertwined nature. Thus, it enables the critique of the continuities between the colonial past and the colonial present:

It is part an act of remembrance. Post-colonialism revisits the colonial past in order to recover the dead weight of colonialism: to retrieve its shapes, like the chalk outlines at a crime scene, and to recall the living bodies they so imperfectly summon to presence. But it is also an act of opposition. Post-colonialism reveals the continuing impositions and exactions of colonialism in order to subvert them: to examine them, disavow them, and dispel them (Gregory, 2004, p. 9).

Affirming Said’s (1994) view of culture, Gregory (2004) argues that “culture involves the production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world” (Gregory, 2004, p. 8). In his examination of the colonial present in the form of “the war on terror” Gregory argues that we often forget the horrors of the colonial past through the twin processes of colonial amnesia and colonial nostalgia and their intersection with culture and power. Colonial amnesia allows the suppression of the terrible violence and complicities colonialism forced upon the people it subjugated while colonial nostalgia produces other cultures as a fixed series of fetishes bolstering the power and privilege of colonialism. As with other post-colonial scholars, Gregory (2004) emphasizes the importance of historical memory and examining the extension of the past into the present while paying particular attention to our own complicities and the ways in which we are drawn to participate in the production of the colonial present through mundane cultural practices that “mark other people as irredeemably “Other” and that license the unleashing of exemplary violence against them” (Gregory, 2004, p. 16).

In a similar vein, Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) propose an anti-colonial discursive theoretical framework as a framework that “interrogates the power configurations embedded in ideas,
cultures, and histories of knowledge production, validation, and use”, “is an epistemology of the colonized, anchored in the common colonial consciousness” and “propels social and political action” (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 298-300). Key to this discursive framework is its conceptualization of colonial “not simply as foreign or alien, but rather as imposed and dominating” (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300), focusing on its goal of questioning, interrogating and challenging institutionalized power and privilege as well as dominance in social relations. As Dei (2006) elaborates, “the anti-colonial prism theorizes the nature and extent of social domination and particularly the multiple places that power, and the relations of power, work to establish dominant-subordinate connections. The prism also scrutinizes and deconstructs dominant discourses and epistemologies, while raising questions of and about its own practice. It highlights and analyzes contexts, and explores alternatives to colonial relations” (Dei, 2006, p. 2-3). Moreover, several post-colonial scholars have emphasized the need to shift away from oppositional binaries and take on an intersectional/interlocking approach to complicate the examination of colonial encounters to include analyses of multiple systems of oppression (including race, gender, and class) and how they constitute each other (Mohanty, 1988; Razack, 2002, 2010; Spivak, 1988; Suleri, 1992; Thobani, 2007, 2010; Yegenoglu, 1998). I will be drawing on these theoretical frameworks in my analysis to illustrate the racialized, gendered, and classed nature of the “war on terror”.

Several feminist anti-colonial scholars have illustrated the historical centrality of gender in imperialist conquests and colonial rule (Ahmed, 1992; Lazreg, 1994; Spivak, 1988; Yegengolu, 1998). As Spivak (1988) has stated, White men saving Brown women from Brown men has been at the heart of civilizing missions. Yegengolu (1998) provides a feminist critique of Edward Said’s (1979) Orientalism in her book, Colonial Fantasies, showing how the constitution of the Muslim woman as a symbol of a community’s place in modernity renders her body as the grounds for claims of universality and superiority of her Western counterpart who gains her power and privilege through unveiling and possessing the Muslim woman’s body.

As Razack (2008) states, the notion of “clash of civilizations” and cultural explanations have authorized the unleashing of war, occupation, and violence against Arabs and Muslims with impunity (Razack, 2008). First Ladies of states along with other colonial feminists in the West were mobilized in the “war against terrorism” to save Afghan and Iraqi women, in the same
way they had mobilized around British colonialists in Egypt (Ahmed, 1992) and French colonialists in Algeria (Lazreg, 1994). As Razack (2005) has further articulated, in the context of the “war on terror”, “a particular geopolitical terrain of culture clash is produced that has enabled blatant racism to be articulated in the name of feminism” (Razack, 2005, p. 12). Razack examines this post 9/11 geopolitical terrain for feminists arguing that this climate has “profoundly altered the conditions under which feminists can address issues of violence in communities of colour” (Razack, 2005, p. 13). As Lila Abu-Lughod (2003) has observed in this context, religio-cultural explanations abound to “artificially divide the world into separate spheres – re-creating an imaginative geography of West versus East: Us vs. Muslims” (Abu-Lughod, 2003, p. 2), rather than “exploring the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the U.S. role in this history” (Abu-Lughod, 2003, p. 2).

Drawing on the rich body of anti-colonial/post-colonial scholarship presented above allows us to examine the “war on terror” as an ideological practice rooted in historical social relations of domination and Western civilizational superiority that continue to authorize the use of war and violence against Arabs and Muslims in our contemporary context. Feminist anti-colonial, anticapitalist theorizations of gender and empire expose the root causes of women’s oppression and resist culturalist decontextualized explanations of the “war on terror” and its accompanying justifications of “civilizing missions” aimed at “saving” Muslim women. Using a feminist anti-colonial analytical frame also enables us to examine the ways in which these historical social relations of domination and ideological constructions of Arab/Muslim women as uncivilized inferior subjects in need of saving, continue to operate in the contemporary Canadian context. In the following section, I will explore these contemporary processes of social exclusion through a discussion of critical perspectives on citizenship and an examination of changing notions of Canadian citizenship and national identity post 9/11. I will then provide a conceptual framework for my discussion and analysis of Arab Iraqi refugee women’s citizenship and belonging in the post 9/11 Canadian policy context.

**Conceptualizing Citizenship**

Razack (2005) elaborates that in the West today, the notion of culture clash relies on a racial logic expressing European superiority and the pre-modern Muslim other who has an increasing presence in North American and European soils, facilitating a disturbing spatialization of
morality that authorizes the use of force (Razack, 2005, p. 15). Razack (2008) further elaborates on the racial logic that underpins the eviction of Muslims from Western law and politics through the suspension of their rights and erosion of citizenship. Drawing on Hanna Arendt’s (1951) concept of race thinking and Agamben’s (2005) state of exception, Razack (2008) argues that the contemporary world order in the context of the “war on terror” is increasingly defined by “the denial of a common bond of humanity between people of European descent and those who are not”, whereby those who are marked outside of humanity are “legally defined as communities without the right to have rights”, (Razack, 2008, p. 7).

Similarly, Peter Nyers (2006) draws on Paul Virilio’s (2003) accident theory and Georgio Agamben’s (2005) state of exception to examine the discursive constructions of citizenship within the context of the “war on terror”, posing the following key question: “How are foreigners and citizens made?” (Nyers, 2006, p. 22). Nyers (2006) coins the concept of the “accidental citizen” as a pejorative way to describe “birthright’ citizenship of individuals born to non-citizen parents. Through an analysis of the case of the so called ‘Second American Taliban’ (Yaser Esam Hamdi), Nyers demonstrates the discursive strategies used to construct him as an “accidental citizen” and enable the exceptional logic that was applied to force him to renounce his American citizenship in order to gain his freedom from three years of solitary confinement without charge. Nyers (2006) argues that state acts of sovereignty are used to apply an exceptional logic to legally normalized subjects, with the potentially catastrophic consequence of excluding them as non-essential, dispensable citizens. As Nyers observes, the case of the “Accidental Citizen” has far reaching implications beyond the particular individual being deemed undesirable as we have seen in the historical precedence of the Japanese internment post World War II and more contemporary Canadian examples of recent citizenship revocations of over 4,000 Canadian citizenships of individuals of Middle-Eastern origins.

Arat-Koc (2005) has similarly argued that in the post 9/11 context, Canadian identity and citizenship has been reconfigured along civilizational lines contributing to a “re-whitening of Canadian identity and increased marginalization of its non-white minorities” (Arat-Koc, 2005, p. 35), particularly for Arab and Muslim Canadians whose citizenship and belonging has become more precarious. The reconfiguration of Canadian identity along civilizational lines entails not only a re-definition of Canadian identity, but also solidifies Canada’s partnership with U.S. imperialism, both politically and economically, while simultaneously ascribing a
subordinate civilizational membership characterized by dependence on the American Empire (Arat-Koc, 2005, p. 35). Sunera Thobani (2007) further extends this argument in her analysis of notions of citizenship and nationality in Canada. Thobani argues Canada’s anti-terrorism measures implemented in its support of the expansion of the American Empire abroad has profoundly reshaped the meaning of Canadian nationality and citizenship resulting in the erosion of citizenship rights of Muslims by constituting them as the most potent threat to national security. Thobani (2007) traces the constitution of Canadian national identity through different historical junctures arguing that “this identity has been deeply racialized since its inception in colonial violence, and that it remains inextricably infused with the colonial tropes of white racial supremacy and Western dominance civilizational superiority” (Thobani, 2007, p. 249). As Thobani states, the exclusion of Muslims and most people of colour from full citizenship further consolidated Canadian national identity as white (Thobani, 2007, p. 249).

As contemporary citizenship scholars have argued, “identity and citizenship are deeply connected” (Isin and Turner, 2007, p. 8). Questions of inclusion and exclusion, redistribution and recognition, and identity have been at the heart of contemporary citizenship debates and have gained additional currency in the context of globalization and increased securitization of nation-states within the context of the “war on terror” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Nagel & Staeheli, 2004). The Marshallian citizenship model which has historically been constructed on a set of contributory rights and duties to the nation-state has been extensively critiqued for neglecting questions of gender, race, and ethnicity, and taking the ‘citizen’ for granted (Isin and Turner, 2007). The modern Marshallian model of citizenship and Keynesian welfare economics have been eroded with the move towards neo-conservative ideology of individualism and the implementation of the global redistribution strategy which entailed a reduction of state intervention, deregulation of labour and financial markets, implementation of free trade, and fiscal regulation of state expenditures. Consequently, struggles for recognition and citizenship have become more paramount, particularly for economic migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers facing heightened state securitization and increasingly more stringent citizenship policies (Isin and Turner, 2007, p. 9).

Moreover, as Tanya Basok (2003) elaborates, several citizenship scholars including Turner (1993), Soysal (1994) and Yuval-Davis (1999) have argued, the emergence of supranational human rights institutions has further undermined the traditional model of national citizenship
and the emergence of the notion of “transnational” or “post-national” citizenship as a more individually-based universal conception of rights under an international human rights regime. However, as has been argued among citizenship scholars, a key limitation of a post-national model of citizenship is that it lacks the required implementation and enforcement mechanisms across nation-states without their consent. Even in the context of sovereign nation-states extending legal access to economic rights to non-citizens residing in their national territories, migrant workers continue to experience human rights violations, despite the existence of legal frameworks for the protection of their rights (Basok, 2003; Isin and Turner, 2007).

Therefore, as several scholars have proposed, citizenship needs to be viewed not merely as a formal or legal citizenship, but as a substantive citizenship accompanied with a set of practices leading to rights, access to resources, and belonging (Basok, 2003; Turner, 1993; Winer, 1997). Additionally it has been argued that citizenship needs to be seen as a multi-layered construct whereby one’s citizenship in different layers such as local, national, state, and supra-state levels is affected by each layer in a specific historical context, and potentially by the interaction of the various layers (Basok, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 1999). As Basok (2003) emphasizes in her examination of migrant Mexican workers’ situation, they continue to experience human rights violations despite existing legal frameworks for their protection. Basok explains this is due to the impact of the social exclusion and their lack of membership in the national community of the host society (Basok, 2003, p. 5).

As discussed earlier, various dimensions of citizenship rights come to bear for Arabs and Muslims in Canada, and particularly for Arab Iraqi refugee women within the context of Canada’s “war on terror” within a national Canadian identity structured along colonial racial divides. To examine the impact of the “war on terror” on Arab Iraqi women’s citizenship and its interconnection with their historical and contemporary trauma, I will be building on a conceptualization of citizenship informed by feminist anti-racist, anti-colonial theories of citizenship discussed above and drawing on citizenship theories centering “difference” on social identities (such as gender, race, class) as described by Moosa-Mitha (2005) and incorporating some concepts from Isin and Turner’s (2007) and Basok’s (2003) approaches to citizenship within a human rights context discussed earlier.
As elaborated on by Moosa-Mitha (2005), difference-centred models of citizenship are grounded in the “new social movements” (e.g. post-colonial, anti-racist, feminist), viewing citizenship as constituting membership in society with a particular focus on examining patterns of exclusion and inclusion which shape membership based on individuals’ social identities. Citizenship is viewed in relational terms and is defined through an examination of the specific socio-historical reality within which citizens’ lived experiences of oppression are situated. Informed by theories of Black feminist thought and a social justice vision rooted in transformative social change aimed at both individual sense of active agency, empowerment, as well as at the transformation of power relations in social relationships in society.

Citizenship is seen as participation representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, emphasizing belonging and subjective experiences of citizen participants. Within this model, freedom is conceptualized as the right to participate in social institutions and culture differently, and with a focus on shifting normative values and practices of society so as to view the agency of citizens in transformative ways. Equality within this model is understood in terms of formal structures and entails an examination of normative assumptions and practices of society (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 372-377). This model of citizenship based on feminist anti-racist social justice principles is most consistent with the theoretical framework and ultimate goals of this study.

Isin and Turner’s (2007) approach builds on Marshall’s model of citizenship and deepens it by emphasizing “in an age of globalization, citizenship should be regarded as a foundation of human rights and not as a competitor” (Isin and Turner, 2007, p. 13). Moreover, Isin and Turner (2007) propose the notion of “cosmopolitan citizenship” which views citizenship as both a legal status and a social status that expands beyond and across borders and affords individuals “rights of mobility and rights of transaction” (Isin and Turner, 2007, p. 14). The concepts of cosmopolitan citizenship along with rights of mobility and transaction have particular significance for Arab Iraqi refugee women who are the focus of this study, taking into account their transnational identities, historical memories, and contemporary experiences in Canada. In addition, Basok’s (2003) emphasis on viewing citizenship not merely as legal rights, but as a set of multi-layer, interconnected practices that may preclude their exercise of these rights, are important concepts to consider in analyzing the social exclusion experienced by Iraqi refugee women participating in this study.
Conceptualizing Trauma

Canadian studies relating to the “war on terror” seem to be focused primarily on its implications for citizenship, belonging, privacy and human rights. Not enough attention has been paid to the potential social, health, mental health consequences of the “war on terror” and its impact on the everyday experiences of individuals, families, and communities of Arab and Muslim origins living in Canada. This is my particular point of emphasis in this study. I believe that the “war on terror” in its multiple facets, is experienced as a trauma that could have potentially serious and ongoing consequences for these communities as a whole. I use the word trauma here not in its medical/psychiatric definition and diagnostic symptoms but in its broad sense as a “wound” or a “shock”. The Oxford dictionary defines trauma as “a deeply distressing or disturbing experience; [mass noun] emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis” and traces the origins of the word to 17th century Greek language with “wound” as its literal meaning.

Several scholars have critiqued the inadequacy of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the intricacies of trauma caused by racism, colonization, wars, structural, political, and economic violence, globalization, and capitalism and call for alternative broader definitions of trauma (Burstow, 2003; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Zarowsky and Pederson, 2000). Models of structural violence and historical trauma have been applied to various populations who have experienced oppression, structural and political violence. I draw on these models of structural violence and trauma to illuminate the unique experiences of Arab Iraqi women in Canada taking into account their transnational identities and the globalized nature of the “war on terror”.

Structural Violence: Colonialism and War

Galtung (1969, 1990) advances models of structural and cultural violence in the context of peace and peace research that are highly relevant to this study. Galtung (1990) “sees violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs” which include survival needs; well-being needs; identity, meaning needs; and freedom needs (p. 292). The violation of these basic needs results in different types of violence which Galtung categorizes in a typology of violence with sub-types identified for direct (e.g. killing, maiming, repression, detention, and expulsion) and structural violence (e.g. exploitation, marginalization, and fragmentation). In his typology of violence,
Galtung (1990) relates the three types of violence (cultural, direct, and structural violence) as three overarching categories forming a vicious violence triangle with linkages and causal flows in all directions and the violence cycle may start at any point of the triangle. Galtung (1990) sees cultural violence as any aspect of culture (such as religion or ideology) that could be used to legitimize direct or structural violence. He defines structural violence as social injustice and exploitation with unequal power and unequal life chances as its hallmark, imbedded within violent structures. In this definition, the threat of violence is also seen as violence. Galtung (1990) further elaborates “that a violent structure leaves marks not only on the body but also on the mind and the spirit”. Therefore, the needs deficits created by direct and structural violence can lead to individual trauma or collective trauma if it is experienced by a collective group. This trauma can then sediment into the collective subconscious and become raw material for major historical processes and events” (Galtung, 1990, p. 295). The connection Galtung makes between cultural, direct or structural violence and trauma is a key element in examining the impact of the “war on terror” on Arab Iraqi women. The typology of violence advanced by Galtung (1990), sheds light on the dynamic processes linking the ideological constructions of Arab Iraqi women as subhuman Oriental savages and terrorists (cultural violence) legitimate the “war on terror” in its structural violence forms (anti-terrorism policies, threat of violence and fear of a “terrorist” label) and its direct forms (war in Iraq; deportations, unlawful detentions and torture).

Paul Farmer (2004) builds on the structural violence framework that was introduced by Galtung and liberation theologians simultaneously. Farmer approaches structural violence from a critical medical anthropological point of view in studying the modern epidemics of AIDS and TB in Haiti using a historical, post-colonial, political economy perspective. Farmer defines structural violence as “violence that is exerted systematically – that is, indirectly – by everyone who belongs to a certain social order” (Farmer, 2004, p. 307). Farmer emphasizes that the concept of structural violence is intended to study oppression resulting from many conditions. Hence, it is necessary to examine the key role of “erasure of historical memory” and “other forms of desocialization” that enable the formation of violent structures and “emergence of hegemonic accounts of what happened and why” (Farmer, 2004, p. 309). The strength of Farmer’s theory of structural violence is in its emphasis on linking the erasure of historical memory to the political market economy and structuring inequalities. As he explains, “the erasure of historical memory is subtle and incremental and depends upon the erasure of links across time and space” (Farmer,
Therefore, he urges that an analysis of structural violence must be a historically deep and geographically broad analysis that takes the political economy into account. This type of analysis is particularly relevant to the examination of the historical roots of the “war on terror” which is embedded in histories of colonial rule and imperial conquest as illustrated by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994). Analyzing the structural violence of the “war on terror” in this way, also enables us to integrate the spatiality and coloniality of the “war on terror” with the global and transnational forces currently at play that limit and structure the life chances of diasporic Arab Iraqi women in Canada and elsewhere. Farmer (2004) further argues that when one studies the experience of people who are subjected to marginalization, racism, and gender inequalities, structural violence is embodied as adverse material outcomes such as death, injury, illness, subjugation, stigmatization, psychological terror, epidemic diseases, human rights violations, and genocide. In his book *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, Farmer (2005) argues that human rights violations are “symptoms of deeper pathologies of power” and are closely interconnected to social and economic rights violations that determine whose rights will be violated and who will be protected. In order to better understand the dynamics and distribution of suffering, our analytical model must be geographically broad and historically deep, recognizing the increasingly interconnected world that we live in with simultaneous consideration of the social factors (such as race, gender, and class) that render individuals and groups differentially vulnerable to extreme suffering.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2004) offer a critique of Farmer’s notion of structural violence arguing that the concept needs to be further elaborated and complicated to avoid being too linear and deterministic, and to examine its relationship to other forms of violence and power in everyday life. Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes extend Farmer’s analysis to articulate how “everyday life is shaped by the historical processes and contemporary politics of global political economy as well as by local discourse and culture” (Comment in Farmer, 2004, p. 318). The authors emphasize that violence includes assaults on self-respect and personhood, gaining its force and meaning through its social and cultural dimensions. Hence, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) propose a theory of a *violence continuum* comprised of a multitude of “small wars and invisible genocides” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 20) conducted in the normative social spaces of everyday life. The authors argue that “small wars and invisible
“genocides” are invisible not because they are hidden away but precisely because they have become a normal part of the everyday and are taken for granted. As a crucial part of their argument, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois build on Bourdieu’s theory of violence and his concept of misrecognition to draw “the links between the violence of everyday life and explicit political terror and state repression” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 20). As the authors explain, Bourdieu sees violence present in all social practices and uses the concept of “symbolic violence” to highlight the fact that everyday violence is often mis-recognized as something good. What makes this mis-recognition possible is its everydayness and familiarity. The key aspect to the continuum of violence theory offered by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) is the notion that permitted everyday acts of violence are part of the same dynamic that enables war-crimes and genocide. Everyday violence, they argue, “is socially incremental and often experienced by perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders – and even by victims themselves – as expected, routine, even justified” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 22). Recognizing the continuum of violence allows us to see the capacity of ordinary people – “practical technicians of the social consensus” – to enforce genocidal-like crimes against “categories of rubbish people” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 22). Hence, as the authors indicate the continuum of violence includes all forms of controlling processes ranging from social exclusion and dehumanizing practices that deny social support and human care to vulnerable populations, to the militarization of everyday life in the form of “super-maximum prisons” and the “heightened technologies of security” practices (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004).

In the context of this study, several participants shared examples of the type of everyday small acts of violence discussed above. The following example shared by one of the study participants provides an illustration: Nisreen is a 48 year old Muslim Iraqi woman who came to Canada about three years ago as a Government Assisted Refugee along with her husband and three children. Nisreen shared her experiences of discrimination by one of her ESL teachers:

I had a teacher who would never say my name. All students had to take turns reading to the class, to practice their English, but she always skipped me when it was my turn, she would just go to the next person. She did that several times, even other students asked me, “what’s wrong, why is she doing this?” I said I don’t know. But I never said anything to her. I kept my pride and dignity. One time she took us on a school trip to the reference library, she showed all the students the different language sections, Turkish, Persian, etc. But even though I was walking beside her, she never pointed out the Arabic section to me. She knew I
spoke Arabic. I had to go ask the volunteers working in the library to show me the Arabic section. (Nisreen, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Nisreen talked about how hurt and humiliated she felt as a result of these experiences but she refused to show her vulnerability to her ESL teacher. As Nisreen indicated in the above quote, she wanted to keep her “pride and dignity”. For Nisreen, these experiences went to the core of her identity and self-respect. She was treated as if she physically did not exist as a person. She defied her teacher’s blatant act of racism and denial of her existence by continuing to attend her ESL class and indirectly challenging her teacher’s racist attitudes as she relates the following example from their interaction:

So one day I asked her, what do you think I should do about my resume, if I put I speak Arabic, some employers will not want to hire me because I’m an Arab. So she said you can put you’re a citizen. She knew I was actually referring to her, not wanting anything to do with me because I’m from Iraq. I looked very serious, I was not smiling. (Nisreen, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Historical Trauma and Colonial Trauma Response

For over a decade, the concept of historical trauma has been used to examine historical and social events that have resulted in intergenerational stress responses among individuals and communities. Different terms have been used to describe the concept of historical trauma in the literature, including “survivor guilt”, “intergenerational grief and bereavement”, “post-traumatic slave syndrome”, “collective trauma”, “intergenerational trauma”, and “multigenerational trauma” (Brave Heart, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Brave Heart & Debruyn, 1998; Danieli, 1998; Degruy Leary, 2005; Kellerman, 2001; Krieger, 2001). Historical trauma has been used to study several historically oppressed communities including Jewish holocaust survivors, African Americans dealing with the consequences of slavery, and Japanese Americans after internment. More recently and predominantly, it has been based on American Indian populations building on the seminal work of Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and her colleagues (Brave Heart, 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Historical trauma has been conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation. It is cumulative, intergenerational, and is linked to a variety of psychological and social responses and multiple negative health outcomes such as depression, self-destructive
behaviour, substance abuse, anxiety, guilt, and chronic bereavement (Brave Heart, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Estrada, 2009; Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Several scholars have used models of structural violence and historical trauma in studying trauma in Aboriginal communities in Canada and examining their historical and contemporary contexts (Jacklin, 2008; Pearce et al., 2008; Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). These studies foreground the history of colonial European contact and the resulting genocide and devastation in explaining the physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological trauma characterized by deep and unresolved grief that has persisted over multiple generations of Aboriginal communities. Building on Judith Herman’s (1997) model of *Trauma and Recovery*, Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) advance a model of historic trauma transmission (HTT) that defines historic trauma “as a cluster of traumatic events and as a disease itself”. According to this model, hidden collective memories of this trauma are passed on from generation to generation resulting in maladaptive social and cultural patterns that are manifested in symptoms of social disorder (e.g. suicide, domestic violence, sexual abuse) causing deep breakdowns in social functioning lasting for multiple generations. In her doctoral thesis, Jacklin (2008) examines community health and healing in Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve in Ontario. Jacklin (2008) uses a critical medical anthropology framework to examine historical trauma and continuing colonial policies as key determinants of poor health status, higher frequencies of self-reported diseases and risk behaviours in residents of Wikwemikong.

Although there are significant historical and contemporary contextual differences between Aboriginal communities and Arab/Muslim communities in Canada, these findings point to potential consequences of the trauma of the “war on terror” experienced by Arab Iraqi women in Canada. Models of historical trauma are relevant to examining the situation of Arab Iraqi women due to histories of colonization and ongoing American and European intervention in the Middle East including the recent U.S.-led occupation of Iraq. However, since the majority of Arab Iraqi women in Canada are recent immigrants with transnational ties and due to the globalized nature of the “war on terror” with its extensive networks of international collaborations and border controls, new models of trauma are needed to reflect the uniqueness of their experiences and their potential consequences. Some potential relevant models explored below include the radical definition of trauma as proposed by Burstow (2003); models of transnational trauma from the
field of transcultural psychiatry (Zarowsky and Pederson, 2000); and the multi-level trauma theory, *Colonial Trauma Response*, developed by Evans-Campbell and Walters (2006).

**Trauma in a Transnational Context: History, Culture & Colonialism**

Zarowsky and Pederson (2000) invite academics and practitioners in the field of transcultural psychiatry to “take a critical perspective on the increasing ‘traumatisation’ of collective violence” and to rethink trauma in a transnational world paying particular attention to the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. The authors argue that highly individualized models of trauma emphasizing healing of “ethically and politically neutralized emotions and memories” are inadequate and do not recognize that individuals are part of multiple overlapping social networks and miss key aspects of collective experiences of trauma (Zarowsky and Pederson 2000, p. 292).

Pederson (2002) explores the health implications of political violence, ethnic conflicts and contemporary wars in Latin America for Amerindian populations arguing that their poor health status is a clear reflection of the powerful interplay of their colonial past, a history of socio-political and structural violence, trauma, and globalization processes that have contributed to increasing economic and health disparities. Similarly, Antonio Estrada (2009) develops a theoretical perspective for examining health status of Mexican Americans in the South Western United States highlighting the legacy of Spanish colonialism and Anglo–American neocolonialism and drawing parallels to historical trauma among Native Americans, African Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Estrada argues that the history of colonialism, dispossession and subordination combined with current anti-Mexican sentiments, the militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border and subordination of Mexican nationals have led to internalization of negative stereotypes, self-hate, alienation, and marginalization which over time have contributed to negative health outcomes including increased rates of substance abuse, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, anti-social personality disorders, and Type 2 diabetes mellitus across generations of Mexican Americans. Estrada emphasizes that the identification and examination of social and historical determinants of health that have influenced the health status of individuals within a particular racial/ethnic group are key components in developing interventions that help address the negative health outcomes of historical trauma (Estrada, 2009, p. 331).
In the case of recent Iraqi refugees, cultural and intergenerational differences intersect with issues of war trauma, violence, and social exclusion to create multiple challenges for youth as they navigate between the different environments of home, school, and the larger society. This dynamic is further complicated by the fact that many of the Iraqi refugee children and youth have not had the opportunity to attend school and did not learn to read or write due to the increasing levels of violence of war, general lack of security and the destruction of basic infrastructures including schools in Iraq. In addition to adjusting to a new society with a new language and cultural practices, the children have to adjust to the demands of being in an educational environment for the first time. Although many of the children learn the language and learn to adapt to their new environment at a much faster rate than the parents, this in itself becomes a source of conflict and friction between parents and children. As Haifa explains, in some instances these conflicts escalate to the point where they lead to the development of mental health and addictions problems for the youth or result in them running away from home only to be brought back in by the police:

Uh, they are young, they are like a dough you can paste them, you can form them the way you like and they go back to their parents. And the parents, they don't understand what kind of changes they are going through so they will have a clash. A lot of people, they will leave their houses. I have youth they left their houses... Either you find them in Tim Horton's or the police they bring them back to the... the...their parents’ house or they go and they will become addicted or it's just like from one place to another place. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa also makes the link to the importance of the availability of supports and employment opportunities to help these families adjust to their new environment and be able to cope with the many changes and challenges they encounter:

Let them contribute, contribute in the community. If people they feel, they are productive uh, they can see the changes. Any change there is a challenge and it needs time. It took me time and I am educated and I know how to speak English. It took me time until I adapt the system until I absorbed the system. For these people also they need to be productive they need to work. They need to have a normal life, not only sitting at home and eating and gossiping because they don't have an opportunity outside. This it makes a person productive. Work is prayer, and if the person doesn't feel they're productive, you're killing him. I mean there is no point then. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa also raises the role of stigma and discrimination in preventing people from seeking available supports. In addition, she emphasizes the importance of providing culturally
appropriate supports and interventions that would increase the community’s receptivity to mental health education and treatment:

They are not aware of it. I can sense that. There are like indications there are even the way they talk, like they shout, they shout at you at the phone, it is, they are not relaxed people, they are still under trauma of... their mentality is still there and they have a, a lot of clients they who have mental health issues. They don't talk about it because it is disgraceful, it is considered as disgraceful in their community and especially for a man you would, don't you dare to tell him you need a family counselor or marriage, he says, Yeah, I don't need that. He's not aware of what he's going through or what he's doing is wrong. This is not normal. So it is very hard to tell them. We might say like I'm dealing with a community mental health agency. This is for mental health, so all workshops, we don't put the mental health we put migration stress, so it makes it lighter on them... It is more acceptable. If you tell them mental health, he says, you are crazy. They will connect it to craziness. They don't connect it with like it is a status of a person because you went through this you are going to have this. Immediately they were going to connect it to craziness. They don't understand what kind of category of mental health they are going through. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

In addition to the necessity of exploring historical and social determinants of mental health, several authors have also emphasized the importance of examining community strengths and resilience in the face of historical and collective traumas (Denham, 2008; Jacklin, 2007; Zarowsky & Pederson, 2000). Using person-centred ethnography, Denham (2008) highlights how a four generation American Indian family frames their traumatic past into oral histories and narratives that transmit resilience strategies and family identity. Denham’s (2008) research affirms the diverse responses to historical trauma and highlights the importance of examining alternative characteristics or manifestations of historical trauma that are often overlooked in the literature. Therefore, as Denham articulates, it is important to distinguish between historical trauma and historical trauma response (Denham, 2008, p. 393).

Interviews with Arab Iraqi refugee women participating in this study provide further support for Denham’s (2008) idea of the varied responses to historical trauma displayed by individuals and affirm the need for further examination of the diversity of responses. The following is an example of resilience and a positive response to trauma shared in the context of this study is demonstrated by Amani’s reaction to experiences of racism and discrimination. As Amani describes, speaking up and challenging cultural stereotypes helped her move beyond their debilitating effects on her life. She talks about it as a recovery and a healing process that enabled her to break the cultural divides and begin establishing positive relationships with individuals.
around her. A supportive relationship that she developed with her Canadian writer friend helped her to carry this positive experience into other settings such as her workplace and to bring about changes in her interactions with her co-workers:

Yeah, at work, at work, you know um, people will judge you until they know you. At work, I was judged. Yeah, I was judged against my food, my religion, my belief, everything. But eventually it started to kind of fade away, because people were starting to see my true side and not...and they started to see okay hey, this is not the person that I see on the news. She's a good person, you know...and it started to open slowly but, it takes some time because I've been now there for six years and now people are comfortable with me. I suffered for years because people were still ignorant. People were still umm, picking on me because of my race and my ethnicity. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Amani’s resistance to racism and negative cultural stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims has also taken shape in her choice of career. Acknowledging the continuing struggle with these issues, and the hurt that still remains inside her as a result of these experiences, but she has decided not to remain silent anymore and to pursue advocacy, public education, and a career in social work in an attempt to change negative public perceptions of Iraqis and Muslims and to help immigrants and refugees through her work:

There's still, there's still that, that thing within me that hurts because of how I was treated....um, but I think the more that I speak about it the more I create more awareness, it kind of makes me feel good. Because I stayed quiet for a long time, and I couldn't speak about it and I suffered within me but now I, I just do it with confidence. Yes, you get those, who kind of, you know, who slap you in the face type of thing. And they say, yeah I don't care what you say, you're this....but at the same time, at least you feel good about yourself that you are trying to educate and trying to create awareness and again like now I'm as a social service worker for refugee and immigration, I chose that, I chose to get into that because I want to play a role of an advocacy. I want to advocate on those people because nobody was there to advocate on my behalf and this is why I want to graduate with an MSW especially with refugee and immigrants, because I want to help those people, because I didn't get that support when I came to Canada. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Several scholars have discussed the limitations of the concept of historical trauma. Denham (2008) reviews empirical challenges raised in the literature around the validity of historical trauma transmission and questions the extent to which, like PTSD, a diagnosis of historical trauma is being used for political or biomedical agendas. Estrada (2009) raises concerns around the measurement, specificity (i.e. specific causes and effects), and conceptual limitations of historical trauma itself. As Evans-Campbell (2008) articulates, standard diagnostic PTSD models account for some of the symptoms but fail to explain the impact of multiple traumas over
generations, account for mechanisms of historical trauma transmission or explain the relationship between historical and contemporary traumatic experiences. Although the concept of historical trauma has been developed to address this gap and has been applied to several communities including holocaust survivors, Japanese Americans, and Aboriginal communities, it has been conceptualized in broad and sometimes conflicting ways (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 317).

To address the limitations discussed above, Evans-Campbell (2008) presents a multi-level framework for exploring the impact of historical trauma at three interrelated levels: individuals, families, and communities. The framework recognizes that responses to historical trauma are varied and complex. Most research has focused on the individual level responses which encompass physical and mental health issues that could include symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, grief, and depression. Previous research has also shown that survivors and their descendants have varying responses to trauma, while some individuals exhibit negative symptomatology; many others show resilience in spite of their histories (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Responses at the family level are less researched however, and may include loss of traditional culture and values, high rates of physical illness and alcoholism, family violence, and internalized racism. Research among diverse communities has also shown that descendants of historic trauma survivors maintain a current interest in ancestral trauma and suggest intergenerational trauma can be an organizing factor in families (Evans-Campbell, 2008). As Evans-Campbell indicates, although the link between traumatic events and community-level responses may be clear intuitively, traditional empirical research has not focused on this aspect. However, emerging historical trauma research recognizes the collective group impacts of traumatic events, particularly with respect to the forced Indian boarding school attendance and its devastating impacts not only on individuals and families but has had lasting impacts on entire communities through the imposition of assimilationist strategies and loss of language and cultural traditions. These effects have been manifested through weakened social structures, higher rates of suicide, higher rates of alcoholism and child maltreatment which consequently may make the communities more susceptible to negative second-order effects (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 328). The multi-level framework advanced by Evans-Campbell emphasizes individual and family responses are experienced “within the context of a traumatized community” (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 328), thus the three levels are clearly interrelated and may reciprocally influence each other.
Moreover, Evans-Campbell (2008) highlights two key factors that influence the severity of historical trauma. The first factor is the crucial influence of communication around the traumatic events, both at the familial level and the community level. At the familial level, secrecy and parental silence around the traumatic events contributes to feelings of confusion, guilt, and resentment which are significantly related to poor mental health outcomes such as paranoia and anxiety for children and grandchildren of survivors. At the community level, societal reactions such as silence, indifference, disbelief, and avoidance may further silence survivors and increase their sense of isolation, loneliness, and mistrust. The second key influencing factor is the strong interplay between historical trauma and high rates of contemporary assaults and micro-aggressions experienced by indigenous communities that are themselves traumatic. As Evans-Campbell (2008) suggests, from the perspective of Indigenous communities, these everyday contemporary traumatic events are clearly linked to the historical traumatic events. Hence, they take on additional emotional and cultural significance that makes historical trauma the ongoing context of their daily lives.

Evans-Campbell and Walters (2006) build on the historical trauma literature and develop the Colonial Trauma Response (CTR) framework that takes into account the complex interaction of historical and contemporary traumatic events within the context of colonization. As Evans-Campbell (2008) elaborates:

CTR reactions may arise as an individual experiences a contemporary discriminatory event or micro-aggression that serves to connect him or her with a collective and often historical sense of injustice and trauma (Evans-Campbell 2008, p. 333).

The multilevel framework of historical trauma and the colonial trauma response theory discussed above seem to be particularly applicable in understanding the experiences of Arab Iraqi women with colonial histories of domination and oppression, and the daily violence of the “war on terror” featuring in their lives in multiple forms as the case of Sundus illustrates. For Sundus, the cumulative effects of the historical trauma are further exacerbated by the contemporary trauma she experiences through the structural violence of Canadian immigration policies that have forced her separation from her husband. She refers to the cancelation of her husband’s sponsorship application because of her late payment of $104 in the repayment of the last instalment of a loan from CIC. All her attempts at reinstating the application and getting updates from CIC on her husband’s status have been futile. She reflects on the harsh treatment and the
lack of compassion she has received in this process that leaves her feeling psychologically damaged and questioning her hope for the future:

Yes, because...one of the things as I told you before, I tried to establish relationships but I wasn't successful. I remained still...the loneliness is more...and many times you know there is no shame in crying. Many times I sit alone. I am damaged psychologically. I mean I'm tired psychologically. Psychologically, I have accumulations from before and I came here wanting to rest. And here, just this deal that happened with me here that I mentioned to you, for four months they've been delaying me and there is no result until now, this alone became another psychological war for me. Yeah, so now I'm sitting in front of you, psychologically damaged. I mean yeah, I laugh...I mean I have a principle that the person in front of me doesn't need to see my pain, so I always try not to show it but when I sit with myself, no, I'm damaged. I'm not damaged in the sense that I can't...hope, I mean...if we don't have hope we wouldn't live essentially. Hope exists in God of course, thank God...but the problem is that sometimes I have black moments like some moments pass by me when I feel the whole world is black and it's over and there is no hope, not in Canada nor in anywhere else. I mean yeah, that's how it is, I mean sometimes you say, God forbid, you came for progress but until now you are regressing. We were in a country that we say we were backwards; of course it's not just us it's the same thing anywhere, routine kills. No one sees the human...in Canada I saw one thing only, that they have compassion...sorry for saying this sentence...ahhh...they have compassion for dogs, cats, and domestic animals, but they don't have compassion for the human. I mean for someone like me, they still have not had compassion for me...in something simple. And I'm new here, they did not take into consideration that I'm new...and maybe I overlooked some laws...and indeed even the person I dealt with, did not explain it to me...so it wasn't my mistake...okay, even if I made a mistake, I shouldn't be paying the price for it for all this time, you know...so they have some particular things...they have things when you feel they are very humanistic and then they have other things where you feel they have no humanistic values whatsoever...and this word...I wish I would meet someone and I will give them this message...I mean I don't have a problem, I have the courage to say it... (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

In the preceding discussion, I have drawn on a wide range of critical perspectives to develop a theoretical framework that informs my analysis and understanding of the “war on terror” and its implications for Arab Iraqi women in Canada. It is important to emphasize that although discussed separately, the theories included in this framework are not discrete entities, in many ways they interlink, overlap, and inform each other. There are a number of key common elements that unite these theories which lead me to include them in this framework. The first element is the importance of examining power relations and the ideological constructions of others as inferior and subhuman that creates “exalted subjects” (Thobani, 2007, p. 7-9) with a sense of superiority legitimating violence, domination, and control. The second element is the
examination of the crucial role of culture and everyday ordinary interactions in perpetuating and maintaining these relationships of domination that implicate all of us in this process. The third element is the emphasis on the globalized and increasingly interconnected, historical socio-economic political context that shape social identities and structure life chances for individuals and determine their health and well-being. The fourth element is the emphasis on challenging our complicities as individuals, scholars, and human rights activists and moving towards social justice. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of this theoretical framework and highlight the unique contributions of each theoretical perspective to the analysis.

Edward Said’s (1979, 1994) influential work informs the analysis in several ways. It traces the historical background of the relationship between the West and the Middle-East and illuminates how Orientalism as a system of thought and body of knowledge has contributed to the ideological constructions of Arabs and Muslims that continue to persist to this day. As discussed earlier, Said’s concepts of imaginative geographies, overlapping territories, and contrapuntal analysis enable us to resist de-historicized, de-contextualized readings of the “war on terror” while simultaneously situating Arab/Muslim diasporic communities in the North American context to provide the links to their transnational identities and highlight the spatialized nature of the “war on terror”. Frameworks of structural violence discussed earlier, provide the links between ideology, racialization processes, and multiple forms of violence (cultural, structural, direct, microaggressions) with historical forces and current contexts that manifest in “pathologies of power” including wars, trauma, human rights violations and health disparities. These theories integrated together, help explain the colonial trauma response, a concept that I have borrowed from Evans-Campbell & Walters (2006) to advance my understanding of the trauma of the “war on terror” experienced by Arab Iraqi women in Canada. Seen in this way, the colonial trauma response encompasses the historical and contemporary trauma experienced by Arab Iraqi women but also de-pathologizes their experiences and allows room to explore the diverse multilevel responses to the trauma which could include an examination of both the negative consequences as well as the strength, resilience, and resistance put forth by Arab Iraqi women in the face of the “war on terror”. In the following section, I apply the developed theoretical framework to examine the current situation of Arab and Muslim diasporic communities through an analysis of some of the related empirical literature primarily focusing on studies in Canada post 9/11. Due to the paucity of Canadian research exploring the trauma and mental health consequences of the
“war on terror”, I review some U.S. based literature on Arab and Muslim American populations, since the “war on terror” originated in the U.S. and it bears the most similarity to the Canadian context as compared to other Western countries. I also review some studies of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan, Australia and Europe exploring the impacts of recent more restrictive immigration policies within the context of the “war on terror”.

Critical Review of Empirical Literature

Using the theoretical framework developed in the previous section, I analyze different bodies of literature to explore the impacts and potential consequences of the “war on terror” on Arabs and Muslims in the post 9/11 Canadian context. Drawing on my particular interests in historicizing and contextualizing Iraqi women’s stories and experiences of the “war on terror” my review of the literature focuses on concepts such as ideological constructions and representations of Arabs and Muslims that facilitate the use of force and violence against them, exploring different forms of violence through an examination of the impacts of different policies, social practices, and everyday encounters that shape Iraqi women’s experiences in Canada, and exploring the different responses to these experiences. The literature review explores multiple levels of the impact of the “war on terror” relating to the theoretical framework and focus of the study including citizenship and belonging, representations of Arabs and Muslims, racism and racial profiling, and mental health consequences of the “war on terror” and immigration and refugee policies.

Representations of Arabs and Muslims and the “war on terror”

Historical and current day negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in Canadian media have been well documented (Awan et al., 2007; Jiwani, 2005 & 2009; Karim, 2000; Said, 1994). In his book *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence*, Karim (2000) traces the history of the current Northern images of Muslims and the “war against terrorism” to Orientalism and age-old ideas about Islam and examines how the Northern mass media has constructed the North to be in conflict with Islam from the mid-1980s to the year 2000. Karim (2000) examines the Northern media’s portrayals of “Islamic violence” in the context of dominant cultural meanings attached both to “Islam” and “violence”, seeing “an integral link between power and violence” with those who hold power having a vested interest in maintaining their preferred meanings as the dominant
hegemonic discourse. Karim (2000) discusses the key role the media plays in sustaining consensus through the use of narratives that dramatize violence and portray particular people as heroes (state), villains (Others), or victims (the public) according to their ascribed social roles. As Karim states, the state has a “bureaucracy of violence” available to maintain its power structures. The state’s “massive and systemic use of violence” is downplayed and de-historicized while its opponents’ violent acts are emphasized by the ruling elites (Karim, 2000, p. 20). In this way, the media helps sustain the moral consensus and support the status quo.

Similarly, Steuter and Wills (2009) examine the Canadian print news media’s coverage of “the war on terror” from 2001 to 2009 focusing on the way in which an image of the “enemy” is constructed in this media discourse. The authors argue that the “Canadian media have participated in mediating constructions of Islam and Muslims, mobilizing familiar metaphors in representations that fabricate an enemy-Other who is dehumanized, de-individualized, and ultimately expendable” (Steuter and Wills, 2009, p. 3). Drawing parallels to historical representations of Jews in Nazi propaganda, of the Japanese in WWII, and of Tutsi ethnic community in the more recent Rwandan genocide, Steuter and Wills (2009) illustrate the common use of animal metaphors in war times and in the current public discourse of “the war on terror” as perpetuated by the Canadian media consistently applying these metaphors to all Arabs and Muslims, and outline how their consequences expand beyond the rhetorical, setting the stage for military action, “racist backlash, prisoner abuse, and even genocide” (Steuter and Wills, 2009, p. 3).

Some studies have documented the coping strategies utilized by Muslim communities to cope with negative media coverage (Caidi & McDonald, 2008; Hirji, 2006). For instance, Caidi and McDonald’s (2008) study of information practices among Muslim university students showed that despite the heightened level of fear and scrutiny they experienced in a post 9/11 environment, they utilized a variety of media sources to stay informed of local and international events, learn more about their religion, and were active in the community and student associations. The Muslim students who participated in the study were aware of stereotypes, negative representations of Arabs and Muslims, and biased reporting in mainstream media. Many of the participants stated they wanted to participate in the study to make Muslim voices heard
and urged the public and mainstream media to exercise more social responsibility and change their depictions of Muslims.

Hirji (2006) examined the role of diasporic media in fostering a sense of identity and community among Canadian Muslims, particularly focusing on the creation of a loosely knit community via a web-based service opposed to the war in Iraq during 2003. Through an analysis of discourses of citizenship, belonging, and civic engagement, present in the content of the website (Montreal Muslim News, www.montrealmuslimnews.net), Hirji (2006) argues that events such as the war in Iraq require a different form of political activity that transcends borders, emphasizing that this is particularly the case for Canadian Muslims whose citizenship claims and civic engagement has become increasingly problematic, they need to draw on a transnational forum for their political activities. This kind of resistance and political activity has also been utilized by several human rights, civil liberties, and Islamic groups (e.g. International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group; CAIR-CAN; Canadian Islamic Congress; Amnesty International) to document hate crimes and human rights abuses against Muslims, and issue press releases, opinion pieces, reports, and provide educational tools and resources for the public. Other grass roots advocacy groups such as No One is Illegal in Toronto and Montreal, and the Montreal based group The People’s Commission, have used similar strategies to provide space for protests and allow marginalized voices to be heard. These groups and alternative media outlets have played a crucial role in providing avenues for resistance, fostering alternative discourses, and creating a sense of belonging and community.

Racial Profiling and Discrimination

In addition to persistent negative stereotyping in the media, Arabs and Muslims have been the subject of increased racial profiling and discrimination which has been well documented in the literature (Bhadi, 2003; Burman, 2006; CAIR-CAN, 2002 & 2005; Razack, 2008, 2010). As CAIR-CAN’s 2002 survey of Canadian Muslims One Year After 9/11 indicates, 56% of respondents experienced anti-Muslim incidents, 33% of which came in the form of verbal abuse while 18% reported experiences of racial profiling and 16% reported experiencing workplace discrimination. In addition, 33% reported their overall personal situation has taken a turn for the worse since September 11, 2001 and 56% reported increased biased reporting on Islam and Muslims by the media (CAIR-CAN, 2005). Canadian statistics on police-reported hate crimes in
2007 indicate that 64% of police-reported hate crimes are motivated by race or ethnicity while 24% are motivated by religion. Although there seems to be a decline in incidents against Muslims from 21.3% in 2006 to 17.2% in 2007, and 10.1% in 2008 (Dauvergne and Brennan, 2009 and 2010), issues of under-reporting and racial profiling by police and security officials remain as serious concerns.

Bahdi (2003) identifies three categories of racial profiling taking place in the context of Canada’s anti-terrorism legislations post 9/11 including measures aimed at the Arab and Muslim communities in general, such as being subjected to increased scrutiny at airports and check points; specific measures aimed at freezing assets of Arabs and Muslims who are listed on a suspected “terrorist” list; and seemingly neutral provisions aimed at the Canadian public but nonetheless may have disproportionate impacts on Arabs and Muslims, such as the amendments to the Aeronautics Act that enable airline carriers to provide information about any of its passengers if requested by foreign governments. As Bahdi (2003) states, racial profiling merges with long-standing deep-seated stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims that lead to warped decision making leading to many false positives and lasting negative consequences such as loss of jobs, career opportunities, businesses, and homes, in the lives of those who are wrongly identified as terrorists. This is illustrated in the case of Liban Hussein, a Somali immigrant residing in Ottawa who ran a money-wiring business that sent funds to Somalia. He was placed on Canada’s terrorist list pursuant to the United Nation’s Regulations on October 2, 2001. Even though an RCMP investigation cleared him of any wrongdoing on June 3, 2002 and his name was taken off the list, his reputation was tarnished beyond repair consequently he lost his home and his business and was forced to move his family to his mother’s house (Bhadi, 2003).

Caidi and McDonald’s (2008) study of information practices among Muslim university students showed similar findings highlighting the multiple impacts of 9/11 on their daily lives. Participants in this study described experiences ranging from questioning their faith and identity, the place of Muslims in Canadian society, restrictions on their travels, negative experiences at work and school, and in some cases losing job opportunities and giving up on careers that they wanted to pursue:

I wanted to send my brother $50 that I owed him, and I decided that it would be faster to wire the money to him. So I go to a MiniMart and wire the money, but they kept the money for a week. They called me and said there was a problem with my name, because it sounds Muslim,
and they were afraid I was a terrorist. They asked me to come back and to fax some ID documents. I was there for the whole day. They asked me all kinds of questions, and I had to pay another $13 to get the service.

9/11 forced me to give up on taking up a pilot degree and a job related to it. It made me look at the world more carefully. You end up questioning more things.

I always wanted to be more of a social activist but because I was not born here, I am afraid that there are more implications to me now. I am afraid to lose my papers or to appear in a list of so-called terrorists. There is a lot of suspicion about Islam, and between Muslims too. (Caidi and McDonald, 2008, p. 370)

Burman (2006) highlights the increased vulnerability of dozens of non-citizens of Palestinian, North African, and South Asian origins, to detention and deportation without charge, after the implementation of Canada’s anti-terrorism policies. In her analysis, Burman reviews the shifting language of the Canadian state in post 9/11 policies from “deportation” to “removal” of undesirable individuals to render these actions more acceptable as banal acts in everyday life. She traces the impact of these “removals” and absences of these individuals on their families and illustrates how these absences shift the dynamics of the diasporic city highlighting overlapping temporalities and differential relations to the nation state.

In a subsequent article, Jenny Burman (2010) examines the circulation of fear and suspicion during perceived national security crises after 9/11, in Toronto and Montreal and traces how non-residents and “Canadian-born brown” became the focus of suspicion and they in turn developed their own suspicions of others in what she terms the “post-terrorism-crisis affective-circuitry”. Drawing on testimonies presented to the People’s Commission on Immigration and Security Measures (PCISM), public hearings conducted by a non-governmental commission in Montreal in April 2006, Burman (2010) illustrates how the politics of fear and securitization reconfigure urban interpersonal relations and stratifies the lived experience of different identities in urban space according to their citizenship status as “entitled citizens, not-quite or not-yet citizens, or illegalized residents” (Burman, 2010, p. 203). Sara Ahmed (2004) elaborates further on the processes through which fear functions to reestablish distance between bodies, creating borders between them, and how the global economy of fear is used to justify the “war on terror”, and bolster the power of the state to detain and deport those who are seen as a threat to national security. Ahmed illustrates how fear “sticks” to the bodies of suspected terrorists, restricting their movement to allow the expansion or movement of others. As Ahmed explains, fear moves
sideways between bodies and backwards based on historical attributions and naming, “such as fundamentalism, Islam, Arab, repressive, primitive” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 129), which do not need to be declared.

Citizenship and Belonging

Several authors have emphasized the changing notions of citizenship and sense of belonging for Arabs and Muslims post 9/11 (Abdulahad et al., 2009; Abdul-Razzaq, 2008; Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007). As discussed earlier in this paper, the eviction of Muslims from Canadian civil society takes place through several processes including cultural violence and racial violence enacted through the law. For instance, Engin Isin and Myer Siemiatycki (2002) analyze how parking regulations were used to prevent Muslims from building mosques in public spaces in the greater Toronto area in the 1990s, and illustrate how Muslim groups struggle to assert their entitlement to space and urban citizenship. A struggle which has been more intensified over the last decade with the introduction of anti-terrorism laws and the global “war on terror” which saw similar scenarios of “symbolic and physical violence inflicted on Muslims and mosques” (Isin and Siemiatycki, 2002, p. 208) throughout Europe and North America.

