IOM IRAQ

RETURNING TO SINJAR

Challenges, Opportunities, and Dimensions of Conflict

Saad Salloum, 2020

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The Yazidi ethno-sectarian minority has experienced vast displacement within and migration from Iraq over the past five years, due to a devastating genocide committed against the group in the summer of 2014 at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This genocide has become a foundational event of the contemporary Yazidi identity and shapes both personal and community views and decisions.

Just as historian Alon Conno dubbed the Holocaust the "foundational past" of the Jewish identity[1], the genocide of 2014 is still very much alive for the Yazidi community, even more so as political conflict over the administration of the traditional Yazidi homeland of Sinjar continues, and as high rates of immigration disperse the community.

The atrocities carried out by ISIL against the Yazidi community caused immeasurable harm. The data gives some indication of the scale: before ISIL's invasion of Sinjar in the summer of 2014, the Yazidi population numbered around 550,000 persons. Following the initial attacks by ISIL, approximately 360,000 persons were displaced, 1,293 were killed, 2,745 were orphaned, and 6,417 were kidnapped (3,548 women and girls and 2,869 men and boys)[2]. These figures indicate the vicious and intentional targeting of the group, more so than any other minority – although Christians, Shia Muslims, other minorities and even Sunni Muslims who opposed the group also suffered terrible atrocities.

The 2014 genocide triggered vast internal displacement which has forced a large percentage of the Yazidi community into camps in the Kurdistan region for years without a clear vision for their future. Three options are available to resolve their displacement: return to Sinjar; settle