Cynthia Baker (2007) applies the concept of cultural safety to examine the social health of a small sample of Muslims living in a small community in New Brunswick, Canada in 2002-2003. Baker borrows the concept of cultural safety from Maori Nurses who developed the concept to study negative health effects of inequities experienced by Indigenous communities in New Zealand. However, it is important to note that the concept of cultural safety as developed and applied in the context of Indigenous communities in New Zealand may be significantly different from the lack of safety experienced by Arabs and Muslims in the post 9/11 Canadian context due to historical contextual differences between the populations, although the relevant dynamics may be experienced in similar ways. As Baker elaborates, people are considered culturally safe when their cultural identity, rights, and needs are respected, and they are culturally at risk when their “cultural identity is diminished or their group is disempowered” (Baker, 2007, p. 297). Baker’s (2007) study found that despite the fact that most participants had lived in New Brunswick for a long time (and three were born in Canada), were highly educated and socially well integrated, they experienced a swift transition from cultural safety to that of cultural risk and visible minority status after 9/11. Participants explained that prior to 9/11 they went unnoticed by the
local community and their religious affiliation generated little attention or interest. Following 9/11 however, they felt that Islam and Muslims became the spotlight of negative international media attention which contributed to their increased visibility in the community, finding themselves “on the wrong side of the coin”. Negative experiences associated with this increased visibility ranged from subtle different looks by others, to increased surveillance by officials, to overt experiences of harassment and hostile comments. As one older woman participating in the study stated, “In one day, we became a potential threat” (Baker, 2007, p. 302). Several participants cited the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) visit to their prayer room informing them that “from now on you have to have full records of who comes and visits you, who comes and prays here” (Baker, 2007, p. 302), as an example of the increased surveillance targeted at them. In addition to increased local surveillance, reports of negative stories of border crossings and interrogations experienced by others left participants feeling fearful of saying or doing the wrong thing that would render them a terror suspect. All these experiences contributed to diminishing their sense of belonging to the local community and negatively altering their social identity and well-being.

Abdul-Razzaq (2008) examined narratives of citizenship and belonging in seven Arab immigrant women living in Halifax. Similar to findings in other studies (Baker, 2007; Caidi & McDonald, 2008; Rousseau and Jamil, 2008 & 2010), the women interviewed in Abdul-Razzaq’s study were hesitant to directly engage in answering her questions about racism or discrimination they may have experienced post 9/11 or to explore how the events of 9/11 changed their lives, which is likely due to the current political climate post 9/11 that generates fear and lack of trust. Nevertheless, participants described experiences illustrating how their “Canadianness”, citizenship, and belonging were affected as Muslims (Abdul-Razzaq, 2008, p. 21-22). As highlighted in the following excerpt from a study participant:

> Whenever I go out, people sometimes look at me, especially with the news and the media...they look at me and really think that I am related to that [conflicts in the Middle East]...whenever I go to a rally they would ask me, “oh, are you from there?” Like when I went to the rally for Iraq, they asked me “oh do you have family from there?” and I was like, “no, I am not from Iraq, I was born in Germany, but I am just here as a human being because I am against war”. The other thing is that people, they stereotype me because of putting the Hijab. I know that if I was not putting on the Hijab, people wouldn’t really recognize me as different, but because of the Hijab they will always tell me, “ahh, you’re Arab,”... so it’s kind of like stereotyping from the other side, it’s not from my side. I was born in Germany and I grew up there and I went to Syria for medical school...Even in Canada, whenever they see a Hijab they will tell you that you are an Arab. People don’t understand that Muslims are not supposed to be only Arabs, it’s just like, I guess, 20
or 30 percent of all Muslims are Arabs; so people don’t really understand that. So when I am going for to protest the way the government treated Canadians in Lebanon [the past summer 2006], it’s not because I am Arab, but because all Canadians should be treated the same, no matter where you are from and because I am against what the Harper Government, is doing so I will not support that (Abdul-Razzaq, 2008, p. 21-22).

This quote also highlights how the struggle for citizenship and belonging is also a gendered experience. The gendered nature of “the War on Terror” has been evident in several public policy arenas in Canada including the Harper government’s crude attempt in 2007 to ban niqabi women from voting, the 2007-2008 “reasonable accommodation” debate in Quebec, the disbarring of hijabi girls from sport competitions (Bakht, 2008; Siddiqui, 2008) and the recent introduction of Bill 94 in the Quebec legislature by Kathleen Weil, Minister of Justice, on March 24, 2010 which aimed to deny Muslim women who wear the niqab access to essential public services such as health care, child care, and education. Many of the proponents of this bill see the niqab as a symbol of women’s oppression and see this bill as a way of achieving gender equality despite the fact that it deprives women of their fundamental rights and freedoms to choose their own religious and cultural beliefs, freedom of expression, and denies them access to basic public services such as health care, child care, and education (Baines, May 12, 2010). Even though different Muslim and feminist groups have made statements voicing their opposition to Bill 94 (Baines, May 12, 2010; CCLA, 2010c; Olwan, May 12, 2010; Simone de Beauvoir Institute, April 7, 2010), a recent Angus Reid poll showed that 80% of Canadians approve of the Bill (Angus Reid Poll, March 27, 2010). Moreover, the Bill was immediately endorsed by both the federal conservatives and the Liberal opposition party, Taber (The Globe and Mail, March 26, 2010). Critics have provided two main reasons for the wide scale support of this bill: the discourse of gender equality and liberation of Muslim women by a civilizing nation and the discourse of the “war on terror” and security concerns (Martin Patriquin and Charlie Gillis, Macleans, April 7, 2010; Olwan, May 12, 2010; Simone de Beauvoir Institute, April 7, 2010). Ironically, these are the same justifications offered by the Charest government as they introduced the bill. Muslim women are seen as both imperilled victims in need of protection and as dangerous to the public and to the state and must be protected against (Bakht, 2008; Razack, 2008). Bill 94 comes at the heels of several high profile cases of women being excluded from public services in Quebec (Martin Patriquin and Charlie Gillis, MacLean’s, April 7, 2010). There is a pervasive sense that the rest of the country will follow suit considering the wide spread public support of the bill and the open support of the federal government and the liberal
opposition as indicated above. Another major debate has been around the role of a secular state in accommodating various religions. In the case of Bill 94, it is clear that it is only targeting the Muslim religion and directly impacts Muslim women although neither is named in the Bill. It follows the same rhetoric and debate that has been raging in Europe for the past several years and has resulted in similar expulsions of Muslim women from civil society in France, Germany, and the Netherlands (Joppke, 2007; Scott, 2010). It is a mentality with deep seated historical roots in Orientalist discourse that continues to this day and manifests itself in the many examples of anti-Muslim cultural narratives and the growing Islamophobic public policies throughout the Western world post 9/11 (Bakht, 2008, Razack, 2008).

Multi-level Impacts of the “war on terror” on Arabs and Muslims in Canada

Rousseau and Jamil (2008) compared the meaning systems associated with 9/11 for two Pakistani communities in Karachi and in Montreal. While there were similarities in the meanings and perceptions, associated with 9/11 for the two communities, one of the striking differences was in the reactions they exhibited. The Pakistani community in Karachi were more expressive and exhibited feelings of intense pain and anger at the injustice of the consequences for Pakistanis and Muslims. While the Pakistani community in Montreal exhibited a pervasive feeling of fear and an internalized negative self-image which seems to be associated with negative representations of Muslims and South Asians in the North American context. The Pakistani participants in Montreal had a high level of suspicion and distrust around participation in the study, and did not want to discuss their feelings or reactions to 9/11 and its consequences. Similar reactions of fear, mistrust, and avoidance of discussions of the topic among Muslims in Canada have been documented by other studies (Abdul-Razzaq, 2008; Baker, 2007; Caidi and MacDonald, 2008) highlighting the impact of political repression and intense scrutiny that they are subjected to. On the positive side, reactive cohesion and identity affirmation have also been documented in these studies among others (Abdul-Razzaq, 2008; Baker, 2007; Rousseau and Machouf, 2005; Rousseau and Jamil, 2010), which speak to community resilience, resistance, and coping strategies which vary among different community members and in different contexts.

Several studies have documented the adverse consequences of the negative media coverage on Arabs and Muslims in Canada (Caidi and McDonald, 2008; Hirji, 2006; Rostam and Haverkamp, 2009). For instance, Rostam and Haverkamp (2009) conducted a qualitative study of the impact
of the mainstream media’s coverage of the war in Iraq on Iraqi expatriates living in Vancouver. The main themes generated included negative portrayal of Iraqis, biased reporting, and images of the war. Participants felt they were constantly exposed to the news about the war in Iraq and felt compelled to keep watching the news due to their anxiety and worry about relatives back home. However, they were angered and frustrated by the negative portrayals of Iraqis as “dangerous”, “criminals”, “terrorists”, “suicide bombers”, “inferior to Westerners”, “incapable of running their country” and “needing to be rescued”. Participants recalled that explosions were shown as “fireworks” minimizing the impact of the crisis on Iraqi civilians. They experienced the biased reporting as sensationalized, and insensitive, trivializing the crisis showing it as an “infomercial” or a “play-by-play update of a game like football”. Images of the presence of the US troops in Baghdad, the explosions, and bombings, along with vivid memories of burned and killed Iraqi soldiers, Iraqi families and children fleeing the war, and torture of Iraqi prisoners by American and British soldiers, the looting of Iraq’s museums, the sectarian divide, the accusations of weapons of mass destruction, elicited a range of strong feelings in study participants including “shock”, “disbelief”, “disgust”, “anger”, “sadness”, “scepticism”, “worry”, “doubt”, “confusion”, “distrust”, and “disappointment” (Rostam and Haverkamp, 2009, p. 105-106).

Some participants reported that relationships with their family members and colleagues were affected as they followed the continuous coverage of the war. Participants felt anger, disappointment, and lack of compassion on the part of Westerners as the coverage of the war continued. As the following quote from one participant illustrates, they felt that Iraqi lives were less valued, their suffering was minimized and diminished compared to that of US soldiers:

As the book is called, The People of a Lesser God...One American soldier gets wounded, and it is, you know, the whole world, it is an issue to them. One person gets caught, as a hostage, and the whole world is on their tippie toes....But a thousand Iraqis die, oh well, you know who cares...Iraqis die, it is okay. Kids, their brain is scattered all over the place, this happens, right? (Rostam and Haverkamp, 2009, p. 108)

Participants in Rostam and Haverkamp’s (2009) study also reported experiencing discrimination and identity conflicts both for themselves as well as for their children. The psychological impacts of these experiences included anger, shame, humiliation, loss of meaning in Islam, inability to express their feelings to others, lack of trust, and feeling vulnerable and exposed. They also reported changes to their sense of identity and their worldviews and general outlook on life changed to that of pessimism, lack of trust, hopelessness and resentment. Participants reported
that as a result of the negative media coverage, their children were hesitant to identify as Iraqis for fear of stereotyping and negative consequences, “they would say I’m from the Middle East, I’m Middle Eastern....that is a reflection of the media coverage, that we don’t see much positive coming from that part of the world, from Iraq” (Rostam and Haverkamp, 2009, p. 109). In response, participants reported utilizing a variety of strategies for coping with the ongoing news coverage of the war in Iraq including limiting their exposure to the news, staying connected to their families, turning to their faith, finding alternative news sources, establishing charities, corresponding to the media, and staying politically active.

Rousseau and Machouf (2005) conducted a school-based preventive pilot project addressing multiethnic tensions in the wake of the Iraq war, in Park Extension, a very disadvantaged neighbourhood in Montreal, primarily populated by recent South Asian immigrants. The aim of the project was to provide recent immigrant children an intermediate space to freely and safely discuss war. The project was developed in response to increased tensions between Muslim families and health and education systems observed in the neighbourhood following the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These tensions had direct consequences for children in the school, who found themselves belonging in two worlds and caught between conflicting views at home and at school. After an initial period of shock and withdrawal, families attempted to cope with increased hostilities and discrimination by affirming their religious identities more publicly, asking schools to accommodate children’s prayer schedule by providing space and time. More children started observing Ramadan fast, and some missed school on Fridays to attend mosque, while others displayed incidents of defiance and passive resistance. This in turn increased fears and critical views of mosques among professionals at schools and health services. Through their participation at the weekly discussion forums facilitated by the pilot project, children expressed heightened levels of fear and anxiety they experienced in relation to the war and being implicitly associated with the “bad side” (Rousseau and Machouf, 2005, p. 467). The children expressed fears for their safety and the safety of their families both in Canada and in the Middle East. The children raised questions around the meaning of the war and why it was happening but they were unable to find satisfactory answers. Several children indicated that their parents did not want them to talk about the war so it was impossible to have a discussion at home. Some children brought in newspaper clippings, such as a story “about a young Iraqi suicide bomber who decided not to go through
with it” and “a picture of Iraqi prisoners being numbered with a marker” (Rousseau and Machouf, 2005, p. 470), as silent evidence of their emotions and reactions to events, they did not want to talk about them. The children talked about those who were wounded or killed in the war, both soldiers and civilians, and seemed particularly moved by the death of women and children. Overall, findings from the pilot project showed that the children appreciated having the space to be able to talk about the war and displayed their capacity to handle the complexity and ambivalence associated with their particular situation.

In a subsequent study, Rousseau and Jamil (2010) examined Muslim families’ understanding of, and reaction to, the “war on terror”. The focus of this study was on examining the parent-child transmission of understanding and emotional reaction to the “war on terror”, patterns of identity assignation, and coping strategies among South Asian (Pakistani and Bengali) Muslim families living in Park Extension, Montreal. A disadvantaged neighbourhood with a large concentration of recent South Asian immigrants and the site of observed inter-ethnic tensions post 9/11 as described earlier. The study also examined the families’ responses to, and views on the role of the school in discussing international events, particularly focusing on comparing reactions to two key events, the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir and northern Pakistan, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The findings revealed stark differences in family communication patterns in response to the two key events. The Kashmir earthquake elicited universal expressions of empathy, community mobilization, and support for the school’s involvement in fundraising and discussing the event with the children. In contrast, most families avoided discussions of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the “war on terror” as a whole, both within their families and in other settings such as during the research interview, and in schools. Parents felt that they were unable to explain these wars to their children and wanted to protect their children from negative feelings associated with the discussion of political events such as the “war on terror”. Youth participants in the study demonstrated their awareness of these political events but they also displayed similar avoidance patterns as their parents as illustrated by this comment made by an 18-year old female participant in the study: “As soon as someone says Sept. 11, I just want to tune out. I just don’t like

I feel bad for the Muslims because I know that’s happening each and every day to little kids in Iraq, in Afghanistan and everyone that’s there. They’re showing stuff on the Holocaust, the World Trade Centre, why don’t they ever show what’s happening there? But I just don’t like
talking about it because I know they feel sorry for their people and I feel sorry for my people, so that’s why I don’t like getting into a discussion (Rousseau and Jamil, 2010, p. 604).

As the authors explain, avoidance of the topic seemed to be associated with a split vision of identity and binary perceptions of self and other, and an overall sense of helplessness in both parents and children. Whereas a more nuanced vision of identity that allowed for more complex views of self and other allowed more room for discussion, navigation between the two worlds of home and school, and a stronger sense of agency and control. Avoidance and silences about the “war on terror” translated into fears and anxieties for some of the children. They expressed anxiety and fears for the physical safety and concerns for the future for themselves and for their families. Younger children particularly, associated religion with war. Studies have also shown that avoidance and feelings of helplessness seem to be related to educational level, socio-economic status, and a sense of control and agency. More affluent people with higher education, with a strong sense of identity tend to exercise more agency and more likely to be more engaged and politically active (Caidi and McDonald, 2008; Rousseau and Jamil, 2008 & 2010; Burman, 2010).

**Mental Health Consequences of the “war on terror”**

Several studies in the US have investigated the relationship between anti-Muslim, anti-Arab bias and mental health (Amer, 2005; Moradi and Hasan, 2004; Rippy and Newman, 2006). Padela and Heisler (2010) report the findings of a cross-sectional representative face-face survey of Arab Americans in Detroit administered in 2003, examining the association between perceived abuse and discrimination post 9/11 and psychological distress, self-reported health status and level of happiness. The study found 25% of respondents reported personal or familial experiences of post 9/11 abuse and discrimination based on race, ethnicity or religion. Moreover, after controlling for socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, and length of stay in the US, experiences of post 9/11 abuse and discrimination were associated with higher levels of psychological distress, poorer health status, and lower levels of happiness. The majority of the sample (81%) had lived in the US more than 10 years and seemed to be well-integrated in American society with 83% having health insurance coverage. The authors do not explore immigration status. These statistics would likely be higher for refugees and newcomer immigrants.
Hassouneh and Kulwicki (2007) conducted a pilot study of mental health in 30 Arab Muslim women living in the US using a variety of instruments “to obtain demographic information and assess women’s psychological symptoms, experiences of discrimination, and trauma history” (Hassouneh and Kulwicki, 2007, p. 3). A serious limitation of this study is that the instruments were not translated nor culturally adapted. They were administered in English and in some cases translated by an Arabic speaking interviewer. The analysis was limited to descriptive statistics, Pearson’s correlations, and t-tests. The authors did not specify what measure/instrument they used to measure discrimination. However, they reported that in the post-911 context, “63% of the women reported experiencing increased discrimination, 67% reported experiencing more overall stress, and 43% indicated that their mental health or the mental health of one or more of their relatives had been negatively impacted by war and/or hate crimes...Seventy-seven percent of women reported experiencing emotional distress sometimes or most of the time during incidents of discrimination” (Hassouneh and Kulwicki, 2007, p. 5). The study found a strikingly high number of the participants (93%) had experienced trauma in their life time with 87% reporting general disaster (the vast majority of which was attributed to war and military occupation related incidents) and 30% reporting physical and sexual abuse as specific types of experienced trauma. The authors conclude their preliminary findings show that Arab Muslim women are at an increased risk of developing anxiety and depression problems and due to the daily experience of trauma related to war and political violence, the use of Trauma History Questionnaire is not recommended for use in this population. However, the authors reinforce that further quantitative and qualitative research are needed to get a deeper understanding of the meanings and contexts relating to the mental health of the Muslim communities post 9/11.

Rippy and Newman (2008) have adapted the Race-Related Stressor Scale (RRSS) for use with Muslim Americans. The RRSS was initially developed as a measure of race-related stress experienced by Asian American veterans of the Vietnam War. The adapted measure, the Perceived Religious Discrimination Scale (PRDS) is unique in that it offers a multi-dimensional measure of stress related to perceived religious discrimination: stress associated with perceived societal anti-Muslim discrimination; stress related to incidents of personal discrimination; and stress associated with bicultural identification with the Muslim-civilian victims of the Iraqi and Afghan wars. The bicultural identification sub-scale is particularly relevant to this study since it is the first measure that incorporates the examination of the stress associated with identifying
with civilian victims of Afghan and Iraq wars, with whom the individual shares a cultural background, and the simultaneous exposure to dehumanizing attitudes directed to Arabs and Muslims. Although the authors offer a valuable multidimensional tool adapted for examining stress and perceived religious discrimination within the population of interest in this study, further research is needed to evaluate the utility of this measure.

A number of studies have examined the mental health of Iraqi refugees living in Michigan (Jamil et al, 2002, 2006, & 2007). Findings from these studies indicate that Iraqi refugees, particularly those who arrived post-1990 Gulf War, had more overall health (chronic headaches, arthritis or rheumatism), and mental health problems including PTSD, Depression, and anxiety, as compared to other Iraqi immigrants (Jamil et al, 2006, 2007, 2010) and other Arab immigrants (Jamil et al, 2002) who immigrated in the years prior. This is primarily due to the fact that the post-1990 group are recent refugees who have experienced pre-migration war traumas and are experiencing higher levels of acculturation stress and discrimination in the post 9/11 U.S. climate. However, the authors acknowledge that there is large within group variability in their findings (Jamil et al, 2007). The other major limitation of these studies is the reliance on culturally inappropriate Western psychiatric measures taken from studies of U.S. veterans, to study the mental health issues of this refugee population. There is a tendency to focus on acculturation stress while failing to examine the impact of the “War on terror” including increased surveillance, scrutiny, discrimination, racial profiling, and the ongoing trauma of the current Iraq war. Interestingly, the above cited study (Jamil et al., 2007) talks about Iraqi refugees’ possible suffering from “paranoia of surveillance” under Saddam Hussein’s regime, but makes no mention of U.S. government’s surveillance and its possible impact on this population group.

Similarly, Kira et al. (2006) conducted a pilot study to examine the mental health effects of what they termed “retributive justice” among Iraqi refugees living in Wayne County Michigan, following the removal of Saddam’s regime by the US in 2003. The authors adapted a number of existing clinical measures and developed some new measures to examine retributive justice, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Cumulative Trauma Disorder (CTD), futuristic orientation, socio-cultural adjustment, and social support among others to test the study hypotheses. Based on their assumption that justice has been served by the removal of the
oppressive Iraqi regime by the US, the authors hypothesized that Iraqi refugees who had suffered torture and imprisonment at the hands of the regime, would experience retributive justice as a sense of relief, increased sense of control of self and environment, and reduced PTSD symptomatology and increased healing associated with socio-cultural adjustment and social support. Even if we overlook the problematic assumptions of the study which ignore the illegitimacy and unjust nature of the war in Iraq and the direct violence it continues to inflict on the people of Iraq, and the limitations associated with the study as outlined by the authors (limited generalizability, issues of cultural appropriateness, reliability and validity of measures), the study did not find any positive changes in participants’ PTSD symptoms as a result of the “retributive justice”. The authors however, do acknowledge that this might be due to “previous trauma or the ongoing trauma of discrimination and the war in Iraq”, (Kira et al., 2006, p. 145). A finding which highlights the need for further research on the consequences of the “war on terror” for Arab and Muslim diasporic communities, in line with the stated focus of this study.

Shoeb et al. (2007) present one of the rare studies of mental health issues among Arab Americans that uses ethnographic interviewing to explore narratives of Iraqi refugees and critiques the application of structured clinical interviews and the use of standardized PTSD checklists with this population, favouring the exploration of indigenous idioms of distress. The study involved the analysis of life stories of Iraqi refugees living in Dearborn Michigan, home to the largest Iraqi refugee populations in North America, to examine issues of identity, home, and exile. Participants in this study described their struggles with defining identity and home in exile within the context of historical and contemporary trauma, war, and political violence in Iraq. They expressed varied views on belonging in America reflecting their diverse vantage points based on a variety of factors including their past experiences, immigration history, and level of acculturation and social integration. The following quotes from the study participants illustrate these issues and highlight the intergenerational impacts of historical trauma in this community while simultaneously raising questions around the long term consequences of the “war on terror” for Arabs and Muslims in the diaspora:

My son was born here...Even though he never lived in Iraq, he is scared to set foot in the country...Why? Because he sees the traces of Iraq’s torture chambers on his dad’s body and feels his pain...Saddam’s atrocities have even touched my child born thousands of miles away...America is the only country that opened its arms to us. Here, I can practice my
religion without fear of persecution. No one is above the law. There is no glorification of the leader (Shi’a Muslim Arab woman, 39 years old, Shoeb et al., 2007, p. 452).

We don’t belong in America. Americans don’t want us here. I refuse to spend my life as a foreigner in a strange land. A person is only truly respected in his own country (Shi’a Muslim Arab man, 52 years old, Shoeb et al., 2007, p. 452).

Shoeb et al. (2007) found that despite the varying views and experiences, faith emerged as a central construct in the narratives of study participants, defining their identity, home, and future in the face of exile, political violence and war. Their religious faith enabled them to make sense of their pain, get through their daily struggles, and gave them hope in their future. This finding highlights the need to go beyond traditional ways of conceptualizing trauma and sheds light on the importance of understanding individuals’ meaning systems and associated coping strategies to develop possible intervention strategies aimed at strengthening individual and community resilience. Follow up to the previous study, Shoeb et al. (2007a) critique the heavy reliance on Western psychiatric scales in mental health assessments of individuals coming from conflict zones. In order to address this gap, the authors utilized the life stories of 60 Iraqi refugees collected in Dearborn Michigan to inform their adaptation of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) to the Iraqi context. Shoeb et al. (2007a) conclude that using this methodology is a useful way to develop a trauma measure that is culturally grounded in developing a multi-dimensional model of mental health.

Other studies of Iraqi refugees in Europe and Australia have examined the psychological sequelae of pre-migration experiences of trauma in connection with family influences and the availability of social supports. In a study of psychological sequelae of torture and organized violence suffered by 84 male Iraqi refugees who were interviewed, Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenbergh (1998) compared the influence of social factors in exile with the impact of trauma factors using various measures of psychological morbidity. The authors concluded that the availability of social support, particularly affective social support was an important factor in alleviating PTSD and depressive symptoms. This study highlights the importance of providing integrated rehabilitation programming along with facilitating the availability of social supports and family reunion. The findings of the above study are reinforced by Nickerson et al.’s (2011a) examination of the familial influence of loss and trauma on refugee mental health among Mandaean refugees. Specifically, using multivariate path analysis the study explored the
relationship between loss, trauma, and mental health at both the individual and family level among resettled Mandaean refugees. The authors assessed trauma, loss, PTSD, depression, complicated grief, and mental health related quality of life among 315 study participants and concluded that loss and trauma significantly affected psychological outcomes at both the individual and family levels, suggesting the importance of the family in considerations of the impact of refugee trauma.

In a related study conducted in 2010, Nickerson et al. used a cross-sectional survey to evaluate the impact of fear for family remaining in Iraq on the mental health of 315 Mandaean refugees in Sydney Australia. Study participants were interviewed around fear for family in Iraq, fear of genocide, pre-migration trauma, post-migration living difficulties and psychological outcomes. The authors report higher levels of PTSD and depression symptoms and greater mental health-related disability for Mandaean refugees with immediate family living in Iraq as compared to those who do not. The study highlights the importance of considering the effect of ongoing threat of violence for family members living in conflict zones, on the mental health of refugees.

**Mental Health Impacts of More Restrictive Immigration & Refugee Policies**

As it is evident from the review of the above literature, the majority of studies of Iraqi refugees in diaspora have primarily relied on psychiatric medical conceptualizations, and some adapted questionnaires of assessing trauma and psychological distress to examine the mental health outcomes of Iraqi refugees. Although some have taken into account pre and post migration experiences and socio-demographic factors, the general tendency has been to neglect the overall historical, political, economic, and exclusionary policy contexts shaping the lives of Iraqi refugees. A number of recent studies have focused their attention on the relationship between more restrictive immigration policies adopted by countries of the Global North and the impact on refugees’ mental health outcomes and their resettlement experiences in their host countries. Most of these studies are based on the Australian and European context but have direct relevance to the Canadian context which is increasingly adopting similar immigration policies of deterrence, detention, and deportation of refugees. In what follows, I review a few of these studies that have specifically examined the impact on recent Iraqi refugees in Australia and Europe.
Gow (2004) examined affective reactions to the 2003 Iraq Occupation of Assyrian refugees recently settled in Sydney Australia. Specifically, the author explored the “complex relationship between transnationalism, the imagination, and the affective pull of the war in Iraq”. Gow (2004) recounts Assyrian refugees’ histories of trauma and fraught relationship both with their home country which they fled, and with their new country of residence, Australia. In this ethnographic study, the author documents the Assyrian refugees’ persistent sense of fear of Saddam and their disbelief as they watched his fall in April 2003, and shows how they were connected to the war in Iraq by following it unfold over the SBS Assyrian radio station and its associated website and satellite phones which connected them to a network of Assyrians across the world.

Gow (2004) documents the complex and multi-level affective reactions of Assyrian refugees as they observe the fall of Saddam with fear and disbelief; their mixed reaction and skepticism of the formation of the new Iraqi Governing Council which shows an appointed Assyrian holding Iraq’s new constitution while standing alongside Paul Bremer; and their transnational worries about their relatives in Iraq, the fate of Assyrians in the new Iraq, and contemplating their own fate as Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders in Australia who were just informed that the Australian government has place a hold on any new protection visas from Iraq. The study illustrates the disjunction experienced by Assyrian refugees holding Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) while observing discourses of “human rights and democracy” that cannot be realized among the US security-driven images of Iraq. It also highlights the complexity of the transnational affective imaginaries that characterize Iraqi refugees’ identities across borders caught at the intersection of embodied historical trauma, hope, and the violence of the “war on terror” and their fragility at the nexus of securitized immigration policies.

Silove et al. (2000) examine the effects of evolving policies of deterrence on the health and psychosocial well-being of asylum seekers through a review of empirical literature and reports by human rights groups focusing on asylum seekers who have filed claims in developed countries (Europe, North America, and Australia). The authors note the ratio of legitimate refugee claims being resettled to another country has significantly changed from 1:20 in the 1970s to 1:400 in the 1990s, with a growing number of asylum seekers making in-land claims after arrival and without prior screening. In response, the majority of developed countries have adopted policies of deterrence and strict border controls over recent years including mandatory
detentions, more stringent refugee determination procedures, and temporary forms of asylum, as well as restricted access to work, education, housing, welfare, and health care services. The adoption of these policies raises serious concerns about the status of asylum seekers ranging from allegations of abuse, untreated medical and psychiatric illnesses, suicidal behaviour, hunger strikes, and outbreaks of violence in detention centres. The authors conclude the growing evidence shows that post-migration stress faced by asylum seekers complicates the effects of previous trauma placing them at further risk for ongoing PTSD and other psychiatric symptoms.

Silove (2002) examines the mental health consequences of contemporary Australian policies pertaining to asylum seekers through a review of historical and political factors driving these policies and an examination of available relevant literature. Findings from this review show high rates of trauma, PTSD, and depression in asylum seekers which are highly influenced by conditions of the post-migration environment. The author concludes that mental health formulations are important in considering the impact of contemporary policies but they need to adopt a broader ecological approach in these formulations in order to understand the complexity of mental health issues of asylum seekers, particularly those who are in long-term detention.

Further evidence linking mandatory detention with adverse mental health outcomes is provided by Steel et al. (2006) which explored the longer term mental health effects of mandatory detention and temporary protection on 241 Mandaean refugees in Sydney Australia. In their interviews with study participants, the authors assessed PTSD, depression, and indices of stress related to past trauma, detention and temporary protection. The multilevel model developed in the study included age, gender, family clustering, pre-migration trauma and length of residency demonstrated the detrimental effects of detention and temporary protection on the longer-term mental health of refugees, independent of the other factors considered. Particularly, longer term detention was associated with more severe mental disturbance which persisted over three years after release.

Similarly, Mansouri and Cauchi (2007) discuss the mental and psychological impacts of Australia’s temporary protection visa (TPV) policy on individual asylum seekers. The article illustrates the discursive manifestations of stressful events in the lives of TPV holders through an examination of their personal narratives. As the authors state, the presence of PTSD symptoms is
not surprising given their common pre-migration experiences of trauma, torture and persecution. These experiences however, are further compounded by the post-migration stress of exclusionary policies and practices, family separation, and the uncertainty of being in indefinite “temporary” protection resulting in chronic states of anxiety and depression for many TPV holders.

Nickerson et al. (2011) further demonstrate the impact of visa status change on the mental health of Mandaean refugees resettled in Australia. The study involved a survey conducted in 2004 with 97 Mandaean refugees, 68 of which were TPV holders and 29 held permanent residency (PR) status. The survey was repeated a second time in 2007 when all participants had acquired PR status. The authors used a meditational model of analysis to determine whether the relationship between change in visa status and change in psychological symptoms was mediated by a change in living difficulties associated with different categories of visa status. The findings showed significant reductions in PTSD and depressive symptoms, and improvements in mental health-related quality of life. Moreover, the relationship between change in visa status and reduced PTSD and depressive symptoms was mediated by reductions in living difficulties. The authors suggest that restriction of rights and access to services related to visa status has negative mental health impacts for refugees and discuss implications for government refugee policies.

Lindencrona et al. (2008) explored pathways to different mental health outcomes among 124 refugees from the Middle-East who had recently been granted permanent residency status in Sweden. The study focused on identifying different models of mental health outcomes using a newly developed questionnaire taking into account pre-migration, migration and post-migration stress conditions, as well as socio-economic variables and the individual’s capacity to handle stress. The authors report four dimensions of resettlement stress that account for 62% of the total variance in resettlement stress: social and economic strain, alienation, discrimination and status loss and violence and threats in Sweden. Specifically, the findings suggest social and economic strain and alienation are important factors in explaining symptoms of mental disorders while a person’s capacity to handle stress plays a significant and mediating role in these mental health outcomes. The authors also discuss the impact of resettlement stressors on different mental health outcomes within the context of the migration process.
In the context of the Netherlands, Laban et al. (2005) studied post-migration living problems and common psychiatric disorders among Iraqi asylum seekers. Factor analysis of findings from structured, culturally validated questionnaires revealed a significant relationship between post-migration living problems and psychopathology. Further multivariate logistic regression showed lack of work, family issues, and asylum procedure stress had the highest odds ratios for psychopathology. The authors urge governments to shorten asylum procedures, provide work permits to asylum seekers and facilitate family reunification. They also encourage mental health workers to recognize and focus their attention on post-migration living problems as opposed to focusing on traumas from the past.

The current study builds on the emerging body of literature discussed above by addressing a number of existing gaps in this body of scholarship. This study attempts to examine Arab Iraqi refugee women’s experiences of the “war on terror” in Toronto from a gendered historical perspective within the contemporary structural violence of state policies and practices. Examining the trauma of the “war on terror” and Iraqi women’s everyday experiences in this light shifts the focus away from disease focused psychiatric conceptualizations of trauma while centering the participants’ narratives and varied responses to their circumstances in the Canadian context. Using a historically-based multi-level trauma framework of the “war on terror” enables us to move away from artificial binaries of “us” and “them” and facilitate a better understanding of the structural dynamics of our interconnected world in order to foster alliances across transnational borders and boundaries aimed at developing multi-level transformative interventions.

Social work literature on working with refugees within an international context is quite limited, a few recent social work studies have focused their attention on examining social work’s roles and suggesting specific interventions in working with Iraqi refugees post 2003 Iraq Occupation (Al-Qdah and Lacroix, 2010; Harding and Libal, 2012). The limited social work literature that exists on this topic tends to focus on refugee resettlement and psychosocial interventions, and cultural competence approaches (Hodge and Rian, 2010; Jamil, et al. 2007; Michalski, 2001). Harding and Libal (2012) discuss findings from extensive qualitative field research conducted with humanitarian aid workers, NGOs, and resettlement workers working with Iraqi refugees in the Middle East and United States. The authors critique the international community’s as well as
social work’s silence on the Iraqi refugee crisis, calling for more active involvement in advocacy and policy development within the context of human rights and international social work. Al-Qdah and Lacroix (2010) offer similar critiques with respect to social work’s underdeveloped interventions in working with refugee populations and suggest the need for further international and local collaborations in this regard. Reporting on findings on a 2004 survey conducted on the needs of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, the authors propose social work interventions at multiple levels of individual, family, community, and macro practice with the main focus being on improving community integration for refugees in protracted situations. The current study also contributes to this body of literature in its focus on examining Arab Iraqi refugee women’s experiences of the “war on terror” within the Canadian policy context.

In this chapter I have provided a detailed overview of the theoretical framework I have developed to inform my analysis in this study. I have drawn on feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial perspectives as well as theories of structural violence and historical trauma literature to explore Iraqi women’s gendered lived experiences and meanings of the “war on terror”. Consistent with my feminist standpoint epistemology and my goals of historicizing and contextualizing Arab Iraqi refugee women’s experiences with the “war on terror”, I have drawn on a number of critical perspectives in a theoretical framework that I use in conjunction with drawing on my own positionality and situated knowing to inform my analysis throughout this study. In what follows, I will provide a brief summary of the theoretical framework that I have outlined in this chapter.

Anti-colonial, post-colonial theories including Edward Said’s seminal works on Orientalism (1979) and Culture and Imperialism (1994) provide the foundation for historicizing the “war on terror” and understanding the ideological constructions and cultural representations of Arabs and Muslims that legitimate violence and colonial rule. Moreover, Said’s concepts of imaginative geographies and overlapping territories provide a frame by which to disrupt artificial binaries of “us” and “them” and emphasize our interconnected histories and transnational identities. I also draw on a number of feminist anti-colonial, anti-capitalist scholars to explore the ways in which gender has been used in imperialist missions throughout history, with a particular focus on how gender has operated within the context of the “war on terror” to legitimate the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan under the rhetoric of women’s liberation on the one hand, and on the other hand to authorize the social exclusion and culturalizing of Muslim women’s issues in the West. In
further exploring the gendered, racialized, and classed aspects of Canadian citizenship and national identity, I draw on feminist anti-racist, anti-colonial conceptualizations of citizenship.

I also offer a conceptualization of trauma as a “wound” or “shock” in order to broaden the frame and shift away from psychiatric disease focused models of trauma. I draw on models of structural violence, historical trauma, and multi-level frameworks of trauma in analyzing the impacts of the “war on terror” on Iraqi women’s lives focusing on the ways in which unequal social relations of power, exploitation and oppression manifest in women’s lives as different forms of violence and trauma. Models of transnational trauma and colonial trauma response offer the possibility of exploring diverse individual responses, resistance, and resilience that can help inform the development of strength-based community level interventions to address the consequences of collective historical trauma. I draw on these critical approaches in my review of the empirical literature and my analysis throughout this dissertation.
Interpretive methodology is an umbrella term that encompasses different schools of thought including phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Frankfurt School of critical theory. Though they emphasize different approaches, they share a number of philosophical presuppositions in seeking to explore knowledge claims and human meaning making. Interpretive methodologies are concerned with meaning, aiming to address what is meaningful to people in the social situation under study. Phenomenology and hermeneutics build on Kant’s central idea that knowing depends on a priori knowledge, arguing that the researcher’s perspective shapes the generation of knowledge, and the way to study human actors is through verstehen – understanding – a concept that was developed by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber (Yanow, 2006). As consistent with the feminist approach used in this study, in interpretive methodology, meaning making is seen as a historically and socially contextualized process mediated by the knower’s prior knowledge. Concepts and categories are seen as embodied, reflecting the point of views, histories and traditions of their creators. Self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher is paramount in examining knowledge claims, and interpreting data. Individuals are seen as members of communities of meaning, drawing on the repertoire of collective shared meanings created by that community. Individuals draw on these collective understandings, traditions, practices, and language to construct their own meanings and make sense of their everyday events (Yanow, 2006).

This research study uses interpretive policy analysis methods as outlined by Yanow (2000) to examine the “war on terror” and the different governmental policy responses that emanated from its enactment. Interpretive policy analysis focuses on the range of meanings a policy has for different policy-relevant actors with a particular attention to two main sources of tension: The first source of tension is between what the analyst expects to find and her present experience in the policy or agency, this tension presents potential sources of insights and therefore should be dwelled on rather than attempts to resolve them immediately. As I will discuss later, an important example of this sort of tension in the context of this study arose when I was exploring the different meanings of the “war on terror”, and the gulf between my own salient experience
and understanding of the “war on terror” and the study participants’ reactions and perspectives on the issue. This key source of tension became evident in my initial interactions with study participants who did not have the “war on terror” as part of their frame of reference and did not see it as being relevant to the context of their lives. Aside from the initial shock and discomfort with the strong unexpected responses I received, it became a source of critical self-reflection and a process of discovery to develop a deeper understanding of the source of this tension rather than trying to impose my own meanings on those of the participants.

A second source of tension that can spark interpretive analysis is the tension between what implementers do and what the policy “says”. In this view, interpretive policy analysis explores the contrasts between “authored” texts (policy meanings as intended by policy makers) and “constructed” texts (meanings made by other policy-relevant groups), Yanow (2000). A clear example of this source of tension between “authored” text and “constructed” texts is the sharp contrast between U.S. – U.K. claims of “democracy” and “liberation” of Iraq and the “occupation” and generalized conditions of lack of safety and security that ensued in the lives of Iraqis following the 2003 invasion.

As Yanow (2000) elaborates, the language of “community” is borrowed into the policy context to refer to similarities of position among a group of people who share a set of values, beliefs, and feelings that can bind people together in communities of meaning. Cognitive, linguistic, and cultural practices reinforce each other to create commonalities among policy-relevant groups to form “interpretive communities” sharing thought, speech, practice, and their meanings. Hence, a central question for interpretive policy analysis according to Yanow (2000) is, how is the policy issue being framed by the various parties to the debate? Borrowing the metaphor from photography, a “frame” creates an interpretive framework within which policy-related artifacts make sense. By definition, frames direct attention toward some elements while at the same time they exclude others. Frames are expressed through language and they reflect what a group or an interpretive community values as important. Frame conflicts occur because different groups value different elements of a policy. Frames contain a complex dynamic inter-relationship between language, cognition, and action. Policy frames often use metaphoric language to shape perceptions and understandings. Frames also entail different courses of action, different values, and meanings. “The role of the interpretive policy analyst is to map the architecture of the debate
relative to the policy issue under investigation, by identifying the language and its entailments (understandings, actions, meanings) used by different interpretive communities in their framing of the issue” (Yanow, 2000, p. 12-13). Some key examples of policy frames and language, actions and meanings I explore in more details in the context of this study include exploring meanings and understandings of the “war on terror” and the constructions of refugees as fraudulent individuals taking advantage of the system. Consistent with the goals of this study, an interpretive policy analysis approach is used to focus on the meanings, values, feelings, and beliefs as dynamic components expressed by the policies under study drawing on a variety of data sources as artifacts of meanings. An examination of discourse and language-in-use is used as a key tool for conducting this interpretation.

Discourse Analysis

Language and Discourse

According to Gee (2005), human language is used to serve two main functions, to enact social activities and social identities as well as “to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (p. 1). Language gets recruited to distribute social goods and resources in society. Therefore, language-in-use is everywhere and is always political. For Gee (2005), the theory of language “is that language has meaning only in and through social practices (emphasis in original), practices which often leave us morally complicit with harm and injustice unless we attempt to transform them” (p. 8). Similarly for Kress (2001), difference in power is what accounts for differences in language use. “All linguistic (inter)action is shaped by power differences of varying kinds, and no part of linguistic action escapes its effects” (p. 35). Moreover, as Maybin (2001) illustrates in her discussion of Bakhtin’s theories of language is heteroglossic and always carries conflict and contradictions between centralizing and diversifying forces within it. As Maybin states, “Bakhtin uses the term heteroglossia to refer to this dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages” (Maybin, 2001, p. 67). Seeing language in this light means that discourse analysis must take into account the dialogic nature of discourse, the multiple voices present within discourse, and the processes through which these discourses build onto each other to perpetuate certain beliefs or to create new discourses.
Discourse analysis provides us with tools and strategies for studying language-in-use and to get an understanding of how language gets used to create injustices and contributes to inequalities. Moreover, as Gee (2005) states,

> We continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies, and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing (p. 10).

Discourse analysis therefore, is not only focused on language-in-use, what Gee calls little “d” discourse but also on big “D” discourse which he defines as:

> ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (p. 21).

Big “D” discourses enable us to study the larger context in which language is used to enact different identities. Big “D” discourses draw our attention to various actors, beliefs and processes that contribute to differential access to social goods and resources and create social inequalities. By using the tools and strategies of discourse analysis we have the potential to disrupt these processes and move towards equity and social change. One such example I discuss in detail in the following chapter was the discourse of fraud and abuse of the system by Iraqi refugees that was used as a basis to withhold information and deny access to social benefits and career training opportunities to recent Iraqi refugees as described by several key informants and study participants.

The current study utilizes multiple sources of data to examine Arab Iraqi women’s experiences of the “war on terror”. The study is comprised of the following main components conducted in phases: 1) Document review; 2) Community Observation; 3) Key informant interviews; and 4) Semi-structured interviews with Arab Iraqi women. The following section provides further detailed descriptions of data collection activities associated with this study.

## Data Sources and Data Collection

### Document Review

A list of relevant documents that were reviewed in conducting this study is provided in Appendix A. The primary aim of the document review is to provide an additional source of data to inform a rich description of the context of Arab Iraqi women’s narratives and gain a better understanding
of their experiences of the “war on terror”. A variety of document sources were identified and reviewed between the months of June 2011 – June 2013. An initial broad internet search was conducted to identify national and international grey literature, research reports conducted by government, non-governmental organizations, human rights organizations, and Iraqi women activists in the diaspora. Specifically, the search was focused on identifying background information on three main areas: 1) Iraqi women’s situation in Iraq since the 2003 Iraq Occupation; 2) Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers who fled Iraq after the 2003 Iraq Occupation; 3) Iraqi refugees in Canada and the Canadian government’s response to Iraqi refugees; 4) recent Canadian immigration and refugee reform policies and their general impacts on refugees seeking asylum in Canada, and their particular impacts on Iraqi refugee women living in Canada. A number of key websites and reports were identified through this process that served as valuable sources of information in helping me develop a better understanding of the context and conditions which had led to the displacement of millions of Iraqi refugees since the 2003 Iraq Occupation, the Iraqi refugee crisis in neighbouring countries, the response of the international community to this refugee crisis and the resettlement of some of these refugees to Western countries such as the US and Canada. I draw on these documents and information sources in various sections of the dissertation including the literature review, policy review, and my discussion of Iraqi women’s experiences not only to provide background and context, but to highlight the various discourses operating in the construction of their subjectivities in their everyday lives within the Canadian context.

**Key Informant Interviews**

Between February-March 2011, I conducted 7 semi-structured key informant interviews with service providers and community members with knowledge and experience in working with Iraqi refugees in Canada. The interviews were conducted in—person primarily at the interviewees’ workplaces. Interviews with community members were conducted in locations of their choice (one interview was conducted at a local coffee shop and another was done in the participant’s apartment. The interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. I recruited interview participants through an initial online search of settlement service providers with a mandate to serve newly arrived immigrants and refugees and provided services in Arabic. Initial contact was made over the phone providing a brief overview of the study and requesting service providers’ participation in an in-person interview. I also sought service providers’ assistance in recruiting Arab Iraqi
refugee women whom they had been working with. Additional information (introductory letter and consent form) were sent out over e-mail. Other key informants were identified through my professional contacts and referrals from other key informants whom I had interviewed. Of the seven key informants that I interviewed, four were of Iraqi origin and three were of none-Iraqi backgrounds. All were university graduates and two had post-graduate diplomas. The key informants ranged in age from early 30s to 50s, five were females and two were males with varying levels of experience in the field from 5-11 years of settlement service provision in the community. Three were currently employed as settlement workers. One was an immigration consultant and one was a college professor, both of whom had worked as settlement workers for several years prior to their current positions. Two of the key informants were community members who had considerable knowledge of the Iraqi community in Canada based on their volunteer work and community involvement.

In addition to the individual key informant interviews, I met with two groups of Iraqi women in the community. In both instances, I was invited to participate in these meetings by key informants whom I had initially contacted over the phone. One group consisted of five older Iraqi women (in their late 60s-early 70s) who had come to Canada in the late 80s-early 90s. Three of the women were Mandaean and two were Muslim. The women knew each other socially and got together on a regular basis for social, recreational activities. The other group of Iraqi women consisted of six Assyrian women and one service provider attending a Violence Against Women workshop conducted by the service provider who had invited me to attend the session. The women ranged in age from 20-60 years old and had been in Canada for varying lengths of time (most between 3-5 years). Both meetings took place between March-May 2011.

I will be discussing the issues and themes arising from these interviews in more details in the following chapters. However, a number of key observations are worth noting here as they may have influenced participant recruitment and participation. Although I only interviewed seven key informants, I initially contacted about twice as many potential participants. Some did not respond to my initial phone calls and e-mails inviting them to participate in the study. Of those I was able to reach, initially responded positively and asked for more information to be e-mailed to them. However, following receipt of the information, they did not respond to my follow up attempts. Two of the service providers whom I interviewed refused to be audio-recorded and specifically
asked that their agency and program not be named or mentioned in my report, for fear of potential consequences for their future government funding. This is despite the fact that I had already informed them that their participation and responses would remain confidential and one of their comments would be attributed to them. Moreover, one of these key informants refused to disclose her ethnic background as part of the demographic questionnaire and they both stated they do not engage in political discussions around the “war on terror” or Canadian government’s immigration policies. There seemed to be a sense of fear and lack of trust permeating in these interviews and preventing others from participating in this study altogether. As other researchers conducting studies with Muslim populations in the post 9/11 contexts have indicated (Barkdull et al., 2011; Rousseau and Jamil, 2010), this fear, lack of trust, and hesitation seemed to be directly related to the topic of the “war on terror” which was a central component to this study. As I will discuss later, depending on their history and positionality, some participants directly challenged my choice of the topic and questioned its relevance to Iraqi women while others silently avoided any engagement with it. Another important factor potentially impacting the recruitment and participation of service providers as key informants was the recent defunding of several social service and immigrant serving organizations by Stephen Harper’s conservative government. This defunding was partly motivated by federal government restructuring of settlement service provision. But more importantly, in some cases the defunding was ideologically driven aimed at control, curbing advocacy efforts, and silencing dissent as was the case with defunding the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF) in 2009. CAF was founded in 1967 and has been representing the interests of Arab Canadians with a focus of protecting their civil liberties and human rights as well as providing settlement services and language instruction to newcomers. In March 2009, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Jason Kenney, announced that he would cut federal funding to CAF accusing it of being anti-Semitic. CAF has been involved in advocacy and an active court case against the Federal government and Jason Kenney since its defunding was announced (Shakir, 2009).

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews formed a key component of data collection in this study. My initial intention was to conduct semi-structured interviews with a range of Arab Iraqi women who were born in Iraq and had come to Canada within the last 20 years (in 1991 or after). This time period was chosen due to the fact that the majority of Iraqi immigrants/refugees have come to Canada
after the 1991 Gulf war and the subsequent sanctions imposed on Iraq. The aim was to conduct 15-20 interviews, over a 6 month period, with study participants who met these criteria. However, there was some flexibility with the number of interviews to be conducted with Arab Iraqi women to account for possible limited number of women who would be willing to participate in this process. As other research studies conducted on similar topics relating to the “war on terror” have reported a high level of suspicion, fear, and lack of trust on the part of study participants due to the current political environment of surveillance, securitization, and anti-Arab/anti-Muslim sentiments prevalent post 9/11 (Baker, 2007; Rousseau & Jamil, 2008).

Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit Arab Iraqi women who met the criteria for participation in the study. My initial intention was to seek diverse representation (age, education, length of time in Canada, immigration and socio-economic status) to capture a range of experiences among Arab Iraqi women. I established initial contact with community service organizations, immigrant/refugee serving organizations, local Arab and Iraqi community associations, and advocacy groups working with or on behalf of Iraqi women to recruit participants. I had also intended to use snowball techniques to recruit further participants for the study. However, due to the fact that most participants in the study had come to Canada recently and did not have many community connections, they were unable to refer other participants with the exception of one participant who connected me with the group of older Iraqi women mentioned earlier.

Despite my attempts to recruit participants through a range of service providers, only two settlement organizations agreed to participate in key informant interviews and assist with participant recruitment. Although service providers at one of the organizations attempted to recruit participants from their client base, their attempts were unsuccessful due to language and cultural barriers that seemed to be at play between the service providers and the Iraqi refugee clients that they served. In addition, many of the Iraqi refugees served by this organization seemed to be living in areas that were far away from the downtown core where the agency was located so transportation may have been another barrier for participation.

In the end, all the women I interviewed were recruited from the same organization through the help of an Iraqi woman who was working as a settlement counselor there. I was referred to this
settlement counselor by another service provider whom I had interviewed. Upon my initial follow up call, she agreed to participate in a key informant interview and to help with participant recruitment but she suggested I interview the women in a nearby coffee shop since they did not have interview space that I could use to conduct the interviews in their agency. She also discouraged me from conducting the interviews at participants’ homes (she did not think they would be comfortable with this option) or inviting them to come to my office at the University since she believed this would deter them from participation. I hung up the phone with her after promising to send additional information about the study and following up later. But I felt in a bind as to accessing potential participants to interview. I did not think conducting interviews of this nature in a coffee shop would be appropriate and other alternatives seemed illusive. However, she followed up with me after reviewing my study information and offered to help by providing one of the meeting rooms as an interview space. Following my interview with her at her office, she offered to call some of her clients and ask if they would be interested in participating in the study. She contacted 10 of her clients, 9 of whom agreed to participate and scheduled interview times. I then followed up with a phone call one day prior to the interview, explained the purpose of the study and asked if they were still interested in participating and gave them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. They all agreed to participate in the study.

I conducted 9 interviews with Arab Iraqi refugee women over a two-month period in February – March 2011. Most of the interviews (eight of the nine) with these participants were conducted in the same community-based settlement organization where the women were accessing various services and had developed a trusting relationship with the Iraqi settlement counselor who was working with them. Participants’ informed consent was sought prior to conducting the interviews. The study consent form along with an information letter (see Appendix G) outlining the details of the study and its objectives, emphasizing anonymity and confidentiality of the shared information, and highlighting potential risks and benefits to participants were translated in Arabic, reviewed with each participant and a copy provided to each participant. Participants were also given the option of providing verbal consent if they did not feel comfortable providing written consent for safety or security reasons, verbal consent was sought out. All interviews were conducted in Arabic (with the exception of one participant who chose to do it in English due to her comfort level. However, Arabic phrases and expressions were interspersed at different points
through her interview). All participants provided written consent and seven of nine participants agreed to be audio-recorded. In situations where participants did not consent to audio-recording, detailed notes were taken during and immediately after the interview. All participants were provided a $30 honorarium and two subway tokens to compensate them for their time and transportation costs as they were all living on very limited incomes.

Questions from a demographic questionnaire were asked at the beginning of the interview following a brief introduction of myself highlighting my background, my interest in the study, and a brief overview of the study. Questions from the initial interview guide (Appendix D) were used as a general guide to the interview process. The socio-demographic questionnaire was used to identify participant characteristics such as age, gender, social status, children, education, ethnicity, language, religion, immigration status, length of time in Canada. This data provided further contextual information to the analysis of the narratives of Arab Iraqi women who participated in this study.

Study participants ranged in age between 24-62 years old. Eight of the nine women were married and five women had children of varying ages. Four of the women had university degrees, three had college diplomas, and two had a grade 8 education. Most of the women were unemployed with only one woman working full-time and one working part-time. One of the women had acquired Canadian citizenship while all others were permanent residents who had come to Canada as either government assisted refugees (GARs) or privately sponsored refugees within the last 2-3 years.

An initial interview guide (see Appendix D) was used to conduct the interviews. The preliminary interview guide was used flexibly to facilitate our conversation, primarily following the cues and issues brought up by the participants. Kvale’s (1996) interviewing guidelines informed the development of the guide and questions. Initial interview questions were based on concepts derived from the literature and the researcher’s personal and professional experiences working as a social worker in the mental health field. These initial questions were open-ended and descriptive to “elicit descriptions” and “less speculative explanations”. The interview guide was used flexibly to promote “spontaneous, lively, and unexpected answers from the participants” (Kvale, 1996). The guide also included a briefing section which informed the participants of the
purpose of the interview, to obtain consent to record, and to inform participants of confidentiality, guarantee anonymity, and offer them the opportunity to ask questions. Following the interview, a debriefing took place where the participants were given an opportunity to reflect on the interview process and ask questions. Field notes were used to document the researcher’s observations/reflections both prior to, and after the interviews in order to accurately represent the context for the interviews and highlight factors that might have influenced them. Field notes provide immediate impressions, based on the interviewer’s empathic access to the meanings communicated and provide a valuable context for the later analysis of transcripts (Kvale, 1996).

Community Observation

In the process of developing my research design, I was mindful of the context of surveillance and securitization of Arab and Muslim communities and felt very uneasy about using participatory community observation and how it might be perceived by the study participants. At the same time as I was aware of my own precarious status as a racialized researcher studying this topic, I was aware of the potential of this study to victimize these women further by the way in which their stories are presented and read by various audiences. While I recognized the potential richness that participant observation could provide, I decided against using it in this study in order to facilitate a less threatening, more trusting relationship with the participants.

Field observation of relevant community events (e.g. community forums, seminars/conferences), and relevant websites (e.g. Aljazeera, Organization for Iraqi Women’s Freedom, Act Together) were carried out in order to gain a dynamic understanding of issues affecting Iraqi refugee women in Canada, the Iraqi community and its local sociopolitical context. Although in keeping with ethnographic methods conducting participant observation would have been an ideal method to gain an in-depth understanding of everyday experiences of Arab Iraqi women in Toronto, it was deemed that this method may not be appropriate due to community concerns and mistrust within the post 9/11 context of heightened securitization and surveillance.

I attended several community events over about a 2.5 year period from October 2011 - May 2013. These events included a) 8 community forums relating to the “war on terror” discussing various policies and related issues and exploring their impacts in the community; b) 8 community forums
and a one day conference, focusing on recent immigration and refugee policy reforms; c) 2 community events relating to Arab and Muslim women within the Canadian policy context.

Field Notes

Field notes on observations and personal reflections during the interviews and community events formed part a key component of my data collection. I took detailed notes on my observations, key issues discussed at the events, and my thoughts, feelings, and reactions during and following these events. The field notes were entered into a database that was set up at the outset of the study using NVIVO 9 qualitative data analysis software. The database was used to track and organize data; facilitate easy retrieval; and increase the reliability of the study. Using NVIVO, separate electronic files were created (and stored on a password protected computer) for each participant and each community event to capture the content as well as the local context of events and interviews. These notes were then used to inform the analysis and provide a rich understanding of the context of the events and interviews.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection throughout the different phases of the study (Riessman, 2008). Audio-recorded interviews along with interview and field notes were uploaded into a password protected computer. Thematic analysis was used to code and analyze the data. The three overarching categories of themes included historical trauma, structural violence, and citizenship and belonging. Field notes were also analyzed to help clarify themes and establish the contextual dimensions of interviews and observations (Denham, 2008). My approach to the analysis recognized participants as producers of context-specific knowledge, paying attention not only to their stories, but also to the ways in which they “bring larger societal concerns to the fore in subtle and less subtle ways” (Dossa, 2009, p. 8).

Since most of the interviews were conducted in Arabic, a first language for myself and the Iraqi refugee women I interview, it introduced a number of opportunities and challenges during data analysis. Immediately following each interview I jotted down my thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the interview and noted the key themes and issues that were brought up during the interview. I developed some initial thematic codes that were based on my knowledge and understanding of issues arising from my review of the literature, document reviews, and
community observations. I then identified additional themes and sub-themes arising from the interviews with the participants. I was interested in staying close to the stories and narratives of each of the women and their meaning-making processes, therefore I decided not to have the interviews transcribed and translated into English. This meant that the interview transcription and analysis was a complex and time consuming process since I was listening to the interviews in Arabic and simultaneously analyzing the data and transcribing the relevant portions directly into English. I listened to each interview several times and identified key issues and themes coming out of each interview. Although this was a complicated and time consuming process, it was an extremely valuable process in helping preserve the integrity of each of the stories and helping me stay as close to the narratives and understand their meanings in the original language they were communicated in. This was particularly important when specific idioms and cultural expressions were used when talking about difficult traumatic experiences of war, displacement and forced migration. In some instances there is no English equivalent for these expressions, I have retained the original expression and spelled it out phonetically in English and tried to convey the meaning as closely as possible by providing a cultural interpretation.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the study including: 1) systematic data management through the use of NVIVO and the creation of the research database to track and organize data and increase reliability; 2) multiple sources of data were used to contextualize and gain in-depth understanding of Arab Iraqi women’s experiences; 3) detailed descriptions of data are provided using direct quotes and excerpts from transcripts of audio-recorded interviews to increase the validity of the study; 4) field notes and memos were used to provide detailed contextual description of data; 5) regular debriefing with members of the dissertation committee also enhanced the credibility of the data collected while simultaneously provided feedback and support to the researcher; 7) reflexivity and reflexive journaling were also used to enhance my awareness of my own positionality and how it influenced the local context of the interviews, and contributed to the co-construction of Iraqi women’s stories.
Potential Limitations of the Study

There are a number of potential limitations in this study. As mentioned earlier, issues of fear, mistrust, concerns around safety and security may have prevented Arab Iraqi women from participating in the study. Women who agreed to participate in the study may have been hesitant to share their personal experiences with me as the researcher. To this end, various strategies were used to establish trust and develop a sense of safety during the interview. Having a shared language, cultural heritage and historical experiences and conducting the interviews in Arabic were facilitating factors that helped create a sense of comfort. Participants were also informed of the risks and benefits and were provided with choices with respect to audio-recording and providing verbal versus written consent.

As mentioned earlier, language considerations may have introduced further limitations to the analysis since the interviews were conducted in Arabic and transcribed primarily in English, it was difficult to capture the specific nuances of words and language used by participants. In instances where this was an issue, Arabic words were used in quotations with an explanation provided in English to convey their meaning to the extent possible.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics

Ethical considerations must be incorporated in our attempts for rigor in qualitative research. To this end, participants’ informed (written or verbal) consent to participate in the study was sought while assuring them of confidentiality and protecting their anonymity (see information letter and consent forms in Appendices F & G). Attempts were made to minimize risks and maximize benefits to participants. Participants were provided with an overview of the study, its goals and objectives, and right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time. The risks and benefits of participating in the study were also discussed with participants. Ethics approval was also obtained from the University of Toronto, Office of Research Ethics, prior to conducting the study.
Potential Risks to Participants

Participants in the study had directly experienced traumatic events associated with the wars and occupation in Iraq, multiple losses and displacement in refugee camps prior to coming to Canada, and most were experiencing ongoing difficult experiences and challenges here in Canada. It is important to recognize that participants had diverse experiences and different reactions to these experiences. Discussing personal lived experiences of the “war on terror” and the Iraq occupation may be liberating and transformative for some participants, and emotionally overwhelming and traumatic for others. In situations where participants experienced emotional difficulties, I drew on my clinical counseling skills in providing a safe supportive environment for the participants to share their experiences during the interview. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide feedback and process their reactions at the end of the interview. Although participants shared some very difficult experiences and some cried and displayed difficult emotional reactions during the interview, these reactions were completely understandable and appropriate to the circumstances. Participants were able to clearly articulate and manage their emotional reactions and displayed their incredible strength and determination to carry on as they had done many times in the past as will become evident in recounting some of these stories in the following chapter.
Chapter 4 : Contextualizing the Study

This chapter is divided into two parts contextualizing the study. The first part provides a brief historical sketch of Iraq with a particular focus on state policies that have impacted Iraqi women’s status and citizenship over the past 35 years, during periods of war, economic sanctions, and occupation, beginning with the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the 1991 Gulf War, the United Nations imposed economic sanctions against Iraq (1990-2003), and the 2003 U.S.-U.K. Occupation of Iraq up to the present. The primary focus will be on examining the gendered impacts of these events on Iraqi women. I also draw on excerpts from my interviews with Iraqi refugee women participating in this study to illustrate these impacts with particular examples. This brief historical overview contextualizes Iraqi women’s historical and contemporary colonial trauma while highlighting the interconnected and intersecting links between the various forces of imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy and fundamentalist religious forces in their lives. The second part of the chapter focuses on the Canadian policy context reviewing Canada’s anti-terrorism measures as well as immigration, refugee, and citizenship policies enacted in recent years within the post 9/11 context and informed by ideologies of the “war on terror”, securitization, and border controls. This section focuses on situating Canada’s “war on terror” through a review of Canada’s anti-terrorism measures and involvement in Afghan and Iraq wars. The discussion in this chapter explores the role of state policies in creating and maintaining the racialized gendered violence that contributes to their historical and contemporary transnational trauma.

Iraq – A Historical Sketch

Iraq’s recent history of wars, sanctions, and occupation over the past 35 years have significantly altered Iraq’s political, social, economic, and civil infrastructure and have had serious and devastating consequences for Iraqi society as a whole and for women and children in particular. In addition to the destruction of Iraq’s civil infrastructures, hundreds of thousands of direct civilian deaths; rise in child mortality, poverty, illiteracy, gender-based violence, and mass displacement have been among these devastating consequences. A detailed historical overview of the social, political, and economic forces influencing Iraqi women’s status is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, I provide a brief overview of Iraqi women’s status since 1948 until the
start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. I then present an overview of Iraq’s recent history over the past 35 years, focusing on the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988); Gulf War (1991); the United Nations Imposed Economic Sanctions against Iraq (1990-2003); the 2003 Iraq Occupation and discuss their impacts on Iraqi women. Through this brief historical overview, I aim to contextualize Iraqi refugee women’s particular experiences of historical and contemporary trauma and shed light on their meanings and understandings of the “war on terror” that is the main focus of the study. Figure 1 below provides a summary of this historical sketch highlighting Iraqi women’s shifting status and changing societal gender relations as a function of different state policies implemented within the context of Western imperialist interventions, state patriarchal institutions, traditional and religious fundamentalist forces during each phase.

Figure 1 – Iraq Historical Sketch
Women and State in Iraq (1948 – 1979)

The period post 1945 in Iraq was a period of rapid population growth and significant societal shifts in the traditional patriarchal family through the growing importance of oil, strategic Western interests, and the introduction of a series of reforms favorable to women’s involvement in the public sphere, particularly with respect to their involvement in education and employment (Kiddie, 2007). The nationalization of Iraq’s oil contributed to economic and demographic expansion through reduced infant mortality and significant increase in literacy rates and labour force participation (Abdullah, 2011; Al-Khalil, 1989). The influence of international forces and gender reforms has been contradictory for women (Kiddie, 2007). Western support for gender reforms has been accompanied by their support of authoritarian governments including financial support. Islamist and conservative nationalist forces on the other hand, have been opposed to gender reforms on the grounds that these reforms are part of the imperialist plot to undermine Muslim countries and cultures (Kiddie, 2007). As will be discussed, these contradictory tensions can be observed throughout Iraq’s recent history.

Iraqi women have been active participants in the public sphere since the late 19th century when they struggled to establish the first women’s Grammar and High School in Iraq in 1899, followed by the establishment of two other schools for women in 1911 and 1913. Ironically, British occupiers in 1918 discouraged further development of schools for girls in Iraq arguing that “the people are fanatic and do not want to send their daughters to school” (Daud, 1958 cited in Ismael & Ismael, 2000). However, despite British and Islamist opposition, Iraqi women’s involvement in the public sphere continued through the establishment of women’s associations, and expanded internationally through their participation in regional and international conferences since the 1930s (Ismael & Ismael, 2000).

A military-led revolution in 1958 toppled the monarchy in Iraq and was followed by the establishment of the left-oriented government of Abdul Kareem Qasim who instituted a major gender-egalitarian reform of family law in 1959. The personal status courts under the 1959 law replaced the Shari’a courts. Qasim’s government was overthrown in a 1963 Ba’th Party coup under which, the new government of Abdul Salem Aref caved under religious pressure and restored the inheritance rules and a few other features of the pre-reform law. However, the key
features of the 1959 remained operative and further reforms were added following another Ba’th coup in 1968, and in the 1970s and 1980s due to a period of economic growth and the government’s need for women’s labour force participation (Ismael & Ismael, 2000).

Iraq’s modernization campaign under the Ba’th regime was pursued from the 1960s until the start of Iran-Iraq war when militarization became the central focus of the government. The modernization campaign included increased access to education, free quality health care to all citizens (in rural and urban areas), and job creation in state-controlled public sector, with a legislated minimum wage, old age and disability compensation, retirement and descendants’ pension plan (Ismael, 2004). The Ba’th regime also adopted a strategy to undermine Iraq’s traditional kinship structure by focusing on women’s involvement in the public sphere through education, work, unionization, and women’s associations. In 1977/78 female enrollment in primary education was 37.4%, 29.6% in secondary education, and 31% in university and other post-secondary education. Women’s employment proportion in government bodies was 15.4% in 1977 (Ismael, 2004).

The Ba’th party’s state-created public sector created a large middle class dependent on the existence of the state and whose social mobility was dependent on education and membership in the Ba’ath Party (Ismael, 2004). State control of the media and suppression of opposition parties also solidified the state’s authoritarian rule, commonly referred to as the “Republic of Fear” in Iraq (Al-Khalil, 1989). As part of this program, the Ba’th Party dismantled most independent women’s organizations which existed prior to 1968 and established the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW) in 1972 to help implement state policies, legal reforms, and lobby for further reforms in the personal status code. The Iraqi Provisional Constitution of 1970 declared all citizens equal before the law and adopted an education law making primary education mandatory for both sexes. Saddam Hussein came to power in 1979 and despite the general political repression under his rule he generally maintained a more progressive approach to women’s rights motivated by his desire to subordinate traditional tribal and religious forces (Kiddie, 2007). A 1979 law required all illiterate persons to attend literacy classes while labour and employment laws provided women equal opportunities in civil services, maternity benefits, and freedom from harassment in the workplace (Ismael & Ismael, 2000; Zangana, 2007). As a result of Iraqi women’s ongoing involvement in the public sphere and these gender-egalitarian
reforms, Iraqi women were among the most educated in the whole region and were active at all levels of state institutions (Al-Ali, 2005; Zangana, 2007).

Iran-Iraq War (1980 – 1988)

A history of state tension has always existed between Iran and Iraq since the establishment of the State of Iraq and the intervention of British colonial policy which created artificial borders in a region that had historically had a shared social, geographic, and cultural heritage. During the Pahlavi era, these tensions were also related to one state (Iran) being the puppet of the US imperialism and the other state (Iraq) being in the hands of the Soviet Social Imperialism (Mojab, 2013, Personal Communication). Saddam Hussein as well as the Islamic government of Iran both came to power in 1979. The newly established Islamic government in Iran was seen as a major threat to Saddam’s regime and to the rest of the Arab countries in the Gulf who feared the rhetoric of the expanding Islamic revolution to the rest of the region. Saddam Hussein initiated the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980, a war which lasted for eight years and was the longest war of the twentieth century with over a million lives lost.

During the war, Saddam was supported by the United States and by other Arab Gulf states. Saddam’s government was supplied chemical weapons by the U.S. which were used against Iranians throughout the Iran-Iraq war and against the Kurdish population during the Anfal campaign in Halabja in 1988 following a series of genocidal campaigns against the Kurds in Iraq. In addition to his genocidal campaign against the Kurds, Saddam engaged in a targeted campaign against the Shi’a population in the South. This campaign included the detention and forced expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Shi’a Iraqis of Iranian origin to Iran. A large proportion of the deportees were women and children as many of the men were among the disappeared. Saddam’s regime also offered financial rewards to Iraqi men married to Iraqi women of “Iranian nationality” to divorce their wives or send them back to Iran. Many Shi’a Iraqis forcefully deported to Iran continue to exist on the fringes of Iranian society (Ismael & Ismael, 2000).

Iraqi women’s social and economic conditions changed drastically during the war years of the 1980s. With men being deployed in large numbers to fight the war, women took on the vast majority of jobs outside the home while also maintaining their households and raising their
children. They were also called upon to fulfill their patriotic duty and produce more children for the nation to support the war effort. In order to facilitate this mission, Saddam’s regime prohibited selling of contraceptives at that time (Al-Ali, 2007; Zangana, 2007). In response to mounting human costs and the huge number of widows, the government of Saddam provided benefits and monthly pensions to families of war heroes. But over the long years of war, these benefits were reduced significantly (Zangana, 2007). In addition to their general victimization, Saddam’s regime introduced other indignant public policy measures targeting women and children of war deserters by ordering their detention and offering special grants to men to marry war widows: “For marrying a woman with a middle-school certificate a man received a grant of 200 dinars, for a high-school graduate 300 dinars and for a university graduate 500 dinars” (Omar, 1994, cited in Ismael and Ismael, 2000). While women carried the Iraqi society forward during the war years, they were encouraged to leave their jobs and return to work at home in order to free the jobs for returning soldiers at the end of the war in 1988.


Iraqi women’s social and economic conditions continued to deteriorate significantly following the 1991 Gulf war and thirteen years of comprehensive economic sanctions against Iraq from 1990 – 2003 (Al-Ali, 2005; Ismael & Ismael, 2000). Saddam Hussein’s incursion into Kuwait in August 1990 triggered the imposition of UN economic sanctions against Iraq and the start of the Gulf war in 1991, led by the United States and its international allies, which was presumably aimed at the liberation of Kuwait. The Gulf war and sanctions had devastating impacts on Iraqi civilians, particularly on women and children who bore their social, economic, political, and health consequences throughout the 1990s and up to the present. The massive air bombardments of Iraq and the use of more than one hundred thousand tons of explosives amounted to the destruction of Iraq’s civil infrastructure, and an estimated one hundred thousand civilians killed in addition to an estimated range of 70,000 – 200,000 Iraqi soldiers killed in the attacks (Ismael & Ismael, 2000).

The actual number of civilians killed as a consequence of the Gulf war and the imposition of the most comprehensive economic sanctions regime over a thirteen year period is estimated to be much higher than the official numbers indicate. The war and sanctions resulted in the massive deterioration of basic civil infrastructures in the country including water, sanitation, and
electricity contributing to increased child mortality, a huge rise in malnutrition, leukemia, and other forms of cancer, epidemic diseases, and birth defects due to the use of depleted uranium by the United States and United Kingdom during the 1991 bombardments and the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Zangana, 2007). Moreover, the psychological distress and trauma of the Gulf war, the rising death tolls and disease, along with the ongoing hardships of everyday life in Iraq has been inescapable for all Iraqis, particularly for women and children. Several studies have documented the increase in psychological trauma, anxiety disorders, insomnia, and depression among women and children following the Gulf war bombardments in Iraq (Al-Ali, 2005; Ismael, 2004; Zangana, 2007). The devastating impacts of the sanctions on Iraqi civilians have also been well documented in various periodic reports of the UN, UNESCO, the WHO, and other human rights groups and NGOs (For a more detailed overview of these reports and impacts of sanctions please refer to Ismael & Ismael, 2000 and Ismael, 2004).

In addition to contributing to massive deaths and severe destruction, the international community has been complicit in strengthening and solidifying Saddam Hussein’s active and violent suppression of civil uprisings in Iraq after the Gulf war. Saddam Hussein’s genocidal campaigns against the Marsh Arabs of Southern Iraq and the Anfal campaign against the Kurdish Northern area were conducted under the monitoring and watchful eyes of the United States and its international allies who encouraged the mass uprisings against Saddam only to abandon them to his murderous campaigns (Falk, 1994; UNESCO 1993; U.S. Department of State 1997). As Ismael and Ismael (2000) conclude, the supranational nature of modern patriarchy, characterized by the geopolitics of militarization and the racialized gendered power dynamics with Western states asserting dominance and control over less developed subordinated states in the East, dramatically escalated the human toll of domestic oppression in Iraq in the 1990s through the war and sanctions. This is illustrated through the maintenance of the sanctions regime and the implementation of 27 UN Security Council resolutions, 13 of which reaffirmed “the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Iraq”, 4 were based on the condemnation of Iraq’s noncompliance with weapons inspections, 8 resolutions focused on the humanitarian disasters which unfolded after the Gulf war, and only one resolution (688) addressing human rights and one resolution indirectly and tangentially condemning the repression of Iraq’s civilian population (Ismael & Ismael, 2000).
Although the Gulf war and sanctions affected Iraqi society as a whole, women were again left with the responsibility to compensate for the lack of infrastructure and carry their families through the various calamities that ensued. This was particularly the case for poor and low-income women in urban and rural areas who struggled for survival against malnutrition, disease, and child mortality. As Al-Ali (2005 & 2007) indicates, the wars and sanctions have had differential impacts on Iraqi women based on a number of differentiating factors including place of residence, ethnic or religious background, and most importantly, social class. In the context of generalized impoverishment, high unemployment, food, water, and electricity shortages, women have had to rely on food rations and resort to more time consuming traditional household activities such as baking their own bread. Increased poverty and the breakdown of the welfare state have forced many women into more traditional gender roles of mothers and housewives. The economic hardships and rise in the number of widows and female-headed households have also resulted in a rise in prostitution for daily survival. Widespread unemployment, high inflation and generalized impoverishment have affected most Iraqi families, 60% of Iraq’s population was dependent on food rations during the sanctions. However, while most people suffered from impoverishment during the sanctions, a new class of war profiteers with close ties to the regime, emerged who mainly thrived on the black market economy and smuggling goods across the borders. These were indicative of other changes in family and social relations in Iraqi society including lack of trust and changes in cultural codes and moral values such as loss of honesty and a rise in corruption and greed (Al-Ali, 2005).

In addition to their struggle for daily survival, Iraqi women were faced with the shifts towards more conservative gender relations and ideologies in the social and cultural fabric of Iraqi society. Many girls and young women were pulled out of schools and there was a steady increase in illiteracy rates going up from 8% in 1985 to 45% in 1995. The economic crisis, high unemployment, and the elimination of previously available supports such as child care and free transportation to work, have pushed many women to return to the home simply because they could no longer afford to go to work. Young women and girls also were faced with increased social conservatism as demonstrated by the changing dress code and being pressured to wear the hijab or Abaya, higher emphasis on preserving their reputation and family honour, and marriage at an earlier age (Al-Ali, 2005; Ismael, 2004). The move towards more conservative moral values and religious fundamentalism is motivated by several factors including people’s desire to...
separate themselves from Western cultural values of their oppressors, and to protect their family honour and reputation in the face of increasing prostitution in the country (Al-Ali, 2005; Ismael, 2004). Moreover, in the post 1991 Gulf war and subsequent UN sanctions Saddam’s regime also shifted its attitude towards religion and tribes in an attempt to solidify its power base and exercise further social control. This shift was particularly harmful to women’s status as the regime instituted more conservative patriarchal policies to appease tribal chiefs and religious leaders. For example, in 1990 the penalty for “honor killing” was reduced from eight years to a maximum of six months. And in 1993 Saddam reversed his prior decree and introduced a new one allowing men to marry multiple wives without the first wife’s consent. These decrees along with additional laws and decrees significantly weakened women’s position in the labor code, criminal justice, and personal status while strengthening tribal jurisdiction over civil and personal matters (Kiddie, 2007). As Ismael and Ismael (2000) argue, Iraqi women are members of two political systems of patriarchy: national patriarchy that is itself subordinate to international patriarchy of state relations. Iraqi women’s citizenship is a function of both their state in Iraq and the general state of Iraq (Ismael & Ismael, 2000). As such, we have seen the deterioration in all aspects of Iraqi women’s rights and social citizenship (education, employment, income, and family and gender relations) in the post-Gulf war and sanctions regime in Iraq.

2003 Iraq Occupation

The Iran-Iraq war, followed by the dismantling of Iraq’s basic infrastructure post-Gulf war and sanctions set the stage for the further deterioration of Iraqi women’s status post 2003 Iraq Occupation. On March 19, 2003 George W. Bush announced the invasion of Iraq by U.S.- U.K. coalition forces under the pretenses of the need to remove Saddam Hussein from power and destroy the regime’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The announcement came after months of deliberations at the UN and mass international opposition to the invasion. And despite the fact that UN weapons inspectors had searched Iraq for four months and had not found any evidence of their existence. Since the case of WMD was not too strong, the U.S. offered other justifications including Saddam’s links to Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, and the promise of freedom, democracy, and ‘liberation’ of the Iraqi people from Saddam’s tyranny (Al-Ali, 2007).
As part of the build up for the war and garnering support for its justification the U.S. administration worked with groups of Iraqi-American diaspora women, featuring their stories of oppression under Saddam’s dictatorship in order to make the humanitarian case for the invasion and make these colonial feminists “the female face of the invasion” (Zangana, 2007, p. 85):

A month before the invasion, in February 2003, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD) brought together 50 Iraqi women (most of them US citizens) to establish Women for a Free Iraq (WFFI) a sister organization of the IAJ. It was also funded by the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq (CLI). The Bush administration rapidly embraced the new organization. WFFI was baptized at a meeting attended by VP Dick Cheney, National security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, and Ambassador at Large for a Free Iraq Zalmay Khalid. At the meeting, the Iraqi women shared their experiences under Saddam's reign of terror.

However, in their attempt to make the case for the war, the U.S. – U.K. administrations selectively forgot to mention their long-term alliance with Saddam Hussein, particularly throughout the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war when they supplied him with the chemical weapons which he freely used against the Iranians and in his genocidal campaign against the Kurdish population in Iraq (Zangana, 2007, p. 69-70).

Shortly after President George W. Bush announced ‘victory’ and the end of combat operations in May 2003, the country descended into a state of chaos and lawlessness because of lack of planning and the failure of the coalition occupying forces to protect the security of the country and its resources (Al-Ali, 2007; Zangana, 2007). After the initial show of “Shock” and “Awe” of heavy bombardment of Baghdad, the world watched the looting of Iraq’s Museums, the theft and pillaging of its historic antiquities among other national resources was allowed to take place with no intervention and perhaps some facilitation by coalition forces occupying the country (Al-Ali, 2007; Zangana, 2007).

Ten years after the initial invasion of Iraq, the numbers of direct war deaths are estimated at 189,000 with 134,000 of those being Iraqi civilians. This number could be considerably higher once more accurate counts are conducted. Moreover, approximately 2.8 million people remain either displaced living in deplorable conditions in camps inside Iraq or in neighbouring countries,
Figure 2 below provides a map of Iraqi dislocation as documented by UNHCR in 2008.

**Figure 2 – Map of Iraq – Iraqi Dislocation (UNHCR, 2008)**

In addition to the direct deaths of thousands of Iraqis following the initial bombardments, the further destruction of Iraq’s already crumbling infrastructure resulted in extremely difficult living conditions with no electricity, clean water, and lack of sanitation. Conditions which have worsened environmental degradation, further deteriorated the health care system, and increased the incidents of various preventable diseases, chronic health conditions, severe malnutrition, and rising child mortality (Al-Ali, 2007 and 2013; IBC, 2013; costofwar.org, 2013).

The initial chaos and lawlessness became a stable feature of post-2003 Iraq Occupation, and have worsened considerably over the past several years and has resulted into hundreds of thousands of deaths from explosions, direct assaults, killings and kidnappings by a variety of militia groups and criminal gangs that mushroomed across the country, in addition to direct killings, assaults and abuses carried out at check points and raids conducted by coalition
occupying forces. Although the U.S.-U.K. forces were deployed from Iraq at the end of 2011, the violence continues to rage in Iraq, with Iraq Body Count (IBC) recording 4,570 deaths from violence in 2012 up from 4,147 in 2011 (Al-Ali, 2007; Zangana, 2007; IBC, 2013; costsofwar.org, 2013).

The general chaos and lack of security later extended into sectarian violence and targeted kidnappings, assaults and killings of specific groups of people including ethnic-religious minorities, professionals, and women. Some of the kidnappings and assaults were carried out by various criminal gangs demanding ransoms from their victims’ families, while others were increasingly sectarian in nature, specifically targeting members of different ethno-religious groups. The sectarian divisions and the move towards more conservative social values and gender-relations which were promoted by Saddam’s regime beginning in the 1980s and worsened under the sanctions regime in the 1990s, now took on a stronger hold with violent dimensions under conditions of general lack of security and chaos. Some of these factions and militia groups were actually created and supported by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in their attempts to appease the different groups and introduce some sense of security in different neighbourhoods (Zangana, 2007).

Samar describes her reaction to the fundamental changes in Iraqi society that ensued after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and reflects on its impact on their lives. She also makes reference to the notion of “freedom” that this war was to bring to Iraqi society and reflects on the fact that it delivered chaos, lack of security, and caused the regression of Iraqi society in so many arenas, particularly with respect to women and gender relations:

The suffering began as a fundamental change, as a life with no security. The society became one with no government, no security. We were hoping that it would be a society that has more stability and freedom, the meaning of freedom to be better understood. But to the contrary, it became chaotic and insecure because for many years, we were deprived of freedom under the leadership of the previous president, Saddam. We wished the freedom to come back to us but it came back in the form of "ashwaeiyeh" (chaos). So freedom hurt rather than benefited us, it was chaos. Freedom as chaos! And chaos is destructive to society as a whole, that's a natural thing. So we could say that was the start of our suffering, the lack of stability and lack of security. For those who had daughters in university, especially for those who did not wear the hijab, so society began to regress instead of becoming more progressive. The fears began, and lots of issues developed. So religion, instead of being something that contributes to peace and security, it became a source of "athieyeh" (trouble) and suffering for us. So the main thing is that our suffering
goes back to 2006, I really became scared for my daughters. We ended up moving to Syria in 2006. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Samar makes an important observation that religion was used as a basis of violence and became a source of suffering for people, particularly for women and religious minorities who became the targets of this suffering. Despite the fact that Samar and her family were not Muslim, she and her daughters had to start wearing the hijab for their own safety:

...as you know Iraq became chaotic and there was kidnapping and killing, and whoever had any "heghed" (grudge), so everything got mixed up in the name of religion. So we say they are "motadarifin" (extremists) because Islam invites to peace. So there was a radicalization of religion for us. We were not Muslim but we had to start wearing the hijab because it became kind of mandatory. My daughter for instance, was threatened in university. She was told, you either convert to Islam or we will kill you or kidnap you. So as I told you, freedom became unusual chaos. So you would wish to remain in a restricted life with no freedom, it's better than a life with chaos and no security. So the suffering remains in Iraq, the lack of security, I would say security and peace are the most important things in the world and that's what we missed in our country. So we had to leave to Syria. We left everything, I mean, our home, our car, everything. We said the most important thing is to get out from Iraq in safety. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

The general conditions of lack of safety and security particularly impacted women and children as it severely restricted their ability to freely participate in social and public life. Women became subjected to gender-based violence from a variety of sources and in multiple ways. One of the more obvious signs of the changing social values to more conservative Islamist ideologies is the changing dress code for women (Al-Ali, 2007). Women were increasingly targeted and pushed to start wearing the hijab, dress more conservatively, and stay at home. For some women and girls, the pressure came from their families, husbands, fathers, and brothers who were more concerned for their safety and for protecting their family reputation and honour. Previously more progressive husbands and fathers began demanding women in their family to start wearing the hijab. This move towards more conservative gender relations was also observed among Christian families who held similar attitudes towards family reputation, honour, and concerns around marriage prospects for their daughters (Al-Ali, 2007; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2006).

Professional working women and university students were particularly targeted and threatened with kidnappings and assaults if they did not wear the hijab or convert to Islam if they were Christian. In many cases professional women working in hospitals, universities, and other public
institutions or government Ministries were actually kidnapped and killed, not just for not wearing the hijab but simply for working. Many women and girls quit school and work and became confined to their homes. They would only venture out if accompanied by a male escort. Since 2003 there has been a significant drop in school and university attendance as well as labour force participation along with a huge increase in illiteracy rates among women and girls in Iraq (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2006 and 2011).

Sundus illustrates the impact of the rise in sectarian and gender-based violence on her life and the lives of those around her. Sundus as with many other Iraqi refugee women who left Iraq after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq cites the rise in sectarian and gender-based violence as the primary reason that led to her and her family leaving Iraq. Sundus was a young professional who felt the immediate effects of the lack of security on a daily basis when she went to work:

...in Iraq, they can tell the tribe and family from the names so it was known that my family name was a Sunni name....aahh...so I was an employee there and when I entered...so imagine when I enter as an employee...the [centre] belonged to the Sadri tribe or something, it was Shi’a....I mean I am Sunni, so I’m telling you about my experience and what happened to me. It may be different for others that go there. So they could tell from my ID card that I am Sunni....they would talk to me begrudgingly or look at me. So I used to be afraid, you know...because I was afraid that they may do something to me. I mean a lot of people used to enter through the [centre] and they would not exit through the [centre]...really, these are doctors...many doctors...may be these instances have been documented by the UN or others...the UN has documented these things...that many incidents happened in this way. Sometimes I mean someone would be with me in the office, a driver or someone who had come with me, I would need an intermediary to be able to get out. So we already used to gather monthly stats on employees...so we had to go to the [centre] to present these stats. So then after that, they began to get young men to go. I wouldn't go. There was a young Christian man with me who was kidnapped....and when he got back...his family sent him out of the country right away and they left their home as is and travelled. I mean they all left...so I'm telling you there were a lot of circumstances where you had to wear the hijab. I mean in certain circumstances, you don't fight with it, to assert yourself. I mean as strong as you may be, they could just pick up a gun and pull the trigger so who are you asserting yourself against? I mean these are people who the sight of blood for them is a natural thing. They have no problem with it. You know how? (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Sundus elaborates on how the sectarian violence and the rise in religious fundamentalism and gender-based violence fundamentally changed the fabric of Iraqi society and attributes these changes to external elements that entered the country after the 2003 war. Sundus also reflects on
the gendered impacts of these changes on Iraqi women’s status through the years since the Iran-Iraq war and the 1991 Gulf war:

Aaahh...I mean the most important thing that happened...I mean we put up with everything except for when the sectarian things began...this was the breaking point...the sectarian issues and the fundamentalism that began....I mean this......I mean fundamentalism affected everyone, but particularly for women. Because the Iraqi woman is the one who carried them in the 80s and 90s let's say...the young men were at the war front so the woman was the worker. Any government office you went to, you would see in any government department, you would find women working. The woman was the one who carried them. She was the one who maintained families and raised children and the like...the Iraqi woman, it was the woman. Then in the 90s...sorry in the 2000s...the rhetoric of religion entered...I mean we all know this is not religion, this is a distortion of religion....aahh...yes, so there were wars against us, then the sectarianism too...the sectarianism gets to you and this was a big problem, between the Sunnis and Shi'as, between Shi'a and Christians...because Iraqi society is a mixed society. All my life, my uncles on my mom's side are Shi'a and my uncles on my father's side are Sunni. We don't differentiate between the two, we respect these, and we respect those. I mean I'm not going to pick up a gun tomorrow and kill my uncle because I'm Sunni, or my cousin would pick up a gun and kill me because I'm Sunni. There is no such thing...and society, especially in Baghdad, there is no such a thing. The interfering elements that came I don't know from where...the strange characters that came our way...they don't even look Iraqi. I mean, indeed, they don't look Iraqi. We're Iraqis and we know...neither their looks, nor their accents, nor their principles, nor their thoughts, are Iraqi at all. (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

As in other wars and conflict situations around the world, women’s bodies become the battle ground for the different warring sides asserting their dominance, control, and inflicting humiliation and dishonor not only on the women, but on their families and communities. Women in Iraq have experienced not only a huge rise in sexual assaults, rape, and torture, but have also been forced into or sold into prostitution, and the number of honour killings have sky rocketed since 2003 (Al-Ali, 2007; OWFI, 2008).

Iraqi women have experienced rapes and sexual assaults by criminal gangs, Islamic militias, police, and occupation forces alike. They are kidnapped and gang raped, they experience sexual assaults and abuses at check points, in prisons, and even in their own homes. There have been several high profile cases of rape, torture, and abuse of Iraqi women by occupying soldiers publicized in the media, and many more that have gone unreported (Al-Ali, 2007, Zangana, 2007). If the women are released from prison or are freed from their kidnapping ordeal, they often become victims of “honour” killings at the hands of their relatives (Zangana, 2007).
Prostitution and sex-trafficking that were on the rise during the economic sanctions are now much higher than ever before, due to higher levels of poverty, higher number of widows and female-headed households, loss of previously available government supports, welfare provisions, and the loss of extended family support networks (Al-Ali, 2007; Al-Ali & Pratt, 2006 and 2011).

As Al-Ali (2007) and Zangana (2007) have shown, despite the lack of security and the deterioration in their social and economic status, Iraqi women have demonstrated that they are not passive victims of their difficult circumstances. Many independent Iraqi professional women and organizations have been active in trying to intervene in the humanitarian crisis that they see unfolding before their eyes. They have been active in a range of different activities to help the many impoverished widows and orphans living in poverty with no formal supports, by offering basic necessities such as food, clothing, and medicine; providing their professional services for free; offering training and workshops; and creating income generating initiatives. Other women have been active in advocacy efforts and political activism addressing women’s human rights abuses, honour killings and domestic violence, as well as establishing shelters and support networks for abused women. Often at great risks for themselves as they become the targets of violence, and with no formal recognition of their organizations and NGOs and no funding supports from governments or international organizations. In fact, they often face active opposition and attacks on their offices and shelters (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2011; OWFI, 2011).

In contrast, NGOs with ties to IGC and CPA primarily tend to be funded by the U.S. administration or by right wing conservative American Associations that are against women’s rights (Al-Ali, 2007; Mojab, 2012; Zangana, 2007). Despite their claims to advancing democracy and women’s “liberation”, they are there to advance a colonial feminist agenda that supports the occupation, suppression of women, within the reconstruction efforts. They focus on hosting workshops, and conferences that are supposedly aimed at “capacity building” for Iraqi women, when in fact they are importing Western conservative antifeminist ideologies (Zangana, 2007). The number of NGOs such as these have sky rocketed in Iraq since 2003. As critical feminist scholars have argued, these NGOs and reconstruction efforts are just the other side of the same coin of colonial occupation and control. The proliferation of NGOs in the Middle East over the past decade or so is used a tool of cultural imperialism accompanying the imperialist colonial onslaught on the region as the contexts of Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq have shown (Abdo,
Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, more than eighty NGOs have been established in Baghdad alone (Abdo, 2010). In fact, colonial imperialist feminists led the campaign of “saving” Iraqi women and not only supported the case for the invasion they have been a central part of the gender component of the “reconstruction” efforts after the invasion (Mojab, 2012; Zangana, 2007). Zangana (2007) provides a detailed account of some of the key U.S. funded NGOs, tracing their funding structure and close association with the U.S. administration in fighting the “war on terror” in Iraq:

After Bush issued the dictum, “You are either with us or against us”, the role of NGOs was transformed to meet the requirements of the “War on Terror”. Former secretary of state Collin Powell outlined the new vision when, addressing NGOs in 2001, he argued, “Just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there serving and sacrificing on the frontlines of freedom. NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team”. Andrew Natsios, the administrator for the US Agency for the International Development (USAID), which was coordinating the rebuilding of Iraq bluntly spelled out the same vision. He told international humanitarian leaders that “NGOs and contactors are an arm of the US government” and that in order to serve Washington’s political and military objectives, aid agencies “should identify themselves as recipients of US funding” (Zangana, 2007, p. 82).

While the U.S. funded women’s NGOs have emerged as the “soft occupiers” in Iraq, independent Iraqi women’s NGOs have become confined to addressing issues of “honour” killings, advocating for reforms and providing shelter and supports to victims of domestic violence and sexual assaults. Iraqi women have also struggled to have a voice and be represented in political participation and in decision making around establishing Iraq’s new government and new constitution, as well as in the arena of personal status and family status laws which more directly impact on women on a range of issues including marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance laws among others. Despite their claims of “liberation” and democracy for Iraqi women, the Coalition Provisional Authority was not in support of implementing the UN resolution 1325 which stipulates a target quota for women’s representation in political decision making on Iraq’s future government and constitution. Moreover, the CPA wanted to replace Iraq’s more secular personal status law with Sharia law, which would have facilitate the implementation of more traditional tribal based patriarchal laws with respect to women and gender relations. Iraqi women have been very active and outspoken about both the issues of political representation, forcing the CPA to adopt a 25% quota for women’s representation, and
were successful in preventing the replacement of the family status law with Sharia law (Al-Ali, 2007; Zangana, 2007).

While independent Iraqi women’s NGOs provide some needed supports and immediate relief for the women who use their services, many of them become project-based organizations dependent on the mandates of their funders. As Mojab (2012) states, these NGOs have the effect of depoliticizing and fragmenting the women’s movement and weakening the “struggle against feudal-religious-capitalist patriarchy” (p. 412). Moreover, the discourses of civil society and women’s rights reforms create the illusion that “freedom”, “democracy”, and “liberation” are viable options under colonial occupation, rather than seeing them as instruments of domination and control, characterizing the new U.S. Middle East strategy (Abdo, 2010; Mojab, 2012). In fact, as the last decade has demonstrated, ten years after the invasion, Iraqi women have very limited political power to influence any decision making. Women who made it into the Council of Representatives have only been there to meet the stipulated 25% quota, and have primarily been the wives, sisters, or daughters of male politicians who want to avert any discussion of gender equality or women’s issues. There were no women appointed to a senior post following the 2010 elections. Only two ministries of state were offered to women, one of which had no portfolio, and the other was appointed Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, that does not go beyond executive-consultative functions, with no jurisdiction over implementing any resolutions or activities, or control over the directorate of women’s welfare or increasing funds allocated for widows (Al-Ali, 2013).

As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, rather than bringing “democracy” and “liberation” to Iraqi women, the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq has only brought death, destruction, and has been severely detrimental to Iraqi women and girls on multiple accounts, setting them back many years. Since 2003, Iraqi women have lost many of the gains they had made since the 1960s including being pushed out of their jobs, schools, and universities and into their homes. Iraqi women are struggling to have their basic needs met on a day-to-day basis under conditions of lack of any civil infrastructure, increased gender-based violence, Islamization and strict patriarchal tribal values, a rise in prostitution and sex-trafficking, and deteriorating health conditions to name a few. As Al-Ali (2013) states, the failure to protect women over the past 10 years of the Iraq war has been one of the major failures of the U.S.,
U.K., and the international community as a whole. The biggest challenges facing Iraqi women today is the lack of security and rule of law contributing to increased, and institutionalized gender-based violence, rampant domestic violence that takes place with impunity, feminization of poverty, and ongoing humanitarian crisis due to food insecurity, lack of adequate housing, and limited access to electricity, clean water and proper sanitation. Despite the fact that many Iraqi women activists have been at the forefront of civil society organizations, social and political movements demanding transparency, an end to corruption and authoritarian rule by the new government, democracy and human rights, Iraqi women have only experienced worsened conditions of violence and further marginalization. Women’s protests for peace and democracy on Baghdad’s Tahrir Square in June 2011 were met with brutal physical attacks, sexual assaults, and arrests (Al-Ali, 2013; OWFI, 2011). Indeed, as Al-Ali and Pratt (2011) demonstrate, the discourse of Iraqi women’s rights and addressing violence against women has dropped off the Western agenda altogether, with the Obama administration maintaining a code of silence so as “to conceal the failure of the U.S. project in Iraq”: despite the large number of international NGOs operating in Iraq, very few are aimed at addressing violence against women; only 5% of aid allocated to Iraq was earmarked for gender equality programming in 2008; and in 2011, the website of the State Department’s Office of Global Women’s Affairs made a scant mention of Iraqi women as compared to the rhetoric of the Bush administration. While the State Department allocated $5 million in 2010 for training Iraqi women, there was no mention of violence against women in Iraq (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2011, p. 35).

Situating Canada’s “war on terror”

The predominant mythologies of Canada are that of a peacekeeping, benevolent, multicultural nation that welcomes immigrants and refugees with openness. These national mythologies continue to persist throughout the years despite the historical colonial legacies and continued historical racial violence and legal racism embedded in Canadian state policies and practices. Situating Canada’s “war on terror” within this historical context I discuss the structural violence of war, colonialism, anti-terrorism measures, and recent changes to immigration, refugee and citizenship policies as three inter-related enactments of the “war on terror” that has become the organizing force in people’s lives. The main aim of this discussion is two-fold: 1) To challenge Canada’s national mythologies and highlight its active role and complacencies in the U.S.-led “war on terror”, invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the increasing human rights violations
and legal violence justified under state policies of securitization, militarization and border controls. 2) To contextualize Arab Iraqi refugee women’s historical and contemporary trauma, arguing that their trauma is a consequence of the structural violence of colonial occupation, forced displacement, and exclusionary state policies and practices. Figure 3 below provides a map of Canada’s “war on terror” highlighting the various state policies and interventions implemented following the events of September 11, 2001 in the U.S.

Figure 3 – Mapping Canada’s “war on terror”

Canada’s Anti-terrorism Measures

In the post 9/11 Canadian context, the Government of Canada has introduced several legislations and policy measures as part of its anti-terrorism strategy. The Canadian state created the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness shortly after 9/11 2001, with its jurisdiction extending over borders, firearms, intelligence, corrections, parole boards, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and its watchdog agencies (Brodie, 2009). Some of the major legislations introduced post 9/11 in Canada include Bill C-36, the Anti-terrorism Act (2001); enactment of security certificates under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act; and the Passenger Protect Program (2007). These security measures have had targeted and
disproportionate impacts, such as increased racial profiling, unlawful detentions, deportations, frozen assets, and being placed on a no-fly list, on Arabs and Muslims in Canada (Bahdi, 2003; CAF & CAIR-CAN, 2005; CAIR-CAN, 2005, Siddiqui, 2008).

Immediately following the events of 9/11 in 2001, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-36, the Anti-Terrorism Act, an omnibus bill designed to combat terrorism at various levels. Among other measures, the Act amends the Criminal Code with the aim to disable terrorist groups and their supporters, by defining “terrorist activity”; by creating a process for listing and defining certain entities as terrorist groups; by creating new powers in order to prevent acts of terrorism; and by creating new terrorism offences (Gabor, 2005). While security certificates existed under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act prior to the “war on terror”, they have been enacted exclusively on Arab/Muslim men. Under this act, security certificates permit the detention and deportation of non-citizens who are deemed to be a threat to national security. A secret hearing is held by a federal judge to review secret evidence against the detainees who only receive a summary of evidence against them.

Since September 11, 2001, all five men who were detained without charge, under security certificates have been Muslim men of Arab origin (Hassan Almeri (2001-2009), Mohammed Mahjoub (2000-present), Mahmoud Jaballah (2001-present), Mohamed Harkat (2002-present), and Adil Charkaoui (2003-2009). They have been detained without charge in solitary confinement for time periods varying between three to seven years then released on strict bail conditions (Razack, 2008). In early 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada issued a unanimous ruling overturning the use of security certificates deeming the detention of people under secret evidence unconstitutional and in violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In 2009, security certificates against Hassan Almeri and Adil Charkaoui were withdrawn and they are now suing the federal government. The other three men are still fighting for justice and asking to have their security certificates withdrawn. Although they have been released from prison, they and their families have been living under very strict conditions and ongoing close surveillance such as wearing electronic GPS bracelets and being monitored on a 24 hour basis. These conditions have imposed extreme stress and hardship on these men and their families to the extent that in 2009, Mahmoud Jaballah requested to be put back in jail so as to protect his family and enable them to lead their lives away from the ongoing monitoring of their every move (http://secrettrial5.com/issue).
These unlawful detentions and strict bail conditions have also resulted in divorce and family separation for some of the men as in the case of Mohammed Mahjoub who has not seen his sons for many years since his ordeal began in June 2000. Mr. Mahjoub was detained with no charge for seven years and was released under house arrest in 2007 following the Supreme Court unconstitutionality ruling (Foster, May 18, 2012, http://rabble.ca/news/2012/05/tortured-mubarak-punished-canada-mohammad-mahjoub-tells-his-story). A recent court ruling in 2012 has loosened some of the conditions of his release which has enabled him to travel to different cities and speak out about his case. In recounting his story, Mr. Mahjoub highlights how he has been detained in Canada for over 12 years with no evidence against him. CSIS has admitted to the Federal Court of Canada that much of the evidence they had against him was linked to torture and that for years, CSIS listened in on confidential conversations between Mr. Mahjoub and his lawyer and ceased boxes of confidential files from his lawyer’s office. Despite Mr. Mahjoub’s continuing appeals to have the security certificate against him and two other men (Mohammed Harkat and Mahmoud Jaballah) still detained under security certificates, be withdrawn (supportmahjoub.org), a federal court ruling has recently upheld the security certificate against him. The impact of security certificates extends beyond these men to severely affect their family members resulting in divorce and separation as in the case of Mr. Mahjoub. And for others, such as in the case of Mohammed Harkat, the family members have had to give up their jobs and their own well-being in their attempts to support their loved ones to meet the strict bail conditions imposed by the court. Sophie Harkat, Mohammed Harkat’s wife, has spoken out about her experience on many occasions and has been a staunch advocate for abolishing the use of security certificates by the Canadian government. However, security certificates are not only still in use to this day, the Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s Conservative government has recently updated the certificate provisions under Bill C-43, the Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act which came into force in 2012. The new security certificate provisions under Bill C-43 give the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness the authority to impose minimum conditions on those identified in security certificates. “The bill also modifies the current security certificate regime so that if the Federal Court deems it reasonable, the security certificate becomes a removal order to be enforced as soon as possible” (Bechard & Elgersma, Bill C-43 Legislative Summary, October 2012). In this way, as the short title of the bill implies, Bill C-43 enables the Canadian government not only to designate and detain individuals under security certificates but to deport them as soon as possible with the approval of a Federal Court Judge.
who is obligated to implement mandatory prescribed conditions specified in the bill. In addition, Bill C-43 introduces several changes to inadmissibility on the grounds of security provision of Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) with respect to evaluating inadmissibility; consequences of being found inadmissible or having a relative who is inadmissible. Bill C-43 gives the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the power to prevent an individual from obtaining or renewing temporary resident status. Moreover, the inadmissibility provision under IRPA and Bill C-43 are applicable to temporary residents, applicants for that status, as well as permanent residents remaining in Canada (Bechard & Elgersma, Bill C-43 Legislative Summary, October 2012). Therefore, these provisions have serious consequences for the individuals deemed inadmissible and for their family members who could also lose their temporary or permanent residency status and be deported simply by association.

Another policy arena where the government of Canada has instituted changes post 9/11 is in the area of airline security and sharing of information on passengers. The Passenger Protect Program (PPP), also known as Canada’s no-fly list, was implemented on June 18, 2007 to address aviation security through the identification of individuals who pose a threat to transportation. Transport Canada administers the PPP in collaboration with Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Under this program, a Specified Persons List (SPL) is held, managed, and controlled by Transport Canada. Individuals who are suspected of posing a threat to security, based on intelligence information, are placed on this list. The list is shared with the airline carriers who are responsible for identity screening and identifying individuals with matching names on the SPL. If there is a match, the airline carrier must inform the Ministry of Transport, and prevent individuals from obtaining a ticket or boarding an airplane (as the case may be) without ministerial approval. Individuals on the SPL will not be informed of being placed on the list until after identity screening. Once placed on the SPL list, it is very difficult to remove one’s name from the list. The first known person to be prevented from travel under PPP was Hani Al Telbani, a Montreal graduate student of Palestinian origin whose name was improperly placed on the SPL in June 2008 and was prevented from flying to Saudi Arabia to visit his family. His case was the first of its kind to challenge Canada’s PPP and is currently under judicial review by the Federal Court. As stated by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), Mr. Al Telbani’s experience raises serious concerns relating to the process of how decisions are made and of “Charter rights of listed persons, including their rights to security of
the person, mobility and privacy” (CCLA, 2010a). In a recent report, the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) details a complex web of databases and legislations both in Canada and the U.S. relating to aviation security and border crossings. Through a review of these initiatives and detailed case examples, the report highlights the finding that Canada’s no-fly list has resulted in further racial profiling and has had disproportionate and serious consequences for racialized communities particularly for Arab and Muslim Communities in Canada (ICLMG, 2010). Canadian nationality and citizenship is profoundly reshaped by the antiterrorism measures implemented in Canada and has resulted in the erosion of the citizenship rights of Arabs and Muslims in Canada (Arnold, 2005; Bahdi, 2003; Colour of Change, 2008; Gabor, 2005; Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007).

Furthermore, violations of privacy and civil liberties under the name of national security have become common place, accepted practices through information sharing agreements between Canada and various governments including U.S., U.K., and Australia. On February 4, 2011, the Prime Minister of Canada and the President of the United States issued Beyond the Border: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness. This joint action plan establishes a long term partnership between Canada and the US that expands border security and information sharing beyond the borders. The Action Plan is hailed as “a historic step forward in joint Canada-U.S. efforts to promote greater security and prosperity in North America” (Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness, 2011, p. 2). It aims to strengthen the mutual security of both countries by identifying “high-risk trade and travelers” before they arrive at the borders. This goal will be accomplished by conducting integrated threat assessments based on intelligence sharing, aligning and coordinating Canada-U.S. security systems. As of June 30, 2013, the Action Plan entered into the implementation of Phase II of its Entry/Exit Initiative:

Under Phase II, the CBSA and DHS will exchange entry data collected on third-country nationals (those who are neither citizens of Canada nor of the U.S.), permanent residents of Canada who are not U.S. citizens, and lawful permanent residents of the U.S. who are not Canadian citizens, at all automated land ports of entry along the common border, including all major land border crossings. This exchange will begin on June 30. No effects on regular operations are anticipated.

Phase II builds on the successful work of Phase I, which involved the exchange of routine biographic information on these same classes of travellers at four land ports of entry in British Columbia/Washington State and Ontario/New York. This initial phase validated the Entry/Exit concept: that entry into one country confirms the exit from the other.
On May 13, 2013, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a joint report on the findings of Phase I of the Entry/Exit Initiative indicating that the first phase of the initiative was successful in reconciling the entry and exit records, identifying potential overstays, and potential unexpected immigration warrants based on the exchange of biographic entry records, (Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness, May 13, 2013). Hence, Phase II will be building on this success and making it part of their regular practice to exchange entry data on all third-country nationals. Some key points that highlight the relevance of the Beyond the Border Action Plan to our preceding discussion are important to mention here. As it is evident from the above statements quoted from the Action Plan, the target of information sharing and security measures are “third country nationals”, “lawful permanent residents” in both Canada and the U.S., in other words immigrant populations of both countries are being targeted and racially profiled as “high risk travelers” and security “threats” that the nation must be protected against. This profile and perceived threat is then used to justify the violation of their privacy and civil liberties on mass, whether they are lawful or law abiding has no relevance in this case. As CCLA’s statement on privacy and national security states, the right to privacy is eroded in the name of national security:

Privacy is a fundamental right which can determine enjoyment of other rights including due process, fair trial and security of the person. Any restrictions must be prescribed by law, and necessary and proportional in a free and democratic society. CCLA is concerned that the right to privacy protected in the Charter (in sections 8 and 7), and in international human rights law, is being eroded in the name of national security.

CCLA is concerned about the creation of databases on individuals and the access to these databases by State agencies or foreign States; exchange of the personal information of individuals among State agencies and/or with foreign governments; placing of individuals on ‘watch lists’ or ‘no fly lists’ without adequate due process; accumulation of personal information on individuals relating to travel, finance and communications resulting in surveillance or accumulation of information on persons without their knowledge; failure of Canada to enforce or extend its legal privacy safeguards to information shared with foreign States or third parties. (CCLA, 2013a, Statement on Privacy and National Security. http://ccla.org/our-work/national-security/privacy-and-national-security/).

The concerns raised by CCLA have been echoed by other civil liberty and advocacy groups who have joined together to call on the Canadian government to uphold constitutional and privacy rights of Canadians. As the cases of Maher Arrar and several other Canadian citizens and
permanent residents have shown, information sharing between Canada and the U.S. has had disastrous consequences for individuals who were wrongfully profiled, detained, and deported to countries where they faced further detention, torture and abuse. Unfortunately, these violations of privacy, lack of due process and failure to protect fundamental human rights are not unique to Canada. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ben Emmerson, has voiced similar criticisms on the UN 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Regime to the UN General Assembly, in November 2012. The Special Rapporteur’s report raises the alarm over the due process failures, lack of international domestic judicial review process for listed individuals, and the Security Council’s lack of due process mechanisms. Mr. Emmerson calls for minimal international standards of due process, the creation of the Office of the Independent Designations Adjudicator (IDA) and for “States to be obligated to disclose information to the IDA on conditions of confidentiality” and to exclude “information plausibly believed to be obtained through torture” (CCLA, 2013b).

In recent years, the Canadian government has introduced further measures to strengthen its national security while simultaneously undermining the privacy and civil liberties of Canadians and further violating the rights of immigrants and refugees creating unsafe and insecure conditions for vulnerable groups of people. A full review of all the new federal policies relating to this topic is not possible in the confines of this dissertation. In the preceding sections, I have provided a brief overview of Canada’s national security measures and their consequences for Arabs and Muslims in Canada. In the following section, I will provide a brief over of Canada’s refugee protection system and discuss the recent refugee reforms which were implemented in 2012. In addition, I will also discuss relevant recent immigration and citizenship policy changes that seem to have a more direct impact on Iraqi refugee women who are the focus of this study.

Overview of Canada’s Refugee, Immigration, & Citizenship Policies

Canada’s refugee protection and resettlement programs are guided by a number of international conventions including The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (also referred to as the Geneva Convention); and The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. As a signatory to the 1951 Convention, Canada assumes certain obligations towards refugees including determining their status as asylum seekers and whether or not they are convention refugees entitled to
international protection. Article 1(A) 2 of the Geneva Convention defines Convention Refugee as any person who:

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her]self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [or her] former habitual residences as a result of such events, is unable or, owning to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (RSTPE-Training, Module 1, p. 6), (emphasis in original).

Canada works closely with UNHCR to assess and resettle a certain number of refugees in need of protection each year. The Government of Canada has recently committed to resettle up to 14,500 refugees and other vulnerable persons a year by 2013 (CIC, January 15, 2013, http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp). Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and its Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR) which came into effect in June 2002, replacing the Immigration Act of 1976, provide the legal framework for Canada’s federal immigration system. IRPA regulates Canada’s refugee protection system which is comprised of two main parts: 1) Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for people seeking asylum from abroad; and 2) In-Canada Asylum Program, for people seeking asylum from within Canada. People who are seeking asylum from abroad fall into two classes: the Convention Refugee Abroad Class; and the Country of Asylum Class. Members of both classes must meet the eligibility and admissibility criteria as specified in IRPA (See table 1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Convention Refugee Abroad Class</strong></th>
<th><strong>Country of Asylum Class</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Must be outside their home country; and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must not be able to return there due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• race,</td>
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<td>• religion,</td>
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<td>• political opinion,</td>
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<td>• nationality, or</td>
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<tr>
<td>• membership in a particular social group, such as women or people with a particular sexual orientation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Must also be:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• outside Canada, and want to come to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must be outside your home country or the country where you normally live and have been, and continue to be, seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or have suffered massive violations of human rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Must also be:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• outside Canada.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or another referral organization or be sponsored by a private sponsorship group, and</td>
<td></td>
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Canada, referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or another referral organization, or be sponsored by a private sponsorship group, and
selected as a government-assisted or privately sponsored refugee or have the funds needed to support themselves and any dependents after they arrive in Canada.

privately sponsored, or have the funds needed to support themselves and any dependents after they arrive in Canada.
Also must pass a medical exam and security and criminal checks.


In addition, unless deemed to be “vulnerable” or in “urgent need of protection” they also need to demonstrate their ability to establish themselves successfully in Canada (RSTPE-Training, Module 1, p. 6). Canada’s refugee system also has an In-Canada Asylum Program which enables people to claim refugee status from within Canada in accordance with the U.N. Convention. In 2011, more than 24,900 people submitted in-land refugee claims in Canada. The asylum program aims to provide protection to people in Canada who are at risk of torture, or cruel or unusual punishment in their home countries (CIC, 2013, The Refugee System in Canada. In-Canada Asylum Program, [http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp)).

More recently, the Canada’s Conservative government has introduced significant changes to Canada’s Refugee Determination System under Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, The Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act, and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act (Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act) in addition to introducing other regulatory and legislative changes in Canada’s immigration and citizenship policies. A comprehensive review of these changes is not possible within the confines of this chapter. However, I will review the most significant changes that have direct implications for Iraqi refugee women who are the focus of this dissertation.

Overview of Recent Immigration & Citizenship Policy Changes

The recent immigration and citizenship policy changes over the past few years (2008-2013) have a number of key characteristics that are in line with neoliberal policies of privatization; cuts to public services such as settlement supports and health care; increasing securitization, border
controls, and criminalization, detention, and deportation of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. These features can be observed in a number of different policy arenas affecting Iraqi refugees among others seeking protection and refuge in Canada including refugee determination, refugee sponsorship, settlement programming, family reunification, health care benefits, and access to permanent residency and citizenship. A detailed discussion of all the recent immigration policy changes is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, I will make reference to the existing body of reports and analysis conducted by refugee rights advocates, violence against women advocates, and human rights advocacy groups over the past few years in Canada.

The historically racialized, gendered, and classed nature of Canadian immigration policy has been well documented by immigration historians (Backhouse, 1999; Iacovetta, 2006) and feminist critical race scholars (Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007). The recent immigration and citizenship policy changes have further intensified the racialized, gendered and classed inequalities while increasing the vulnerability of women and children to further structural and interpersonal violence, social exclusion, precarious immigration status and deportation (Albiom & Cohl, 2012; Alaggia et al., 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2013; CCR, OCASI, MTCSALC, COP, 2012; Zahraei et al., Forthcoming). Over the past several years, Canada has seen a significant decline in the number of refugees, humanitarian and compassionate claimants, family reunification classes and a corresponding increase in the number of temporary foreign workers and international students with little or no access to public services, permanent residency and citizenship (CIC, March 5, 2012; Zahraei et al., Forthcoming). The recent introduction of Bill C-31 in 2012 has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of refugee claimants. Similarly, the number of resettled refugees has dropped by 26% in 2012 as compared to 2011 (CCR Media Release, March 7, 2013) and the arrival of both Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) as well as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) not only has been well below target, but has been the lowest since 1979 (CCR Media Release, March 7, 2013). A number of different factors have contributed to these significant reductions including bureaucratic delays in processing of claims and applications causing backlogs in the system; low approval rates of GARS and PSRs; the closure of the visa office in Damascus in 2012; and more importantly, the introduction of more restrictive refugee determination (Bill C-31) and refugee sponsorship regulations in addition to the imposition of caps on the number of refugee sponsorships (CCR, 2013).
In addition to the reduced number of refugee claims and acceptance rates, the number of immigration detention and deportations has been on the rise as a result of the increased immigration raids in public spaces and the introduction of the Assisted Voluntary Removal Program in 2012. This number is expected to continue to be on the rise due to the implementation of Bill C-31 with its extremely tight processing timelines, the designation of “Irregular Arrivals” and “Designated Country of Origin (DCO)” list who are subject to automatic detention and deportation. Moreover, Bill C-31(Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act), Bill C-43 (Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act) and Bill C-10 (The Omnibus Crime Bill) include regulations that facilitate the cessation of protected refugee status and loss of permanent residency as consequences of criminalization or being deemed inadmissible due to security reasons (Barnet et al., 2012; Bechard and Elgersma, 2012).

In the case of family reunification, a number of recent policies have resulted in significant reductions in numbers, particularly for individuals and families with low incomes and particular classes of refugees and temporary migrants who have no chance of being reunited with their family members. The Conditional Permanent Residence (CPR) regulation was introduced in the fall of 2012 despite strong opposition and concerns expressed by violence against women advocates that it would increase women’s dependence and vulnerability to abuse by their sponsoring spouses. The CPR program requires sponsored women to reside with their sponsoring spouse for the first two years of their sponsorship in order to maintain their permanent residency. Although the regulation allows for exceptions for spousal abuse, critics argue it does not go far enough to protect women from abuse and many women would not report the abuse for fear of losing their status (CIC, October 2012; CCR, 2012; Douglas, Go, & Blackstock, 2012; METRAC, 2012).

The Parent and Grandparent Super Visa was also introduced in 2012 with the imposition of further restrictive regulations in the spring of 2013. The new regulatory changes increase the income requirements for potential sponsors, require the purchase of medical insurance prior to arrival, and extend the sponsorship period to 20 years, from the existing 10 years, making it inaccessible for low income families who would be unable to meet the income requirements and the long term commitment of the sponsorship (CIC, March 5, 2012).
In addition to legislative and regulatory changes in the areas of refugee determination, sponsorship, and family reunification, the federal government has also introduced significant changes to the settlement supports and health care benefits that are available to immigrants and refugees. In 2012, the federal government significantly reduced the health care benefits to different groups of refugees through the Interim Federal Health Program. As a result of these funding cuts, refugee claimants from DCO countries and failed refugee claimants would only be eligible for health care coverage if they are deemed a public health or public safety risk, while sponsored refugees would be eligible for health care coverage such as hospital services and services by doctors; and government assisted refugees would be eligible for both health care and expanded care coverage such as supplemental health care products (CIC, IFHP Reform, April 25, 2012). As many health care providers and refugee health advocates have indicated, these changes have severe and detrimental effects on refugees and violate their basic human rights of access to health care. Many advocacy groups continue to demand the reversal of these cuts and restoring health care benefits for all (Canadian Healthcare Association, 2012; http://www.doctorsforrefugeecare.ca/).

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) also face increasingly limited supports provided to them. In addition to the general low social assistance rates, there have been overall cuts to the duration and types of assistance provided to government assisted refugees (GARs). For instance, as Haifa, a key informant participating in this study explains, GARs used to be able to stay at the Refugee Reception Centre for three months and received counseling, orientation, and settlement supports upon their arrival to Toronto, now they can only stay at the Reception Centre for three weeks:

Why do you bring them here if you're not going to support them? COSTI used to keep refugees for 3 months, but now it's only 3 weeks. The first week they are still in shock, they don't even remember their own name. Then the second week, they apply for different ID cards (SIN, Health Card, etc.) then by the third week they send them to the DonMills/Sheppard area. It's not fair, sometimes I don't blame them. I imagine myself in Paris, I have just arrived, I don't speak the language, and I don't know any settlement services, then I just get pushed out to be on my own. How are they supposed to manage? I mean I don't blame them sometimes. It's very hard for them. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Regardless of who sponsors convention refugees, sponsors are required to provide them with financial and social supports for a period of one year. However, some private sponsors such as
Groups of 5 or church groups sponsor refugees knowing that they do not have the financial means to support them so they tell them they have to support themselves once they arrive in Canada. Haifa elaborates on such private sponsorship cases she has encountered in her practice:

These people, they have to take care of the family for one year. After this they can be on the social assistance because this is their contract with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Now some churches they, what they do, is they tell you okay, I will sponsor you here but I cannot fund you, I don't have the funds for you, to take care of you, so you are on your own. So they are doing them a favor to bring them here to a safe country but at the same time, they are not covered by social assistance. And they cannot fund them, they cannot provide them housing or whatever. So still, I have families they come here. They don't know how to do. They don't have language first. They don't have OHIP card, IFH form because they don't know what's the procedure. They don't know what's going on so they come here and they are totally exhausted and devastated because, okay how can I be covered by health card. The UN, when they come to COSTI settlement services everything she will do it for them. The church where they are actually sponsored these kinds of families they will go with them. They will issue the health card, SIN card, all these types of documents, registration for school. They let them to settle, they provide them with furniture for the house and allowances monthly until they settle down. After one year, they are out. After one year they become on the welfare. So the tough part is, when you bring a family, you just put them in here, no language no nothing and just tell them okay, good-bye. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

In these instances, the privately sponsored refugees have to rely on their own savings and personal resources and creative means to survive. As the following example provided by Haifa, illustrates:

Well they do from their saving. I had one of the cases. A lady, she is a late forties, uh, she didn't have any kinds of income. She got a box of chocolates and she went near to school to sell chocolate and the principal he caught her and he says you cannot do this. The lady, she was very devastated, she said, I just need a job. I do not need anything. She cannot communicate. She was selling chocolate (laughter), the principal he just kicked her away. He said next time you are here, I am going to call the police for you. So I feel really, really, it is really tough on them, really hard. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Settlement counselors such as Haifa try their best to connect these individuals to existing community resources such as food banks, furniture banks, and other church groups to get the basic necessities for them until the first year of sponsorship commitment ends. Due to their contract with Citizenship and Immigration if they break the sponsorship agreement rules and go on social assistance, the government will require the church to repay every penny the sponsored person received in social assistance and prevent them from taking on any future sponsorships. Due to these limitations and lack of supports, refugees often resort to different means such as
going on social assistance, disability benefits, or working cash to support themselves and their families. Others take on advocacy efforts on their own behalf to gain access to needed supports and demand additional supports to be made available to them as the example below described by Haifa illustrates:

KI: …Some of them they get nuts and crazy, they make a strike in front of Citizenship and Immigration Canada Office (laughing).

I: What for?
KI: (laughing)...because they have their own system right? When the child is 18 years old, he is under a family category, under his mom and dad, and he receives child tax benefit. The moment he becomes 18, his file, they do not open his file. They do not open a new file for him and give the child $781. The salary it would be included with the parents, it would be another $200. So the parents are always mad and furious about this. Why this child doesn't have money? So it happens many times, they went to CIC office and they did like a strike.

… Yeah, they go and they strike. And they would say “Who are these people with their signs?” (laughing)...They are really, really funny...they're really funny people (laughing) ... And they fight, they really fight...one of them says I want my right, I will hire a lawyer....they want, he wants to sue CIC...nothing comes out of it because this is the system, take it or leave it... (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Although Haifa seemed amused at the Iraqi refugees’ ingenuity to demand changes to the benefits they received, she further elaborated that CIC actually did change this policy more recently, they now do open a separate file for a person who is 19 years or older and provide them with the full rate. After the many complaints they received from GARs, CIC has also acknowledged the insufficient amount of assistance provided and increased the amount of assistance to GARs from $680 to $781 per person. However, this amount is still too low to cover the necessary expenses for a single person as Sundus attests to this. Sundus explains during the first year of her arrival she received about $787 as a government sponsored refugee. She found it very difficult to survive on this amount as it did not even cover her rent. She tried living in a basement apartment which offered cheaper rent but the damp basement caused health complications for her because of her asthma so she had to move out and take on a part time job in a restaurant to supplement her income. Although the part-time job helped her get financially, it got in her way of taking more ESL classes and working towards recertification in her field as she would have liked to be able to do.
Government assisted refugees who are unable to take on jobs also experience serious challenges and hardships that complicate their already difficult situations and exacerbate their psychological distress. Their attempts at speaking up about the inadequacy of supports provided to them either get ignored or get labeled as having “high expectations” that need to be adjusted as in the case of the following government assisted Iraqi refugee woman described by her settlement worker, Bertha, who participated in the study as a key informant. Bertha mentioned this case during my interview with her as an example of some of the frustrations she experiences in working with recent Iraqi refugees and to illustrate what she perceives as the Iraqi refugees’ high expectations of the Canadian settlement supports system: This woman is the mother of two disabled daughters who has come here as a single mother since her husband was kidnapped and has been missing following the 2003 Iraq Occupation. Bertha explains that this client receives $1,500.00/month in government assistance but her rent alone is $1,400.00/month. Bertha acknowledges that the social assistance rates are too low but explains that this is the rate that everyone gets, that’s how the system is. So she tries to convince her client to move to an apartment with cheaper rent, refers her to the food bank, and helps her with budgeting and goal setting but she expresses her frustration with the client refusing to move to a smaller apartment and requesting help with her disabled daughters:

"WHERE ARE THESE HIGH EXPECTATIONS COMING FROM?" I ask my manager, my colleagues, WHERE IS THIS COMING FROM? She wants someone to come and take care of her children. Her husband was a professional but he was kidnapped. In their home country they did not have any social services. She says "they told us everything is going to be taken care of once we got to Canada. I don't have to work when I come to Canada"….You try to give information, a realistic picture of how things are. Help them understand and transition. Provide basic information about the system and programs. As a service provider, you hear it over and over again. They don't want to hear what we have to say. They start yelling, screaming, invading your space, it becomes a safety issue. (Bertha, February 21, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Bertha explains that she receives a lot of complaints from clients about the limitations in the system and the limited supports provided. At times the interactions become explosive and she fears for her safety, at other times clients would go and voice their complaints to the program manager hoping they would get a different response, and at other times they just say they want to go back to Iraq because they are not getting the supports they need in Canada. Bertha explains that “most of them are thankful for being given the opportunity to come here”, but she observes differences in the types of interactions from clients with higher education and professional
degrees versus those with lower education but higher standards of living back home since they came from well to do families:

I see a difference in clients from higher level of education are more willing to work with you, they're more relaxed, they want to work with you, and want to do something. They don't complain as much. People who don't have a high level of education tend to complain a lot. They understand the message but don't want to accept it because it's going against the script in their head. They go against the worker and complain to the manager. Thinking the manager would provide what the worker can't. (Bertha, February 21, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

While acknowledging the power struggles and frustrations, Bertha also reflects on the realities of her practice as a settlement worker and the limits imposed on her by the system and the expectations of her work. She has a caseload of over 100 clients across the GTA, many of whom have multiple complex needs. She also does home visits to some elderly clients and to those with disabilities and she tries her best to connect clients to supports and services and advocate on their behalf whenever possible. However, she often faces institutional barriers that hamper her advocacy efforts, particularly when dealing with government institutions such as social services and Revenue Canada:

For us, we have these huge agencies that we work with, e.g. Revenue Canada, CIC, School boards. They have their own policies and procedures, everyone is treated the same, same rules apply e.g. Ontario Works amount is the same for everyone. Sometimes clients don't understand that. They think that government assisted refugees they have to be exempt or get quicker access to housing, etc.

Because of confidentiality reasons, it's difficult to advocate for clients, they want to talk directly to the person. But if they don't speak English they can't speak to them. You have to fill out a special form and send it to them but that takes a couple of weeks to process. Clients get frustrated at us. They think we don't want to help them. You have to have a consent form, for example with Revenue Canada even though the client is there and can get by with her English. Every time you call is a different person and you have to explain the same issue all over again. So much time is wasted. Until we finally got an agent who knew what she was talking about, was clear about what needed to be done. So it's the little things like that are frustrating. In the meantime, this woman needs money for her disabled kids…. Sometimes you have to clean someone else's messes. They just want their money. But you have this huge mechanical monster behind you! (Bertha, February 21, 2012, Key Informant Interview)
The huge mechanical monster which Bertha is referring to is the huge institutional bureaucratic system of income support and refugee resettlement programs that do not make allowances for the specific and multiple complex needs of a recently arrived refugee population in need of support and protection. Bertha states, “everyone is treated the same” with the same limited social assistance amount and the same rules, regulations, and long wait lists for services and support. But as we have seen from the previous examples and discussions above, everyone is not treated the same when it comes to language, cultural barriers, racism and racial profiling. And the fact is, everyone should not be treated the same when it comes to equity of access and social justice, universal depravation and life below poverty is not the goal. The seemingly “high expectations” of a refugee single mother of two disabled children who have lost their father to the violence of war, are in fact basic humanitarian survival needs. Bertha’s clients and Haifa’s clients have every right to demand more adequate supports, how are they to survive on such meager amounts? The provision of special considerations and supports are a necessity for convention refugees who have survived war, violence, years of economic sanctions that have brought multiple traumas and complex chronic health conditions upon Iraq’s population as a whole, and upon women and children in particular. Rather than living up to its obligations as a signatory to international conventions for the protection of refugees and vulnerable persons including women and children, Canada is selectively hand picking a few thousand Iraqi refugees, most of whom are brought in under the private sponsorship program with no obligation to the government, and expect them to hit the ground running to be productive members of Canadian society, with increasingly limited restrictive supports provided during the first year of their settlement.

The government of Canada has also introduced a series of changes to its funding allocation model and model of settlement service provision. Some of the key aspects of these changes include an overall 5% reduction in the settlement and integration funding envelope across Canada in 2011-2012 and the introduction of a new funding formula that is based on landing numbers in provinces. The overall base funding reduction along with the landing based funding formula has resulted in significant reductions in the settlement funding allocation for Ontario since 2011. These funding reductions have been particularly detrimental to racialized communities and settlement service providers in the GTA, many of whom have experienced total defunding or significant job losses within their organizations (OCASI, 2011). Consequently, recent immigrants and refugees have lost access to key services that are essential to their
successful community integration including transportation assistance, language instruction, and child care supports (OCASI, 2011).

Citizenship rules and eligibility criteria have also undergone significant changes since 2009, making it more difficult if not impossible to obtain for particular groups of permanent residents. The changes in this arena include: 1) restricting citizenship by descent to the first generation of children born outside of Canada to a Canadian parent, which would have implications for second and subsequent generation of children born outside Canada; 2) new residency and language requirements which require individuals to prove their proficiency in one of Canada’s official languages and to prove their physical presence in Canada for three of the past four years. Certain individuals may be required to complete a detailed residency questionnaire and appear before a citizenship judge in order to determine their eligibility for citizenship (CIC, 2013).

A significant change introduced by the government of Canada in 2012, has been the ban on wearing the niqab during citizenship oath, which would have a direct impact on Muslim women seeking to obtain citizenship. While the ban on wearing the niqab during citizenship oath applies to a relatively small number of Muslim women who wear the niqab, it represents the tip of the iceberg of ongoing public debates and controversial legislative and regulatory changes, and institutional practices that have serious negative material consequences for Muslim women’s and Muslim communities’ access to substantive citizenship and further solidify their eviction from Canadian civil society. Stemming from notions of “clash of civilizations”, these debates have primarily centred on the question of values and Muslim communities ability to integrate into Canadian society. “Canadian” values and traditions are highlighted and emphasized in many arenas, ranging from Canada’s new Citizenship Guide; to the Reasonable Accommodations debates in 2006; the introduction of Bill 94 Niqab Ban in 2009; and the more recent introduction of the Charter of Values in Quebec. A key point that is important to emphasize here is the serious material consequences of the introduction of such policies and public discourses that go far beyond “just talk”, and value-based ideological differences resulting in increased incidents of race-based and religious-based hate crimes and assaults, limited or prohibited access to public programs and services; limited access to jobs and in certain cases job losses; and as discussed earlier limited access to Canadian citizenship and increasingly loss of permanent residency status.
or revocation of citizenship for certain individuals in an alarming rate that has been unprecedented in Canadian history. Since 2011, about four thousand Canadian citizens, mostly of Muslim and Middle Eastern origins, have had their citizenships revoked based on allegations of residency fraud (CBC News, “3,100 Citizenships ordered revoked”, Sept. 10, 2012; Payton, Dec. 9, 2011).

Canada’s Involvement in 2003 Iraq Occupation

Canada has been a major ally of the United States in the war in Afghanistan since its launch in 2001. Canada has made an explicit commitment to support the US in the war in Afghanistan providing Canadian troops and resources being involved in peacekeeping and combat missions over the last ten years. Due to space limitations and the specific focus of this paper on Iraqi women, I will not be elaborating further on Canada’s involvement in the war in Afghanistan. Instead, I will pay particular attention to Canada’s role in the Iraq invasion which has largely gone unexamined despite the fact that it was the site of wide public protests and the subject of much debate prior to the start of the invasion in 2003. The official government stance was that Canada would not back a US-led war in Iraq, but unofficially, despite the media spin and the Canadian government’s denials, Canada has been a key player in the invasion and reconstruction efforts in Iraq (Engler, 2009; Fawn, 2008; Gordon, 2010). Canada’s contribution to the Iraq invasion has spanned a wide range of supports including providing Canadian war planners who helped mastermind the invasion initially from U.S. central command in Tampa in February 2003, then from the American headquarters in Kuwait where the Canadian General Walt Natynczcz helped plan the invasion and later served as deputy commander of U.S. forces in charge of 35,000 troops in Baghdad. Canada also had provided three CC-130 aircraft and Canadian pilots to support the invasion; allowed US warplanes enroute to Iraq to fly through Canadian air space and refuel in Newfoundland; and had at least 30 Canadian soldiers incorporated into U.S. and British units that invaded Iraq (Engler, 2009, Fawn, 2008). Moreover, a few weeks after the start of the Iraq invasion, the Canadian government pledged $300 million in aid for Iraqi reconstruction and offering police, detention facility experts, legal officers, combat engineers, and transport planes to help in reconstructing post-war Iraq. A Canadian colonel, under NATO command, was the chief of staff of a Baghdad-based training mission responsible for training Iraq’s military and police officers to replace U.S. soldiers. The RCMP has helped train 32,000 Iraqi police officers and senior Canadian police have helped build the Iraqi Interior Ministry
providing advice and financial support to the same Ministry that has been caught running torture centres in Iraq (Engler, 2009). In addition to the Canadian government’s support, a number of private Canadian security companies have supported the U.S. occupation; a Montreal-based company (SNC Technologies) has manufactured and supplied 300 – 500 million bullets per year, to occupation forces since 2004; and a Burlington-based firm (L-3 Wescam, a division of Titan group) supplied “interrogation” teams allegedly implicated in tortures at Abu Ghraib. In the meantime, at least eight Canadian oil companies were busy securing oil deals with the Kurdistan Regional Government (Engler, 2009).

Canada’s Response to the Iraqi Refugee Crisis

In the following section, I draw on a number of document sources (see Appendix A for a list of documents reviewed during the course of this study); key informant interviews; and interviews I conducted with Iraq refugee women, in order to analyze Canada’s response to the Iraqi refugee crisis since the 2003 Iraq invasion. In particular, in addition to the interview data, my analysis includes a more detailed discussion of four main document sources: 1) Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s news releases on Iraq and Iraqi refugees; 2) Canadian Council for Refugees’ (CCR) position statement, backgrounder on Iraqi refugees, advocacy statements, and an analytical report examining several cases of Iraqi private sponsorship cases refused at Damascus; 3) Evidence provided to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (39th Parliament, 2nd Session, April 2008) as part of an Iraqi Refugee Study conducted by this committee; 4) Reports by UNHCR, Amnesty International, and Refugees International examining the Iraqi refugee crisis.

As the preceding paragraphs make clear, Canada has directly and indirectly been involved in supporting the U.S. led invasion and occupation of Iraq. Yet, in keeping with its humanitarian and peacekeeping mythologies, Canada continues to deny this involvement and chooses to repeatedly highlight its “commitment” to accepting increasing numbers of Iraqi refugees over the last few years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). “Since 2007, Canada has doubled refugee targets in the Middle East to allow for more resettlement of Iraqi refugees. Canada’s commitment to the protection of Iraqi refugees is ongoing and, since 2002, over 11,000 Iraqi refugees have been resettled in Canada” (CIC, 2010).
Between 2009 and 2011, 2,500 Iraqi refugees were accepted annually under the private sponsorship program. An additional 8,600 Iraqi refugees will be resettled to Canada between 2011 and 2013 (CTV News, Oct. 23, 2010). However, refugee and human rights advocates have criticized Canada for not doing enough to address the Iraqi refugee crisis and the refugee resettlement process is fraught with bureaucratic delays, an inadequate refugee determination process and backlogs within the system (Keung, June 21, 2011).

In 2006, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) documented a number of Iraqi private sponsorship cases refused at Damascus. The CCR undertook this analysis following a series of concerns raised by private sponsors at CCR meetings and CCR’s finding that about half of Iraqis sponsored by a private group in Canada were refused by a Canadian visa officer (CCR, 2006). These concerns were related to a pattern of negative decisions affecting Iraqi refugee sponsorship cases at the Damascus visa post. CCR’s analysis of 11 cases found many problematic aspects with respect to the negative decisions including lack of proper reasons for rejection; lack of consideration of Iraq’s context when assessing the credibility of claims; misinterpretation of the Convention refugee definition; failure to consider all relevant grounds for concluding the refugee claim decisions; and failure to consider Country of Asylum Class. All negative decisions involved eligibility, in other words the applicants were found not to be refugees nor members of the Country of Asylum Class. None of the letters to applicants provided much information about the reason for refusal or any clear indication as to which grounds of the Convention refugee definition or Country of Asylum definition were being considered and assessed. Closer examination of the more detailed notes which are meant to document evidence of the decision-making process did not provide much more indication of a sophisticated decision-making process. For example, one of the cases was the case of a family who left Iraq after their young daughter was kidnapped and murdered. They fled to Syria but then had to return after a month to gather the necessary documentation for their refugee claim. The decision letter simply stated, “Therefore, I am not satisfied that you have a well-founded fear of persecution…” this is despite the fact that the family had presented their young daughter’s death certificate, so their credibility was not into question. Moreover, as CCR notes, the Federal Court has stated that failure to make a refugee claim at the first opportunity does not constitute a reason for refusal. Reasonable and plausible explanations provided by the refugee must be considered and addressed in order to determine whether in fact “the family has been seriously and
personally affected by civil war, armed conflict or massive violation of human rights” (CCR, 2006, p. 5). In addition, the UNHCR’s 2006 Return Advisory and Position on International Protection Needs of Iraqis Outside Iraq had acknowledged the generalized violence and massive targeted human rights violations in Iraq, and had issued an advisory to favorably consider Iraqi asylum-seekers from Southern and Central Iraq as refugees under the 1951 Convention (UNHCR, 2006). CCR’s analysis of the refusal decisions concluded that there was a general attitude of suspicion towards the applicants’ accounts, with no sufficient objective explanations provided, calling into question the quality of decision-making and the inadequate understanding of the legal requirements for refugee determination (CCR, 2006, p. 6).

In 2007, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration was mandated to undertake a study of the Iraqi refugee crisis and provide a report to the government of Canada. The Standing Committee held meetings with panels of witnesses across Canada. Representatives of the Iraqi Canadian community, refugee and human rights advocates testifying before the committee provided evidence of the dire situation facing the 4.5 million Iraqis displaced since 2003 and urged the Canadian government to accept more Iraqi refugees and address the bureaucratic delays and inadequate processing of sponsorship applications in their visa office in Damascus. Ghina Al-Sewaidi, the President of the Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario and a practicing immigration lawyer in Toronto, was one of the witnesses appearing before the committee. She expressed her frustration with the application processing at the Damascus visa post as follows:

Applications take years. I can specifically mention that I know of a couple of family-class sponsorship applications that have taken over eight years to be processed, even though an appeal was allowed and an error in the application was rejected again. We had to correspond and correspond, and it took months for the embassy—that's in Syria, because most of my applications are being processed through Syria—to eventually respond when I sent them a letter, for example, saying, if you do not respond I'm going to Federal Court, and the Federal Court will be asking for cause and damages. That's basically when they responded.

It's very frustrating for us as lawyers. The same information keeps being asked by the embassy staff over and over—same documents, same photocopies. There is delay by them in answering questions or queries by us lawyers from here. They send correspondence to us with files without names—just file numbers—and we have to write back to them asking them for the name of the client. That's another two months for them to answer back. They send letters dated one date and the envelope dated a month and a half later, and they give the client a deadline of one month from the date of that letter. So again we have to write to them, send them copies of the envelope,
send them copies of the letter, and ask for an extension of time. That's a further delay.

They do not review files, it seems. Each time we ask for an update they ask for the same thing, the same standard letter they have. If clients go and ask them at the embassy, at the visa section, what is happening with their application, first of all, the clients say they are not treated as human beings there. They are treated differently from people with other nationalities, and at the same time they tell them, “Go and ask your lawyer in Canada. Your lawyer did not send us what we had asked your lawyer to send.” They come to us. We show them proof that we had sent to the embassy what they needed us to send to them.

So really all this is very frustrating. To clean up the situation, that would help immensely with the backlog they have at the embassy, especially with the situation of refugees, because a lot of them do have family here who are willing to sponsor them. They do have family here who are willing to support them, and if the mind was put actually to the application and to the paperwork, we would not have the backlog we have now here in the system.

(House of Commons 39th Parliamentary 2nd session Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, April 7, 2008, p. 4)

As I will discuss later, the key issues Ghina Al-Sewaidi identifies with the processing of refugee applications, among them the long processing delays, lack of responsiveness, and the different treatment afforded to Iraqi refugees, continue to persist within Canada’s refugee determination system overseas, adversely affecting refugees and their family members in serious ways. Other significant issues identified with respect to refugee selection and application processing by Canadian visa offices overseas included language proficiency and documentation requirements as well as the lack of consideration of the context of the Iraqi refugees fleeing Iraq, as indicated by Falah Hafed, of the Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario:

I also would like to mention some problems I have been hearing about from the refugees in Jordan and Syria. As all of you know, the refugees, when they leave their homes, have not prepared by learning English—they're just trying to save their skins. The requirement by Immigration Canada to have somebody speak English to come here as a refugee is a problem. The other problem they are facing there is that they don't have jobs and they live on their savings. Most of the people drain their savings while waiting for somebody to look after their application. Some of them risk their lives and go back to Iraq to do some work to put food on the table in Syria or Jordan, where their kids are.

The Canadian embassy and the people who are dealing with the refugees overseas, in Syria and Jordan, are asking for documentation—certified documentation, like a marriage certificate or an education certificate—and this kind of thing is impossible for a refugee to grab at the last minute, when some of them or most of them are leaving at gunpoint.
There are a lot of health issues for the Iraqi refugees. I get a lot of letters from my friends and family members. They can't afford to buy medicine for their kids. The economies in Syria and Jordan are very slow, and they have difficulty in finding jobs. They're appealing for help, and we are trying here to help them. (House of Commons 39th Parliamentary 2nd session Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, April 7, 2008, p. 3)

Falah Hafed raises a number of key points that we saw illustrated earlier in the discussion of refused sponsorship applications investigated by CCR. The requirement for documentation seems to be a double edged sword for Iraqi refugees whose applications are rejected if they lack the proper documentation and also if they go back to Iraq to obtain the required documentation. Moreover, additional selection criteria such as language proficiency and educational attainment are imposed on refugees fleeing war and violence, criteria that are typically used of the selection of economic class applicants and are not specified by any international refugee determination conventions. The lack of consideration for the context of asylum-seekers’ living conditions such as unemployment, lack of financial supports, and poor health conditions are not taken into consideration as the following cases shared by participants in this study illustrate:

Yasmine is a young Iraqi refugee woman I interviewed who spoke about the impact of immigration policies on her family separation. Yasmine came from a large Mandaean family who owned their own business. They all left Iraq together following the rise in sectarian violence and kidnappings that resulted in one of her brothers being kidnapped and murdered. After living in Syria for several years, members of her family were sent to countries across the globe including Canada, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. One of her sisters had cancer so she did not get accepted by any country and still remains in Syria with no access to necessary treatments. Yasmine and her parents came to Canada as privately sponsored refugees. Her parents were elderly and suffered from multiple health conditions. Her mother had experienced several strokes following the death of her sons, one of whom was kidnapped and murdered, and the other died of Leukemia. Her mother’s health deteriorated considerably after coming to Canada and became confined to a wheelchair. Yasmine assumed the primary responsibility of caring for her parents but was facing a lot of pressure from their welfare worker to place her parents in a nursing home so she could go out and get a job. Yasmine found this situation extremely distressing as she could not imagine abandoning her parents to a nursing home after all the trauma and suffering that they had been through. She became severely depressed and started taking antidepressants to
help her cope with her situation. At the time of my interview with Yasmine, her mother had just passed away two months prior. She was still visibly grief stricken and cried through most of the interview as she conveyed her story. Her family was a close knit family who lived and worked together all their lives. The imposed separation due to war, violence, and immigration policies was extremely distressing to the whole family, having to leave her dying sister alone with no access to support or treatment was particularly concerning and traumatic for Yasmine. In addition, she and her siblings had to come up with the funds to send for her sister’s medical treatments in Syria. Despite the separations and all the stressors involved, Yasmine and her family members felt fortunate to have been resettled to other safe countries. And her parents were among the few fortunate elderly Iraqi asylum seekers to make it to Canada and to have the support of their children.

Jawaher who is another Iraqi refugee woman who participated in the study, shares different experiences as an older woman with no children or extended relatives in Canada. Jawaher and her husband are an elderly couple in their 70s who have come to Canada as government assisted refugees and their only support is their settlement worker and a few relatives living in Europe. They had wanted to join their relatives in Europe but after several years of waiting in Syria, their case was accepted to Canada so they came here. Jawaher and her husband used to be very well off financially in Iraq. They had no children and they used to travel all over the world. Jawaher described her home as her child. They invested everything into their house filling it with antiques from around the world and entertaining their friends and family. Following the war and the sectarian violence that ensued, her husband was kidnapped for three days and they had to pay a ransom of thousands of dollars to get him back. Later, they were threatened for their lives by the militias who took over their home and murdered her sister in her own apartment.

I sensed a deep sadness, humiliation, shame, and fear in Jawaher during my interview with her. She kept her head down and struggled to fight tears as she spoke of having to live in poverty and rely on food banks and second hand clothing and furniture. At the start of the interview she mentioned that her husband would have liked to come with her but he had to stay home because he did not have a token to spare. She lamented that these are the kinds of decisions that they are now reduced to making. She then proceeded to ask me whether I knew how she could get a voucher so she could go buy used clothes. I was taken aback by her request and said I’m not
sure. You will need to ask your settlement counselor. Then she explained that she felt really cold coming to the interview since she did not have proper winter clothes:

I have to buy used clothing, used shoes, etc. because I have to. It’s very hard for me to get used to this. I really suffered in the winter because I didn’t have the proper clothes. They gave me a voucher to go get free second hand clothes from the store, but I lost it. Now I have to go ask them again for another ticket. (Jawaher, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

She further explained that they receive $1,350/month on social assistance and their rent is $1,100.00. After paying the phone bill, they are left with $150/month for all other expenses. So they have to get their food from the food bank which worsened their health conditions as both she and her husband suffered from diabetes and other chronic diseases. The first apartment they moved to after leaving the Refugee Reception Centre was infested with bed bugs so they had to throw out all the furniture that was provided to them by the government when they first came. She and her husband slept on the floor for several days until some friends gave them a couple of twin beds that they were no longer using. Although Jawaher had well to do siblings living in Europe, she was deeply ashamed to talk to them about their living conditions and ask for help, so she kept it all inside in order to maintain her pride and dignity. Similar feelings of shame and humiliation at being on welfare and living in poverty were also conveyed by Samar who was also an older refugee woman who recently came to Canada with her family:

No one.... nothing. Honestly, I mean if a person is close to you...I mean the closest people to me, I don't want to explain to them about the situation at home because... material became something that is essential. I mean for example....I mean I don't want to denigrate the value of our home by complaining about financial issues. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

The sense of shame and humiliation experienced by these study participants further contributed to their trauma, depression, and sense of isolation because they felt they had to maintain living life in poverty as a shameful secret that should not be seen by their friends and relatives. As these examples make clear, the lack of consideration for the specific health needs and trauma conditions of Iraqi refugees continues upon arrival and resettlement process in Canada as they are forced to continue to live precarious lives in poverty and isolation.

The House of Commons Special Committee examining the Iraqi refugee crisis completed its series of meetings across Canada but fell short of producing a report since an election was called
and Stephen Harper’s conservatives formed a majority government. Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, the Canadian government did increase its quota to take on more Iraqi refugees between 2008 and 2013. However, the Canadian government’s commitment to resettle Iraqi refugees has been severely impacted due to the recent political upheaval in Syria and the closure of the visa office in Damascus. On January 15, 2013, Minister Jason Kenney reaffirmed Canada’s 2009 and 2010 commitment to resettle up to 20,000 Iraqi refugees in need of protection and stated that Canada will resettle up to 5,000 Iranian and Iraqi refugees currently in Turkey by 2018 (CIC News Release, Jan 15, 2013). It is important to note that the commitment to resettle 20,000 Iraqi refugees has resulted in the resettlement of about 12,000 mostly privately sponsored refugees and at no cost to the government. The timeframe for the resettlement which was supposed to have been completed by 2013 has now been extended to 2018. Moreover, as the recent case of the Meera family indicates, the resettlement process continues to be mired with long processing delays, confusion, and continued uncertainty and insecurity for sponsored Iraqi refugee families. The Meera family who were sponsored by a Catholic parish in Brampton Ontario arrived in Canada on April 8, 2013 after enduring seven years of living as refugees in the poor Jermannya neighbourhood in Damascus, Syria:

The Meeras beat the odds over and over on their way to Canada.

The family was nearly on a plane to Toronto in December when an exchange of shells between the Syrian Army and rebel forces closed the airport. Two days later their medical exams expired and Canadian officials would not let them fly without another set of X-rays and signatures from doctors.

When the new medicals were ready, officials in Ottawa issued new visas but sent them to Paris. The St. Anthony refugee committee had to phone their MP, Conservative backbencher Bal Gosal, and Citizenship and Immigration officials to get the visas from Paris to Damascus.

But then Canadian officials decided the police background checks and medicals did not entitle the whole family to travel. Two of them could come, but the remaining four would have to stay in Syria. The St. Anthony refugee committee and the Office for Refugees Archdiocese of Toronto swung back into action, reviewing 120 pages of medical exams and police checks page by page with Immigration officials to prove that there was no reason to break up the family. Getting out of Damascus has become more difficult ever since Canada closed its Syrian embassy at the beginning of 2012.

(Iraqi Refugees Finally Beat the Odds. The Catholic Register, www.catholicregister.org/, April 21, 2013)
Despite the bureaucratic nightmares and the long years of waiting, the Meera family managed to make their way to Canada, unlike the 50,000 thousand Iraqi refugees who have had to return to Iraq in 2012 since the escalating conflict in Syria became unbearable, and the 65,000 Iraqi refugees who still live in Syria and endure the hardships of the civil war along with Syrian nationals (UNHCR, 2013). The thousands of Iraqi refugees who have been forced to return to Iraq by destitution and the escalating violence in Syria face a grim reality in Iraq much worse than the one that forced them to leave Iraq in the first place. The UNHCR, Amnesty International, Refugees International, among other humanitarian aid organizations have repeatedly issued advisories and reports advising against returning refugees to Iraq over the past few years that the security situation in Iraq continues to be extremely volatile amidst raging sectarian violence and a worsening humanitarian crisis by the day (Amnesty International 2008; Refugees International 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; UNHCR, 2006, 2008, 2013). In addition to the thousands of Iraqi refugees who have forcibly returned, thousands of Syrian refugees are also fleeing to Iraq. As of July 2013, more than 150,000 Syrians had registered with UNHCR in Iraq and this number is expected to double by the end of the year (Refugees International, 2013).

Iraq was already dealing with the worst and fastest growing refugee crisis in the region. Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion between 4.5 – 4.7 million Iraqis were displaced with around 2.8 million being internally displaced and the remaining 2 million primarily being in Syria and Jordan. Internally displaced Iraqis have been living in squalid conditions, lacking the most basic needs, with the majority being unemployed and homeless, living under plastic sheeting among trash dumps, with polluted water and limited access to food over the past ten years (Refugees International, 2013). As a result of the failure of the Iraqi government, U.S.-U.K. occupying forces and the rest of the international community to provide an adequate response, non-state actors have had to take on the role of providing assistance to vulnerable Iraqis. This has enabled militia groups of all denominations to establish a stronghold by providing social services and supports in the neighbourhoods and towns that are under their control, and recruiting increasing numbers of civilians to their militias in the process (Refugees International, 2007 & 2008).

Syria and Jordan are not signatories to the 1951 Convention, and yet they have shouldered the largest share of Iraqi asylum-seekers since 2003. The large influx of refugees to Syria and Jordan has placed a huge strain on these countries’ infrastructure with minimal supports from the
international community. Displaced Iraqis living in Syria and Jordan are not afforded refugee protection under the convention since these countries are not signatories. Iraqi asylum-seekers in these countries are unable to work legally and are not granted permanent residency status. They live precarious lives in fear of deportation, having to survive on their own savings while awaiting resettlement to other countries. The vast majority have already exhausted their savings and live in poor neighbourhoods with limited access to health care, education, or other necessary supports. They have had to resort to a variety of means to survive including working illegally, begging on the streets, prostitution, and child labour. While some have given up and returned to Iraq out of desperation and lack of any other options (Cohen, 2007; Harper, 2008; Refugees International, 2010).

The government of Iraq, the U.S., the U.K., and the rest of the international community have largely failed to live up to their responsibilities to meet the humanitarian needs of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons who constitute the largest displacement in the Middle-East since 1948 (Harper, 2008). According to UNHCR’s 2007 statistics on displaced Iraqis around the world, 95% remained in the Middle East with 43% internally displaced in Iraq, 44% in Syria and Jordan, 9% in the rest of the Middle East, 4% in Europe, and only 0.5% in the rest of the world (UNHCR, April 2007). Despite the fact that only 5% of Iraqi refugees were resettled in industrialized countries, by October 2007 many European countries were forcing “voluntary” returns on Iraqis and sending refugees back to Iraq under the rhetoric of “improved” security. Amnesty International expressed serious concerns around the international community abdicating its responsibilities towards Iraqi refugees and documents these “voluntary” and “forced” returns to Iraq in its 2008 report Rhetoric and Reality: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis. The report counters the international governments’, particularly the U.S. and U.K.’s, rhetoric of improved security and highlights the fact that they were motivated by their desire to show that their military involvement was a “success” and the Iraqi authorities’ political desire to present an overly optimistic and positive image of Iraq’s security situation. The Syrian government introduced strict visa regulations in October 2007, following which Iraq’s Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki visited Damascus and requested the closure of the border in an attempt to limit further negative publicity about mass exodus of Iraqis from Iraq. The Iraqi state began an advertising campaign on its state controlled channels encouraging Iraqis to return to Iraq. In November 2007, the Iraqi embassy sent three private coaches to Syria to return hundreds of Iraqis on a
widely publicized “voluntary” returns campaign. Two thirds of those who returned became internally displaced since their homes were looted, occupied, or destroyed. Moreover, the promised US$1,000 return incentive by the Iraqi government never materialized (Amnesty International, 2008, p. 24-25).

European countries on the other hand got engaged in their own version of coercive return campaigns for Iraqi refugees by adopting policies that are intended to make failed asylum-seekers destitute and to encourage their return. For instance in the UK, failed refugee claimants are expected to leave the country within 21 days if there is no pending appeal, financial and accommodation support to them is cut during this time period. The Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark have adopted similar policies of significantly reducing financial assistance, restricting work permits and family reunification, and illegalizing failed claimants. Since 2003, Germany has revoked the refugee status of 18,000 Iraqis who were granted protection during Saddam Hussein’s regime and an additional 5,780 new revocation procedures of Iraqi refugees were introduced, many of which have resulted in revocation of protection (Amnesty International, 2008, p. 29 - 31). With the introduction of its new refugee determination, immigration and citizenship policies, since 2008, the Canadian government seems to be setting the stage to follow in the footsteps of these European governments. As discussed earlier, Canada has introduced new regulations that enable cessation of protection status, cessation of permanent residency, and has revoked about 4,000 Canadian citizenships most of these individuals were of Middle-Eastern origin. The Assisted Voluntary Return program was introduced in 2012 and the number of migrant detentions and deportations is steadily on the rise. Moreover, Minister Jason Kenney has made an official visit to Baghdad in March 2013, to become the first Canadian Minister visiting Iraq since 1976. Minister Kenney’s discussions with Iraqi authorities centred around “immigration management”, “bilateral trade”, and “minority rights”:

“This official visit to Iraq was an historic opportunity to help strengthen ties between Canada and Iraq,” Minister Kenney said. “As Iraq continues its transition to a democracy, it is important that Canada work with the government to ensure protection for minority rights and help establish stable and enduring democratic institutions.”

Minister Kenney attended the enthronement of Patriarch Louis Raphaël I Sako as the new Patriarch of Iraq’s Chaldean Catholic Church, the largest Christian community in Iraq. The ceremony was held at St Joseph’s Chaldean church in downtown Baghdad. Christians in Iraq have been among the victims of sectarian violence in recent years, a
fact highlighted at the Minister’s visit to Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic Cathedral, where 52 worshippers were killed by extremists in 2010.

As Prime Minister Harper recently said, “There is a crucial and historical link between respect for religious pluralism and the development of democracy itself. That is why we shall continue to champion freedom of conscience and freedom of religion throughout the world.”

Minister Kenney met Iraqi Vice President Kudhair Al-Khuzaie, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, Minister of Displacement and Migration Dindar Najman Duski, and Minister of the Environment Sargon Lazon Sliwah, and other senior officials. Discussions included bilateral trade issues, migration management, political developments in Iraq, the situation in Syria, and minority rights.

He also met with members of civil society and religious leaders to further discuss the protection of minorities and aid to those affected by terrorism and extremism in the country. (CIC News Release, March 7, 2013)

If Minister Kenney’s visit to Hungary and his billboard campaign urging the Roma refugees to stay in Hungary are any indication, I would venture to say that his “migration management” strategy is to keep displaced Iraqis in Iraq and encourage “voluntary” returns of Iraqi refugees so they could be killed or die of malnutrition and disease. Similarly, Minister Kenney’s bilateral trade agreements with Mexico and other high refugee source countries have resulted in visa impositions and severe restrictions placed on refugee claimants from those countries by designating them as coming from “Designated Countries of Origin” that respect “democracy” and human rights, a designation which he delusionally thinks Iraq is moving towards at this moment in time. Let’s face it, the real reason Jason Kenney is in Iraq is not to be outdone by his American and European allies in cashing in on whatever trade deals still to be had while standing alongside religious patriarchs touting “democracy” and “religious minority rights” in a true imperialist neocolonial fashion.

In this chapter I have traced the historical continuum of state structural violence in Iraqi women’s lives over the past 35 years. Through a review of a historical sketch of Iraq’s recent history, I have attempted to show Iraqi women’s changing social and economic status as a function of the interconnections between imperialist colonial interventions, Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship regime, patriarchal state institutions, and fundamentalist religious forces in the region. The main goal of this chapter has been to historicize and contextualize Iraqi women’s experiences of the “war on terror” in the Canadian context in order to show the continuity of state structural violence in Iraqi women’s lives. My aim has been to disrupt the notions of civilizing missions
and discourses of Iraqi women’s liberation through occupation. As it is evident from this brief historical sketch of Iraq’s recent history, Iraqi women’s social, economic status has significantly deteriorated as a consequence of wars, UN economic sanctions, and the most recent invasion and occupation of Iraq which has led to increased gender-based and sectarian violence that have resulted in the death, disappearance, and displacement of millions of Iraqis.

In the second part of the chapter, I have provided an overview of Canada’s “war on terror” with the particular aim of challenging the national mythology of Canada as a peacekeeping, multicultural nation and exposing Canada’s complicity and direct involvement in the 2003 Iraq invasion and post-war reconstruction. In addition, I have provided an overview and analysis of Canada’s anti-terrorism measures as well as recent immigration, refugee, and citizenship policy changes in order to demonstrate Canada’s imperialist mission, and neoconservative neoliberal agenda. I have also explored the racialized, gendered, and classed nature of Canada’s immigration policies that have increasingly been shifting towards privatization, criminalization of migrants and refugees, detention, deportation, and human rights violations of vulnerable populations in need of protection. Through a review of a variety of policy relevant document sources I have analyzed Canada’s response to the Iraqi refugee crisis in order to further contextualize Iraqi women’s experiences of the “war on terror” and to demonstrate the structural violence of immigration policies and their contribution to increased violence and trauma in Iraqi refugee women’s lives in Canada. In the following chapter, I present key findings from my interviews with Iraqi refugee women and key informants participating in the study, focusing on three main themes of violence, citizenship, and trauma.
Chapter 5 : Violence, Citizenship, & Trauma

I'm often asked the question, "Will you ever go back to Iraq?" It always shocks me because, deep down, I feel like I never left. (Haifa Zangana, 2007, p. 150)

Violence

In the process of conducting this research study, I received the most powerful responses and in turn I experienced some of the strongest personal reactions when discussing the “war on terror” and its meanings and relevance to Arab Iraqi women in Toronto. In this section, I will be drawing on feminist standpoint epistemology while discussing the various perspectives on the “war on terror” conveyed by study participants and key informants. In the course of this study, I conducted 9 semi-structured interviews with Arab Iraqi refugee women, 7 key informant interviews, and two group meetings with key informants in the community, in addition to reviewing several relevant reports and documents (See Appendix A for a list of documents reviewed). In this chapter, I will primarily be drawing on my interviews with the four study participants introduced in chapter 1 (Ahlam, Amani, Sundus, and Samar) and provide more detailed analysis of interviews with two key informants (Sabah and Haifa) as well as a group of Iraqi older women in order to present the range of meanings and experiences of the “war on terror” I encountered in this study. I also revisit some of the quotations used in the analysis later on in Chapter 6 to illustrate some of the discussion and conclusion points with specific examples from these interviews. Critical self-reflection and explicit discussion of the interview process and analysis are essential components of interpretive methodology and feminist standpoint theory. To that end, I will be drawing on interview transcripts and field notes, notes from my reflective journal, and share reflections from conversations with some of my thesis committee members. My reflexive journal and consultations with my thesis committee members played an important role in helping me recognize my own standpoint and framing of the “war on terror” and enabled me to step back and hear the differing and diverse perspectives being offered on the issue. In addition, my conversations with two Iraqi Canadian academics who acted as key informants and informal community advisors at different points of the study, particularly during the data gathering phase, provided valuable insights in deciphering the different meanings of the “war on
terror” by situating them in the particularities of the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical context in which they were developed.

The biggest challenge to me came from the first key informant interview with a Kurdish Iraqi-Canadian service provider. Her first response to me when she read the information letter about my study was that she not only wanted me to define the term, but she also insisted that the “war on terror” had no relevance to Iraqi women or to Iraqis in general:

The "war on terror" what do you mean by it? How does it apply to Iraqi women? I don't think it applies to us. I'm not affected by it! I think it applies more to Afghan women but not to us because the war in Iraq was due to “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and “Liberation from Saddam's dictatorship”. We don't have organized terrorists in Iraq. There is no Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The "war on terror" is completely justified, they were attacked [Americans] and they had to defend themselves. However, the war in Iraq is a completely different story. (Sabah, February 10, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Sabah elaborated on this for about an hour, and she encouraged me to change my research topic. She even offered a new topic and heading and a suggestion that I remove the “war on terror” entirely and focus on Iraqi women’s suffering during Saddam’s regime, because that was their real suffering. From her standpoint and situated knowing, the real terror that Iraqis are facing now is “the terror from within”, the sectarian violence and in-fighting that are going on. I was really taken aback by her reaction and told her I can’t really change my topic and take out the “war on terror” focus out of it, it was already approved by research ethics and my thesis committee. I was however, concerned about the possibility of study participants getting turned off by the study title and be prevented from participating in the study, so I had to think about perhaps changing the wording. Following consultation with my thesis supervisor and one of my thesis committee members, I changed some of the language in the introductory letter and consent form without taking away from the meaning or intent of the study. They also encouraged me to go and see how other interviewees would react to it.

The interviews with the Iraqi women went well, though they all pretty much said, with some variations, that the “war on terror” does not have anything to do with them. I will provide further analysis and elaborate on this later on in this section. The next big challenge to the relevance of the topic came from a group of Iraqi older women I met with a few weeks later. In addition to interviewing recent Iraqi refugee women, I was also interested in meeting with Iraqi refugee
women who had come to Canada after the 1991 Gulf War in order to cover a range of perspectives, so one of the Iraqi refugee women I had interviewed introduced me to a group of older Iraqis who met socially on a weekly basis. I met with Mona who was responsible for coordinating the group’s gatherings a few days prior to meeting with the group. I initially spoke to her briefly over the phone and introduced the study and asked if I could meet with her and the group. She invited me to meet in her apartment the next day so we could talk about it further. Our meeting started out awkwardly, I was not sure whether this was going to be an interview or a conversation about the study and learning more about the group. I also felt awkward sitting on the couch, with Mona sitting on a chair to my right. She started out talking about the information I had sent her and saying “I’m not really sure how helpful I would be to you I know you said you’re focusing on the “war on terror”, all I can tell you is about myself and my experiences. I came here in 1989 with my son, our suffering was more under Saddam’s regime, I’m not sure about the “war on terror” and what you mean by that or what I can say about it”. So I gave my definition of the “war on terror”, saying it refers to the policies that were implemented in Canada after 9/11 and the more recent war in Iraq and their impacts on Iraqi women living in Canada, and how things have changed for them. She was very pleasant and hospitable offering me tea and sweets. The interview was more like an informal conversation. She was showing me some old photographs and some information about past community events that she thought were relevant. She kept shifting back and forth in time, narrating her story of how she came to Canada following the Iran-Iraq war, asking me about the focus of my study and repeating that she was not sure if she could help and how much her experience was relevant to it; asking me about myself, my personal background, talking to her husband in the other room, telling him about me, asking him to look up things or asking him questions. After about an hour or so she suggested I attend the group and do a brief presentation to them about my research. She thought it would be a good learning experience for the group to hear about some of the findings so far. I informed her though I speak Arabic, I had not done any presentations in Arabic before, but I would do my best. She reassured me that would be fine.

Two days later, I attended the informal group gathering which was taking place in a common room of Mona’s apartment building. There were about 12 men sitting around three small tables playing dominoes, a popular game played among Arab men in social gatherings and at coffee shops. And there were four women sitting to the side, on the couch and armchairs. When we
entered the room the men stopped playing their game for a couple of minutes. Mona took me by the hand and announced to the group, “This is the girl I was telling you about. She is from Iran but because of the passion she has for her Iraqi mother, she is studying Iraqi women instead of Iranian women”. I was surprised at the way she introduced me but I smiled pleasantly and greeted the group. The men waved and said hello and resumed playing their dominos. Mona directed me to sit with the women in front of the table laid out with some snacks.

There were three Mandaean women, and two Muslim women in the group, one of whom was wearing the Hijab. After the hostess welcomed and introduced me, one of the Mandaean women started out by asking me “so can you enlighten us how you see the “war on terror” affects Iraqi women? You’ve been here how many years, over 20 years, how have you felt it? What have you seen?” I felt like I was on trial to prove to them the “war on terror” did have relevance to Canada and to Iraqi women. I was a bit thrown off because I thought I was doing a presentation to them. But I went along and started answering by giving my definition of the “war on terror” and mentioning anti-terrorism policies, security certificates and so on. So she said well I think the “war on terror is between countries, not against individuals. This goes back to Kissinger’s time, it’s nothing new. I still don’t see how it relates to us”. I proceeded by giving the example of Maher Arrar and other examples of what I was hearing in my recent interviews with Iraqi refugee women. However, before I could finish they dismissed it all by saying, “well yes, this is in the U.S., not in Canada” or “yeah, if they had kept those men longer under security certificates, I’m sure they would have found their connections to terrorism”. I was struck by the blatant internalized racism and the lack of sensitivity to the stories and experiences of recent Iraqi refugee women I had interviewed. The Mandaean woman who did most of the talking just shrugged her shoulders and said, “So let them go back to where they came from. Who asked them to come to Canada?” So I said “but you know Iraq, you’ve seen what it is like, how could they go back? They have no choice”. She said, “Well then they shouldn’t complain about Canada”. Another woman chimed in, “Most of them are probably on welfare, now they’re complaining about Canada”. The other women nodded in agreement. I could not believe my ears, it seemed as though the voice of Minister Jason Kenney or another conservative MP was talking to me. It was so unsettling that I just thought to myself, well this is hopeless I should just leave. It felt as if we were coming from a different planet. The women probably picked up on what I was thinking. They seemed to want to help me but did not know how. They said “we want to
help you, we want you to succeed and do your research, but it doesn’t apply to us”. So I reassured them not to worry, that it’s their perspective and experiences, they can’t make things up for my sake. One of them actually said at the start, “well yeah, it doesn’t apply to us, but she doesn’t want to give it up, it’s her theory, her research”, and all the other women agreed with her. I felt like they took pity on me at the same time as they seemed exasperated by my insistence on the “war on terror” and my attempts to explain and give examples.

I was so acutely aware of the woman wearing the hijab, because she did not say a word, but she was nodding her head when I was talking about the negative impacts of the “war on terror” on Arabs/Muslims post 9/11. The women also agreed, and outright said that “we’re not impacted by the “war on terror” but may be Hijabi women are. I looked over towards her but she still did not say anything. About half way through the conversation she decided she had heard enough, she packed up her cell phone and papers and stood up to leave. Mona seemed surprised as she asked her “where are you going?” She responded, “Oh I’ll be back”. The other women did not say anything. It did not seem to bother them. She came back after about an hour as I was leaving.

At the same time that these women were insisting the “war on terror” had nothing to do with them, they each provided examples of their experiences with racial profiling at the border and discrimination on the job. Despite having lived in Canada since the early 90s, they felt they were not integrated into Canadian society. They made statements such as, “we don’t really have relationships, connections with Canadians. They don’t want to connect with us somehow. They already have their friends and connections so they’re not interested”. The same woman who made this statement also relayed that despite having Canadian passports they were always pulled aside and questioned at airports and borders by immigration officials because their country of birth is Iraq. She expressed her frustration at the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officer asking her yet again where she was from: “I told him [border officer], “you know Iraq?” and the officer said “yes Ma’am… I know Iraq” and “he said it in such a way, you know…”. The Muslim woman remaining in the group said, one time she was returning from a trip to Qatar, aboard Qatar airways, their plane was diverted to the U.S. due to severe weather conditions in Canada. She said almost everyone on that plane was an Arab. So they were all placed in a large room, then were called and questioned one-by-one, for an extensive period of time. All their passports were stamped with a red stamp then they were taken to a hotel where they stayed.
overnight and departed to Canada the next day. Following this incident, she and her husband were going to their time share in Florida and they were planning to take a boat cruise, she was pulled aside because of the red stamp in her passport and was told she had to go back to immigration (which was about 200 Km away from where they were). So she and her husband got very upset and said “forget the time share and the cruise we paid for, we don’t need this, we’re going back home!” All the women agreed and related similar experiences at border crossings. Yet at the same time, the women said they did not mind this because they have not done anything and they were always released after questioning. This was done for their own protection and security, “We can’t really blame them. They have to defend the nation. We have respect for Canadian laws. Canada respected us and accepted us. I don’t mind being questioned. It’s for safety and security of nations”.

I finally decided after about 1.5 hours of this encounter, that I better gather up whatever dignity I have left and leave, so I asked my hostess to be excused, and she said as you wish, I think she was relieved too. The women did not get up to say goodbye as it is customary to do so. They just nodded and wished me well. Mona was not going to accompany me out either, but then she changed her mind and decided to guide me through my way out of the winding basement of the building.

This meeting just sent me reeling for a few days. I felt so down, humiliated, and discouraged by this experience. The encounter was not only so different from what I had expected it had negated my experiences and called into question the relevance of my research to Iraqi women. I had another interview scheduled with a key informant that was coming up within two days but I could not conceive of going there and asking him the questions that I had in my interview guide. I relayed my feelings of discouragement and my doubts to one of my thesis committee members who knew about this meeting coming up through our conversation the day before. She suggested I go through with the interview but focus on seeking his input about this encounter and the women’s reactions. She also shared an article about the hermeneutics of hope written by de Sales Turner (2003) and encouraged me to draw on Turner’s method and write about the hermeneutics of terror from my perspective. In her article, Turner (2003) used Gadamer’s hermeneutics phenomenology to explore the meaning of hope in a small sample of Australian youth. Drawing on Gadamer’s concepts of pre-understanding and the hermeneutic circle, Turner explored her
own initial meaning and understanding of hope through writing her reflections in her journal. She then used this understanding to inform her data analysis and her encounters with the youth.

Inspired by Turner’s method, I explored my own understanding of the “war on terror” in order to understand Iraqi refugee women’s meanings and experiences of it. The following is an excerpt from my reflexive journal exploring what the “war on terror” meant to me personally:

When I started my research project about four years ago, my reference point was the “war on terror” that began after the events of 9/11 as pronounced by George W. Bush. My reference point was my experiences and reactions to the events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I remember that day, September 11, 2001 like so many people who were living in North America at the time. I was at work when one of my colleagues came into my office and started telling me in disbelief what was going on. Then we went into the hallway and encountered a few other people that were trying to make sense of what was happening. People were going online to see what was going on, others found TV sets and stood there looking at the images of the planes hitting the Twin Towers, shocked that something like this could happen. And that’s when the speculations started and the names Osama bin Laden, Saudis, Muslims, etc. started circulating around. I remember my heart sank and thought oh, God, I hope not. Don’t let it be an Arab or a Muslim. I didn’t know what would happen but I knew it would not be good for us. That we would somehow pay for the consequences. For me, this kind of trauma of witnessing a shocking, destructive event was not new. Yes, I felt bad that it had happened and that many people were killed and many others were affected by it. But I also remember thinking this kind of suffering is not new for us but now people in the U.S. were getting a taste of what it feels like.

I recall feeling the terror, and the assault on my senses that I felt when “Operation Desert Storm” began in 1991 and the ease with which the media provided live coverage of the precision attacks and explosions. I remember watching the TV screen in horror and shutting it off after a while because I could not bear to watch the extent of the horror, and the simultaneous lack of sensitivity to the fact that this really wasn’t just some TV show. It was a real destructive war. People were living there, in Kuwait. My family were living there, and from my point of view, I pictured every precision bombing and spectacular show of explosions that followed, falling on my parents heads. I remember thinking how could they possibly survive this? I don’t care how precise the media claims they are.

I also remember where I was on March 19, 2003 when George W. Bush announced the U.S. invasion of Iraq. I was at a family gathering at my brother’s house to celebrate Iranian New Year. But we were not dancing or celebrating, instead we were staring at the T.V. with a great sense of fear, sadness, and rage, watching the start of yet another atrocity in the region. Millions of people around the world, including myself, had marched and voiced their opposition to the unjustified war that was bound to be devastating for the people in Iraq. But that was not enough to stop the U.S. imperialist expansionist mission waged in the name of “democracy” and “freedom”. I got physically sick that night and could not go to work the next day. I kept pacing between watching the bombs falling on the skyline of Baghdad, and pacing up and down the stairs in my house out of sheer despair, outrage, and anguish. I did not know what to do with myself. Although I am not religious, I found myself doing what my mother would have done.
when she was mourning, listening to the Quran. I was mourning for the people of Iraq, for my mother, and for her family who was living there.

The real terror for me was the state terror. Witnessing the terror of the indiscriminate assault on human lives while at the same time dismissing, devaluing, discounting that very violence as if those lives did not count or matter, because they were not worthwhile lives, because they were inhuman to begin with (Butler, 2010). The terror was the complacency, the double standard of whose lives mattered. Whose pain and suffering mattered? Who got remembered and memorialized in ceremonies and monuments, and who remained nameless? Who was just deemed “bilateral damage”, “war casualty”, who was talked about as an object? Whose charred, mutilated, assaulted, and tortured bodies were captured in images and circulated on TV and internet sites and e-mails? Our pain and suffering as diasporic Arabs and Muslims was to be silent and invisible. What’s more, we were to show sympathy and grief for their suffering while at the same time enduring the violence and assault on our people; enduring the daily assaults on our senses, of witnessing the death and destruction in Iraq; enduring the harassment, discrimination, racism and racial profiling that has become so common place, so normalized in our daily lives. Enduring the terror and the symbolic acts of violence on a daily basis while being called upon to demonstrate our loyalty and allegiance to our colonialisabusers, and demonstrate our innocence. We have to prove that we are good citizens who mean no harm, who will work hard, buy into Canadian values and contribute our labour to the market economy. Who would maintain the status quo and not challenge injustice, in fact, not dare to name it.

As someone who has lived through the war, political violence, racism and discrimination all my life, my definition of terror, my experience of terror is infused and embedded in my every day ordinary experiences as much as they have shaped and structured my life course. It colours and shapes many of my actions and decisions. It permeates every aspect of my life. So when I started out to study the “Impact of the “war on terror” on Iraqi women’s Lives in Canada”, it did not occur to me that I needed to define the “war on terror”. I took for granted that people would know what I’m talking about, particularly for those who shared a similar background and historical experiences. When my thesis advisers asked me to provide a definition of the “war on terror”, I thought of course, I have to define the concepts that I’m using, it is part of my training as a future scholar. I have to be clear and be able to explain and defend what I’m doing. Then I got the same question and request by the University’s Research Ethics Board to define the “war on terror”. I thought I had defined it already, but I was pushed to further clarify and define it. I did so begrudgingly, but it was done and accepted.

Going through this process of writing about my experiences and understanding of the “war on terror” helped contextualize my strong reactions to the seemingly oppositional views that the “war on terror” had nothing to do with Iraqi women. Through critical reflections and consultations with my committee members and my community adviser I was able to step back and evaluate how my own subjectivity and situated knowing was influencing my interactions with and understanding of the study participants’ perspectives on the issue. Consistent with
feminist standpoint theory (Haraway, 1988; Naples and Sachs, 2000), what these encounters highlighted for me was the importance of examining the situated knowing, histories, and subjective locations of the Iraqi women participating in the study while also paying attention to how my own subjectivity influenced the interview context. From my lived experiences and understanding of the “war on terror” I was unwilling to accept the notion that the “war on terror” had no relevance to Iraqi women. Therefore, hearing it from my key informants was emotionally upsetting to me on a personal level and challenged me on an intellectual level to go deeper in my analysis to try to understand what stories were being conveyed, how these stories came to be, and what was being accomplished by these stories (Reissman, 2008; Mishler, 1986).

In what follows, I will be drawing on various interpretive and discourse analysis tools to explicate the dynamics at play in my interactions with my key informants and study participants as active constructors of meanings. In addition to feminist standpoint theory, my analysis will be drawing on the following theoretical discourse analysis tools and concepts as outlined by Gee (2005 & 2011): 1) *The Situated Meaning Tool* enquires about the situated meanings of phrases communicated by actors, examining the meanings in the particular contexts in which they are constructed; 2) *The Intertextuality Tool* examines how any communication refers to other “texts” (i.e. what others have said or written); 3) *The Big “D” Discourse Tool* interrogates how the person is using language to enact a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable activity (Gee, 2011).

In exploring Arab Iraqi refugee women’s meanings of the “war on terror” three overarching themes emerge:

1. The “war on terror” does not relate to us. We’re not terrorists.
2. The “war on terror” as an imperialist mission going after Iraq’s oil and resources, preventing Iraq’s progress.
3. The “war on terror” as Saddam’s doing. He instigated it by attacking Kuwait.

As I will be discussing throughout this section, these overarching themes were relayed in variations by the study participants. The particular meanings of the “war on terror” varied based on the intersectionality of multiple axes of the women’s social location including their personal history and characteristics such as age; ethnic, religious, and political affiliation; level of
education; class and socioeconomic status; geographic region which they originated from; history of immigration, and immigration status in Canada. This finding is consistent with other studies of Iraqi women in diaspora showing the intersections of Iraqi women’s storied narratives with their personal history and social location (Al-Ali, 2007; Jones-Gailani, 2012).

The first two overarching themes were illustrated in the case of Sabah and the group of Iraqi older women, the key informants introduced earlier in this section. Sabah, a Kurdish Iraqi service provider viewed the “war on terror” as irrelevant to Iraqi women and situated Iraqi women’s suffering within Saddam’s era. She viewed the “war on terror” as “completely justified” by the U.S. administration in order to defend itself against terrorist attacks on its soil. While she believed the 2003 Iraq Occupation was due to Saddam’s accumulation of “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and was intended to “liberate” Iraq from Saddam’s tyranny and dictatorship:

Uhh...no. As previously discussed, I think I had my...uhh...let us say...my viewpoint regarding the title of the thesis, it's quite viable but I don't know how much that will apply to the Iraqi women. In precise, it might apply to, to Afghani women, more so than Iraqi women when it comes to the "war on terror". "War on terror" is just like a definition, more or less it's like the Jihadi people. When you say Jihadi for example, immediately you start thinking about the Palestinian. And the Shi’a in Lebanon and stuff like that, rather than thinking about the Iraqi people. Uhh...when you say "war on terror" you immediately give the definition, or the understanding it comes to Afghanistan rather than Iraq. The Iraqi situation is totally different you know, I don't believe that Iraq...that not only I don't believe...I mean the whole thing was about the Iraq...uhh...2003 or the purpose for uhh...you know, the collapse of the regime in Iraq...uhhh or the liberation by uhh...American troops and government, and the invasion, people, there are people they call it invasion, there are people they call it uhhh...liberation... uhhh...I personally will call it liberation for 24 hours...or a week time, and then it turned out to be a disastrous invasion because frankly speaking, and I heard that from American people, that they didn't have any agenda when they went to Iraq. At least they say this in the congress, that we didn't have an agenda, an agenda when we went to Iraq. They thought there would be some kind of resistance that will take place...you know, that it will take time to liberate Iraq. You know like when it happened in 1991, 1991-92 that the Gulf, the second Gulf war in Kuwait, that it took you know, a few months. They didn't know that they will come to Iraq and it won't take more than a few hours, even less. And they were even welcomed, you know, whole heartedly by the Iraqi people because they, envisioned them...envisioned them...uhh that, as liberators, not as invaders, until they start, uhh...Misusing their power...uhhh, mis-interpreting the liberation, it ended up to be kind of invading the privacy of the Iraqi people. In the street, at home, everywhere...aaahhh...of course, with all the problem in Iraq, and the people in Iraq, they have been oppressed for decades and decades, I mean all their life actually, they have never had a democracy, so it was extremely confusing for them, what does that mean? So when the American troop are there, are we free? Can we shout and scream and kill and do whatever we want? No questioning? Is that a democracy? Is democracy...is to...you
know...uuhhh...to swear in the street...and to swear at the government and the people and the authority? Aahh...is democracy...aahh...you know, to have rights? Which kind of rights? Because they didn't know, they never....frankly speaking they never had rights, so they didn't know what rights even mean. So all this confusion, and aahh...you know, getting back to your question...aahh, whether America entered, uuhhh...or invaded let us say, liberated...whatever it is, whatever you want to call it, at that point in 2003, whether they came to declare "war on terror" in Iraq? NO. Our understanding, their understanding, the purpose they came, was to topple the regime in Iraq that was extremely, extremely you know cruel and destructive to the whole region and to the Iraqi people, and then, to mainly to destroy the weapons of mass destruction, that they expected, or let us say, the...uuhh the Pentagon informed Bush, that there are still....uuhh...weapon of mass destruction. So they came late, after many years, they said they were mistaken, even Bush said that, “I was misled and misinformed”, that “there were no more weapon of mass destruction”. Again, this is extremely questionable, whether there are still may be to date, there are weapon of mass destruction hidden here and there, who knows? Uuhh...ummm...weapon of mass destruction...that was only, you know, that was the purpose. So whether this, the whole title, you are asking people, asking me to start with, "war on terror" does that apply to the Iraqi situation, Iraqi dilemma, Iraqi problem, you know all the misery that happened to all these people after 2001, whether that applies or not....really, myself, it doesn't apply to me. I don't even know how to respond to this question.

I: May be that particular term doesn't apply, but do you see a connection between the timing of the 2003 Iraq Occupation, and the weapons of mass destruction, the reason that was given for the Iraq war, do you see any connection with the post 9/11?

KI: You know what, yes of course. You know, aahh...if I say it's something, what is the reality is something else...I mean America always has to have a reason to go and do something somewhere, somehow, aahh...I think it's all connected together. But...I don't think Iraq was ever known for that, for harbour...you call it harbouring, Al-Qaeda, for example, they hated each other, they fought each other, because each one of them is a master for killing people in a different way. So....Iraq was never considered harboring, like Afghanistan, like Pakistan, you know terrorists...it's a totally different situation. Therefore, to relate, to connect these two huge, humongous, you know events...in the...uuhhh...of 2001...2000...in this century, I really don't see any, and extremely involved with the community, and living in Canada and being aahh...constant, on a daily basis, I have worked with the community. I did work for 11 years, from 2000 to 2011, and I was in direct, front, like a frontline worker or settlement counsellor, so every day I hear problems, I deal with problems, I solved problems, I advocate, I...I...I...whether ever, "war on terror" was mentioned before me...by any Iraqi woman, man or Iraqi people? NEVER.

I: How did they refer to it at the time when the war was starting and even now? How do they refer to it?

KI: It's never about the terror from outside. It's aahh...not the terror...as the terror...the definition of terror as I say, they just ...the terror that is coming from the Arab world to
Iraq. Always what is known, that the borders were extremely loose, especially at the beginning, therefore, a lot of terrorists, you know, who were those factions, why they ended up in Iraq? People came from Lybia, from Morocco...from Sudan, from Jordan, Palestinian, Syrian, Yemen! They were coming to the border, entering very easily from the border, and aahh...working as a group, to destroy the country, the infrastructure, by all this bombing...you know, explosions, killing people...and aahh....aahhh...doing all this anarchy on the street, all this terror, WITHIN. As I said, it was a terror, WITHIN. Those people, who did send them? Nobody knows, maybe they know. But it was not this kind of terror. What I mean, those were not the kind of organized terror, like the group of Bin Laden, No. It was you know, "Essabat" (Gangs) let's say, who paid them? Whether they got from the Shi'a people, from the Sunni people, whatever it is, it was a terrible era of the Iraqi history, the most recent history of Iraq, because we just...we are not used to these things. We don't have suicide, you know, aahh...suicide bombers, you call them? We don't have in Iraq, we have everything, but not this. Nobody kill himself to kill others. Palestinians are very famous for this, they have a cause. They have a....you know, a reason to do this, but Iraqi, never. Iraqi, don't kill himself in order to kill the group around him. So most of these people, to the best of my knowledge, when were [inaudible], they were not Iraqis. They were people from outside they bring them, some of them they came back, if you kill people on the street or if you kill an American, you will go straight away to heaven. I mean they bring [inaudible], all kinds of nonsense, they were brainwashing them. Which kind of terror is this? This is not the terror we understand in the West. In the Western point of view, "war on terror", which is an organized crime against humanity, against a different way, with their ideology. They put a title of an ideology that this is Islam. Islam is Never, Ever, Ever, will accept this. God will NEVER accept this. Prophet Mohammad will NEVER accept this. Neither Jesus, nor Moses...No one on earth, the way it has been conducted. This terror, because they are hurting civilians and no one else. How many people died in Iraq, you know from 2003 to date, how many of them are in authority? How many of them are officials as opposed to how many thousands and hundreds of civilian in the street, they are dying. Which, what kind of terror is this? I don't know, call it! So this is when it becomes very confusing. But let me tell you, I know that...that very well, Iraqi people they don't have this ....mindset of suiciiding, with the suicide bombers to kill themselves in order to aahh for a purpose. (Sabah, February 10, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Sabah’s perspective resonates with the mainstream discourse of “liberation” and “democracy” promoted by the U.S. and the U.K. prior to the invasion. Many Kurdish Iraqis actively supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq and saw it as a real opportunity for liberation of the Kurdish people in the region who have long struggled for independence and self-rule. What this discourse leaves out however, is the U.S. complacency and active support of Saddam over the years of his dictatorship including supplying him with the chemical weapons which he used in the Anfal campaign against the Kurds in Halabja. Moreover, the discourse of “liberation” remains silent on the U.S. control of the Kurdish Regional Government and their vested self-interest in this oil rich region as they have demonstrated since the 1991 Gulf war. However, in her support of the
“liberation” discourse, Sabah comments that she saw it as “liberation for 24 hours” which quickly turned into a “disastrous invasion”, chaos and confusion. Rather than questioning the whole premise of liberation, Sabah locates the cause of chaos and rise in violence and civilian deaths in the lack of prior planning and abuse of power by the U.S. military. Moreover, she further buys into the ideology of bringing “democracy” by force and blames its failure on oppressed Iraqis who never knew the meaning of democracy and freedom in their whole history, particularly under Saddam’s dictatorship. When I asked her how the Iraqi community in Toronto referred to the “war on terror”, and how they understand the war in Iraq, Sabah elaborated further on her understanding of “terror” both from what she called a Western point of view and from the point of view of Iraqis that she worked with. Sabah explained that the Western notion of “war on terror” refers to “organized crimes against humanity” that is based on a different way of thinking, based on an ideology such as that purported by Osama bin Laden, and his Al-Qaeda group, of what they call Islam, when in fact it has nothing to do with Islam and is not supported by any of the prophets or anyone on earth. Interestingly, Sabah associates “terror” and “suicide bombing” with Palestinians who are automatically thought of as Jihadis who are fighting for a specific cause. However, she emphasizes that the mindset of terror and suicide bombing never existed in Iraq. Sabah sees the current situation of war and violence in Iraq as “terror from within”, as terror and brainwashed suicide bombers that were imported from other Arab countries (Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Morocco, Libya, and Yemen) in order to destroy the country. While Sabah acknowledges the Americans’ lack of planning and their failure to protect Iraq’s borders, she absolves them from any role in creating and maintaining the situation of chaos, lack of safety and security due to the rise in sectarian violence, and the many factions and militia groups that have taken hold post 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

It is important to mention that Sabah’s views are not representative of the many Kurdish Iraqi women in the diaspora who actively opposed the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, as indicated by the views of independent activist groups such as Acttogether and the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI). Haifa Zangana is a Kurdish Iraqi-born novelist and former political prisoner of Saddam’s regime who has been living in the UK since the mid-1970s. She has been an active member of Acttogether and has openly voiced her opposition to the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq. In an article she wrote prior to the 2003 Iraq Occupation, Haifa writes
about how she ironically found herself siding with Saddam’s dictatorship that tortured and imprisoned her while at the same time places the historical Western support for him into context:

**This war plan forces me to stand by the dictator who tortured me**

The massacre of Halabja in 1988 went unnoticed here. Iraq was then the darling of the west. Iraq fought the west's war with Iran, to protect their interests and ensure a free market for oil. But this was Mrs. Thatcher's government, which supported friendly dictators and normalised relations with military regimes.

In 1990, the Iraqi regime occupied Kuwait, and the U.S. and U.K. decided Saddam had breached his contract of employment. In January 1991, hell was unleashed against the Iraqi people. The bombing lasted 43 days, destroyed many civilian targets and massacred tens of thousands of defenceless conscripts. Iraqis were shocked and confused: it seemed bizarre to punish them for the crimes of their persecutors.

Confusion turned to numbness when people discovered they were to be subject to one of the most comprehensive campaigns of economic sanctions in modern history. On December 6 1995, I sent an A4 padded envelope to my nieces and nephews in Mosul. It contained one pencil case, three erasers, three sharpeners, six fountain pens, two markers, one glue-stick and two Biros. It was marked "gift for children". The envelope was returned, stamped: "Due to international sanctions against Iraq, we are not able to forward your packet." But that was under John Major.

In 1997, the Labour party was at last elected, and Robin Cook declared the government's foreign policy to be "ethical". I applauded. But what has the restoration of hope brought? Continuing sanctions, for a start, which has meant starvation, death and intellectual stagnation. The bombing of Iraq has never stopped either. The USAF and RAF have been bombing civilians almost daily since December 1998; 144 civilians were killed in raids in 1999 alone. For the rest, life in Iraq goes on, as hard as ever.

So how do I now find myself standing by Iraq's dictatorial regime, while Tony Blair presents himself as the defender of both democracy and the Iraqi people? For decades, it was the other way around. Iraqis were not only resisting the oppressive regime, they were sacrificing their lives for change long before the occupation of Kuwait. They appealed for help from western governments. Their request was: stop supplying the Ba'ath regime with weapons. Nobody listened.

Haifa Zangana, Tuesday September 17, 2002
In the case of the group of Iraqi older women, while the “war on terror” was viewed as irrelevant to Iraqi women, it was seen as a historical conflict between governments, not focused on individual people. Yet, they simultaneously recounted specific experiences of racism, discrimination, and racial profiling which they experienced within the context of the “war on terror”. They also acknowledged that the “war on terror” may have more relevance to Muslim Iraqi women, particularly those who wear the hijab, but not to them as Mandaean Iraqi women. Recounting experiences with racial profiling at the U.S. border clearly seemed to conjure up unpleasant memories for them but they quickly rushed to say they did not mind being pulled aside and questioned by CBSA officials because they had not done anything wrong and they were always released. They justified these encounters by saying “well we don’t blame them. They have to defend the nation”. They actively wanted to show that they were law abiding citizens who respect Canadian laws and would never attempt to “bite the hand that feeds them” by speaking up against Canadian policies. They took their loyalty to Canada so seriously to the extent that they advocated for recent Iraqi refugees to go back to Iraq if they don’t like Canada. Several issues or competing factors seem to be at play in these communications. On the one hand, there seemed to be an active tension between what they were saying and what the realities of their lives were telling them, a reality which they seemed to want to conceal or had difficulty acknowledging. These were a group of older women (in their late 60s – early 70s) from middle to high middle class background with a relative amount of affluence in Canada. They had left Iraq shortly after the Iran-Iraq war and did not directly experience the hardships of the UN sanctions in Iraq or the devastation of the U.S. invasion in 2003, although they were well aware of the impacts of both on Iraqi society as a whole. Their hesitation to speak out about the hostile negative environment they were experiencing post 9/11 could be interpreted as denial that these issues exist or may be attributed to the fear or lack of trust that is prevalent in this environment.
as several research studies of Arabs/Muslims in the post 9/11 context have shown. Considering the fact that they did share some of their experiences with discrimination on the job, their children being turned away from jobs that they were clearly qualified for (one woman spoke about her son who was a highly trained surgeon here in Canada, being turned down from a job which he was sure he was qualified for and should have been given), and being racially profiled at the border, it would be harder for them to deny these experiences. But they were quick to find justifications for these experiences and accept them as part of their daily lives in Canada. Their desire to fit in and be accepted as “law abiding Canadians” prevented them from speaking out against Canada. They were afraid of being seen as disloyal to the country that accepted them and gave them refuge. So this was their way of protecting themselves and their families. This dynamic has been well documented by several critical scholars examining the changing notions of citizenship within the post 9/11 context showing how Muslims are often called upon to prove their loyalty to the nation. Another source of fear and lack of trust for them likely has to do with their experiences under Saddam’s dictatorship where any dissent was unacceptable. Several study participants made reference to the impact of historical oppression under Saddam’s dictatorship on ongoing fear and lack of trust among the Iraqi community in Canada. This explanation was offered by the key informant whom I consulted after my meeting with this group of women:

The denial and fear may have to do with their experiences during Saddam’s regime. They never reveal sensitive information for fear of losing their status. The new generation of immigrants, second generation immigrants are different. They know that the government can’t take their status away. They have rights…Their socio-economic status also makes a difference…those who came in the 80s were mostly rich people. (Samir, April 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

The tensions I experienced in my interactions with the key informants discussed above highlight the disjuncture and what Yanow (2000) refers to as the “frame conflict” in interpretive policy analysis, between my personal desire and political conviction to expose and historicize Canada’s
complacency and active involvement in unleashing the structural violence of the “war on terror” on the one hand, and the predominance of the discourse of Canada as a benevolent state committed to protecting the safety and security of its law-abiding citizens emanating from the perspectives of my key informants. As the researcher in this study, the tensions and disjuncture I experienced in these encounters emphasized the value of critical reflexivity in the research process and highlighted the importance of examining how meanings, values, feelings and beliefs are expressed through language and everyday interactions (Yanow, 2000; Gee, 2005).

The following section illustrates the diverse experiences, meanings, and responses to the “war on terror” by the Arab Iraqi refugee women participating in this study. Due to space limitations and richness of the data, I primarily focus on the stories of the four study participants presented earlier on in chapter 1. I also draw on interviews with other refugee women, key informants, and document sources in my discussion of three key themes arising in the course of the study: 1) Violence; 2) Citizenship; and 3) Trauma. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the key findings presented in this chapter.

When I asked Ahlam what she thought about the “war on terror” and whether or not she saw a relationship between the events of 9/11, she responded clearly that she did not see a link between the war in Iraq and the events of 9/11. She saw Iraq and Iraqis as being far removed from the events of 9/11 especially since they were under the control and grip of Saddam’s dictatorship that controlled their access to news and information from the outside world. She was hesitant to provide an explanation for the US invasion of Iraq, stating that there are political reasons beyond what we can talk about and “I do not know what the real reasons for it were, I wish I knew”. But at the same time she challenged the relevance of the events of 9/11 to Iraq and Iraqis, and questioned the existence of “weapons of mass destruction” as the rationale that was given for the invasion. She believed that these were used as excuses to enter Iraq, excuses which in her view were part of a bigger plan that involved the U.S. and other neighbouring countries that turned Iraq into a theatre of war and violence. The ultimate outcome of which, was the sectarian violence, increased gender-based violence, and lack of security that resulted in their dislocation and exile to Syria:

Oh...what are the reasons for it....in my opinion....I don't see the reasons that it was 9/11...I see it was an excuse...an excuse to enter Iraq. But I don't see it as having any truth...the events of 9/11...because what does it have to do with Iraq? Iraq by the way is not a terrorist country. I mean Saddam Hussain was the one who destroyed it. But it's not
a terrorist country. Iraqis are not terrorists....(Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

She goes on to elaborate further:

But after the war...especially the events of 9/11...it didn't affect us directly. Essentially, Iraqis were very far away from events happening in the whole world because they were connected to two media channels and Saddam himself was responsible for them...so you're connected to what he's telling you...but you're not connected to what's happening in the external world. Is it true or not? So when they said that the US claims there were weapons, etc. in Iraq, we said, yeah...Saddam must have collaborated with whomever who has supplied him with the weapons. Okay...so when they entered Iraq on the basis that there were weapons, then they didn't find the weapons in Iraq....is it true or not? Their excuse was that Iraq had nuclear or chemical weapons or whatever kind, I don't know...then the weapons that they entered Iraq on the basis of it, they didn't find those weapons...then what happened?....What happened was sufferings and problems and sectarianism happened... (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Ahlam’s explanation affirms the views of the key informants discussed earlier, that the “war on terror” had no direct relevance to Iraqis, but it had direct consequences for the country and the people in Iraq. However, the key difference in her standpoint on the issue is that she challenges the stereotypes of Iraqis as terrorists and calls into question the real motivations behind U.S. claims of “destroying weapons of mass destruction” while at the same time highlighting the historical significance of the impact of Saddam’s dictatorship on Iraqi people’s lives. For Ahlam, as with other Iraqi women I interviewed, the central issues in relation to the 2003 Iraq Occupation were the resulting lack of security, the increased sectarian violence, and gender-based violence that overshadowed their lives and drove them out of their country after enduring years of wars and sanctions. Ahlam traces the emergence of the sectarian violence from her point of view as starting during Saddam’s regime:

Our relationships used to be different totally...totally different...if we talk Sunni and Shi’a...I had two friends, one’s mother was Shi’a and her father was Sunni. And the other one was Shi’a. They used to joke with each other...I swear to God...there was nothing else other than laughs...we used to say it jokingly...one makes fun of the other laughingly...but they would die for each other. There was no such thing called...Iraqis generally, all their marriages were Sunni-Shi’a...I mean "Ammak, Khalak" (your uncle on your father's side, your uncle on your mother's side)...there was no such thing called a religious view...we Mandaeans and Christians...we were mixed with them...so I mean...I mean I could tell you that Saddam Hussain...he started the seeds of religions...and he made a faith attack, and that women have to wear the hijab...and I don't know what...a kind of faith attack...it created a kind of a....how should I tell you...a kind of a...religious clash between people...because I had a lot of friends...they did not wear the hijab, and their
mothers did not wear the hijab...and their parents drank...so it was a very normal thing. We lived in Beiji, about three hours away from Baghdad. Beiji had a chemical refinery and that's where my father worked...the people that were living there...had parties in clubs...and regardless of your view of alcohol, whether it was forbidden or not...I'm just telling you generally, people's views...parties in clubs...and drinking was normal...and I don't remember anyone saying whether they were Muslim or Christian...because the Muslim and the Christian and the Mandaean had the same behaviours...I mean they had the same attitudes generally...same habits and customs....in aah...this was in the 80s...in 95..., the religious things started to become an issue, it began generally, Saddam wanted to...issues of hijab...he created huge differences between Sunnis and Shi’a. Of course he created a lot of conflicts between Shi’a and Sunnis...because he supported the Sunnis, especially towards Tikrit which is his side, and he stepped on the Shi’a. The Shi’a, even their boys, I mean each woman...had four martyrs lost in the 80s...she has three martyrs...so he put pressure on one side versus the other side. He would place Shi’a soldiers in the front lines while those who were from Tikrit or Beiji or from Samarra or from Fallujah or Ramadi, he would place them as national guards or private guards so they would never enter you know? So this issue was created, it became an issue...but as individuals living in Baghdad, this did not exist. I mean may be this existed in the South, since the South was Shi’a and the North and Central were Sunni. Central...no...it was mixed. I mean Baghdad is mixed...but in Baghdad, I don't remember that there was such a thing. In Baghdad, we...like...there was no such thing called religion...like no one thinks of these religious issues and no one tells you who you are or where you're from. No...like people would behave based on their own faith beliefs. (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Ahlam’s reference to Saddam’s strategic targeting of Shi’a Muslims during the Iran-Iraq war and the differential consequences of the war for different geographic regions and religious groups has been well documented in the literature. As we have seen from the brief historical overview discussed in chapter 2, Shi’a Muslims in the south and the Kurds in the north were particular targets of genocidal campaigns in the 80s and 90s (Ismael & Ismael, 2000). Reflecting on the conditions that led her and her family to leave Iraq, Ahlam cites the rise in sectarian and gender-based violence after the 2003 invasion as key factors:

...then slowly slowly, they began...I mean the members of our tribe began to suffer from problems. They began to be kidnapped and murdered....so when there are your own people that are related to you, began to be terrorized, kidnapped, and murdered, I mean...for sure your turn would come too. The type of dress began to change too. I mean, I for instance don't wear hijab and I'm free to do so "Ana sofour wa bkaifi". No, people began to observe that you're not wearing the hijab and that...and that's one of the important reasons in the situation. The personal freedom ended. Is that true or not?

Then the story began that it became a religious issue. This one is Muslim, this one is Christian. This one is Shi’a and this one is Sunni...and this one is Mandaean and this one is Christian...you know how? And we're weak people...I mean there are no large numbers
and no back up. People began to travel and we were affected by this as well. So our lives were in danger. My husband would come and go with the car and he works in places that would expose him to danger. Explosions happened every little while...I mean you go from here to there and there is an explosion. I mean our lives became endangered. I mean you're endangered the first thing is because you're from a tribe that is threatened "Mohaddedeh" and the second danger is the explosions that happen on the street are horrendous "aashwaieyeh", is it true or not? So it became...there were multiple reasons...we were among the first people that left towards the end of 2004. Very few Iraqis were leaving at that time mostly they were leaving in 2006-7. (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

As Ahlam states, while the seeds of sectarian divides were planted by Saddam for his political gains in the 1980s and 1990s, they severely intensified following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In addition to the general lack of safety and security, women, religious minority groups, and professionals were particularly targeted for kidnapping, assaults, and murders. In his testimony to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration Nabil Farhan, chair of the Canadian chapter of the Mandaean Human Rights Group describes the dire situation of Mandaeans and Mandaean women in particular:

I represent the Mandaean Human Rights Group. The Sabian Mandaean community of Iraq is a small ethnic religious minority, which is one of the oldest gnostic religions and is the only living one still surviving in the Middle East. This minority is ethnically distinct from its Arab neighbours and has its own language and culture. The religion is independent from all other monotheistic religions and follows the teaching of John the Baptist. These are peaceful, knowledge-loving people. This peaceful religion prohibits violence in any form.

In the past, the Mandaeans have managed to coexist among their neighbours despite suffering incidents of persecution and government-imposed discrimination. However, since 2003, the Mandaeans have become the target of a sustained and violent campaign by insurgents and militia extremists. Accounts of murders, rapes, kidnappings, forced conversions, and financial exploitation committed against hundreds of Mandaeans in the last five years necessitates an immediate investigation.

Mandaean women suffer the most persecution at the hands of extremist insurgents and militia, who consider them products of treasure. The escalating kidnappings and rapes of Mandaean women have gone unpunished. Many families, young girls, and even children have been subject to forced conversion. In an effort to destabilize the country, the insurgent groups have purposely singled out and persecuted the Iraqi religious minorities. The Sabian Mandaeans are small in number and are not protected constitutionally or socially within Iraq, despite the constitutional reforms under the transitional and current governments.

(Nabil Farhan, Canadian Chapter Chair, Mandaean Human Rights Group, April 8, 2008)
While the Iraqi women participating in the study did not see the relevance of the “war on terror” to Iraqis and Iraqi women in particular, they saw it as a continuation of the historical relationships between Western governments, Saddam’s dictatorship, and the collusion of other Arab governments in the region with these forces. Although the discourse of the “war on terror” was not part of their vocabulary, its meanings and impacts were embodied in their everyday experiences and understandings of the destruction it brought upon them and in the way in which it altered the social fabric of the Iraqi society. Their definition of “terrorist” and “terrorism” seemed to be closely associated with “suicide bombing” and “jihadi” ideologies, seen from this angle, they argued that terrorism and the “war on terror” had nothing to do with them or with Iraq and Iraqi people as a whole because up until the 2003 war, suicide bombing did not exist among Iraqis and the notion of jihad did not have any currency in Iraq. Yet, they all conveyed that Iraqis and Arabs as a whole are seen as terrorists in mainstream Western societies.

Regardless of their different understandings and experiences, the predominant understanding was that the main stereotype of Iraqis and Arabs is that of “terrorists”. These historical Orientalist representations of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists have gained a stronger currency in the context of the “war on terror” and have been used as the basis to justify the invasion of Iraq and the use of violence against Iraqi civilians, particularly women and girls in Iraq. Another common issue raised was the rise of sectarian violence, and the gender-based violence and lack of security that gripped their existence and its continuing destructive impacts on Iraqi society and on Iraqi communities living in the diaspora. Regardless of their age, religion, or region of origin in Iraq, they all named sectarian violence, lack of security, the rise in fundamentalist views of gender and gender-based violence as the reasons that led them to flee Iraq. The rise in sectarian and gender-based violence and their continuing impacts on the Iraqi community are manifestations of the structural violence of colonialist interventions that are often misrepresented as cultural manifestations of a backward, barbarian society. Rather than examining the historical structural forces that have had negative devastating consequences for Iraqi society, and for Iraqi women in particular, their issues get culturalized and invisibilized through dehistoricization and decontextualization (Abu-Lughod, 2003; Arat-Koc, 2012).

Samar also emphasized the devastating impacts of the sectarian violence and gender-based violence on Iraqi society as a whole, and on women specifically. Samar is a retired teacher who left Iraq along with her husband and three children in 2006. Samar attributes the cause of the
2003 Iraq Occupation to Saddam Hussain’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and his inability to protect the country from imperialist invasion and ultimate destruction:

Precisely...I mean...we say, your country is flourishing if your leader is protecting you. But us sadly...I mean how do we say...he's the one that allowed the hand of imperialism enter against him. Because he either...for instance his entering Kuwait...and it's an Arabic country...I mean this is a reputation that is not good...so now you attack a country that is your neighbour's country, it's like your neighbour's home...I mean this for instance, is in every holy religion...there is no such thing. Is it true or not? So this gives you the view of what kind of a country this is. If you attack someone's country...for instance, my brother was in Kuwait...such bad images were presented to people...I mean such bad images...and images that are disturbing...from the theft...from kidnapping...from stealing...from rape...I saw it...I mean my sister-in-law herself used to have a shop and she said I saw what they did. I saw what the Iraqis went and did to it....so of course, what would happen to Iraq’s reputation? So I say it in all honesty...so I don't blame them...because we...with an Arabic country...the betrayal happened with it, so how would they trust us anymore? So of course the wet would burn with the dry "yehtereg al-habel wiey al-nabel". (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Samar’s interpretation also emphasizes the role of the negative ideological constructions of Arabs and Iraqis in facilitating the use of multiple forms of structural violence against them. Samar makes reference to the negative portrayals of Iraqis after the invasion of Kuwait and the detrimental impact that these portrayals had on Iraq’s reputation. So Iraq was seen as betraying an Arabic country and Iraqis could not be trusted anymore and they were made to pay the price of Saddam’s betrayal. This opened the door not only to the U.S. invasion of the country, but to many other hatreds and anyone who had a score to settle:

....so we say a lot of things contributed to it. Firstly, I would say, he's our leader and he's supposed to protect our country. And we have the wealth...which is the oil...and we have many bounties...so you, entering Kuwait, brought in all the evil, all the betrayal to the country. So the country opened up to...you're probably understanding me...anyone who had anything in his head...it's something that opened up...and they began to enter...and the US forces began to enter...so you can't do anything...it's like the door to your house and you open it up...and you can't do anything anymore, because you opened it....and of course it began...the plots...and the hatreds...and you know... (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Unlike Ahlam, and Samar, who were more recent refugees from Iraq, Amani came to Canada as a young child in the 1990s after the Gulf war. She grew up in Canada and was in high school when the events of 9/11 took place. She recalls being called a terrorist by her classmates and being beaten up by a group of girls after school one day. She was afraid to tell her teachers about
the incident. She felt that they would not believe her and even if they did, she thought they would not intervene because the incident took place outside of school and after school hours. When asked about her perspective on the events of 9/11 and why they happened, she offered the following explanation:

I think that whole thing that happened in 9/11 is to tell America - look there's power if you can destroy because we know that America has controlled the rest of the countries of the world and I think that's a sign of America that you can destroy other countries, we can destroy your country. But they don't know that that impacted back on us because we really don't know who did it. We don't know if it was a Muslim person or a Christian or a Catholic or Jewish. We don't know. But that whole assumption and that media promoting it automatically came, to Muslims. You know Bin Laden did it. What does Bin Laden have to do with Islam? Yes he claims he's a Muslim but there's a Christian person there, do we look at Priests, do we see what Priests are doing to people. Do we see the rates of rape? Right, so people, people are mixing people with religion, mixing religion with culture. That's where the conflict is. That's what’s impacting me and my point of view (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Amani believes the events of 9/11 took place as a response to American foreign policy that has destroyed many countries. She challenges the media discourses immediately after 9/11 that attributed it to Islam as a religion and the automatic assumptions and stereotypes that had negative impacts on Muslims. Amani challenges these stereotypes and assumptions by drawing parallels between Osama Bin Laden’s actions and the involvement of priests in sexual abuse scandals. She concludes that the whole conflict lies in people conflating religious fundamentalism with Islam and seeing the terrorist actions of Osama Bin Laden as representing the culture and religion of Islam, offering another example of the ways in which decontextualized cultural explanations replace historical structural understandings of the “war on terror”. Amani extends her argument around the events of 9/11 further when she offers her explanation in response to my question whether she saw a connection between those events and the war in Iraq:

Because I guess America wanted, (chuckle), this is political, but. I'm not a specialist here. But may be America wants to, may be America wants to destroy and take a part of Iraq. Like I... I don't know, but for me as an Iraqi woman, I think America destroyed many countries and a part of it is my country. Iraq was destroyed and, and people can say, it did a good thing. America did a good thing by stepping in but I think it destroyed it. It took all its oil. It destroyed the people you know do we really know the stats behind it? Do we really check YouTube and see what American soldiers do? Is America doing any good? That's the question that we have to ask. But that's always under the table, never comes out and I think America does things not for the purpose of the country or the people. It's for the purpose of themselves and I think that's how it impacted people. There's a lot of hate.
There's a lot of anger in Iraqi peoples’ hearts and especially living there and living here, there's a lot of anger in our hearts because as people we are taken advantage of, we are tortured, and we're USED, and ABUSED and ... and it's still not recognized...in this society, or in the other society. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

At first, Amani hesitates to offer a political opinion because she does not see herself as an expert or a specialist on the issue. But she reasserts her opinion again that America went to Iraq for its own imperialist self-interest in Iraq’s resources and it destroyed Iraq, as it had done with other countries. She also challenges the notion that America acted in the best interest of the Iraqi people and to liberate Iraq by drawing attention to tortures and abuses committed by American soldiers in Iraq and questioning the silences and complacencies around reporting the impacts of the war on Iraqi civilians. Amani also highlights Iraqi people’s responses to the Iraq war and their anger at the destruction of their country, and the tortures and abuses that are unrecognized in Canadian society or in other societies. Amani raises key issues that have been extensively debated by several critical anti-colonial scholars examining the silencing of descent and the prevalent complacencies and lack of engagement with these issues in the media as well as in academia in the post 9/11 Canadian context (Arat-Koc, 2005; Razack, 2005). Amani also reflects more directly on her own reaction to the Iraq invasion in 2003:

I was devastated. I was very upset. I couldn't believe it because you finish from a 9/11 and you get the Iraqi war and the impact, and your family are living there and it's just...it was a terrible moment and I can't even remember, I remember I took some days off work. I couldn't handle it. I was depressed and people would come to you and be, “Oh did you see what happened in Iraq, did you see what happened to these people. Why are your people killing each other?” And I cannot tell them because I don't have any explanation as to why this is happening. But it impacted us because we have family. We have a life that's there too. It's our identity. It is always going to be something within us. We're always going to be attached to our country and it was a very difficult moment. It affected me and it affected how people perceived me too because they had internal, external, the bias were just coming from all over the place. I couldn't speak to one thing, because the next thing would go like… I had people that were um…that would say something… I was so weak. I was on my own. I couldn't back up my own culture, my own country. I couldn't back up myself. They say, “You guys don't know how to work with each other. This is good it's happening”. I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't speak up to it because I was on my own it was just me. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Amani’s response highlights a number of key issues in exploring the transnational traumatic impact of the Iraq occupation on diasporic Iraqis living within the post 9/11 context in the West.
In addition to being devastated at the start of the invasion and being concerned for her family living in Iraq, she felt burdened and overwhelmed with having to respond to people’s biases and stereotypes of Iraqi people. Her reaction highlights the complex interaction of historical and contemporary everyday trauma of witnessing the violence in Iraq, as well as experiencing the everyday acts of violence in her interactions with people around her. As a diasporic Iraqi woman observing the start of the Iraq war from afar, Amani emphasizes the impact of the war on her identity and her ongoing attachment to her country of origin and the simultaneous burden of responsibility that is put on her by others demanding an explanation and a response to what was happening. The trauma of watching the start of the war and the concern for her family in Iraq drove her to stay home for a few days in order to cope with its devastating emotional impacts but then she found that her trauma was further complicated by having to listen to the negative perceptions expressed towards her and her people. She felt alone and overwhelmed with the demand and her desire to defend her country and her culture against the cultural violence that she was encountering in her day-to-day interactions. Her initial response was to avoid or ignore these kinds of interactions but later determined that it was getting worse so she decided to resist these comments and stereotypes by taking on a different approach:

I just...I, I ignored it...but then it was getting worse. And I said you know, ignoring it is not helping. I need to kind of, again... play the role of educating people but we're as people, it's a very natural process, there are always internal biases in us, if you don't like me and like my religion, you're never going to like it unless, unless you choose to change that within you. So people no matter what you tell them, if they don't want to change their own perspective, they are not going to change and they're always going to treat you the way they want to treat you. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Amani’s reflections on the “war on terror”, its multi-level impacts on herself and her community, as well as her evolving responses affirm Evans-Campbell’s (2006) theory of Colonial Trauma Response which highlights the importance of examining the interaction of historical trauma with contemporary experiences of racism and discrimination and the varied responses that individuals put forward to this complex interaction. Recognizing the negative impacts of racism and discrimination on her mental health and everyday life, Amani decided to actively resist it by attempting to educate people with a view to change their perceptions and stereotypes of Iraqis. As we will see in the following section, the impacts of racist ideologies and racial profiling extend beyond their impacts on an individual’s mental health, to have direct material
consequences in various aspects of their lives including their education, employment, and sense of belonging in the community.

Citizenship

Iraqi refugee women’s resettlement experiences in Syria, and later on in Canada had direct bearing on the way they experienced and coped with their historical and contemporary experiences of trauma. These experiences and responses were closely intertwined with societal ideological constructions of them as Arab Iraqi refugee women and the associated everyday symbolic and cultural violence they experienced in their day-to-day interactions, as well as the structural violence of immigration and refugee policies and the resulting material consequences that manifest in their lives. Arab Iraqi women’s stories of the “war” and “terror” embedded within the state “war on terror”, trace the continuum of structural violence in their lives and the ways in which it shapes their responses to the historical and contemporary colonial violence in their lives. Their everyday experiences lay bare the intersection of their racialized, gendered, and classed existence as it intertwines with the institutions and historical forces of imperialism, patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, war, and violence structuring their lives. In this section, I will discuss the different ways in which these historical forces and institutions impact on Arab Iraqi women’s sense of belonging and limit their access to substantive citizenship rights within the Canadian context.

Access to employment and education emerged as a key area that had direct implications for Arab Iraqi women’s sense of belonging and community integration. Most of the women I interviewed expressed their frustration with lack of access to jobs and relayed experiences of racism and discrimination in their attempts (as well as their spouses’ and their adult children’s attempts) to gain access to education and employment in Toronto. As a young aspiring professionally trained engineer, the predominant metaphor in Ahlam’s story is that of her “wanting to build herself” and the structural forces that have prevented her from doing so. The continuum of violence and trauma for her is directly related to her not having a chance to get a job and work in her career. She clearly describes the phases of transitions in her life and how she was prevented by war and political violence, as well as her personal circumstances of raising young children, to move ahead in her career. She keeps longing for stability, independence, and working in her career:
I get really frustrated...for instance now, my staying at home, is really frustrating me...In that...I DON'T WANT TO STAY AT HOME! I got married, got pregnant and couldn't work. Then I went to Syria and I worked but I had another child and had to stop working. I DON'T WANT THAT ANYMORE. I WANT TO BUILD MYSELF. When am I going to get a chance to build myself? Should I remain for the rest of my life...as a...a housewife and...aah...children, and cooking and such...I mean...I HATED this...this daily scenario that passes day after day...I hate it...I don't like it anymore...I don't want it anymore...I WANT to BUILD MYSELF...because I'm sure the moment I get a job and I have for instance...a salary and that...my whole life would change...my whole mentality will change. I know that this is one of the problems that causes me to feel down emotionally ....and how should I say it to you....I suffer from depressive conditions...but it's because we did not have the opportunities to work...we did not have the opportunities to succeed in it...there are always reasons that make you...I mean how should I say it to you...there is someone who is stopping you...what we suffered in Iraq stopped us...what we went and suffered in Syria, that you had to work without the government's knowledge, this...I mean...affects you negatively...then you come here and also ... also ...there are numerous conditions and numerous barriers that tie you down until you get a job...is it correct or not? (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Ahlam makes clear links between staying at home, not having a job, and her psychological state of depression and remembering the past. She gives an example of how she felt much better when she was attending ESL classes and doing job search and a brief training program designed for foreign-trained professionals. During that time, she had to leave the house at 7:00 am and come home at 11:00 pm. Her husband and family looked after the children and household chores. Even though this was a very stressful time for her and the whole family, Ahlam felt at peace psychologically, because she felt she was accomplishing something towards her goal. She describes her frustration at not being able to find a job in her career and having to stay at home as the most distressing situation that is bringing her down and triggering her traumatic memories of violence and war. She draws a direct connection between issues of community integration and historical trauma and the lack of choice to go back to Iraq. Ahlam began her interview by talking about their expectation of what their life would be like when they came to Canada, that they would learn English in three months and get jobs and be established within six months, and acknowledged that these are “pink dreams, they don’t exist in reality”. She recognizes that many recent immigrants would encounter these kind of issues when they first arrive, but highlights the uniqueness of the situation of Iraqis by stating that “we have arrived essentially tired (“ehna jayeen taabaneen”) and we don’t have a choice, we must stay and struggle”. The sense of “arriving essentially tired” is repeated several times throughout her interview and she seems to use it to refer to the trauma and the psychological drain of surviving wars, sanctions, and
different forms of violence. At times she uses a different variation of the expression “aasabneh taabaneh” (literally meaning our nerves are tired) to elaborate on her point and draw connections between her state of mind, the things that trigger her depression, and the continuum of violence in her life:

But still, when you come to the reality...we Iraqis are still...aah, how should I tell you this...for example our nerves are tired "aasabneh taabaneh”. I mean the least significant thing that happens in your life, you feel that it throws you off right away. I mean for me personally, I'm not [ ]...I mean I see the people here are more relaxed. I mean when they have a problem they deal with it...in an easier way. I don't deal with problems in an easier way. I always try to complicate the problem. I mean I get more afraid naturally. For example, my nerves easily...I get nervous quickly...I lose my temper quickly. I mean all this...not all people suffer like these problems. Not all immigrants who come here suffer from these kinds of problems. But not us, I mean we have essentially come... (sigh) TIRED. We haven't come as comfortable people. No. We have come ESSENTIALLY TIRED. (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Through the use of phrases such as arriving “essentially tired” and having “tired nerves”, Ahlam demonstrates the impact of the continuing structural violence on her everyday life to result in what Paul Farmer (2004) would call “pathologies of power” whereby her trauma and depression could clearly be seen as symptoms of the systematic structural forces preventing her from “Building” herself and limiting her life chances. Ahlam’s analysis of her situation makes explicit connections between structural violence of policies of exclusion, structural violence of war and displacement, and her historical trauma which is further complicated by the contemporary trauma of her everyday life.

Similar to Ahlam, Amani highlights how her experiences with everyday structural violence impacted her psychologically. Amani expresses these experiences with the violence of racism and discrimination as being “shot down” every time she tries to get up. She talks about how the experiences with racism and discrimination post 9/11 and the Iraq war impacted her at work and everyday interactions with people and her decision to start speaking up for herself and her culture rather than allowing them to pull her down. After a while, resisting the everyday symbolic and cultural acts of violence became an important aspect of her identity that gave her the strength and confidence to be able to function in a hostile environment. Here is how she describes the impact of racism on her and how she responded to it:

Aahhh....I, it kept on, it kept on, it was like, uh, I was like...it kept on shooting me down ....because every time I want to get up and I wanted to try something, like apply for a job
I get shoted down. Every time I wanted to do something, people would always come with something. And like I got to a point where I don't want to go to work, I don't want to walk outside, because it was like, Oh my God (Sigh), here I am gone go now... I'm gone get attention. People are going to look at me. But, it was a long, it was a phase.... and now, I'm kind of healing through that, and now I'm, I'm kind of recovering and becoming more confident because I feel that, um...the more you speak up for yourself and your culture sometimes ...yeah, you're not gone create a whole awareness, but if that one person that's close to you will understand, it will make a difference. And that's how I dealt with it. It was very difficult, but I had you know I...I got very close with a Canadian friend of mine and she's a writer, and she supported me and she's like she started to educate me and she, she started to listen to me and I started to listen to her, and she was my support. Every time I had an issue ...um, I would tell her and she was so open about it and that made me feel good, because one person could understand and that made a difference. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

What Amani’s experiences also highlight, is the key influence of everyday interactions in shaping her responses to trauma and violence. As Amani elaborates, her response to her experiences of racism and discrimination influenced her to pursue education and advocacy through a career in social work. Moreover, it has also had a significant impact on her identity and has influenced her decision to start wearing the hijab. Early on in my interview with Amani, she had indicated the tensions that existed between her and her parents when she was a teenager. They had been in Canada only a few years and her parents wanted her to start wearing the hijab in an attempt to preserve their religion and cultural values. Amani had adamantly refused to comply with her parents’ demands around this issue. About four years ago she decided to start wearing the hijab as a way of affirming her faith and identity in the face of the racism and discrimination that she was facing in the post 9/11 Canadian environment. The following is an excerpt from my interview with Amani exploring her decision to wear the hijab and what it meant and represented to her: (I = Interviewer, P = Participant)

I: So it pushed you to become more active and define your goal. And you mentioned that you started wearing the hijab more recently. Can you tell me a little bit more about the reasons that made you decide to wear the hijab?

P: Yes, I ....I wasn't wearing the hijab and now I recently, it's been four years I believe that I'm now wearing it. And you know what, yes people might say you're covering your hair, but for me it's not covering my hair. For me, it's standing up for my culture and my identity and I want to prove to society that you know not every person that wears the hijab is a bad person. You know, I want to be the Muslim woman and also practicing my religion, and an educator, through creating that awareness and I feel to be honest with you wearing the hijab makes me feel belonging. You know I am belonging, I am supporting my culture, I'm supporting my religion. Because, um as humans I think it's
important to have faith in life and have...a...be inspired by something and for me being inspired by Islam is...is what makes me live every day and be strong, and be what I am today. Because I believe that Islam is a beautiful feeling and a beautiful belief to have and being closer to God.

I: So the belonging is to Islam or do you see yourself as belonging to the Iraqi community here?

P: Belonging, belonging to Islam and, and I'm not so much...back then I was with my community, I'm not so much associated with my community now. I'm more, you know my, my closest friends, my colleagues are, they are not Iraqis. But I, I...it's not fitting into the Iraqi community. I don't think it's that anymore. Because I don't associate with a lot of them, but um, it's, it's fitting in and...and being myself. I don't want to fit in another culture. I want to fit in my culture only. I want to have... I want to believe in myself and you know wearing the hijab, you know anybody that fit, that believe they can fit in their culture is not about wearing the hijab, but for me the hijab is a signal that sends to society because there is so much discrimination against it and I think wearing it is following the rules in Islam, and also is to stand up for it because nobody will know me if I don't practice and I don't, I don't know, you know what I mean, nobody will know me if I don't wear the hijab I will be like everybody else if I wear the hijab I'm going to be somebody else to people so I want to see that. I want to bring that out to people. I want to educate in a positive way.

I: So it makes your identity stand out...

P: Yes, yeah

I: Do you feel that you also belong in the Canadian society?

P: I do. It's not that easy to say this now, but because I've been exposed, I've, I've networked, and because I um...I perceive myself because I carry myself in that positive way in that Iraqi women, Iraqi immigrant women, um...I'm now slowly starting to feel that I am blending in the system. I don't know if every Iraqi woman will feel that way because everybody is different. It depends how, how you are yourself and how much you want to establish in your life. For me, I feel that I do stand but there is always those bias. It's very challenging and you can see it. Biases are always there. There's always those people with discrimination and there is always the good people who will take your side and I've experienced both. Yeah.

I: How does the wearing the hijab um, impact you on a day to day basis. Like when you're going for ...in the school or work or your interaction with like legal institutions or government institutions?

P: You know what, I honestly.... even if there is any discrimination I go in with my confidence. I go in with my knowledge because I know, yes I know there is discrimination, yes I know they'll make me wait 20 minutes in line, to serve me and they'll serve a person who is non-visible minority in their point of view, but I still have
the extra, like do you know what I mean like if I'm standing in line they will probably make me wait, serve whoever they think is important but then serve me after, yes I will see that bias but I still face it, I am now used to it. I take it as what it is. Yes it is disappointing because Canada is a multicultural diverse country that brings everyone together but unfortunately is that the people that have states of power in facilities like this [university], are ignorant themselves and as educators we have to educate the people that have the access of power because those people are the ones that makes the big decision but that's nothing in my hand. I'm just a simple person that's uh, working, going to school, you know trying to become something but I'm just saying there is a lot of that. You know health service providers you know how do some doctors perceive Muslim women? Do they respect her? Do they accommodate her? There is a lot of that, I experience...

I: What do you think?

P: I don't think so. For me, what me and my mother experienced, I didn't find that. Because some doctors are ignorant, and they have their bias and again they have a source of power and you can't talk to them. “You don't want me, go to another doctor”. So I think we have to emphasize on educating the system itself before coming to the people because the people are in need of the system. Immigrants don't come and get a high chair and sit in the government or sit in a big organization no we need to educate our own people and then emphasize that to the newcomer, the Iraqi community and other communities. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

For Amani, wearing the hijab is about affirming a positive identity for herself while it’s at the same time about belonging and fitting in. Being fully aware of its implications and negative societal consequences for herself, she wears it with confidence and mindfully navigates the accompanying tensions and contradictions. Her experiences with racism and discrimination, and her sense of being “shot down” pushed her towards a more politicized subjectivity and to enact a different identity as a hijab wearing community worker, advocate and educator. This kind of move towards a more politicized use of the hijab is a phenomenon which has been observed among many young Muslim women in the post 9/11 context (Jones-Gailani, 2012; Scott, 2007). Amani consciously uses the hijab to enact a positive image of an Iraqi immigrant woman who is working, studying, and trying to make something of herself. She also uses the hijab as a tool to make her identity stand out, as she put it, she does not want to just blend in the Canadian multicultural society and be like everyone else. She wants to use her hijab as a positive educational tool, and to be recognized as an Iraqi immigrant woman who has her own culture, religion, and identity, by doing so she also challenges historical Orientalist stereotypes of Arab Muslim women as passive, helpless victims oppressed by their own cultural practices. Yet, she
fully recognizes that there is a lot of discrimination against the hijab and people treat her differently as a result, but she is willing to pay the price. Despite the discrimination and the negative consequences, it puts her at peace with herself, it gives her self-confidence and creates a unique sense of belonging that is simultaneously to Islam, to her own culture, and to Canadian society, albeit tenuously.

Sundus is another young Muslim Iraqi woman who began wearing the hijab more recently, however for different reasons and with different effects than those of Amani’s. Sundus lives alone in Canada while she is waiting for the processing of her husband’s sponsorship application and his safe arrival from Syria. Although Sundus was trained as a computer scientist in Iraq, the only jobs she could find in Canada were in customer service. At the time of my interview with her, Sundus was working two part-time jobs in Middle-Eastern restaurants and attending ESL classes part-time. She began wearing the hijab only about four months prior to my interview with her. I was really surprised when she told me this because a few minutes prior to that, she had been talking to me about how she had resisted wearing the hijab in Iraq despite the ongoing threats to her safety due to increased gender-based violence and the targeting of young female professionals. So I inquired about her reasons for choosing to wear the hijab now that she was in Canada. She offered the following explanation:

For several reasons...aahh...personal reasons and reasons...aahh...I mean it's a kind of psychological protection...I mean I'm alone here...may be...may be this initiative may continue or it may stop, it's still under study. My husband will come here then we will decide whether I will continue with the hijab or remove the hijab, okay. But I wasn't a hijabi. In Iraq it became that you must wear the hijab and you must not go out and when you go out you mustn't laugh, and you must not go out after 5:00 pm, you must be sitting at home...you know like, it became...our lives...I mean I was working...and thank God I was working...I mean my friends were not working, 24 hours at home? NO WAY! And if they went shopping, they would be accompanied by their father and brother...you know how? Their whole family had to be with them. I used to work, my life was barely to go to work and come back from work, so my life stopped there, and the next day would be the same thing. Same routine....and for many reasons, and there were other reasons...I was engaged there...and because of sectarian things, he was Shi'a and I was Sunni...we separated and after I separated...I was engaged, not married...so after I separated, I said that's it...I'm not going to stay, that's it.... (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Sundus goes on to elaborate on the increased gender-based violence and the pressures that women were under to conform to the demands of fundamentalist militias and the lack of safety
they encountered. She clarified that even in Iraq, although she was not a hijabi, she had to wear the hijab in order to frequent certain areas safely. I was still unclear about why she would choose to wear the hijab here so I asked her for further clarification:

I: Yes, but here...you mentioned you put on the hijab as a protection, protection from what?

P: Self-protection. Not from anyone, no. Self-protection, for myself. When I saw that there was a lot of stresses, etc. This is more of a psychological security for myself, especially with respect to the other sex, they would see the hijab as a modesty. Is that true or not? So I said they would keep their distance from me until my husband comes. So it's possible I may continue with it or I may decide to remove it. It's a fact that I started to receive different treatments when I started wearing the hijab.

I: On the part of Canadians?

P: Aah...Canadians...with respect to work, you know when I was looking for work before wearing the hijab, I used to be able to find a job perhaps downtown. But when I put on the hijab, my area became confined to areas where there are more Muslims and Arabs. That's in Scarborough, North York...I mean these areas. So in these areas there were more possibilities, but before I used to work in downtown with no problem. It's not that they wouldn't welcome me at all, there is no such thing. But relatively speaking, even in some dealings....sometimes...I mean you would see in a lot of situations...even in simple situations....like in TTC for example...even the driver I feel...for instance, sometimes you would be running late and you run to catch the bus or something like that....he used to stop for me before. Now in many instances, he would just leave me and take off...For example, one time on Sheppard, I was buying a perfume...a perfume...there was a Canadian woman before me, testing different ones and such, to be able to choose. So no one would tell her anything. So I came and I had grabbed a bottle and set it aside without testing it because I knew I liked that particular perfume. So I had set it aside and I was trying another kind so I could get another one. She came and she took my perfume and put it away. So I told her this is for me, I wanted to buy it. She said it's okay, but she put it back in its place...she said sorry this is not for testing. So I thought the woman before me was just trying it and you were helping her try it and I came just after her, so what's the difference? So I became agitated, but I didn't have time, I wanted to complain to the manager over there. But I had an appointment, I only had ten minutes and I was just passing time while waiting for my friends to pick me up so I could go with them. So they called me and I was so upset, but I said that's okay, it's over now and I have to go. But I mean you see the difference in the way I'm treated because of the hijab. This is the only thing that I may remove the hijab because of it. This is the only thing, if I think of removing the hijab. Because the hijab is something religious, part of my religion, and it's not a problem. If I feel that it's going to impact my future, and I'm still at the beginning of my future here. Tomorrow, I want to enter university, I want to get the equivalency of my degree, I want to establish myself. So if I feel that this is going to be a barrier for me, I will not let it be a barrier for me. But I wish that...I mean...how...you feel really sad when you sense these people in Canada, that has three million Muslims here and this discrimination exists till now. This is something disturbing. And I wish that you would
relay this point in your thesis because in actuality, this is something painful, regardless of whether I'm wearing the hijab or not. I mean if a woman is hijabi, she's not hijabi because...she is like the woman who decides to go out with her bathing suit on the beach. So I for one am wearing the hijab and respecting myself, this is how I go out. No one says anything to the other woman, so they're not supposed to say anything to me either. It's the same. I mean this is the foundation of freedom. I mean as long as my freedom is not crossing others, it's not affecting others, then that's it. They should respect my freedom the way I respect their freedom when they're not impacting on me. That's it. I mean this is the foundation of the freedom that I know. (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

In wearing the hijab, Sundus finds herself caught up managing patriarchal social relations on the one hand, and racism and discrimination in Canadian society on the other hand. Sundus found herself living alone and felt vulnerable working as a waitress in restaurants so she drew on her cultural and religious understandings and decided to wear the hijab as a form of self-protection. She assumed wearing the hijab would command a certain level of respect and modesty, and give the message to the men frequenting the restaurant to keep their distance from her. But then she found herself becoming the subject of discriminatory practices that limited her mobility and job prospects in the city and exposed her to other negative interactions in her everyday routine. She provides clear examples of the different kinds of treatments she received before and after wearing the hijab. She draws on liberal notions of individual freedom to question the limitations placed on her freedom of choice and the discriminatory treatment she receives when she wears the hijab. The violation of her personal freedom goes counter to her understanding and assumptions of Canada’s multicultural society with a growing Muslim population, and asks why this discrimination still exists and urges me to include this point in my thesis in order to bring awareness to the issue.

Sundus is clear in her mind that wearing the hijab is a barrier to her progress and her career prospects in Canada. She is also clear that she is just beginning her future in Canada and she will not let this be the barrier that would stop her from achieving her career goals. She talks about it as a matter of fact that this would be the only thing that would drive her to take off her hijab but she will wait and assess the situation after her husband comes to Canada. However, she laments having to choose between her religious values and her ability to get ahead in her career. A dilemma that is facing many Muslim hijabi women not only in Quebec with its multiple attempts (e.g. Reasonable Accommodations Debate, Bill 94, and the recent introduction of the Quebec
Charter of Values) at preventing Muslim women from wearing the hijab in public spaces and when accessing or working in public services over the past several years, but also in the rest of Canada with varying degrees as the examples shared by Amani and Sundus illustrate. As we have seen from the examples shared by Amani and Sundus, historical ideological constructions of Arab Muslim women as undesirable, uncivilized, backwards, and oppressed continue to play out in their everyday lives in Canada in multiple ways impacting on their identity, sense of belonging, and their ability to exercise their fundamental human rights of freedom of choice of religion, and limiting their access to material resources such as jobs and education. Despite their demonstrated resilience, active resistance and their conscious choice to assert their identities through wearing the hijab and standing up for themselves, they were being pushed into the impossibility of choosing between either practicing their own culture, religion, and a positive sense of self or exercising their social citizenship rights and gaining access to key resources such as jobs and education that would facilitate their community integration. As several critical feminist anti-colonial scholars have argued the historical Orientalist discourses of “us” vs. “them”; “uncivilized Muslim women” vs. “civilized liberated Western women” are enacted to strip Muslim women such as Sundus and Amani from their own agency, freedom of choice, and citizenship rights (Abu-Lughod, 2003; Arat-Koc, 2012; Razack, 2008). As Arat-Koc (2012) has illustrated, the current widespread culturalist perspective on gender creates a “paradoxical invisibility” and “hyper-visibility” of gender in policy making and policy discourse in neoliberal Canada. Relying on de-contextualized, de-materialized, essentialized notions of culture, this culturalist perspective serves as the basis of:

invisibilizing the relevance and significance of what happens “here and now” and through real, material impacts of state policies and dominant social, economic and political forces, it helps to let the “host” society and the state “off the hook” in both the analyses of and solutions offered for gender inequality for immigrant women (Arat-Koc, 2012, p. 9).

In this process, the structural violence of state policies and systemic sources of gender inequality get erased and ignored (Abu-Lughod, 2003; Arat-Koc, 2012).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that experiences of racism and discrimination among Iraqi refugee women were not limited to Iraqi Muslim women wearing the hijab. Several Mandaean women and Muslim women who do not wear the hijab also relayed experiences of
discrimination on a day-to-day basis and in a variety of settings and situations. As the examples shared by Iraqi women demonstrate, the predominant stereotype encountered by study participants was the historical ideological construction of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, which is reinforced by negative stereotypes and images in the media post 9/11. Study participants used different strategies to resist and challenge the negative stereotypes and everyday experiences of discrimination they encountered. Similar to Amani’s response, Samar emphasized the importance of establishing meaningful relationships and education in changing people’s negative perceptions and attitudes towards Iraqis:

I mean to establish ones’ self, I'll tell you it's in mixing with people. They will evaluate you and get to know you. I saw this with my daughter for example. Once she entered college and mixed with people and began talking about society, and our country, they tell her we don't expect there are Arabs that don't have a terrorist spirit. So what do you do? It's up to you to decide how you convey your message to the people that are surrounding you. For example, my husband, when he sits with people in his English class, he goes to ESL class level 7, even though he knows English. He goes to mix with people and to be involved in an educational setting. He really likes education and discussing different topics. So the discussions in class would always be around the country, he talks about...he talks about a lot of things, so this becomes the only message that gets conveyed to them. So I told you, they have formed their opinions...especially about Iraqis...they're terrorists. Because they saw the crimes, the bloodshed and the murders. This is not a small thing. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Samar discusses how her daughter and her husband use the opportunity of mixing with people in educational settings as a way to provide a different image of Iraqis that counters preconceived notions of Arabs and Iraqis and challenge media representations of Iraqis as violent terrorists. Haifa on the other hand, uses a different strategy to deal with the everyday symbolic acts of cultural violence she encounters in her interactions with people. Haifa is a settlement counselor of Arab Iraqi origin who has lived in Canada since the early 1990s and participated in the study as a key informant. In response to my questions around how her Iraqi clients connect with other community members, she talked about the barriers they encountered in their attempts to establish connections. She also relayed examples of her own negative encounters and expressed her frustration as an Iraqi Canadian, at constantly being asked where she was from, how she got to Canada, and what she was doing:
Okay, if, if they don't have a language barrier, that's easy to connect with others, but don't forget... like with white Canadians, or other communities, other communities they do not accept the Arab community, the culture of the Arab community. They have the stereotype, like Muslims. Like Muslims, they, they related to terrorism, Muslims related to violence. They relate things, it's the stereotype, they are just living in a bubble....they are generalizing things. So it is hard...it is not hard to connect, we do connect but it is up to them to accept it or not.

Yeah, a lot of people they are very, very judgmental. It happens with me! Uhh, the moment that they see me, they say where are you from? ....I live in Oakville and I go to one of the dancing classes and immediately, all of them they are white and I am the only person who is in colour. So immediately before they know me, before they know what is, what do I carry with me, they say okay where are you from. So I say I'm from Turkey because I don't want them to have the stereotype bubble even though I'm telling them I'm from Turkey, they relate me to the Middle East and so you are Muslim, and I say yes I am Muslim and what are you doing here? .... Yeah, and I say I am here to dance. And how did I come here, definitely by airplane, not on a camel. So, because I felt defensive, like why are you asking? I am in the middle of Toronto nobody asks me where do I come from. Is it...why is it so important to you? They isolated me. They didn't want to connect with me. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa elaborates that ironically, she had joined a dance class so she can relax and socialize with people but she ended up feeling shut out and isolated in the process. Based on her previous experiences, Haifa had anticipated this kind of negative response and she tried to avoid it by telling people that she was from Turkey, not from Iraq, but she still encountered the same stereotype since Turkey still fit the general stereotypical categories of Middle Eastern, Muslim, terrorists:

Yes, it's a dancing class, so everybody, it's dancing. So the dancing, it's a social program so I'm supposed to be social with people. So the moment, within two or three days the whole studio they knew okay, I'm from Turkey. They started to come and ask me. Some of them, they are very nice, so where do you get this dress, is it from Turkey? But some of them, especially the white ones...Oh my God! As if, you know, I am a disease... They do not connect with me at all. Because this is the stereotype they live in, Middle Eastern? They are on the camels, they are terrorists. Muslim are terrorists, they connect things. Because people, they depend a lot on propaganda here from media, but they don't know how much we are more civilized than them, when it comes to civilization. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

After hearing this story from Haifa, I jokingly commented that perhaps she did not go far enough from Iraq to be able to avoid the stereotypes. She elaborated further that she encounters these stereotypical reactions within her practice and observes it in interactions among her clients. She
tries to utilize different strategies to challenge these stereotypes and change the nature of their interactions by drawing on her historical and cultural knowledge of Canadian society:

Yeah, it is sometimes, even here. Sometimes we get old people, senior people at work here, like the clients they come and they ask us before anything, “Hi, how are you? What is this program and what is this? Where is he from, like Alberto? It happens with us, so it happens so many time and we are trained not to ask. It is none of our business. Religion, sexuality, whatever, we don’t ask about these things. Where is he from? And I say he’s native. Then they freeze. What do you mean by a native? And I say this guy, he is native, First Nation and they keep looking at me. Am I serious? And I…he is, he is original Canadian, we are all immigrants when we become Canadians. Even other people that are not aware of what’s going on, that we're all immigrants, we all come here to Canada and we all become Canadian citizens and mingle and that’s it. We are all immigrants. A lot of people are not aware of this. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

As the stories shared above illustrate, the ideological constructions of Iraqis, and Arabs in general, as terrorists, had social, psychological, and material consequences for the Arab Iraqi refugee women and their family members. The renewed historical negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims within the post 9/11 context, combined with contemporary anti-immigrant sentiments and discourses of “bogus” and “fraudulent” refugees had severe detrimental impacts on the Arab Iraqi refugee women participating in the study and on the Arab Iraqi community in Toronto as a whole. These negative consequences manifested in a number of policy and practice arenas which ultimately resulted in their social exclusion and eviction from civil society (Razack, 2008). In the following section, I will discuss these processes of social exclusion and illustrate how they manifested in their interactions with various social service institutions and enacted through the continuation of structural violence of immigration and citizenship policies and practices.

Similar to my initial jarring experiences of exploring the meanings of the “war on terror” discussed in the previous section, I was struck by the discourses of “fraud” and “abuse of the system” circulating around and among Iraqi refugee women and key informants I interviewed. During the first few key informant interviews I conducted, I was confronted with a number of contradictory discourses and descriptions of Iraqi women. On the one hand, I was disturbed to hear the different descriptions of Iraqi refugee women as having “high expectations” of the system; as being “passive and not motivated to do much to help themselves”; and as “wanting to stay on welfare and get as much benefits as they can”. On the other hand, I was hearing of all the limitations existing within the system and the lack of resources and supports needed to facilitate
their settlement process and address the complex social, medical, and psychological needs of this highly vulnerable refugee population that has endured years of war, sanctions, and political violence. As a first generation immigrant who had experienced similar processes of racism, discrimination, and systemic social exclusion particularly during my first few years of settlement in Canada, and as a social worker who had worked with many immigrants and refugee communities over the years, I found it very difficult to listen to the discourses of “bogus”, “fraudulent” refugees who just want to take advantage of the system. It was particularly difficult hearing it from service providers who were supposed to be working with these refugee women, supporting them and advocating on their behalf. In reflecting on these interviews and my reactions to the comments made by the participants, I debated whether I should dig deeper into these issues or whether I should refrain from engaging in this topic for the purposes of analysis and discussion of findings as it seemed to be taking me away from the focus of my research, which was the meanings and impacts of the “war on terror” on Iraqi women’s everyday lives. I was also concerned about the potential detrimental impacts of discussing Arab Iraqi refugee women as “bogus”, “fraudulent” refugees who were taking advantage of the system, and adding to the list of multiple negative stereotypes and racial profiling which they were already facing. After much critical reflection and consultation with members of my thesis committee as well as my community advisers and key informants, I decided to continue to explore the issue in my interviews with community participants and to include it as a key component in the analysis of my findings.

As I will elaborate further later on, upon further reflection and deeper analysis of the current Canadian context, I came to the conclusion that discourses of “fraud” and “bogus” refugees are the mirror image of discourses of the Arab Muslim “terrorist”, “securitization”, and “protecting Canada’s immigration system”. They are both manifestations of the capitalist, imperialist, neoliberal agenda of war, violence, and destruction for the accumulation of global capital and protection of the market economy. The same processes of colonial violence that waged war on Iraq in the name of “freedom”, “liberation”, and “democracy” were now continuing to exclude and constrain the movement of the very same women it claimed to “liberate” from Saddam’s tyrannical dictatorship. The discourse of humanitarianism, democracy and freedom was pushed aside and gave way to the construction of Iraqi refugees as undesirable terrorists and fraudulent criminals who had to be managed, controlled and monitored to make sure they become model
citizens who comply with Canadian values, demand the very least of the system, and be as self-
sufficient and as productive as possible. As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) articulate in their theory of *violence continuum*, “everyday life is shaped by the historical process and contemporary politics of global political economy” (p. 20). As the authors further elaborate, permitted acts of everyday violence are part of the same dynamic that enables war crimes and genocide. The key distinguishing feature of everyday violence is that it is socially incremental and is often normalized, even justified by perpetrators, bystanders, as well as by the victims themselves (p. 22). This dynamic of the violence continuum can be seen in my interviews with Iraqi refugee women and key informants which revealed the ongoing contradictory tensions between the national imaginary of Canada as a generous humanitarian multicultural society; increasingly restrictive and punitive, criminalizing policies and practices; and vulnerable groups of refugees who were in need of protection and support but simultaneously were to be protected against due to their terrorist, criminal tendencies and their potential to defraud and abuse the system that was set up to protect them.

**Processes of Social Exclusion: Denial/Withholding of Information and Services**

Several of the Iraqi refugee women I interviewed indicated the importance of the availability of the financial support, guidance, and social support to their successful settlement and integration into their new community. For Samar, the most important obstacles were the lack of sufficient financial support and appropriate guidance to help her teenaged and young adult children find their way to colleges and universities. She describes the multiple impacts of the trauma of war and violence which led to them leaving Iraq to Syria. Samar talks about the continuation of the trauma and structural violence in Syria as a different kind of suffering, she describes it as a “stoppage”, as a “stopping point” in their lives with no access to schooling or jobs. Her children stopped their schooling for three years while they were in Syria. Then when they arrived here the biggest challenge as she sees it, is the lack of appropriate guidance and support. Her daughter was 20 years old at the time of arrival in Canada and she was not informed that she could attend high school so she ended up going to a number of different ESL classes instead, and then went on to college, which held her back a few years from pursuing her real goal of going to university. In addition, due to the extremely limited income on social assistance, the children had to go to
work as well as study, which placed further psychological strain on them and on their parents who were unable to provide them with the necessary emotional and financial support.

Amani describes one of the biggest challenges facing the Iraqi community in Toronto today as that of exclusion:

Exclusion! Not being a part of the Canadian society. There's a lot of that. You know...um, you know, it's not just about like I know, Iraqis have a lot of potential. It's not always about speaking English. Oh if you don't speak English, there's a lot of smart people that don't speak English that still have a lot of skills and abilities but, but it's, it's getting them into the system. It's, it's including them. There's not a lot of that. You know, it's hard to get people even volunteering experience. You think certain people will take you, like as coming...as an Iraqi or not speaking English. You think other organization will take you? (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Amani explains further that she sees this type of exclusion and lack of opportunity as a contributing factor in a lot of Iraqi people giving up trying to establish themselves and remain on welfare or long term disability, as she states, “every time they try, the door claps in their face” so they are just giving up trying:

Yeah, you still have to, you know depending on what organization it is but certain places they have to see your ability. You know they sit and they give you an interview as if you're getting hired and if you don't do well then you're not going to get...you're not gone be a part of the placement so I'm just, I just feel there is a lot of exclusion because they're not given the opportunity. You know, you know not speaking English, that's the automatic assumption made against them and that's why a lot of Iraqis now are not um, helping themselves to get established. They're sitting on the social service uh...you know, system. Or they're on long term disability because they're always shut down. Every time they want to do something the door claps in their face because they're not given the opportunity because of the language and I think that's where we have to work on that in the society.

....There is a lot of giving up and I know that I can even give you a number. I know that there is so many people I have met from my community that came from the time I came that are saying forget it. What's the point of working in Canada when nobody recognizes you? When you're not given an opportunity, even if you're given an opportunity you get shut down. You stay in a LINC school for three or four months and then you stay home because nobody wants to hire you. No one wants to give you the opportunity because of your strong accent, because of where you're from. You know, and because of lacking Canadian experience. Even though you are a certified or educated person, you don't have Canadian experience. Nobody is going to look at you. And this is a lot of it, yes it’s written on paper, yes it’s in stats, but this is what's happening now. And ... and unfortunately there's nothing that's uh, supporting it right now, nobody's doing anything about it, it's like a hidden thing and nobody cares. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)
When I asked Amani if she hears that a lot, that Iraqi people want to stay on welfare, she agreed saying that she hears often that they are frauds and want to stay on welfare. But she also questioned why no one is asking for the reasons behind it, and offered her own explanation when I asked her to elaborate on what she thought the reasons were:

Oh yeah, they're frauds, I get the, um, I get they're frauds, they're frauds, they're on welfare all the time, they have nothing to do.

….Because they, they probably would, like they're you know they're on the welfare, like you know, that's that assumption people make that they don't work, they're always on the welfare or they kind of have a disability but they're fine, you know what I mean, but really we don't look into the aspect of why these people are doing it, you know. I would never want to stay home. Like if you think about it who would want to stay home all day and not work. Work is a part of our nature. To work and to interact, practice our skills. It's a beautiful feeling, you know, not every person that's on welfare is doing that on purpose to fraud the system - no. It's because of the situation that we went through, the frustration… you know the experience with war. You know war is not an easy thing, you know. Not everybody can experience war and take it as it is. You know, like when I look at Canadians' stress. People's stress about working and overtime and, and just being frustrated with certain things but if they look into the Iraqi culture and the impact they have faced in the Iraqi war, they're still here. They are still able to do a little bit of interaction. I think that's a score for them because they faced what nobody faced especially in the war and being tortured by Saddam. So we have to understand that and give them credit for what they do now. Yes, they're not working but at least they're still functioning. They're still not creating harm to themselves and you know what, we don't know what's the reason. If exclusion is broad then we don't know, maybe they were excluded maybe they can't find something so that's the automatic assumption people make. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

While Amani is more sympathetic to the driving forces behind the discourses of fraud and explores the root causes of Iraqi refugees being on welfare and their inability to work, Samar offers a different explanation that is more in line with mainstream discourses of corrupt individuals that violated the trust of the system and took advantage of government benefits that resulted in general hatred of Iraqis and negative consequences for everyone receiving those same benefits:

….We were okay for the first year, we got financial assistance, $700/person…but then I mean with all due respect, you know the trust was lost. Like my daughter, she got a job in IT and she wrote to the government that she got a job so if you want to discontinue my benefits. So I mean the source of trust is there. I mean she got a job and she said you know mom, I will practice my rights, and I will work. And she got a job in IT, Mashallah, and thanks be to God. Aah...others were taking advantage of the situation...I mean you
see the person who would say that he is disabled and he has nothing. And you see the lies, they didn't tell the truth. Even our case worker told us, a lot of people were defrauding the government. This caused a lot of damages to the government that were not natural. I'm sure you have heard of this too. For example, they would have a report that he has this and that, then they find out when they opened their files...I mean my brother told me about this too, they found out the files had nothing in them. I mean...the lies and deceits, in order to get money. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Yet at the same time as locating the blame within the individuals taking advantage of the system, Samar offers a historical perspective into the root causes of the fraud that relates it to the war, years of poverty and deprivation under the sanctions regime and professionals being severely under-paid by Saddam’s regime. Samar simultaneously emphasizes the importance of the correct guidance and upbringing that parents can offer their children, such as in the case of her own family, emphasizing the value of hard work and honesty. Moreover, she attributes the fraud not only to the individual, his upbringing and character, but also to the contributing socioeconomic and political factors that created the structural conditions of poverty and changed the cultural values and societal fabric in Iraq. Samar reflects on how these dynamics contributed to changing interactions between social service caseworkers and the development of more restrictive policies and punitive practices in working with Iraqi refugees:

It's the mentalities, my dear, the mentalities...the necessity...I mean we were in a country that was very rich but we didn't live in luxury and we had no comforts. I mean for instance, my husband was a consultant to the Ministry of Natural Resources, and so that's supposed to be everything. And I was a teacher....the salaries had no value...no value! I mean you get the Egyptian who is working under my husband...for example my husband was the manager of the unit, so my husband would get $150 dinars, I'm talking in the 80s and he gets $300 dollars and he has no job, I mean you don't know if he got a fake degree or not....so the low self-esteem we had was not natural. So it remains, what...the person who had a good upbringing and felt that money had no value and the most important thing is your good values, then he would walk the right path but the person who had a poor character, he started to play tricks to get money in his own country, so for sure he would do the same thing outside of his home country. I mean do you imagine that he was honest in his country and now he became a fraudster? So let's say it with all confidence. So this is what made an impact...so our caseworker, initially she was tough with us...but when she started to get to know us...she began to trust us...and she began calling us saying there is no need for you to come in. So it's a question of trust...they know who they are dealing with...they read your files...and they know what you are. So there are some, I mean my son sometimes tell me some things...they have a car crash and there is nothing wrong with them but they come to an agreement...I mean lots of stuff...so these are the things...and it's not just the Iraqi, Afghans also participate, and others...so these things destroyed the economy of the country...destroyed the trust that existed. They say this did not exist before....I mean my brother would tell me, this
did not exist before...but now, no, now there are investigations into everything. And I mean they have a right to do that...

I: So now they became stricter? How are they stricter?

P: Of course, of course, I mean there is no trust in anything now. I mean there are many, many issues... Like if you don't bring all the correct documentation...for instance you see for Canadian citizenship...how much it has been defrauded...so there are a lot of things.....material things play an ugly role, that the human being is not satisfied and he wants more and more...it plays a "ghathra" lowly part in life, I mean the person is not satisfied with a little, like to say thanks to God and be fulfilled...he wants a lot of things...for instance my son is a teenager and sometimes he says mom why don't we have such and such? I tell him my dear, if we didn't provide you with the material things, we provided you with security and respect in our home. This is what we can provide for you my dear. May be this is something that many people are deprived of, and they are in need of it. Myself and your father, that's what we provide for you, honesty, security, and respect. I cannot provide you with the material things, these are my circumstances. What do you want my dear, what more do you like to have? So he began to work and to help out. So you understand how? So this is the direction that we give in our case....My son was directed to the correct path...I mean for each person, it depends on their family's upbringing. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Sabah, a key informant with several years of experience in working with Arab and Iraqi immigrants and refugees, also reflects on the recent more restrictive citizenship policy changes and attributes them to instances of fraud committed by immigrants of Middle Eastern Origin. She shared these observations and experiences in response to my question enquiring about what changes she had observed towards the Iraqi community in general, and towards Iraqi women more specifically in Canadian society post 9/11:

Uuhh...frankly speaking, this is, I can always...aahhh...my mind is always, not always, but you know, when you work in a specific field it will take you all, while you were asking the question, I was thinking how immigration has become difficult in Canada...aahh...how...Yes, definitely from 2001 to now, a lot of changes happened if I don't know of anything, I know at least in the field of immigration and refugee, the climate changed in the country, how they have been dealt with, aahh...Canada is changing a lot of its attitude, strategy towards newcomers, especially from Middle Eastern Countries. So your question is precisely to Iraqi, and in particular to women. No, I don't think there are drastic changes. You know, this country is having, it's based on, built on communities. And every community is entitled to have full services to make the best of every single opportunity in Canada. Aaahhh...how this affected on women, I don't see any effect on women precisely on women. (Sabah, February 10, 2012, Key Informant Interview)
While Sabah acknowledges the changing attitudes towards immigration is not specific to Iraqis or Iraqi women particularly, she goes on to elaborate as to the causes of the immigration and citizenship changes in Canada:

Overall, definitely, you know the changes...why? Because...again, they had a lot of....before, when you used to say something, in Canada, they used to believe you. Because you signed that all that I have mentioned is true to the best of my knowledge. Now, you say something and you sign, now they say PROVE it. Why they did that? Why all that happened?....A....huge number, like the majority of the Middle Eastern, aahhh...immigrants to the country, or refugees to the country, they come here, they abuse the system in the most obnoxious way. You...it's just Amazing...I'm working closely with them. (Sabah, February 10, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Sabah explains that many Iraqi and other Middle Eastern immigrants who come to Canada as permanent residents, have been living and working in Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia or Jordan. They had been trying for several years to immigrate to Canada and when they finally do get accepted and come to Canada, they obtain the necessary ID cards such as social insurance numbers, health cards, and permanent residence cards and after a short while they return to the countries they came from in order to maintain the jobs they held prior to coming to Canada. As a result, obtaining Canadian citizenship has now become extremely difficult:

Aahh...I don't know the percentage, but almost, I can tell you the percentage of the people coming as landed immigrants and they return to where they come from, whether from their own country, or the country of their habitual residence, but they have a job there, still waiting for them. Okay, this I can tell you. I can tell you about may be 80% return, and 20% settle in Canada, and this is a lot. And after three years, they come back and they are applying for citizenship. They used to believe them. Not Anymore. Now, acquiring Canadian citizenship is becoming Very, Very, Very demanding to obtain, and very difficult if we compare it to before. (Sabah, February 10, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

As she explains, this is mainly because they find it difficult to get jobs and living expenses are high, making it difficult for them to settle in Canada. Some leave wives and children in Canada while they return to the Middle East to work, while others return with their families. However, they continue to receive child tax benefits while they are away and then return after three years and apply for Canadian citizenship. Sabah makes reference to Minister Jason Kenney’s speech announcing the revocation of 2,200 Canadian citizenships that were deemed to have been obtained fraudulently with the help of immigration consultants and through the process which she elaborates above. Most of the individuals who had their Canadian citizenships revoked were
of Middle Eastern origin. Sabah attributes the causes of more restrictive Canadian citizenship policies to these instances of fraud committed by Middle Eastern immigrants and explains how the process of obtaining citizenship has changed over the years since:

Now, in 2005-2006 when they started, with all this problem they were hearing about, and investigating, and informing them you know, start giving the office information, now it takes a year or two, and whether you pass the...for example, before when you pass the test...you pass the test, it's twenty...aaahh...questions, if you manage 16, you pass the test and after that you are invited for Oath. Now, you go for the test, you pass the test, it doesn't mean anything. Still, they ask for your passport and see every single stamp, and it all has to be translated. And they give you first of all, a list of aahh...the inquiry, you know the questionnaire to show where you have lived and so forth, and then a list of documents to submit to immigration and citizenship, that proves you have been actually, physically resided in Canada three years of the last four years. Those were only, if you don't....I mean, before, only if you didn't pass the test, then a judge will see you. If you have a good command of English, you know something about the history and the political system...you know something about the, the....governmental, election, and citizenship stuff like this, verbally, you pass. Some people you know, they can't manage with the written, but verbally they could, in front of the judge. Now, this all can happen, bring all this and prove it to me. You are accused until you prove you are innocent, while you know the whole ....system in the whole world...and including Canada is that you are innocent until it's proven that you are condemned. With immigration and citizenship it has become totally the other way around. From where, mostly from our people. (Sabah, February 10, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa is another key informant with many years of experience working as a settlement counselor with Iraqi refugees. She highlights another area of policy and practice where the discourse of fraud comes into play when working with Iraqi refugees.

Haifa explains that many of the recent refugees were members of the Mandaean community who were accepted as protected refugees due to religious persecution as a religious minority in Iraq. In her experience, many of the recent Mandaean refugees were well off financially because they worked as Goldsmiths or owned their own businesses and properties. They fled Iraq to Syria and Jordan and because they could not get permanent residency or work or go to school there, resettlement to countries such as Canada was their only hope for safety and security. Haifa states that many “exaggerated” and “tweaked” their stories in order to get accepted as protected refugees and come to Canada but once they got to Canada, their experiences of the system were different from their expectations. Once they began to get to know the system, they began to exaggerate their stories in order to gain access to more benefits. Haifa elaborates that she draws on her years of experience and her intimate knowledge of her community to distinguish who is
exaggerating and who is in real need. When I asked her whether she has conversations with her clients about their perceptions and experiences of the Iraq war, she offered the following response:

Well, yes I did but I don't go usually in depth with them, because my settlement job as a position, they don't want to give me the right picture because they want the maximum benefit of the system so they don't give me the right picture exactly, they would exaggerate, they would exaggerate a lot. While I'm sitting with a friend, it's a completely different story because they want me to sympathize with them. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Working as a settlement counselor, she was well aware of the power dynamics inherent in her position and she reflected on how these dynamics were impacting her interactions with her clients:

Yeah. Like, because we are a service provider. It's in my hand if I want to provide them with a food bank referral, or not. Like the food banks, usually I give it to the really, really needy people that they don't have food to eat. I cannot provide it for everyone because not everyone is the same so when they exaggerate, like I was kidnapped, I was shot, they exaggerate and these people unfortunately, they come from very wealthy families so you don't get the right picture from them. While when you are sitting with a friend and you open the subject there is no intention behind what is the conversation going to be. So I can see the right picture from them. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

When I asked Haifa to elaborate further on what she thought was going on behind the “exaggerations” in the stories, she also seemed puzzled by Mandaean refugees who came from well to do families, wanting “to get the most out of the system” as she put it. She was also puzzled by their seeming unwillingness “to stand on their feet, and open their own business”:

Yeah. Sometimes I say it is so strange, because most of these people, the conventional refugees, they are goldsmiths. And they have got shops. They are very wealthy, when they come here, they come here as a status as a protected refugee, because of the minority in Iraq because they are Mandaean (Sobba). So when they come here, I don't know what, what happened to them, they are not willing...to stand on their feet, and open like their own business, or they go and work because of the language barrier. So after one year of being on the government, they change to welfare. I know well, and with their words, that "we do have money but we don't want to spend it, why though, the welfare is paying for us". Now the government started... (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa elaborates that many also come in and fill out applications for disability benefits under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). She acknowledges that they have gone through a
really hard time but also questions their need to go on disability benefits and says something must be wrong:

It's so strange and it's so sad because they come from a very rich country. Why do they do this, we don't know. And everybody is on ODSP and everybody comes and I fill out their forms because I have to, they have a language barrier, and they say okay we do have disabilities, if it's permanent or temporarily. I know well, they went through a really hard time, but that doesn't give them the benefit of the doubt that they need to abuse the system which is, which is, it's not really good. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa explains that this phenomena is not unique to Iraqi refugees, she also observes it in conversations with her co-workers who work with Afghan and Pakistani refugees who work cash and collect social assistance at the same time. She further explains that the system in Canada is not perfect and has many limitations that contribute to this problem:

Um the social assistance system, it is like, they don't scan very well. Like your eligibility is like bank account three months, bank statement, we don't really understand this very well uh, but there is lack in the system. The kind of money that they give to the people uh, first of all it is only roof, it is only money for the roof on the top. They don't involve people when they have language barrier in the kind of training that it helps them to stand on their feet, and go and find a proper job. Like most of these Iraqi and Afghans their hand, it makes gold. Either they are a mechanicals, tailor, uh, people they have, they used to have spas in their, back home so if they open their own business they can make gold in their hands. They are, they are really talented but the system, the government here they don't provide them the right training according to the language level to push them, to train them, to push them in the right spot so they can start their life. They just provide them like, doing resume. This is for professional people, resume, cover letter is for the one that has fluency. You're not expecting people, he's not even fluent in his mother language. He doesn't even write and read, but he has a brain to work. Just train this guy, format him to the right program. Just put him in the, in the right place. He will go, he will be productive, nobody doesn't want to be productive. But if you keep underestimating him, no you don't have language -go, no, you give him minimum wage, below minimum wage, because at the end of the day these people need to put food on the table. But if you don't give him a chance and a proper training to integrate into the system he won't move. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Haifa highlights how the system creates and maintains dependencies in individuals by providing minimal financial support that is insufficient to sustain them and inappropriate training that is not tailored to their needs and does not support them to establish themselves in their trades and professions. These conditions lead people to work cash jobs in factories and restaurants under substandard precarious conditions in order to survive, facilitating their further exploitation:
Most of them restaurants or factories and the factories they really, really abuse them because they give them $7.5. It is less than minimum wage. But these people, they have to. Sometimes I say okay I don't blame them because the welfare it is, it doesn't cover a lot, uh, what can you do? (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Aside from insufficient amounts of assistance, several study participants indicated social services has now resorted to withholding information and access to benefits and entitlements for Iraqi refugees along with others who have now become suspects for fraud and abuse of the system. Haifa describes this dynamic as follows:

Now they are becoming a little more strict. Even with the benefits...social services, there are so many tricks...I mean, the social worker...she would either tell you about it or not. For example, the start-up benefit, a lot of people don't know about this. The special diet form.... if you want to go and start your life, there are $500...there are so many things that they don't tell them about....And I don't blame them to tell you the truth. You know, they don't want them to abuse the system more than this. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Yesra also shares her experiences with the welfare worker withholding information from her husband and denying a training program for her:

We met with the welfare worker once and we could tell that she did not like us, did not want to give us any information. My husband is an Engineer and he asked her if there were any training programs he could take. She just told him no and that’s it. She did not provide any other information.(Yesra, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Yesra had been requesting her welfare worker to provide her with approval for a training program that would enable her to have her own home daycare. She described her experience with the welfare worker as the most demoralizing experience for her. She felt she was denying her the opportunity to something that could lead to employment by withholding the funding with no explanation and not responding to her many calls for follow up about it. As Galtung (1990) articulates, ideologically based cultural violence legitimates the use of structural violence that has social injustice, exploitation, unequal power and unequal life chances as its hallmark. Galtung (1969, 1990) defines violence as “avoidable insults to basic human needs” which in this case could include the denial of access to basic social benefits and services to Iraqi refugees as we have seen from the above examples. As the above examples demonstrate, social service providers and welfare workers have the capacity to exercise a considerable amount of power and
discretion in deciding who gets access to information, training and other resources that have the potential to facilitate more successful community integration and access to social citizenship rights. As Bhuyan (2010) has argued, “social welfare benefits as social entitlements are crucial aspects of citizenship and a contested site of who belongs and is fully endowed with their rights and protections offered by the state” (p. 65). Drawing on Foucault’s theory of governmentality and Lipsky’s (1980) analysis of street-level bureaucrats, Bhuyan (2010) demonstrates social service providers take part in practices of governmentality through their use of discretion and relative autonomy in determining service eligibility, thereby exercise the regulation of citizenship and define the boundaries of who belongs and who does not. In the context of service provision to Iraqi refugee women, the regulation of citizenship has taken the form of withholding information and denial of access to services and resources informed by their construction as defrauding and abusing the system.

Haifa describes the strict and increasingly selective nature of Canada’s refugee resettlement program as another significant challenge and puts it into context:

The people who made it to Syria and Jordan, means they had the means to get out. Life is very expensive in Jordan. But they’re also being told that we're selecting you because of the children. The children will go to school, and they would be the future. So they are totally neglecting the parents. But they are missing the point, the parents provide the foundation for these kids, they are raising them so if they're all not well, then the kids will not be strong kids. They don't choose elderly people because they know they can't be productive, they would go on ODSP. But these are the real people that need protection, they don't have anyone to support them and provide for them. So they are selecting people based on their ability to be productive. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Other study participants also echoed Haifa’s concerns with respect to tighter refugee selection and the lack of support for the lucky few who make it to Canada. Sundus expresses her frustration at having to leave her parents behind in Syria and her inability to sponsor them or even bring them here on a visitor’s visa:

This is one of the things here, is that there are cases that they need to look at from this point of view. That I for example...I'm the youngest in the family. I'm alone here and my parents are alone over there. If they ease up some of the policies...that would be...even for a visitor's visa, they want me to...I mean...aah...$34,000.00/year to be able to bring them. I mean even if I work $2,000.00/month I will not be able to bring them. If I make that much...which I don't make that much, I'm just using it as an example. I mean I have just arrived, how do they expect me to make this amount to be able to bring them? (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)
Sundus, her sister and her parents had filed their asylum applications at the same time and they lived together in Syria. Her sister was accepted to the United States, she was sent to Canada, and her parents remain in Syria. Sundus’ situation is further complicated by the fact that she has also been struggling to sponsor her Syrian husband whom she met in Syria and married after coming to Canada:

The situation in Syria is very difficult now, like in Iraq, things kept getting worse and worse until it reached to a point then exploded. It's very difficult now. Especially for us, we saw so many wars...so it's enough, we don't want to see anymore wars...I mean even when I went to talk to the MP about my husband, I told her I know what the meaning of war is because I saw it in my own eyes. I mean I don't want someone to call me one day and tell me "your husband was killed". Let's be realistic, I mean now my husband...I mean my parents will leave Syria. In the worst case scenario, they would go back to Iraq...aah, I mean if they don't have any other option, they would have to go back to Iraq and live like all the other people in Iraq. And now Iraq seems safer than Syria, and that is the problem....under these circumstances, Iraq became safer than Syria, so....I mean I told her, I don't want one of these days to get a call and be told that my husband has been killed. I mean enough wars, we've seen too many wars in our lives...in the 80s and 90s...all and in the 2000s...it's all too much....and the sanctions, and the sectarian wars, and external wars...and travel bans...and we have no freedoms...I mean enough is enough...I mean one reaches a point where one wants to just rest...but.... (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

As I have shown earlier in my discussion of Canada’s recent immigration and policy changes in chapter 2, the implementation of more restrictive immigration policies, refugee deterrence, criminalization, and border controls have become a key feature of the new world order in the context of increased securitization and militarization post 9/11. This has enabled Canada along with the rest of the international community to abandon their obligations towards protecting the human rights of millions of internally displaced Iraqis and Iraqi asylum seekers in neighbouring countries. The structural violence of more restrictive immigration and refugee policies is detrimental not only to the millions of refugees left behind with no protection or supports, it has also resulted in further trauma and imposed separation of families across transnational borders and continents. As the preceding discussion on the politics of citizenship and belonging, and processes of social exclusion has demonstrated, Iraqi refugee women’s access to social citizenship rights has been severely impacted in multiple ways through the enactment of a continuum of violence in their everyday lives. As the above interviews with study participants have shown, this continuum of violence takes on many forms from racism and discrimination in everyday interactions, to withholding information about available resources and supports, denial
of access to jobs and training opportunities, as well as refusals of refugee claims, sponsorship applications, and access to formal citizenship status. The predominant underlying ideologies facilitating the continuum of violence are historical Orientalist ideological constructions and stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, and uncivilized subjects who are lacking in moral values and are out to defraud and take advantage of Canada’s generous humanitarian system. Culturalized, de-historicized, and de-contextualized explanations abound and serve to facilitate the erasure of historical memories of colonial imperialist violence and state structural violence while authorizing further violence, social exclusion, and denial of basic human and citizenship rights to groups of Iraqi refugees deemed undeserving of such rights. Iraqi refugee women, caught in this complex web of continuing violence and marginalization, are left to manage their own historical memories of trauma and deal with its contemporary manifestations for themselves and their families.

Trauma

In this section, I draw on my conceptualization of the trauma of the “war on terror” as a “shock” or “wound” in order to reflect a broader, non-medical model, and more critical perspective on trauma. I also draw on theories of historical trauma, colonial trauma response, and multi-level frameworks of trauma to inform my analysis of the historical and contemporary trauma of the “war on terror” experienced by Iraqi refugee women participating in this study. As the critical review of empirical literature on trauma and mental health studies of Arabs/Muslims, and Iraqi refugees in the post 9/11 context has demonstrated, the primary theoretical orientation and conceptualization of trauma has relied on Western Eurocentric, psychiatric models of trauma without taking into account the historical, socio-political, and transnational contemporary context of these communities. This study aims to address this gap and examine the trauma of the “war on terror” from a gendered historical perspective with a particular focus on the structural violence of state policies and practices as the main contributing factors shaping Iraqi women’s experiences of, and varied responses to this trauma (See chapter 2 for more detailed discussion of issues and limitations of existing literature on this topic).

Ahlam describes the sense of fear and terror that she felt after the 2003 Iraq Occupation and the sectarian violence and lack of security that ensued, particularly for her and her family who felt
targeted as a minority religious group. She feared kidnapping, rape, or murder every time she or her husband went out of the house. As she was pregnant at the time, she and her husband feared losing the baby due to her ongoing sense of fear and terror. As she states in the interview, this fear persisted with her after she moved to Syria and here in Canada. She found she was afraid to go out when she first arrived in Syria, the slightest noise made her jump with fear because she thought it was an explosion. Ahlam relays that her fear and trauma were further complicated by the fact that they had to keep crossing the border back to Iraq every two months in order to renew their visa, and by her son’s serious illness which he developed there. Ahlam describes her son’s illness was a transition point that changed her worldview and outlook to life into “Nathra Sowdawieyeh”, a “darkened outlook” which she cannot seem to change no matter how hard she tries:

Yes, I see it still remains. I mean as much as I try to get it out of my life, but I see it is still there affecting my life. The simplest thing is...is that your outlook towards life...is not optimistic, I mean it's not hopeful. There is I mean, an outlook that is kind of blackened "Nathra Sowdawieyeh". I mean where...you always think...I mean I don't know....I always try to think in more positive ways...I mean how much I try to change this thing...I've accepted that I have now come to Canada....I accepted that I am now settled...I've accepted that my life is completely different from what I lived in Iraq and in Syria, but...when you come and you reflect on many issues in your life in a negative way, this is a problem. I mean I see it as a problem that must be solved. It must be...the human...I mean there is no such thing that would be solved by an external effect on you...I mean this is something that you have to deal with internally with yourself...asking yourself how can I change myself....so this has all become part of our personalities in that....the nervousness....the blackened outlook...I see all of this as a negative impact.

(Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

While Ahlam connects her fear and trauma to her experiences of war and violence, she simultaneously locates the problem internally within herself. She seems to blame herself for having this dark outlook to life and keeps trying to deal with it by “motivating herself” and changing her outlook to a more positive, optimistic one. In her mind, if she succeeds in this process, then she would be more like Canadians and be able to be more relaxed and deal with problems in a less complicated way. She seems to have bought into the discourse of individualism and self-responsibility as she locates the problem and its solution within herself, stating “this is something that must be changed internally with yourself”. Therefore, she refuses to seek help and keeps putting pressure on herself to change her outlook:

No...I didn't try to talk to anyone because I know my problem. I mean I'm not...it's not that I don't know what the problem is. I...how do I tell you...I've specified the
problem...I've specified that I for instance, am taking a darkened outlook "Alnathra alsowdawiyeh", that always for instance...for example my husband currently is working...this is just as an example...he is on a contract. So I keep thinking what if he loses his job, what would happen to us? I mean, so for example, what if he lost his job...I mean it's not the end of the world, is that true or not? He will find another job...but no, I sit and think, and how are we going to live? (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

She further elaborates on this point that if only she is able to change her outlook to a more optimistic one, then she would be able to fit in and make friends with Canadians and immigrants from other nationalities. She goes on to compare herself to Jack Layton, the leader of the NDP who had recently passed away at the time of the interview, as an example of the quintessential Canadian who maintained a positive outlook and continued to be active, and to give to society until the last day of his life while dying of cancer:

The most important thing is health and well-being. Iraqis, this has become a...how should I say it to you...it has become the basis of our talk when we speak among ourselves..."Yalla...aham shie alssaha wa alafiya" (the most important thing is health and well-being)...right?... (laughing) ...yeah, as my husband says, well where is this health and well-being going to come from when one's not well emotionally? (laughing) ...Yes, it's true that you say that to comfort yourself...but you have to surpass that...It's true the most important thing is health and well-being but it doesn't mean the people who are sick here are not alive. There are people who are sick and have cancer...but their optimism is more than us regular, healthy people. Is it true or not?...This is the thing that frustrates me. This is what I wish to change in myself...in that I become stronger in this life. I would be stronger to deal with the problems that I am suffering from. That, not every problem means this is the end of the world...because this is...I mean I like to pay attention to these psychological issues...for instance when I see Jack Layton and how he was dying and at the same time he appears on TV as if there was nothing wrong with him...and he's laughing...his optimistic view towards life...I mean I say...he's a person who is dying, and his optimistic view of life...and not just his optimism...his giving...he is giving...when one of us gets sick, he goes to bed right away. You see what a big difference there is in the thinking...I mean the essence of the thinking is different for me personally...I mean the essence of their thinking is different from the essence of our thinking...we people, especially us Iraqis, we really love grief...I mean people started to love grief...not people who started to like happiness and joy in life. And of course these circumstances that we lived through created this view for us.

So I wish...I wish to become one like them...like that my worldview in life would be different...that he is a person who is dying, but he is giving back in life...he is doing things in life...and he is optimistic in life...and the last day in his life you see him come out and walk, etc. Us no,...us no,...my uncle, God rest his soul, when he died in Iraq...aah...I remember that a few months earlier, he slept in the bed and he was finished...his life was over...as soon he found out...his life was over...I mean see what a difference...the thinking...so I wish I would have the same as their thinking...I wish...I
mean I try...I see the one good quality I have is that I am identifying the problems that I am struggling with...the psychological problems...(laughing) and I wish I would change them.(Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

In her attempts to cope with her trauma and day-to-day struggles of trying to get by, Ahlam seems torn between her desire to motivate herself to be more optimistic in life and the continuation of the structural forces and the historical trauma that is built into her foundation and keeps overshadowing her life:

And we say that we're young....But at times I tell my mother, you were better off than us. You saw something good...it's true that you suffered afterwards...but us, no! Since we opened our eyes, there were wars, we hear sirens and bombs and things....and we are STILL suffering...I mean we didn't spend, what should I tell you, we didn't spend years that we were comfortable in...there is no such thing as years where we were comfortable in. I mean you, since the moment of birth...I was born in 1979, the war started in 1980...until I came to Canada, I'm still suffering...is it correct or not? (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant)

Ahlam’s sentiment that her whole life is overshadowed with wars and she has known nothing else but wars, is shared by the other young women I interviewed. She as with others, lament the fact that their whole lives are fundamentally structured by the wars and sanctions in Iraq over the past 33 years, the effects of which will be long lasting on their lives. Ahlam expresses the lasting effects of the historical trauma in this way:

That's how...I mean there is something that is correct and that is, when you build the foundation correctly, the building will continue to go up correctly. But when you leave this building...and you come back to it a second time to build it...you're going to face some difficulty in building it. Because you do have a foundation in it...but how are you going to finish building it? So here is the difficulty. This is what happened to us...you...the little baby here...is going to be raised here...he's going to...how should I say it to you...his personality, his character will be different. But for us whose foundation has sufferings, when you come to it...as much as you want to try to change it, there will remain something that is destroyed inside you. Something that is still....I mean you're still suffering from it. Even if you're sitting here and you're comfortable, and having fun, and it's green around you and the weather is nice for instance, in the summer, in the winter, okay...there is snow and you accepted, and managed to deal with the snow...I mean one of the problems, is the snow. We haven't seen snow, and when you go to do your shopping and with your stroller, and you take the children to school for instance...(sigh) if this was a regular issue for many people here, for us, it's not a regular issue at all. Because we're essentially tired "taabaneen"...as if you put another weight on top of our heavy load! "aabalak, methel shenou, foug alhemel, ala golethom, tealawa! We have a saying that says that"...(sigh) and then (sigh)...you are still tired and suffering...your problems have not ended... (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)
Ahlam continues to struggle with trying to maintain a positive outlook and motivating herself on the one hand and on the other hand recognizes the continuing impact of the trauma of war and violence on her life that is further exacerbated by the barriers and difficulties that she experiences here in Canada. She acknowledges the detrimental effects of not being able to find a job in her career on her psychological well-being. She recognizes that the slightest problem she encounters in her daily life, such as one of her children getting sick and staying home for the day, would tip the balance she so carefully tries to maintain and send her back into depression. The social exclusion she experiences in the Canadian labour market represents the continuation of structural violence and the historical trauma in her life:

Yes, so I know that I'm wrong...and I know that I'm doing something wrong because I'm doing something wrong by being sad about things that don't deserve it...right...so...how do I motivate myself? I try to look at things in a better way...I try to put pressure on my nerves...I try to...I try to...then you see that I return and I become okay. I can move ahead for a while, without having any difficulties....but it comes back for instance afterwards...as soon as for instance the children get sick one after the other...they stay at home and I stay home with them...and that's it, it causes me a crisis again right away. I get really frustrated...for instance now, my staying at home, is really frustrating me...In that...I DON'T WANT TO STAY AT HOME! I got married, got pregnant and couldn't work. Then I went to Syria and I worked but I had another child and had to stop working. I DON'T WANT THAT ANYMORE. I WANT TO BUILD MYSELF. When am I going to get a chance to build myself? Should I remain for the rest of my life...as a...a housewife and...aah...children, and cooking and such...I mean...I HATED this...this daily scenario that passes day after day...I hate it...I don't like it anymore...I don't want it anymore...I WANT to BUILD MYSELF...because I'm sure the moment I get a job and I have for instance...a salary and that...my whole life would change...my whole mentality will change. I know that this is one of the problems that causes me to feel down emotionally ....and how should I say it to you....I suffer from depressive conditions...but it's because we did not have the opportunities to work...we did not have the opportunities to succeed in it...there are always reasons that make you...I mean how should I say it to you...there is someone who is stopping you...what we suffered in Iraq stopped us...what we went and suffered in Syria, that you had to work without the government's knowledge, this...I mean...affects you negatively...then you come here and also...also...there are numerous conditions and numerous barriers that tie you down until you get a job...is it correct or not? (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Ahlam’s experience of continuing historical trauma that is exacerbated by the contemporary experiences of social exclusion is also shared by other Iraqi refugee women participating in the study, particularly for the young women who have experienced war and violence all their lives. Amani vividly recalls her traumatic memories of the 1991 Gulf war and the U.S. air attacks that followed. She acknowledges that these memories and experiences will always be part of her life.
However, she also reflects that these traumatic memories may fade gradually and become more manageable with more successes and positive relationships if they evolve over time:

It's still within us. There is still anger, there is still not sleeping at night. There's still flash scenes of what happened in the war, you know, the war doesn't just go away because you integrate to Canada. No, especially even facing more difficult times in Canada so coming here doesn't, yes it brings your life to safety, but it's still, you're still under pressure and stress but the war still stays within us. And I mean for me, to remember the scenes that I went through when I was four, you know until now, that clearly tells me, and I'm not a doctor, clearly tells me it's still within me. It's, I still see the scenes, I'm still aware of what happened. I don't think it will ever go away because it's so, it's so devastating, it was so um, it was so um, I don't even know the word to describe it. It was, it was so dramatic, it, you know seeing people dying in front of you when you are four years old. Can you imagine, you know, you know I can't imagine, I feel like, I'm thankful because I didn't get into violence you know, that if a child experiences this kind of things, they will automatically go and do that to other people or you know, have a miserable life. But for me, it didn't impact me as much as other children or other youth. I'm still aware of it, it's still going to stay within me till God knows when but I'm slowly kind of, it's slowly fading away with more success and more being and more establishing with more um, with more knowledge. Because now I'm aware of what happened to me and my country. I can study, I can relate, I can talk to people and that's helping me through my social work diploma because we get into a lot of these topics and we have to work, you know with them. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Samar also attests to the continuity of structural violence and cumulative trauma that spans across the trajectory of their displacement from fleeing war and violence in Iraq, to living with uncertainty and precarity in Syria, to the multiple barriers and challenges of settlement in Canada:

So you know we have come here after all that suffering, we haven't come here with joy. You know...we came to Syria...and I mean we came with suffering that was very difficult...very difficult...from our country, to Syria, then we came to a country where we thought we would relax, but our suffering continues...so what would happen to a person? (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Samar goes on to reflect on the continuing impact of war and violence, and the dilemma of the impossibility of return to Iraq as well as the impossibility of belonging and community integration under conditions of poverty and ongoing social exclusion:

Yes...but I say thanks be to God that we got out safely. And we always say may God provide for you. So how do we say, he got us out from the wars...You know we were in our own country, my husband is an Engineer, I'm a teacher...I mean if it was modest...I mean it was a life...But on the other hand you see the society is finished...I mean nothing remains...so you don't know what is the right choice for you. If you should stay in your own country...it's something that is for sure not possible...then your presence here is suffering, and we say hopefully it's for a limited time. So financial support is something
that's very important because what they give us in welfare is $1,340.0, our rent is $1,440.0 because we have a three-bedroom. My two daughters are in one room, my son has a room, and my husband and I are in a room. Okay, so this doesn't include the phone, the internet, cell phones, doesn't include food or drink...so where do we get money for these? What do we do? So the kids have to work, there is no other way. But as I told you it's affecting them psychologically and impacting their studies. So this is the problem that I see. So I'm suffering and they are suffering. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

In addition to the cumulative effects of historical trauma and continuing structural violence, Samar’s psychological distress is directly connected to the cultural values and expectations of her as a mother and the multiple responsibilities placed upon her as a woman. Despite her own trauma and physical health conditions, she is obliged to set aside her own needs and provide a safe, supportive atmosphere for members of her family in order to compensate for the harsh realities they encounter in their everyday lives:

Honestly, my psychological distress affected my own health. I became depressed. I would stay up at night thinking how I'm going to provide for them. For example I thought about baking because I like baking, but what happened to me was I had disc problems in my spine and it began to affect my hands and the doctor said I have to have surgery. So I couldn't sleep at nights. The man also developed depression because we don't know how to provide for them financially, so of course it affects us. I mean if we had financial security then a lot of our problems would be solved. So we wouldn't have that kind of psychological distress that we faced. I mean my daughters, thank God...my older daughter is married and she has two children. Daycare is so expensive, so I'm responsible for them. My sister is not married, so I'm responsible for her. The house is my responsibility...I am TIRED...I am TIRED....The man, you would be afraid for him, because he is really fed up. He went from being a manager and a Ministry consultant to this state. You know these things.... I was retired from the 80s. I had three kids so I retired. I'm used to this way of life. But my husband is not used to it. So I have to provide for all of them...provide a life for them at home so that....how do I tell you...I mean...food and drink, and put on music...and I mean create a happy atmosphere at home. But I suffer inside...so I just collapsed...I just collapsed at once... (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

As with Ahlam, Sundus, and all the other women participating in the study, Samar keeps her pain to herself and projects a pleasant exterior while she feels exhausted and mentally drained on the inside. Samar knows too well the impact of the racism and its psychological, as well as material consequences of poverty and economic inequalities that are shaping her life and the lives and future prospects of her children. She tries to protect them at her own expense and tries to convey the importance of social, psychological, financial support as well as addressing
structural economic inequalities and precarious working conditions as necessary elements for successful resettlement of refugees:

I am still tired...I mean you see the smile...and you see me dressed up...but I'm TIRED...TIRED because when my son comes in the snow late at night...I get really upset but I don't show it to him. I get up and I squeeze an orange for him and I give it to him. I give him food. And I get him hot water and say my dear put your feet in it you can relax. So I must look after him so that his stress would get reduced because he's not used to like, carrying grocery bags and taking them to the trunks. You know...some appreciate him and thank him but others just close their trunk and go. So I mean in societies you find masters and slaves. I mean we don't expect this in Canada...and this is a very important point...there are masters and slaves here. I mean you see the person who is well off, always ordering the person under him. Let him toil even if he is dead tired. Let him toil....for example, for example my daughter who used to work at IT, she used to work for the company with all honesty. She got into an accident on her way to work. She was coming back from college and she got hit by a car and her fall affected her. So her hip was injured and she stopped going to work. I mean this in Iraq doesn't exist. I'll tell you an important point. In Iraq, they would support you...I mean your job will remain. Here, right away she was fired. And you know if you worked they would give half your salary. So my daughter still doesn't have a job. I mean the suffering began...because she was really helpful to us. This has really affected us. [continues talking about her daughter's contract and work with IT]...so the company forgot all her hard work and let her go. And this is a very important point that I would mark it as a negative here. And my daughter's husband works in a plastic factory outside of Toronto. You see the hard work on him that is unnatural. He hardly gets $15/hour and the person above him gets $60 or $100 per hour, and all the work is on him. It's something that we saw in Canada that we did not expect and I would say this frankly...I would say it frankly to any Canadian...that Canada has Masters and Slaves. I mean there is a Masters class and a Slaves class. I mean the one with the limited income is really suffering and the one with the high income is having a lot of fun, and is living in comfort and luxury....and so I tell you this is a negative point with respect to Canadian society. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

While Samar and her family stay and struggle to get settled, some Iraqi families long to go back to Iraq and others make the difficult decision to further split apart when the men leave to go work in other Gulf countries for work and send remittances back to their wives and children. While this arrangement improves the families’ financial situation, it introduces new challenges for them in the form of differences in cultural adaptation, marital and parenting difficulties that often result in divorce and family disintegration as a whole. As Haifa explains, even when families remain together in Canada, their minds are still back there in Iraq still caught up in their historical traumas of war and political violence:
Oh yeah, any type of Iraqi family, if you go if they are friends or whatever, they have to open the subject. Just imagine that you are dating an Iraqi and he goes and he talks about war. It’s still there. It’s still there! (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

thoughts and conversations around war and violence are an ongoing phenomenon among Iraqi families and friends whenever they get together as Haifa elaborates on the different types of conversations and the dynamics of going back, mentally or physically. Haifa highlights the transnational nature of their trauma and overall existence in this context of continuing sectarian violence, racism and racial profiling. No matter where they go, they carry their trauma and history on their back as they traverse borders and boundaries looking for survival and the belonging which eludes them:

Do you remember what happened when we were bombed and one he talks about Sistani, and one he talks about Sadr, and I am somewhere in between (laughter) and I say what are you talking about, just bring happy things to your life. It’s there, it’s far away, and now you’re in Canada. You have to live your life, your moments. They keep going back. He says no, no when I get my citizenship, a lot of them they do this. I’ll get my citizenship and I will go back…. So some of them have gone back actually. I have, yeah, I have a couple of them but they go back not to live in Iraq, they want to do a business let’s say between Dubai. They are carrying their Canadian passport so they won’t have problem with the visa. Like entering any countries, like an Iraqi passport at the last period it was a problem, nobody lets you to be in the airplane. I suffered from this also. They check your passport and they scan you as if you are a terrorist. So they have the Canadian passport so they go and they do business. Like Dubai, other places. They live in Jordan because this is their community, Arabic. They want to go back to Arabs. They don’t want to live in here and mingle in the system. “No we don’t want Canada anymore, that’s it. We’re done!”

So, of course, people need to belong, right? Everybody tells them you are an Arab, you are a Muslim, you are a terrorist. It is just like labelizing people so they don’t want to stay here. Well, why would they stay here? (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

**Family and Community Level Impacts of Trauma & Exclusion**

The families that try to endure the historical and contemporary trauma of racism and social exclusion have to contend with their multi-level impacts on their lives. These impacts manifest not only at the individual level as discussed in the previous section, but also at the family and community level in the form of domestic violence, addictions, mental illness, and a lack of community cohesion and support. As several study participants indicated, many Iraqi women become subject to different forms of domestic abuse and they often suffer this abuse in silence, shame, and lack of supports. The children and youth in these families also experience the trauma
and domestic violence and abuse on multiple levels as witnesses and as direct victims of the abuse. As Amani observes, children and youth are also relied on as interpreters for their parents in interactions with various service providers which further exposes them to witnessing and reliving the trauma:

Well the children are ... I can relate to that. The children are suffering themselves, because again they are aware of the families' issues, you know the children are translating everything, like say if they want to go to a doctor or lawyer or this or that, the kids are translating this. The youth are doing that. The youth becoming aware of these issues is impacting their own life as being a youth. Um, also the abuse in the relationship. The Iraqi women being abused because of you know, lack of you know, she can't go out to school, she can't do that. The husband is fed up with the life here. You know like the whole family, the whole house falls down when somebody is upset and not being treated good in Canada. Um, its, its... (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

As Amani observes, the gendered impacts of structural violence, racism, and social exclusion combined with patriarchal traditional family values play out in the form of control and multiple forms of violence for Iraqi women and girls in the family:

Of course, the man controls her physically, psychologically and verbally, and that's a form of abuse as well and that is because the man himself is frustrated with life of being in Canada, and the discrimination, and exclusion, and not being able to um, to find a job like you know in certain cultures the norm is the man has to make the bread has to bring the money to the house. If the man doesn't have a job he can't bring living to the parents, to the kids and to his wife, what kind of impact do you think the father might have? He's going to have a lot of anger, frustration and he's going to take it out on his kids and that's where things go wrong. (Amani, March 17, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Amani also elaborates that the dynamics of fear and political oppression further complicates matters for women and contributes to maintaining the silence on abuse. The historical environment of fear and political oppression which they endured during Saddam continues to play out in the mindset of many Iraqis who lived through his tyranny. This persistent fear and secrecy gets extended and further complicated with the fear of loss of status and deportation here in Canada:

You know what, there is support but I don't know if people are aware of the support and I don't know if people want to disclosure this kind of information because of what happened in Iraq of all the war and all um...exclusion, uh you know, uh, expressing themselves and, and, being killed in Iraq. I think they're still afraid of that. They're still facing that post-traumatic stress disorder of not expressing anything and staying in the hidden areas so that nobody finds out, nobody goes to the government and tells them because they might get deported. That's the automatic assumption and thought that they
Another persistent issue that is affecting the Iraqi community in Toronto is the impact of the rise in sectarian violence in Iraq which led to many of them leaving Iraq. Almost all the women participating in the study alluded to sectarianism as a divisive issue that acts as a barrier to forming close relationships and community cohesion among the diasporic Iraqi community in Toronto. Many of the women reflected on the historical interconnections and coexistence of diverse religious and ethnic groups in Iraq and how these relationships deteriorated significantly following the 2003 Iraq Occupation. Iraqi refugee women participating in the study, regardless of their age, religious, or educational background talked about their intermixed families, friends and neighbourhoods in Iraq and lamented the loss of safety, security, and social cohesion that used to exist among them. Some of the women traced the roots of these sectarian divisions to Saddam’s era during the 1970s and 80s when he used it as a strategy to suppress the different groups and to solidify his power base. However, the predominant sentiment was the rise in sectarian violence as a major consequence of the 2003 Iraq Occupation and the ensuing chaos, lack of safety and security. These conditions have left an indelible mark on the Iraqi diaspora community that continues to play out in their day to day interactions and is contributing to their further isolation and social exclusion. Although all the participants indicated their desire to move beyond these issues and used different strategies to transcend these differences, they cited other members of the community as being closed minded and stuck on maintaining these conflicts. The following examples illustrate some of these dynamics and their impacts on the Iraqi community in Toronto.

Samar describes some of the issues she has encountered with a close friend of hers who is Muslim:

Yes, yes, it's true...it's true. This is something that I observed. I mean I have a close friend who when she comes to our house...because we're not Muslim, she doesn't eat or drink in our house....This is the truth. And she is living here in Canada for the past 15 years....And we are friends. We really like her, because of her manners...and because she's a very good person. She doesn't feel comfortable so this is her mentality. You can't really.....is it true or not? You can't....You know you feel....you know, there remains the sensitivity. I mean I told you....I'm form the kind that, I mean my advice to them is always to tell them we left our society, weighed down with these pains and problems. Please forget where you're from and what your religion is. Let's live together as people here...this is the right thing....forget that you are Shi'a or Sunni or Mandaean and you're such and such...so you...it's enough what we went through and what we suffered...and our
country reached war because of this...so truly, I mean sectarianism increased, not decreased. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Although Samar has managed to maintain her relationship with her Muslim friend and move beyond their differences, she observes the continuing tension that exists among Iraqi women she encounters in her ESL class and expresses her frustration at its continuation:

This is the state that we arrived to. For example, at school, at the moment I go to ESL class. We sit together, there is the Egyptian, the Iraqi, the Christian, Iranian...I mean you know, even the Iranian is considered Easterner, we’ve all had the same upbringing more or less...but you feel there is still the fundamentalism...I mean the Sunni would say you see how the Shi’a are backwards, how they have the marriage of convenience? I say to each his own mentality. There is no need for you to be bothered. You do what satisfies you. And this is the right thing to do. For example, you still feel the sensitivities are there and they get into arguments with each other and they upset each other. For instance she tells no, the Shi’a are better and you see what Saddam did...so they are in the Canadian environment but these fundamentalisms remain with them. I mean you came to Canada, to a society that has no connection to the religions. This will keep you ... so we're in a strange society so let us stand together to try to live our lives. (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Haifa also makes a similar observation in interactions between her Iraqi clients at work:

The Mandaeans, they are together. The Muslims, they are together. The Christians, they are together. They are divided. They do talk to each other, but...(chuckles)...just open politics or religion, you will have a war zone....because this is their backgrounds. It is very complicated…. It is very complicated. But we are not the only community, the Christian community here immediately they would ask you “Are you Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant?” so what difference does it make to you. They do ask these questions, and I, sometimes I would say it seems to me we are not only these strange people. Canadians also they are strange, Spanish people are also the same. All of them are the same. It's human nature it seems to me, but it depends how much you adapt and accept things, and accept others. (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

Although Haifa acknowledges the historical and complicated nature of the sectarian divisions and tensions that exist among the diaspora Iraqi community, she raises the issue that this is not necessarily unique to this community and it exists among other communities as well. It is a matter of how you adapt and accept others, which seems to be the point that is getting in the way of Iraqis accepting and adapting to their current reality as a diasporic community in Canada.

The preceding discussion of experiences of trauma shared by Iraqi refugee women demonstrates its complex historical, contemporary, and multi-layered nature. Although the experiences of each individual woman is unique and the responses vary according to the
intersectionality of their personal histories and characteristics such as age, religion, family status, and the circumstances of their displacement, and current situation in Canada, there are a number of commonalities that I would like to discuss here. All the women participating in the study emphasized the lasting and ongoing historical and collective trauma of the direct violence of wars, sanctions, the recent occupation and the ensuing rise in sectarian violence and gender-based violence that ultimately led to their displacement from their homes and homeland. This is indicated by their use of expressions such as “we have arrived here essentially tired”; “I see it still remains...It is still there affecting my life”; “…so this has all become part of our personalities in that...the nervousness...the blackened outlook...I see all of this as a negative impact”; “It’s still within us. There is still anger, there is still not sleeping at night. There’s still flash scenes of what happened in the war, you know, the war doesn’t just go away because you integrate to Canada...and I mean for me, to remember the scenes that I went through when I was four, you know until now, that clearly tells me, and I’m not a doctor, clearly tells me it’s still within me...I don’t think it will ever go away because it’s so, it’s so devastating”. This was particularly so for the young women who have spent most, if not all their lives in wars and violence. As they have indicated, these historical experiences have overshadowed their whole lives and fundamentally changed their personalities and outlook in life as Ahlam so clearly articulated citing a conversation with her mother: “I mean you, since the moment of birth...I was born in 1979, the war started in 1980...until I came to Canada, I’m still suffering...” as she repeatedly indicated, she felt these experiences have set the foundation for her personality and built a “darkened outlook” on life that continues to colour her current experiences despite her ongoing efforts to alter her outlook to a more optimistic one. As it is also clear from Iraqi refugee women’s responses, their traumas are not only individual traumas but are historical collective traumas impacting families and communities on multiple levels.

The lasting effects of the historical collective trauma are further complicated by the continuing structural violence of intergovernmental policies of securitization, border controls, and more restrictive, exclusionary immigration and refugee policies shaping their lives today. All the Iraqi refugee women I interviewed spoke of the continuation of their suffering as a result of their social exclusion, poverty and precarious living conditions, and lack of access to jobs and career opportunities both in Syria and in Canada as the following quotes demonstrate:

I suffer from depressive conditions...but it’s because we did not have the opportunities to work...we did not have the opportunities to succeed in it...there are always reasons that
make you…I mean how should I say it to you…there is someone who is stopping you…what we suffered in Iraq stopped us…what we went and suffered in Syria, that you had to work without the government’s knowledge, this…I mean…affects you negatively…then you come here and also…also…there are numerous conditions and numerous barriers that tie you down until you get a job… Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

No one sees the human…in Canada I saw one thing only, that they have compassion…sorry for saying this sentence…ahhh…they have compassion for dogs, cats, and domestic animals, but they don’t have compassion for the human. I mean for someone like me, they still have not had compassion for me…in something simple. And I’m new here, they did not take into consideration that I’m new…and maybe I overlooked some laws……even if I made a mistake, I shouldn’t be paying the price for it for all this time, you know…so they have some particular things…they have things when you feel they are very humanistic and then they have other things where you feel they have no humanistic values whatsoever… (Sundus, March 12, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

So you know we have come here after all that suffering, we haven’t come here with joy. You know…we came to Syria…and I mean we came with suffering that was very difficult…very difficult…from our country, to Syria, then we came to a country where we thought we would relax, but our suffering continues…so what would happen to a person? (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Moreover, in addition to dealing with their own trauma and suffering the women carried multiple care-giving roles, to ensure the physical and psychological well-being of their family members and many times at the expense of their own well-being. More often than not, the need to protect their family members and the stigma and shame associated with mental illness meant the women kept their trauma, depression, and psychological distress to themselves and suffered in isolation with no supports. As indicated by the literature on historical trauma, lack of supports, silence and secrecy around experiences of collective trauma are further complicating factors that could contribute to other psychosocial sequelae at the family and community levels, and multi-generational transmission of the trauma (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). In the case of Iraqi refugees in this context, other factors contributing to their further isolation and silence about their suffering are fear, lack of trust, and lack of community cohesion due to their past experiences of political repression in Iraq, ongoing sectarian violence in Iraq, and racial profiling and surveillance in the post 9/11 context. As discussed earlier in this section, there are several indications of family and community level consequences such as domestic violence against women, mental health, addiction, and trauma issues among children and youth that could develop into more long term issues if left unaddressed. Despite the historical and contemporary
experiences of trauma, structural violence, and social exclusion, Iraqi refugee women participating in this study have shown diverse responses, incredible resilience, persisting faith and a sense of hope for a brighter future for themselves and their families, which motivates them to keep trying to move forward. Further exploration of multiple levels of trauma, varied responses to the trauma, and developing multi-level interventions aimed at social justice and social change taking into account the multiple issues facing Iraqi refugee women in the Canada are important future considerations for social work research and practice.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Overview & Summary of Main Findings

In this dissertation I examine the ways in which the “war on terror” manifests in the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi refugee women in Canada. Drawing on feminist anti-colonial anti-racist theoretical frameworks I examine the impacts of state policies emanating from the “war on terror” on Iraqi refugee women and explore the ways they respond to these consequences in their lives. Using interpretive and discourse analysis methods I analyze Canada’s “war on terror” to illustrate Canada’s complicit role in Iraq’s 2003 occupation and challenge the national mythology of Canada as a benevolent humanitarian state. Resisting de-contextualized representations of the “war on terror”, I argue binary constructions of “us”/”them” at the root of the theory of “clash of civilizations” enable and maintain a continuum of structural violence in Arab Iraqi refugee women’s lives. I also argue that Iraqi women’s historical and contemporary trauma is a consequence of their experience of structural violence.

Continuum of Violence: Policies of Destruction, Displacement, & Deterrence

I analyze Iraqi refugee women’s experiences of the “war on terror” from a gendered historical perspective in order to show the circulation of power and interconnected nature of women’s oppression in Iraq, Syria, and Canada and to challenge the stereotypical Orientalized constructions of Iraqi women as helpless victims in need of “saving” and “liberation” by U.S. – U.K. colonial occupation. Through a discussion of the particular historical context of Iraqi women I demonstrate that despite their activism and involvement in the public sphere, Iraqi women’s access to substantive citizenship rights and gender equality in the public sphere has fluctuated as a function of the interplay between colonialist, nationalist, patriarchal and religious forces shaping their lives.

As the historical overview of Iraq since 1948 illuminates, Iraqi women’s status has undergone significant changes over the past decades. Western strategic interests in Iraq’s oil, nationalization of Iraq’s oil, and demographic expansion between 1948 –1979 were accompanied by a series of gender egalitarian reforms which increased Iraqi women’s participation in the public sphere.
This period saw a significant increase in Iraqi women’s literacy rates, labour force participation, establishment of women’s associations, and Iraqi women’s participation in regional and international conferences since the 1930s. Following the 1958 Revolution, a major gender-egalitarian reform of family law replaced Shari’a courts. The modernization campaign continued during 1968 Ba’th coup to 1979 which included increased access to education, free health care, public sector job creation, legalized minimum wage, old age and disability pension plans.

During the Iran-Iraq war (1980 – 1988), Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship, supported by the United States and Arab Gulf states waged war against Iran and engaged in genocidal campaigns against the Kurdish population in the North and the Shi’a population in the South. Saddam’s regime instituted a number of detrimental gender reforms including offering financial rewards to Iraqi men married to Iraqi women of “Iranian Nationality” to divorce their wives or send them back to Iran, and to marry war widows. Iraqi women were called upon to fill most jobs in the public sector; care for households and children; and with an official ban on contraceptives, they were called upon to reproduce more children for the nation. The initial benefits and monthly pensions offered to families of war heroes during the early years of war, dwindled with the war years as the number of widows grew exponentially.

The 1991 Gulf war and the imposition of the United Nations economic sanctions (1990 – 2003) had devastating consequences for Iraq’s civilians with Iraqi women and children bearing the brunt of the destruction. Massive deaths and severe environmental degradation and destruction of Iraq’s basic civil infrastructures (including water, sanitation and electricity) resulted in high rates of child mortality, birth defects, cancers and other epidemic diseases due to the use of depleted uranium by the United States and United Kingdom forces; and high rates of trauma, anxiety disorders, depression and insomnia among many women and children. Comprehensive UN economic sanctions along with the United States and international complicities drastically increased domestic oppression in Iraq through the 1990s and strengthened Saddam’s active and violent suppression of civil uprisings in Iraq after the Gulf war.

The impacts of the Gulf War and UN economic sanctions were highly gendered and classed. This period saw a huge rise in poverty, breakdown of the welfare state, rise in generalized impoverishment, and unemployment and prostitution. These conditions resulted in drastic changes in cultural codes and moral values such as loss of honesty and rise in corruption.
Moreover, there were significant social and cultural shifts towards more conservative gender relations and ideologies exemplified by the changing dress code for women who were being forced to wear the hijab. During this period, Saddam’s regime also shifted its attitude towards women in order to solidify his power base with religious leaders and tribal chiefs. For instance in 1990, Saddam Hussein reduced the penalty for “honour killing” from eight years to six months. In 1993 he reversed his previous decree and introduced a new one allowing men to marry multiple wives without the first wife’s consent. These decrees along with other laws and decrees significantly weakened women’s position in the labour code, criminal justice and personal status laws while strengthening tribal jurisdiction over civil and personal matters.

Despite claims of “liberation”, “freedom”, and “democracy” used as justifications for the invasion of Iraq, Iraqi women’s status has significantly deteriorated following the 2003 occupation. General conditions of lack of safety and security following the U.S. – U.K. led invasion of Iraq restricted women’s ability to freely participate in social and public life. Increased gender-based violence from a variety of sources (militias, criminal gangs, police, occupying forces, as well as family members) became part of the new reality of Iraqi women during occupation. Societal and cultural shifts towards conservative Islamist ideologies observed during the previous wars and sanctions, continued and further intensified following the 2003 U.S. – U.K. led invasion of Iraq. Women were increasingly forced to change their dress code and wear the hijab. There was a significant decrease in women’s labour force participation, particularly for professional women who were targeted for kidnapping and murder. Illiteracy rates rose exponentially with women and girls being forced to leave schools and universities and stay home for their own safety; increased poverty rates and unemployment, particularly among the high number of widows and female-headed households with no formal supports, led to increased prostitution and sex trafficking of Iraqi women and girls. Iraq’s secular state was replaced with a theocratic state through the institution of ethnic and religious quotas in Iraq’s governing Council and the new constitution. Despite the stipulated 25% quota for women to be represented in the Governing Council, women have had very little involvement in decision-making. Moreover, Iraq has seen a huge rise in cultural imperialism through the proliferation of many NGOs promoting Western colonial anti-feminist conservative ideologies acting as the “soft occupiers” in Iraq.
Generalized conditions of lack of safety and security, lack of infrastructure, increased gender-based and sectarian violence combined with a rise in social conservatism and religious fundamentalism, poverty and lack of access to basic needs have led to the displacement of millions of Iraqis, many of whom are women and children (Al-Ali, 2007; Ismael & Ismael, 2000; Zangana, 2007).

Iraqi women’s loss of status, poverty, lack of access to basic needs and human rights violations continue with their displacement into neighbouring countries such as Syria and Jordan, and into their resettlement in Canada. The structural violence of state policies increases their precariousness and vulnerability to deportation and further violence in Syria. An estimated 1.2 – 1.4 million Iraqis fled to Syria following the 2003 occupation, seeking safety and security. Iraqi asylum seekers in Syria were not recognized as refugees by the Syrian government since Syria is not a signatory to the UN Convention. These asylum seekers had no permanent residency and no work permits. They were forced to live on their own savings with limited support and access to healthcare and education, and facing ongoing threat of deportation. High rates of poverty, prostitution, child labour, illegal employment, begging on the streets, and multiple chronic health conditions were common features of their daily existence. Strict visa requirements imposed by the Syrian government in 2007 requiring Iraqis to leave every two months and return to renew their visas increased their precariousness and exposed them to further risks of violence. The volatile civil war in Syria combined with conditions of poverty and destitution forced the return of thousands of Iraqi refugees along with an estimated 200,000 Syrian refugees to Iraq.

The vast majority (95%) of the estimated 4.5 million displaced Iraqis post 2003 invasion of Iraq were either internally displaced or fled to neighbouring countries of Syria and Jordan. Only about 5% of Iraqi asylum seekers have been resettled to Western countries. As several UNHCR, Amnesty International, and Refugees International reports have indicated, both the Iraqi government, and the international community have failed to live up to their obligations toward the protection of the human rights and the provision of basic needs for displaced Iraqi civilians. Ten years following the invasion, internally displaced Iraqis continue to live in deplorable conditions of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, lacking access to the most basic needs such as food, water, electricity and sanitation, amidst ongoing lack of safety, security and raging violence in Iraq. Many Western countries have taken up exclusionary refugee policies of border controls, securitization, detention, deportation, revocation of protection, withdrawal of financial
and accommodation supports, and forced voluntary returns of Iraqi refugees back to Iraq in violation of international conventions of refugee protection.

Canada’s response to the Iraqi refugee crisis has been widely critiqued by human rights and refugee advocacy groups as being severely limited and inadequate. Despite its repeated commitment to take in about 20,000 Iraqi refugees, Canada has accepted only about 12,000 Iraqi refugees since 2006, and about half of them have come under the private sponsorship program. Evidence from the House of Commons Subcommittee on Citizenship Immigration’s study of Iraqi refugee crisis, as well as the findings from the Canadian Council for Refugees’ review of refused Iraqi refugee applications demonstrate that Canada’s refugee determination process has been fraught with bureaucratic delays, inadequate processing of applications; general attitude of suspicion towards, and inhumane treatment of applicants; high refusal rates and family separations. Moreover, the recent closure of its Damascus Visa Office in 2012 has severely impacted Canada’s ability to meet its own target for Iraqi refugee resettlement (CCR, 2006 & 2013; CCIM, House of Commons Committee, 2008).

Canada’s response to Iraqi refugees must be seen within the context of its “war on terror” and as a key component of neoliberal restructuring, neoconservative anti-immigrant, anti-refugee policies of privatization, and criminalization. Contrary to the national mythologies of Canada as a multicultural, humanitarian, peacekeeping nation, Canada has been a staunch ally in the U.S. imperialist mission and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Canada has made explicit commitments to support the U.S. in the war in Afghanistan providing troops and resources being involved in peacekeeping and combat missions. Canada has also been a key player in the invasion and reconstruction efforts in Iraq supplying war planners, aircrafts, pilots, and soldiers embedded in U.K. forces on the ground supporting the invasion. Since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S., Canada has implemented a series of anti-terrorism measures including the Anti-terrorism Act of 2001; the enactment of security certificates under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA); Canada’s Passenger Protect Program; and the more recent Beyond the Border Agreement with the U.S. in 2011. These measures have had differential and severely detrimental effects on Arabs and Muslims in Canada including increased racial profiling; unlawful detentions; torture and deportations.
Within this backdrop of militarization, securitization and criminalization, the Canadian government has also taken drastic measures that have amounted to a complete overhaul of Canada’s immigration, refugee determination, and citizenship policies over the past several years (Albiom & Cohl, 2012). The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and its Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR) were introduced in 2002 replacing the Immigration Act of 1976 in providing the legal framework for Canada’s federal immigration system. Since their election as a majority government in 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s conservative government has introduced a series of legislative and regulatory changes to Canada’s immigration system effectively aimed at increasing Canada’s competitiveness in the new political economy and serving the needs of the market through privatization, and exploitation of an increasingly temporary, precarious, racialized and gendered migrant labour force; and the regulation of the movement of the most vulnerable groups of people, namely racialized women from the global South who have been displaced and forced to migrate for survival as a consequence of the destruction brought on by capitalist imperialist expansion and greed.

Some of the key recent immigration policy changes affecting refugees seeking safety and protection in Canada include the introduction of Bill C-31 (Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act) which drastically alters Canada’s refugee determination system creating different classes of refugees subject to differential treatments, processing timelines, and rights; changes to refugee sponsorship regulations and imposition of caps on the number of sponsorships; the introduction of regulations facilitating the cessation of refugee protected status and loss of permanent residency under Bill C-43 (Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act) and Bill C-10 (Omnibus Crime Bill); the introduction of the Assisted Voluntary Removal Program; along with increased immigration enforcement in public spaces, detentions, and deportations of failed refugee claimants. These changes have resulted in a significant decline in the number of refugees and refugee claimants. Additionally, the government of Canada has introduced drastic cuts and changes to services and benefits afforded to refugees and refugee claimants. Since 2011, the government of Canada has changed its funding allocation model to one based on landing numbers; its model of settlement service provision to a model based on outcomes and accountability; and introduced significant cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program which provided health care coverage and benefits to refugees. These service cuts and changes to
funding allocation have had serious consequences not only for very vulnerable groups of refugees and their family members, but also for the service providers working with them, resulting in lack of access to essential services and supports, defunding of many organizations; job losses and insecurity for service providers working with immigrants and refugees.

As the interviews with Iraqi refugee women have shown, their interactions with social services, health care, and educational systems seem to be mired with multiple barriers, lack of trust, and different processes of social exclusion ranging from lack of access, language and cultural barriers, anti-refugee sentiments, accusations of fraud and abuse of the system, and inadequate supports and resources. Despite their best intentions to help, social service providers also find themselves caught providing services in increasingly restricted and restrictive work environments with shrinking resources and an insecure funding base, higher caseloads, increasing demands for accountability and limited community supports to address the complex needs of their clients. In recent years, in addition to a general neoliberal restructuring trend towards privatization, cuts to public services and downloading federal responsibility to the provinces, the government of Canada has engaged in ideologically based defunding of non-profit organizations such as the Canadian Arab Federation in a concerted effort to limit advocacy efforts and silent dissenting voices (OCASI, 2011; Shakir, 2009). The new settlement funding model and service agreements with Citizenship and Immigration Canada place an explicit focus on outcome based reporting and accountability, and prohibit CIC funded programs from engaging in advocacy efforts. These conditions, combined with the generalized sense of fear, lack of trust, and overall surveillance prevalent in the post 9/11 context has created an advocacy chill in the non-profit sector. Although social service providers engage in advocacy efforts on a case-by-case basis on behalf of individual clients, they generally refrain from speaking out about larger socio-economic political structural issues affecting their clients and the services they receive. This has had an overall de-politicizing effect on the practice of social work among other disciplines serving marginalized populations including women, immigrants and refugees and racialized communities as a whole.

Other significant recent policy changes introduced by the government of Canada include the introduction of more restrictive family reunification regulations such as the Conditional Permanent Residency for sponsored spouses and the Parent and Grandparent Super Visa program, both of which have gendered, racialized, and classed dimensions which have resulted
in increased vulnerability of migrant women to abuse, long term economic dependence on their sponsors, and fear of loss of status and deportation. Access to Canadian citizenship has also become increasingly more restrictive, difficult to obtain, and easier to be revoked for certain groups of individuals, particularly for Arab and Muslim communities. New citizenship rules and residency criteria introduced in 2009 require proof of proficiency in one of Canada’s official languages (English or French) and stricter proof of residency requirements. A recent ban on wearing the niqab during citizenship oath and the revocation of over 4,000 Canadian citizenships of individuals primarily of Muslim and Middle Eastern origins, under allegations of fraud, illustrate the increased vulnerability, precariousness and lack of access to citizenship rights for this population. This is particularly the case for Muslim women wearing the hijab or niqab in Quebec where recent debates over reasonable accommodations (2006), the introduction of a niqab ban under Bill 94 (2010) and the introduction of, and debates over Quebec’s Charter of Values (2013) have sparked new waves of racial hatred, violence, and denial of citizenship rights for Muslim women in Canada. As I will discuss later, along with other Arabs and Muslims, the exclusionary refugee and immigration policies in Canada, securitization, racial profiling, Islamophobia, and everyday micro-aggressions and symbolic acts of violence facilitate Iraqi women’s social exclusion, lack of access to social citizenship rights and violation of human rights. In this context of structural violence, racism and social exclusion, Iraqi women’s experiences of historical trauma of war, occupation, and gender-based violence, get further complicated and intensified by their contemporary transnational colonial trauma. In the following sections, I will discuss the key themes of Violence, Citizenship, and Trauma and explore their interrelationships as they arose in the context of this study.

**Violence, Citizenship, Trauma**

Drawing on feminist standpoint theory and interpretive policy analysis methods I examined my interviews with Iraqi refugee women, key informant interviews, as well as critical reflections on my own reactions during and after the interviews, and on the context of the interviews in order to develop a deeper understanding of the various meanings and experiences of the “war on terror” shared by study participants. In exploring Arab Iraqi refugee women’s meanings of the “war on terror” three overarching themes emerged in my interviews with study participants:

1. The “war on terror” does not relate to us. We’re not terrorists.
2. The “war on terror” as an imperialist mission going after Iraq’s oil and resources, preventing Iraq’s progress.
3. The “war on terror” as Saddam’s doing. He instigated it by attacking Kuwait.

These overarching themes were relayed in variations by the study participants. The particular meanings of the “war on terror” varied based on the intersectionality of multiple axes of the women’s social location including their personal history and characteristics such as age; ethnic, religious, and political affiliation; level of education; class and socioeconomic status; geographic region which they originated from; history of immigration, and immigration status in Canada.

This finding is consistent with other studies of Iraqi women in diaspora showing the intersections of Iraqi women’s storied narratives with their personal history and social location (Al-Ali, 2007; Jones-Gailani, 2012).

The first theme indicating the “war on terror” had nothing to do with Iraqis and Iraqi women, was an unexpected response that was quite eye opening and yet jarring experience for me that I encountered very early on during the course of conducting my interviews with key informants. Consistent with interpretive analytical methods, points of tension between what the analyst expects to find and her present experiences are important sources of insights and should be dwelled on rather than attempting to resolve them immediately (Yanow, 2000). Therefore, this encountered disjuncture between my perspective on the “war on terror” and my key informants’ assertion that it is not relevant to Iraqi women became a point of ongoing critical reflection and an important source of insight for me as I conducted my research and analysis. This disjuncture emphasized the importance of examining the researcher’s, as well as the participants’ personal history and memory of lived experience in shaping one’s meaning making processes and understandings of the “war on terror” which was my focus.

Sabah, a Kurdish Iraqi key informant participating in this study saw the “war on terror” as being completely justified, because Americans were attacked and they had to defend themselves, yet she simultaneously stated that it had nothing to do with Iraq. She saw the invasion of Iraq as being aimed at “Liberation from Saddam’s dictatorship”, a liberation which as she affirms quickly descended into a state of chaos and lawlessness. On the other hand, Zangana, a Kurdish Iraqi novelist and former political prisoner during Saddam’s regime saw the “war on terror” and the invasion of Iraq as an imperialist mission that was forcing her to stand beside her oppressor.
in opposing it and the destruction that it would bring on the Iraqi people (Zangana, 2002). These very divergent perspectives from Kurdish Iraqi women who shared a collective history of persecution and genocidal campaigns at the hands of Saddam Hussein and his U.S. – U.K. allies who supplied him with the chemical weapons which he used against the Kurds, illustrate an example of the diverse responses to the historical trauma that individuals exhibit in reaction to their shared historical trauma. It reinforces the need for a multi-level trauma framework and an examination of varied and complex responses as proposed by Evans-Campbell’s (2008) Colonial Trauma Response theory which critiques limited understandings of historical trauma that take on an individual disease/deficit focus when examining consequences of collective historical trauma without accounting for diverse responses and resilience factors that could potentially build community strengths in addressing the impacts of trauma on their community. An important aspect emphasized by the Colonial Trauma Response theory is its focus on the multiple interrelated levels of the impact of historical trauma and the need to look beyond the predominant individual-level focus on psychiatric disorders such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression.

Another example of the multiple and varied responses on the “war on terror” comes from the context of a meeting I had with a group of Iraqi older women as key informants. This group of middle/high middle class women in their 60s – 70s had all come to Canada following the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Three of the women were Mandaean Christians and two women were Muslim, one of whom was wearing the hijab and one was not. I had gone into the meeting with the expectation that I would be presenting my preliminary findings to this group and have a discussion with them, as they had requested prior to the meeting. After the initial greeting, one of the women asked me to explain why I thought the “war on terror” was relevant to Iraqi women because she did not see the relevance of it. As the conversation progressed, the meeting felt more like I was being put on trial to prove the relevance of the “war on terror” to Iraqi women. Similar to my meeting with Sabah, this was another encounter where the relevance of the “war on terror” to Iraqi women became a source of tension between the key informants and me as the researcher asserting our different perspectives on the issue. I knew as the researcher in the study I should not be imposing my views on my participants, and that was clearly not my intention. My attempts to explain my definition of the “war on terror” by providing examples from the literature and my interviews with other study participants were met with responses such as “well
yes, this is in the U.S., not in Canada” or in relation to Maher Arrar’s case, and other Muslim men held under security certificates in Canada they responded by saying, “if they had kept those men longer under security certificates, I’m sure they would have found their connections to terrorism”. In reference to recent Iraqi refugees’ experiences of social exclusion, they offered the following comment: “So let them go back to where they came from. Who asked them to come to Canada? ….they shouldn’t complain about Canada”.

On the other hand later on during the course of the meeting, the women shared several experiences of racism and discrimination that they themselves had experienced in crossing the United States border on their way to their holidays. The women highlighted how despite having Canadian passports, they were always pulled over and questioned because their country of birth was listed as Iraq. One woman’s passport (along with other Arab passengers’) had been red-stamped following extensive questioning by border officers simply because their Qatar airways plane was re-routed to the U.S. due to severe weather conditions; since then she is pulled over and questioned every time she travels. However, despite their frustration with these procedures they indicated “we can’t really blame them. They have to defend the nation. We have respect for Canadian laws. Canada respected and accepted us. I don’t mind being questioned. It’s for safety and security of nations”. At the same time, they also acknowledged that the “war on terror” may have more relevance to Muslim Iraqi women, particularly those who wear the hijab, not to them as Mandaean Iraqi women. Though the only hijabi woman in the group did not engage in the conversation and left half way through the meeting. Yet they simultaneously indicated their sense that they were not integrated into Canadian society despite the fact that they had lived in Canada since the early 90s. They made statements such as, “we don’t have relationships with, connections with Canadians. They don’t want to connect with us somehow”.

This meeting left me somewhat distressed questioning the relevance of my research and trying to make sense of the unexpected tense encounter and conflicting messages I had received. As mentioned earlier, meaning making in interpretive methodology is seen as a historically and socially contextualized process mediated by the knower’s prior knowledge. Concepts and categories are seen as embodied, reflecting the point of views, histories and traditions of their creators. Individuals are seen as members of communities of meaning, drawing on the repertoire of collective shared meanings created by that community. Individuals draw on these collective understandings, traditions, practices, and language to construct their own meanings and make
sense of their everyday experiences. Self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher is paramount in examining knowledge claims, and interpreting data (Yanow, 2006). After much critical self-reflection and consultations with my committee members and other Iraqi key informants about this encounter, I came up with the following interpretations that highlight a few key issues in relation to examining meanings and experiences with the “war on terror” as relayed by this group of key informants: From the standpoint of this group of relatively affluent older Iraqi women who have lived in Canada for about 20 years, drawing on the mainstream discourses of the “war on terror”, they saw it as being completely justified in the name of national security and in defense of the nation state. There also seemed to be an active tension between what they were saying and what the realities of their lives were telling them, a reality which they seemed to want to conceal or had difficulty acknowledging. In their expressed views, their experiences of racial profiling at the border and violation of their rights along with the rights of other Arabs and Muslims were justified. Therefore, they sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the Canadian state by stating that they were law abiding citizens and expressing their support of its anti-terrorism measures and arguing that others should do the same and not complain about Canada. This need on the part of Arabs and Muslims to express their loyalty to Canada in order to demonstrate their belonging to the nation in the post 9/11 context has been discussed in the literature as an indication of the ways in which Canadian identity has been reconstructed along racial lines and drawing the boundaries around who may express dissent, in what ways, and what consequences they may face for speaking up against Canada’s anti-terrorism measures and Canadian foreign policies (Arat-Koc, 2005; Razack, 2005). For this group of Iraqi women, this environment of silencing dissent, fear, and the need to express one’s loyalties to the state is reminiscent of the severe repression they experienced during Saddam’s dictatorship which continues to haunt many Iraqis today and shapes their everyday interactions as has been demonstrated by recent studies of Iraqi diaspora communities (Gow, 2004; Nickerson et al., 2010; Rostam & Haverkamp, 2009). Several key informants in this study also affirmed this view by highlighting the prevalent tendency among Iraqis not to reveal any sensitive information about themselves to others for fear of losing their status in Canada. However, they also indicated this dynamic of fear and lack of trust may look different according to people’s socio-economic status, level of education, and age with younger people being more likely to take risks and to speak out about their experiences more openly as it is evident in the examples of young Iraqi refugee women’s perspectives shared below. Another important factor that may be shaping this group of older women’s responses is
the time of their migration and the length of time they have lived in Canada. They had left Iraq shortly after the Iran-Iraq war and did not directly experience the hardships of the UN sanctions in Iraq or the devastation of the U.S. invasion in 2003, although they were aware of the impacts of both on Iraqi society as a whole.

Although some of the Iraqi refugee women and key informants participating in the study indicated the “war on terror” had nothing to do with them, when they elaborated on their responses and shared their stories of war, gender-based violence and sectarian violence which they experienced in Iraq, they were clear that these lived experiences and memories were continuing to have impacts on their lives today, indicating that these memories and traumas were part of their collective experiences as a community. This type of meaning making as an interpretive community was particularly evident in the stories and perspectives of the young women participating in the study as they commonly indicated that their whole lives were essentially shaped and structured by their experiences of war and structural violence that they were born into. For Iraqi refugee women participating in the study, the central issue in relation to the 2003 Iraq occupation was the lack of safety and security, gender-based violence, the rise in fundamentalist religious ideologies, and sectarian violence that drove them out of the country. They also historicized and traced the seeds of the growing sectarian divides as being fed by Saddam Hussein during the 1980s and 1990s when he engaged in genocidal campaigns and active violent suppression of civil uprisings in the Kurdish North and Shi’a South.

Simultaneously, the women challenged the justifications of “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and Saddam’s links to Al-Qaeda and terrorism arguing that these claims were used as excuses for invading Iraq and there were bigger motivations at play on the part of the U.S., U.K., and neighbouring Gulf countries. Several of the women argued that this invasion was a continuation of the historical relationships between Western governments, Saddam’s dictatorship, and the collusion of other Arab governments in the region with these forces. This dynamic was further intensified in the context of Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and Saddam’s inability to protect Iraq from imperialist invasion and ultimate destruction. Negative portrayals of Iraqis after the invasion of Kuwait were also seen as having further detrimental impacts on Iraq’s reputation and promoting hatred of Iraqis as people who betrayed an Arabic country. Therefore, Iraqi people were made to pay the price for Saddam’s betrayal of Kuwait. The women emphasized that Iraq and Iraqis had no links to terrorist organizations, and notions of “suicide bombing” and
“jihadi” ideologies did not exist in Iraq prior to the 2003 invasion. Defining terror and terrorism from this perspective, they argued that terrorism and the “war on terror” had nothing to do with them or with Iraq and Iraqis. However, they also conveyed that Iraqis and Arabs as a whole are seen as terrorists in the West as reinforced by the media and general public perceptions. The women commonly agreed that the predominant stereotype of Arabs and Muslims is that of “terrorists” and it continues to operate in their everyday interactions and encounters with people in Canada.

Study participants also challenged notions of “freedom” and “democracy” that were used as justifications for the invasion of Iraq, emphasizing that to the contrary, what the 2003 invasion delivered was chaos, lack of security, and caused the regression of Iraqi society in so many arenas, particularly with respect to religious ideologies, sectarian violence, women and gender relations. Several study participants were young professionals from highly educated middle-class backgrounds who were forced to start wearing the hijab and were pushed to stay home for their own safety and security. In addition to gender-based violence, the women highlighted the fundamental changes in Iraqi society as a result of the general state of lawlessness in the form of kidnappings and murders, and changing societal values with respect to religious and gender relations that ensued after the 2003 invasion. Amani, a young Iraqi woman who came to Canada as a child following the Gulf war, takes her explanation of the “war on terror” further by elaborating that the events of 9/11 took place as a response to American foreign policy that has destroyed many countries including Iraq. Amani also challenges the notion that America acted in the best interest of the Iraqi people by drawing attention to the tortures and abuses committed by American soldiers in Iraq and questions the silences and complacencies around reporting the impacts of the occupation on Iraqi civilians. She also challenges the media discourses immediately after 9/11 that attributed it to Islam as a religion and the automatic assumptions and stereotypes that had negative impacts on Muslims.

Amani shares her experience of being beaten up by a group of girls at school following the events of 9/11 and her ongoing experiences of discrimination and being called a “terrorist” and highlights the impact of these experiences on her sense of identity and her mental health. Her initial reaction was to withdraw into herself and stay home but as time went on she felt she had to speak up and defend herself, her country and her religion and culture. As she began to speak up and challenge the negative stereotypes she was encountering, she gained more confidence in
herself and decided to pursue a career in social services in order to continue her advocacy and public education efforts. She also found that she developed a more politicized identity and began to wear the hijab in order to carve out a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self despite the fact that wearing the hijab exposed her to further experiences of racism and discrimination. Several studies of Arabs and Muslims in the diaspora have found similar impacts of Islamophobia, racial profiling, and discrimination on individuals’ identity and mental health demonstrating the diverse reactions displayed by individuals including internalization of negative stereotypes, denial of own identity, anxiety and depression, isolation and lack of belonging, as well as the development of critical consciousness and more politicized identities (Caidi and McDonald, 2008; Rostam & Haverkamp, 2009; Rousseau and Jamil, 2008 & 2010; Shoeb et al., 2007).

In this dissertation my main focus has been to examine the ways in which the “war on terror” manifests in the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi refugee women. A key area of my analysis has focused on tracing the historical roots of the “war on terror” and showing the continuity of structural violence in Iraqi women’s lives over the past 35 years of Iraq’s history as a function of Western imperialist interventions and their intimate interconnections with nationalist patriarchal institutions, tribal, traditional and religious fundamentalist forces. In my analysis I have attempted to show the historical and ongoing interactions of these forces in structuring Iraqi women’s lives and changing their status in the public and private spheres. Since my main research focus has been on examining the impact of the “war on terror” on Iraqi women’s lives in the Canadian context, I was often asked, “Why are you digging deep into Iraq’s history?” And the next follow up question was, “How do Iraq’s history and the women’s changing status there relate to their status and experiences in Canada? How are you going to link the two?” And I usually said, “I’m not sure, I have to figure it out”. I may not have had clear answers to those questions at the time, but in my mind, the answer was clear. I saw the two histories and contexts as a continuum, they were not separate entities but rather, they were interconnected through the complex web of global capitalist patriarchal systems of oppression, dispossession and exploitation. The Iraqi refugee women in Canada were the same women who were in Iraq, except now they were displaced physically, far away from their homes. They were displaced after experiencing years of hardship, war, violence, loss, and trauma.
They had a stop-over in Syria for a few years living in uncertainty and insecurity, experiencing further violence and social exclusion. Now they had moved to Canada and they were trying to connect, trying to live in peace, trying to leave the memories of war, violence, and trauma behind and establish new lives, new careers for themselves and for their children. As Ahlam, a young professionally trained engineer put it:

I get really frustrated...for instance now, my staying at home, is really frustrating me...In that...I DON'T WANT TO STAY AT HOME! I got married, got pregnant and couldn't work. Then I went to Syria and I worked but I had another child and had to stop working. I DON'T WANT THAT ANYMORE. I WANT TO BUILD MYSELF. When am I going to get a chance to build myself? Should I remain for the rest of my life...as a...a housewife and...aah...children, and cooking and such...I mean...I HATED this...this daily scenario that passes day after day...I hate it...I don't like it anymore...I don't want it anymore...I WANT to BUILD MYSELF...because I'm sure the moment I get a job and I have for instance...a salary and that...my whole life would change...my whole mentality will change. I know that this is one of the problems that causes me to feel down emotionally ....and how should I say it to you....I suffer from depressive conditions...but it's because we did not have the opportunities to work...we did not have the opportunities to succeed in it...there are always reasons that make you...I mean how should I say it to you...there is someone who is stopping you...what we suffered in Iraq stopped us...what we went and suffered in Syria, that you had to work without the government's knowledge, this...I mean...affects you negatively...then you come here and also...also...there are numerous conditions and numerous barriers that tie you down until you get a job...is it correct or not? (Ahlam, March 19, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

This quote from Ahlam summarizes what I have been calling the continuum of violence in Iraqi women’s lives. It also illustrates the intricate interconnections between violence, citizenship, and trauma; between historical and contemporary structural violence, historical and contemporary trauma, and the denial of citizenship rights and life chances. It illustrates the depth of her embodied trauma that is often triggered by her gendered experiences of social exclusion and simultaneously highlights her desire to build herself, to have an opportunity for a better life. Ahlam clearly articulates the continuity of structural violence in her life as the thing that is not only stopping her from achieving her dreams, but is dragging her into the depths of trauma and depression. She specifically refers to her suffering in Iraq, her suffering in Syria, and the numerous conditions and barriers that are tying her down to the daily scenario which she hates and wants to alter. Ahlam’s story highlights how the structural violence of war, displacement, restrictive refugee policies, and systemic processes of social exclusion have prevented her from exercising her substantive citizenship rights of access to employment, income, and participation.
in public life throughout her adult life travelling with her as she traverses across borders in search of safety and security.

Virtually all the women participating in the study shared similar stories illustrating the significant drop in their social and economic status as a result of state policies under Saddam Hussein’s regime particularly during the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf war, and the UN economic sanctions, and the more recent U.S. led invasion and occupation of Iraq. Most of the women I interviewed were university educated and came from Middle-class families who place a high importance on women’s education and careers. However, now they were all living in conditions of poverty, unable to access jobs in their careers, and experiencing racism, discrimination, and social exclusion on many levels.

Although several study participants acknowledged that access to employment and barriers to community integration are common among newcomer immigrants and refugees, they emphasized several key aspects that they saw as unique to the historically specific experiences of Iraqi refugees. The three main aspects emphasized by study participants were: 1) the significance of the historical structural forces and their ongoing manifestations in their lives. Several of the women described the consequences of these historical structural forces in terms of their embodied trauma and suffering, using expressions such as: “we have arrived here essentially tired”; “our nerves are tired”; “we have not come here as happy people”; “our suffering continues”; “where is health and well-being going to come from when one is not well emotionally?”.

2) Many of the study participants emphasized the role of the historical ideological constructions and stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as “terrorists” in shaping their everyday lives and limiting their participation and community integration. Iraqi refugee women as well as key informants shared vivid examples of experiences of racism and discrimination ranging from being called a terrorist and getting beaten up by classmates; being ignored and pushed aside by their teachers at school; being denied access to social assistance benefits and entitlements; to being denied family reunification through stringent sponsorship policies and bureaucratic dehumanizing practices on the part of immigration officials.

3) Study participants also emphasized the impacts of ongoing sectarian violence in Iraq on community cohesion and establishing supportive relationships within the Iraqi community in Toronto. Muslim, Mandaeans, and Christian women young and old, all lamented the shifting moral, cultural, and social values towards more conservative religious fundamentalist ideologies and the rise in sectarian and
gender-based violence in post 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq as a destructive force with continuing devastating effects both in Iraq and here in Canada.

Iraqi refugee women as well as key informants participating in the study highlighted a number of ways in which their collective trauma intersects with their contemporary trauma, resulting from their social exclusion, ongoing structural violence, and lack of supports, to produce multiple negative consequences at various levels:

At the individual level, almost all the women expressed their ongoing struggles with embodied traumatic memories, depression, and anxiety. Some of the women were taking anti-depressants to help them manage the symptoms. But for the most part, the women said they were dealing with their psychological distress on their own, keeping it inside and showing a more pleasant image on the outside, due to shame, stigma, lack of trust, and out of concern for the well-being of their family members. Several women expressed this dynamic in the interviews by revealing statements such as these:

Honesty, my psychological distress affected my own health. I became depressed. I would stay up at night thinking how I'm going to provide for them. For example I thought about baking because I like baking, but what happened to me was I had disc problems in my spine and it began to affect my hands and the doctor said I have to have surgery. So I couldn't sleep at nights. The man also developed depression because we don't know how to provide for them financially, of course it affects us. I mean if we had financial security then a lot of our problems would be solved. So we wouldn't have that kind of psychological distress that we faced. I mean my daughters, thank God... my older daughter is married and she has two children. Daycare is so expensive, so I'm responsible for them. My sister is not married, so I'm responsible for her. The house is my responsibility...I am TIRED... I am TIRED.... The man, you would be afraid for him, because he is really fed up. He went from being a manager and a Ministry consultant to this state. You know these things.... I was retired from the 80s. I had three kids so I retired. I'm used to this way of life. But my husband is not used to it. So I have to provide for all of them... provide a life for them at home so that.... how do I tell you... I mean... food and drink, and put on music... and I mean create a happy atmosphere at home. But I suffer inside... so I just collapsed... I just collapsed at once... (Samar, March 6, 2012, Community Participant Interview)

Several Iraqi refugee women and key informants discussed multiple impacts of trauma, social exclusion, and isolation at the family level. Many spoke of family separations imposed not only by war and displacement, but by restrictive immigration and refugee policies that forced family members to either leave their relatives behind in Syria or resettle in different countries, as
contributing to their isolation and further complicating their trauma. Families who had managed to stay together and make it to Canada, faced additional challenges including domestic violence against women; intergenerational conflicts between youth and their parents, substance abuse and mental health difficulties impacting family relationships. These challenges were further complicated by their collective memories of trauma, their lack of belonging in Canada, and their desire to go back to Iraq as the following quote from Haifa, a key informant participating in the study illustrates:

Do you remember what happened when we were bombed and one he talks about Sistani, and one he talks about Sadr, and I am somewhere in between (laughter) and I say what are you talking about, just bring happy things to your life. It’s there, it’s far away, and now you’re in Canada. You have to live your life, your moments. They keep going back. He says no, no when I get my citizenship, a lot of them they do this. I’ll get my citizenship and I will go back….So some of them have gone back actually. I have, yeah, I have a couple of them but they go back not to live in Iraq, they want to do a business let’s say between Dubai. They are carrying their Canadian passport so they won’t have problem with the visa. Like entering any countries, like an Iraqi passport at the last period it was a problem, nobody lets you to be in the airplane. I suffered from this also. They check your passport and they scan you as if you are a terrorist. So they have the Canadian passport so they go and they do business. Like Dubai, other places. They live in Jordan because this is their community, Arabic. They want to go back to Arabs. They don’t want to live in here and mingle in the system. “No we don’t want Canada anymore, that’s it. We’re done!”

So, of course, people need to belong, right? Everybody tells them you are an Arab, you are a Muslim, you are a terrorist. It is just like labelizing people so they don’t want to stay here. Well, why would they stay here? (Haifa, March 2, 2012, Key Informant Interview)

These quotes from Haifa highlight a number of key points with respect to family and community level impacts of trauma, social exclusion, and their implications for citizenship. First, these quotes illustrate the complex, multi-layered transnational nature of not only their historical, collective memories of trauma are alive in their psyches but in their daily conversations and interactions with each other, colouring their lives in Canada. As Haifa puts it: “they keep going back”, not only mentally, but also physically. Their memories haunt them despite themselves, the memories “are still there” and they can’t help but go back to them. However, they also want to go back physically, not necessarily to Iraq, but to another Arab country where they are more likely to belong, to be able to get jobs or start businesses, and to be able to get away from the historical stereotypes of Muslim terrorists that continue to shape their lives by denying them membership and substantive citizenship rights. They know they have access to legal citizenship,
they can get a Canadian passport which enables them to travel, to try to find belonging somewhere else because they also know they will never belong in Canada, as they have learned from experience. This is not to say that all Iraqi refugees are traumatized for life and they have no choice but to give up trying, but it is to emphasize the profound continuing impacts of the collective historical trauma and structural violence on their lives.

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, Iraqi refugee women have displayed incredible strength, resilience, and a diversity of responses to the continuum of violence and trauma in their lives. They have demonstrated their active agency and resistance to the denial of their rights, challenging the essentialized stereotypes and everyday acts of violence they encounter. Some have chosen to start wearing the hijab in defiance and as an act of protection of their own identity and self-worth; some have taken up advocacy and public education; and some have tried to change attitudes and public perceptions through personal relationship building and acting as role models in community spaces. Yet there is no denying that they all continue to experience structural violence, social exclusion, and normative dehumanizing social practices in their everyday existence. These are the everyday manifestations of the “war on terror” in the lives of Arab Iraqi refugee women that we need to challenge and change.

**Potential Limitations of the Study**

This study has used interpretive research methods and discourse analysis to understand Arab Iraqi women’s meanings and experiences of the “war on terror”. A variety of data sources including interviews with Iraqi refugee women, key informant interviews with service providers, community observation, and document reviews in order to develop a more in-depth contextualized understanding of Iraqi women’s stories and experiences. While the interviews provided a lot of rich data for analysis, the stories and experiences shared were heavily influenced by the context of the interviews. Both within the immediate context of my interactions with participants, and the influence of our respective subjectivities in co-constructing the stories; as well as the larger context of surveillance, fear, lack of trust prevalent in the post 9/11 context, particularly for Arabs and Muslims. The impacts of the larger societal context was evident in the process of recruiting participants as many people were hesitant to participate due to lack of trust, safety concerns as has been documented in the literature.
Significance of Violence, Citizenship, and Trauma: Implications for Social Work Practice, Education, and Research

I began my dissertation with a dedication to my mother and a discussion of my situated knowing, emphasizing the significance of history, violence, and feminist standpoint epistemology in my exploration of this research study. I would like to end my analysis and discussion of implications for social work by further critical reflections on my situated knowing as the daughter of an Arab Iraqi woman; as a diasporic Arab-Iranian woman living in post 9/11 Canada; as a practicing social worker with several years of experience working with racialized, immigrant, and refugee communities in mental health settings; and as a social work graduate student, educator, and researcher. In this discussion, I will also be drawing on my interviews with Arab Iraqi refugee women, key informants and relevant bodies of literature to illustrate my key points.

My exploration of this research study over the past six years along with my multiple inhabited identities mentioned above, have been deeply informed and transformed through the course of my doctoral education, and more specifically through conducting this research study and the process of writing this dissertation. In what follows, I would like to draw on some of my own experiences in this process along with the experiences of my study participants in order to elaborate on the implications of this research to social work education, research, and practice.

My interest in exploring this research topic was informed by my own experiences of racialization and social exclusion in the post 9/11 context and was further solidified by my mother’s death about two months after I began my doctoral education, and my subsequent interest in learning more about my mother’s history and the history of the conflictual relationship between Iran and Iraq. I had grown up in the shadow of this conflictual relationship observing how my mother was cut off from her family in Iraq because of the closure of the border between the two countries. I learned my first lesson about the trauma of exile and state structural violence then, in an embodied way through my mother’s experience, rather than through history lessons at school. My embodied personal history lessons and experiences of trauma and structural violence continued through the Iranian revolution of 1979, and my parent’s exile to Kuwait; the Iran-Iraq war and the destruction of our hometown and the loss of my uncle in the war; observing the “shock” and “awe” of the Gulf war on television in Canada, while my parents were in Kuwait; observing the events of 9/11 in the United States and living with the consequences of its
aftermath, including the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Throughout these experiences I had learned to cope with the trauma and pain by blocking out and minimizing my exposure to graphic images of war, destruction, and the accompanying state propaganda broadcasted through the media. I had also learned to hate history as it was being taught in schools for the same reasons. I detested learning facts and figures that had no relevance to my life and did not reflect my lived experiences of these significant events in the region. I experienced similar disjunctures between my lived experience of the 1991 Gulf war which took place during my undergraduate education in Toronto, and the contemporary “war on terror” and my experiences during my doctoral education in social work.

Although there seemed to be a general openness in principle to have open dialogue and intellectual discussion on various topics, when it came to the “war on terror”, the topic rarely came up in my social work classes. And when it did come up and I began to express my views and experiences, I often felt silenced and dismissed in subtle and not so subtle ways. The silencing and dismissal usually came from one or two classmates from the dominant privileged groups but was reinforced by the instructor’s silence and inaction which enabled and indirectly legitimized the silencing of marginalized voices in the classroom.

Other instances of silencing and erasure of my voice and experiences came from spaces in the academy where the predominant operating framework was from mainstream discourses of Canada’s multiculturalism and benevolence as a nation, erasing its colonial and racial history of violence. Ironically, these experiences of active silencing and dismissal were committed by academics purporting to be experts on immigration research and were imparting their wisdom and expertise onto graduate students in research seminars and training workshops. I attended two such events at the university during my doctoral studies and both experiences left me feeling deeply hurt and angry at the same time. Fortunately for me, I also had the privilege of having the support and mentoring of critical scholars who provided me with the necessary tools, resources, and the safe space they created in their classroom environments to be able to develop my own critical consciousness and analytical framework in order to have a more integrated learning experience that did not require me to operate in a disembodied fashion. Moreover, these mentorship opportunities and positive learning experiences inspired and nurtured my interests in the relationship between history, violence, and trauma which have relevance far beyond
exploring my own personal history as we have seen its application to my research with Iraqi refugee women.

In the course of my research and conducting my literature review of the “war on terror” and its impacts on Arabs and Muslims in Canada, I became acutely aware of social work’s lack of engagement with this topic. I searched social work databases with various keywords relating to the “war on terror”, “9/11”, “security”, “securitization”, “Arabs”, “Muslims”, and the search only came up with a handful of articles, a few of which were focused on the impacts of the events of September 11, 2001 on American populations and the rest were focused on impacts of suicide bombings and similar incidents on Jewish populations in Israel. This lack of engagement and seeming disinterest along with my negative experiences of being silenced and dismissed in the classroom, made me raise some critical questions about social work education and social work research: why was social work as a discipline silent on the issues affecting not just Arabs and Muslims, but our whole society at the local and global levels? Why was I as a doctoral student being silenced in the classroom? Why was that allowed to happen in a space of higher education intended for the development of critical thinking and open scholarly debates? What happened to the mandate of social justice in social work? Why is social work not concerned with the human rights violations of Arabs and Muslims in the post 9/11 context? There are many more critical questions that we need to pose to ourselves as social workers, social work educators, and social work researchers in this regard and hold ourselves accountable to our own ethical, moral, and professional standards.

The importance of transnationalism and the need for social work to develop a framework for understanding the complex aspects of diasporic people’s lives has been emphasized in the literature (Massaqoui, 2007; Razack & Badwall, 2008; Yuval Davis, 2007). As Massaqoui (2007) urges, we need to move away from seeing the local and the global as “complete binary opposites” and to see them as interconnected and constantly changing realities. Social work education also needs to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing into our ways of understanding and practice (Baines 2007; Massaqoui, 2007). As Razack & Badwall (2008) emphasize, in the North American context, there is an imperative to incorporate globalization into social work today due to two main factors: increased numbers of immigrants and refugees moving to escape war and poverty; and the legacy of colonization and imperialism that continue to operate in the constitution of social service settings today. They further argue that critical attention needs to be
paid to how global issues are taught in the classroom recognizing that the current content of international social work and development courses focuses on deprivation and the social ills of countries in the global south. We need to examine “what is discussed”, “what is erased” and “whose voices continue to be privileged in such a discourse” (Razack & Badwall, 2008, p. 662-663). The development of global standards in social work with its “critical approach to the global economy”, its emphasis on the “impact of structural sources of inequality, exclusion and oppression” as well as “non-hierarchal power relations, inclusivity, inclusion, human rights and social justice” (Sewpaul, 2005, p. 217) is a right move in this direction. Moreover, both CSWE (2008) and CASWE (2008) educational policies and accreditation standards express a commitment to a global perspective, social justice, human rights, and respect for human diversity as core values for the social work profession. These values underpin the educational curriculum and are accompanied by specific core competencies and standards. These core competencies include (but are not limited to) the social workers’ ability to engage diversity and difference in practice; appreciate that as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim; gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups; recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights (CSWE, 2008); achieve critical analysis of the social construction of theory and practices that may reflect injustices; transferable analysis and practice skills pertaining to the origins and manifestations of social injustices in Canada, and the multiple and intersecting bases of oppression, domination and exploitation; demonstration of the ability to evaluate her/his own practice and recognize the effect of one’s own ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds on professional relationships; understanding of and ability to develop, apply and critique social work values, ethics and practice in order to make professional judgments consistent with a commitment to promote equality and the eradication of oppressive social conditions (CASWE, 2008).

I recently presented my research findings to a class of MSW students and posed some of these questions to them. Their responses were quite reflective and consistent with the literature, my experiences, and research findings. Reflecting on their own work experience and field placements in social work settings, students offered a number of key factors influencing the context of social work education, social work research, practice, and advocacy. With respect to
social work education, students commented on the lack of awareness of structural issues in general. They raised issues around the role of power and funding arrangements in knowledge production which directly impacts on what issues get researched and what gets talked about in educational settings. With respect to my research and analysis of Canada’s “war on terror” and the impacts of anti-terrorism measures, several students commented that they had never discussed these issues in their social work education, even in social work schools with a primary focus on social justice and anti-oppressive practice. Students critiqued the Eurocentric approach to international social work practice and the lack of acknowledgement of our power and privilege in this process. Another key aspect that was highlighted by the students, and discussed earlier in this dissertation, is the impact of funding cuts, and defunding of non-profit organizations particularly those serving Muslims and racialized communities. Mandate and advocacy restrictions placed on organizations, combined with fear of job loss have had the effect of racializing social workers, leaving them feeling helpless and disempowered in the face of serving many clients with complex issues and increasingly limited resources and supports. Students emphasized the need for further research to examine the impacts of the cuts and policy changes on clients as well as on social service providers; and the need for grassroots organizing and influencing our own networks with a social justice ideology and recognizing the importance of working towards change on multiple levels.

As my interviews with Iraqi women and key informants have illustrated, the issues identified above are playing out in their experiences with service providers. Several study participants have shared negative experiences of discrimination and humiliating, dehumanizing practices such as denial of information and access to benefits and entitlements. Moreover, as the interviews with Iraqi refugee women and service providers working with them have shown, mainstream conservative anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiments also find their way not only among service providers but are also internalized among Iraqi community members themselves. As a result, social workers, social service providers and their organizations become the primary enforcers of the very same oppressive policies and structures they are supposed to advocate against, perpetuating further structural violence and resulting in denial of necessary services and limiting access to social citizenship rights. As Bhuyan (2012) has argued, social service providers and their organizations have the capacity to “influence who is deemed worthy of social membership and what rights an individual can successfully claim from the state” (Bhuyan, 2012,
Rather than becoming instruments of oppressive structures, social workers have the obligation to act on their professional and moral ethics to promote social justice and advocate for human rights.

Social work as a discipline has the potential to influence social change at multiple levels of practice in working with Iraqi refugee women and other racialized Arabs and Muslims whose citizenship and human rights have been violated in the post 9/11 context. Despite the scholarly contributions of many disciplines, the profession of social work has maintained a deafening silence about the issues affecting Arabs/Muslims in the context of the “war on terror” in the Canadian context. As social work practitioners, educators and scholars we have an ethical responsibility to pay attention to issues facing these communities and to raise our awareness, break the silence and reflect on our own complicity. At the level of micro practice with individuals and families, social workers need to deepen their understanding of trauma and its intersection with historical structural violence, contemporary practices of racism and everyday processes of social exclusion. Social work interventions in clinical mental health settings need to move beyond limited Eurocentric psychiatric models of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder to incorporate a more historical structural understanding and develop more holistic interventions based on anti-oppressive practice principles and models of community development. As the many examples shared by Iraqi refugee women participating in this study have illustrated, Eurocentric disease-focused treatment models are not capable of addressing the multi-level complex layers of historical and contemporary trauma experienced by these women, their families, and their communities. Effective multi-level interventions are needed in order to address their multiple and complex needs. Effective community-led interventions require creative community-led solutions, collaborations, and transnational alliance building that recognize the complexity of the historical and contemporary issues facing this community. Successful community development and policy change advocacy also require capacity building, ongoing awareness of policies, and joint advocacy efforts in collaboration with other marginalized groups and networks.

As I have shown through this study, we need to recognize that the impact of war and structural violence goes much deeper than the physical manifestations of death, destruction, and displacement. As the historical trauma literature has shown, the impact of the trauma is often deeply ingrained and embodied into the core of individuals, families, and communities affecting
them in different ways at different times, potentially lasting for generations (Brave Heart, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Estrada, 2009; Evans-Campbell, 2008). However, we also need to recognize that individuals are differentially impacted and respond to these effects in a variety of different ways and also focus on examining community strengths and resilience (Denham, 2008; Jacklin, 2007; Zarowsky & Pederson, 2000). Therefore building on the findings from this study, more research studies are needed in order to gain a better understanding of individual and community resilience and strengths in facing these structural adversities. As the stories of the Iraqi refugee women participating in this study have shown, we need to trust that they always find ways not only to survive but to maintain love, faith, and hopes for a better future. We as social workers have a lot to learn from these women’s stories in our quest to be true to our professional values and ethical standards of promoting human dignity, equity, and social justice. As a starting point, we need to begin with challenging our own silences and complicities. We need to start by understanding our own histories and recognizing our interconnectedness as human beings in this world and challenging the artificial binary separations between “us” and “them”. Only then we might be able to move beyond being instruments of oppressive, unjust and inhumane colonial patriarchal structures and work towards building alternative visions of more just, equitable societies.
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Appendix A: List of Documents Reviewed

- Archival files of Michelle Lansberg (Past Toronto Star Columnist) – Fonds 250 – 1089 Series (2001-2003) contain files, articles, interview notes, and background research documents relating to Terrorism and events of 9/11, 2003 Iraq Occupation, Iraqi Women (Note: I have obtained permission to access these files at the City of Toronto Archives but have not had the chance to go and review the files. I have however downloaded the related articles from the Toronto Star online archives).

- Reports/documents relating to condition of Iraqi women in Iraq post 2003 Iraq War (Red Cross; Amnesty International; Oxfam; Code Pink Women for Peace; Brussels Tribunal; Human Rights Watch)

- Reports/documents relating to condition of Iraqi refugees in Syria (CCR Website – background and analysis of Iraqi refugees crisis and advocacy/position statements urging Canada to take action; UNHCR reports on Iraqi refugees and Iraq conditions;

- Articles from Organization for Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) Website (Diaspora Iraqi Women Activists some of whom have gone back to Iraq to improve Iraqi women’s conditions and fight for their rights)

- Articles from Acttogether Website (UK-based Diaspora Iraqi Women Activists with international links)

- Articles from Aljazeera Website

- Documents relating to Iraqi refugees in Canada:
  - Citizenship and Immigration Canada – News releases on Iraqi refugees;
  - House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration: Iraqi Refugee Study (39th Parliament, 2nd Session, April 2008): Committee meeting minutes and evidence
  - Refugee Sponsorship Training Program – Training Modules

- Documents relating to Recent Refugee Reforms:
  - Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers Website (articles on bill C-31)
  - CCR Website – Documents on Bill C-31 and other refugee reform policies
  - FCJ Refugee Centre Website – Documents and presentations on various refugee reform policies
Appendix B: Interview Guide for Key Informants

Date:
Time:
Place:
Length of Interview:

A. Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women’s meanings to the “war on terror” and Iraq war in particular
   - How do Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women make sense of the “war on terror” and the Iraq war in particular?
   - What meanings do they make of the “war on terror” and the war in Iraq?

B. Impacts of the “war on terror” and Iraq war on Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women in Canada
   - From your perspective, how is the “war on terror” manifesting in the daily lives of Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women in Canada?
   - What are the consequences of the “war on terror” for Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women living in Canada?
     - How are these consequences manifested?
     - How do Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women deal with these consequences?

C. Iraqi community/women’s responses to the “war on terror” and Iraq war in particular
   - How do you think Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women have responded to the “war on terror” in general and to the Iraq war in particular?
   - What have been some Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women’s responses with respect to the “war on terror”? To the Iraq war? What have been some of their responses? How do they deal with it/cope with it?

D. Issues/challenges faced by Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women in Toronto
   - What are the main issues/challenges faced by Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women living in Toronto?
     - What resources/supports do they have available to them?
     - Where do they go for help if they need it?
     - How do they cope with their issues/challenges they face?
     - What coping strategies do they use?
     - What are their strengths/assets?

E. Iraqi community Integration/refugee resettlement process (issues, challenges, successes)
- How do you see Iraqi community’s integration into Canadian society? What are their issues/challenges? What do you see as their success factors?
- What helps/hinders Iraqi immigrants’/refugees’ settlement?
- How do you see Canada’s role in the Iraqi refugee settlement process? What are the key issues/challenges?
- How do you think Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women are perceived/received by mainstream Canadian society/by the Canadian public?

F. Existing Supports/resources

- What mainstream resources/supports are available to Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women in Toronto?
- What resources/assets exist within the Iraqi community in Toronto?
- What activities/initiatives exist within the Iraqi community in Toronto?

G. Canada’s policies/practices impacting on the Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugees women

- How do you think Canada’s policies (foreign affairs, Immigration, security/anti-terrorism) are impacting Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women?

H. Socio-demographics

Position:
Length of time in this position:
Type of Involvement with/or service provided to Arab Iraqi immigrant/refugee women:
Education:
Gender:
Age:
Ethnicity:
Religion:
Immigration Status:
Length of Time in Canada:

I. Feedback on: gaining access to the community/Iraqi women, interview guide/process, review draft reports, literature/key documents for review, other?
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Community Participants

Date: 
Time: 
Place: 
Length of Interview: 

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Introduction:**
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The main goal of the interview is to find out your views and experiences of the Iraq war, your life circumstances before and after the war. I will be asking you a few questions on this topic and the interview will probably take about an hour and a half to two hours. With your permission, I will be audio-taping this interview so I can transcribe and analyze your responses. Answering the interview questions is totally voluntary, your responses to the questions will be confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. Please let me know if at any point you don’t feel comfortable answering any of my questions or if you would like me to turn off the recorder at a certain point. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

**A. Pre-migration experiences & migration process**

- Tell me about how you came to leave Iraq.
- What were your living circumstances before you left Iraq?
- How did you come to be living in Canada? How long have you been in Canada?
- Did you come to Canada alone or with other family members?
- What were the challenges in coming to Canada?

**B. Post-migration/Settlement Experiences/Community Integration**

- What’s life like for you in Canada?
- How do you see the Iraqi community’s relationship with the mainstream society?
- How do you think the mainstream Canadian society/the Canadian public perceives Arab Iraqi women?

**C. Meanings and perceptions of the “war on terror”/Iraq war**

- How do you understand the “war on terror”? What does it mean to you?
- Where were you living when the 2003 Iraq Occupation started?
- How did you feel about the war starting? How did you make sense of it?
- How was your life before the 2003 Iraq Occupation?
- What were your thoughts/feelings about the anti-war protests?
- How did you feel about the media coverage of the war?

**D. Effects of the “war on terror” and the 2003 Iraq Occupation**
How has the war affected you and your family?
How has your life changed since the start of the “war on terror” and the 2003 Iraq Occupation?
How has the “war on terror” influenced how you see yourself? How has it influenced how others see you?

E. Coping/resistance strategies

- How did you deal with the effects of the war in your life?
- How did you cope with the difficulties you encountered?
- How do you deal with the challenges you face in your life now?
- Where do you go for help when you need it?
- What resources/supports do you have in your life?
- What helps you deal with the challenges/difficulties that you face?

F. Daily experiences/encounters with the “war on terror”; manifestations of the war in their daily lives

- What are the issues/challenges/barriers that you face in your daily life now?
- How is the war affecting you in your daily life now?
- How do you cope with the effects of the war in your life now?
- How do you talk to your children/family about the war?
- How do you help your children deal with the war and its effects in their lives?
- How has the war and your immigration experiences affected your relationship with your children/spouse/family?

G. Socio-demographics

- Age:
- Occupation:
- Education:
- Relationship Status:
- Children:
- Ethnicity:
- Religion:
- Immigration Status:
- Length of Time in Canada

This is the end of my questions. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. Would you like to add anything else that you think is relevant?
Appendix D: Information Letter and Consent Form for Key Informants

Title: The Impact of the “war on terror” on the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi Women in Toronto

Principal Investigator: Sajedeh Zahraei, PhD Candidate, MSW
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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Charmaine Williams, MSW, PhD
Associate Professor
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
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Tel: (416) 946-8225
E-mail: charmaine.williams@utoronto.ca

Purpose of the Study

My name is Sajedeh Zahraei and I am a doctoral student at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research study entitled The Impact of the “war on terror” on the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi Women in Toronto. The overall purpose of this study is to find out how Arab Iraqi women in Toronto are impacted by the “war on terror” and how they cope with its impacts in their daily lives. Findings from this study will provide a better understanding of Arab Iraqi women’s issues and help inform the development of services that will contribute to their well-being and better meet their needs in the community.

Participation

You will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss your experiences in working with Arab Iraqi women in Toronto and express your views on their everyday experiences, issues, and challenges living in Canada within the context of the war in Iraq and the broader context of the “war on terror”. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality

The investigator will not use your name in any publications or presentations of the study findings. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Interview notes obtained through this project will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator’s (Sajedeh Zahraei) office for 7 years. After which point they will be destroyed.

Potential Risks and Benefits
Participating in this research poses no risks to your health. There is a possibility that some questions may make you uncomfortable, but please remember that you are not obligated to answer any question. The main benefit of participation is the knowledge that you are contributing to the better understanding of Arab Iraqi women’s experiences of the Iraq war and the ways in which they deal with these experiences. Please remember that you may end your participation at any time.

**Additional Information**

If you have any questions about this study you may ask the principal investigator, Sajedeh Zahraei, at (416) 795-3004 or e-mail her at sajedeh.zahraei@utoronto.ca. If you wish to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

**Informed Consent for Participation by Key Informants**

( ) I choose a verbal consent

( ) I choose a written consent

Participant’s Name    Participant’s Signature    Date

I confirm that I explained the purpose of the nature of this study and have answered the questions of research participants before they consent to participate.

Name of the investigator    Signature    Date
Appendix E: Information Letter and Consent Form for Community Participants

Title: The Impact of the “war on terror” on the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi Women in Toronto

Principal Investigator: Sajedeh Zahraei, PhD Candidate, MSW
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Purpose of the Study

My name is Sajedeh Zahraei and I am a doctoral student at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research study entitled The Impact of the “war on terror” on the everyday lives of Arab Iraqi Women in Toronto. The overall purpose of this study is to find out how Arab Iraqi women in Toronto are impacted by the “war on terror” and how they cope with its impacts in their daily lives. Findings from this study will provide a better understanding of Arab Iraqi women’s issues and help inform the development of services that will contribute to their well-being and better meet their needs in the community.

Participation

You will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss your experiences as an Arab Iraqi woman living in Toronto and express your views on your everyday experiences, issues, and challenges living in Canada within the context of the war in Iraq and the broader context of the “war on terror”. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality

The investigator will not use your name in any publications or presentations of the study findings. Your name will remain anonymous and your responses will be kept confidential.

Interview notes obtained through this project will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator’s (Sajedeh Zahraei) office for 7 years. After which point they will be destroyed.
Potential Risks and Benefits

Participating in this research poses no risks to your health. There is a possibility that some questions may make you uncomfortable, but please remember that you are not obligated to answer any question. The main benefit of participation is the knowledge that you are contributing to the better understanding of Arab Iraqi women’s experiences of the Iraq war and the ways in which they deal with these experiences. Please remember that you may end your participation at any time.

Compensation

You will receive $30 for a one-hour interview to compensate you for your time.

Additional Information

If you have any questions about this study you may ask the principal investigator, Sajedeh Zahraei, at (416) 795-3004 or e-mail her at sajedeh.zahraei@utoronto.ca. If you wish to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

Informed Consent for Participation by Community Participants

( ) I choose a verbal consent

( ) I choose a written consent

Participant’s Name  Participant’s Signature  Date

I confirm that I explained the purpose of the nature of this study and have answered the questions of research participants before they consent to participate.

Name of the investigator  Signature  Date
Glossary of Terms

Anti-colonialism

I recognize that there are different conceptualizations of post-colonialism and anti-colonialism within the literature. A discussion of these various views is beyond the scope of this paper (See Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001), Dei (2006) and Howard (2006) for a more detailed discussion of these debates). I draw on both anti-colonial and post-colonial perspectives, building on their points of overlap and convergence in emphasizing the extension of the colonial past into the present and the discursive nature of colonial relations of dominance and subordination. I use anti-colonialism as a critical analytical discursive framework that highlights history, context, and pursues political resistance (Dei, 2006).

Colonial Trauma Response

Evans-Campbell and Walters (2006) build on the historical trauma literature and develop the Colonial Trauma Response (CTR) framework that takes into account the complex interaction of historical and contemporary traumatic events within the context of colonization. As Evans-Campbell elaborates “CTR reactions may arise as an individual experiences a contemporary discriminatory event or microaggression that serves to connect him or her with a collective and often historical sense of injustice and trauma” (p. 333).

Cultural Violence

Cultural violence as defined by Galtung (1990) is any aspect of culture (such as religion or ideology) that could be used to legitimize direct or structural violence (see corresponding definitions in glossary of terms).

Direct Violence

Galtung (1990) “sees violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs” which include survival needs; well-being needs; identity, meaning needs; and freedom needs (p. 292). The violation of these basic needs results in different types of violence which Galtung categorizes in a typology of violence with direct violence (e.g. killing, maiming, repression, detention, and expulsion) identified as one of its subtypes, along with cultural and structural violence forming a violence triangle, reinforcing each other.

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma has been conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation. It is cumulative, intergenerational, and is linked to a variety of psychological and social responses and multiple negative health outcomes such as depression, self-destructive behaviour,
substance abuse, anxiety, guilt, and chronic bereavement (Brave Heart, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Estrada, 2009; Evans-Campbell, 2008).

**Imaginative Geographies**

Said introduces the concept of imaginative geographies in *Orientalism* (1979) highlighting how Orientalism progressed from a scholarly discourse and a textual attitude in writings about the Orient to an imperial institution that transformed the geographical space of the Orient to a colonial space in the 19th and 20th century. This transformation took place through a process that began with “arbitrary” geographical distinctions made in one’s mind between “a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” that is designated “the land of the barbarians”. Accordingly, these geographical distinctions accompany social, ethnic, and cultural ones and “all kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own” (p. 54). Building on the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s idea of “Poetics of space”, Said argues that “space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here”. Said further argues that through this process “imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (p. 55).

**Structures of Attitude and Reference**

Said argues that “the British, French, and American imperial experience has a unique coherence and a special cultural centrality” with “the idea of overseas rule – jumping beyond adjacent territories to very distant lands – [occupying] a privileged status in these three cultures” (p. xiii). This idea is continuously expressed and projected systematically in fiction, art, geography, and other cultural domains forming what he refers to as “a structure of attitude and reference”. Said’s notion of “structures of attitudes and reference” is a very useful way of examining dominant colonial discourses as it helps illuminate the process of the production of the other and how this representation of the other is done in a systematic way that builds onto itself and creates a “cultural topography” as he calls it. This cultural topography then justifies domination and colonial rule. Here Said also explores geography, spatiality, and “hierarchy of spaces” in Western literature which gives it a cultural centrality while at the same time “relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, ontological status” which is “essential to the primariness of the European” (p. 59).

**Structural Violence**

Galtung (1969, 1990) defines structural violence as social injustice and exploitation with unequal power and unequal life chances as its hallmark, imbedded within violent structures. In this definition, the threat of violence is also seen as violence. Galtung further elaborates “that a violent structure leaves marks not only on the body but also on the mind and the spirit”.
Paul Farmer (2004) builds on Galtung’s structural violence framework and defines structural violence as “violence that is exerted systematically – that is, indirectly – by everyone who belongs to a certain social order” (p. 307). Farmer emphasizes that the concept of structural violence is intended to study oppression resulting from many conditions. Hence, it is necessary to examine the key role of “erasure of historical memory” and “other forms of desocialization” that enable the formation of violent structures and “emergence of hegemonic accounts of what happened and why”. In his book Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor, Farmer argues that human rights violations are “symptoms of deeper pathologies of power” and are closely interconnected to social and economic rights violations that determine whose rights will be violated and who will be protected. In order to better understand the dynamics and distribution of suffering, our analytical model must be geographically broad and historically deep, recognizing the increasingly interconnected world that we live in with simultaneous consideration of the social factors (such as race, gender, and class) that render individuals and groups differentially vulnerable to extreme suffering.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2004) offer a critique of Farmer’s notion of structural violence arguing that the concept needs to be further elaborated and complicated to avoid being too linear and deterministic, and to examine its relationship to other forms of violence and power in everyday life. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois extend Farmer’s analysis to articulate how “everyday life is shaped by the historical processes and contemporary politics of global political economy as well as by local discourse and culture”. The authors emphasize that violence includes assaults on self-respect and personhood, gaining its force and meaning through its social and cultural dimensions. Hence, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) propose a theory of a violence continuum comprised of a multitude of “small wars and invisible genocides” conducted in the normative social spaces of everyday life. The authors argue that “small wars and invisible genocides” are invisible not because they are hidden away but precisely because they have become a normal part of the everyday and are taken for granted. As a crucial part of their argument, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois build on Bourdieu’s theory of violence and his concept of misrecognition to draw “the links between the violence of everyday life and explicit political terror and state repression” (p. 20). As the authors explain, Bourdieu sees violence present in all social practices and uses the concept of “symbolic violence” to highlight the fact that everyday violence is often mis-recognized as something good. What makes this mis-recognition possible is its everydayness and familiarity. (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004).

Trauma

I use the word trauma here not in its medical/psychiatric definition and diagnostic symptoms but in its broad sense as a “wound” or a “shock”. The Oxford dictionary defines trauma as “a deeply distressing or disturbing experience; [mass noun] emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis” and traces the origins of the word to 17th century Greek language with “wound” as its literal meaning.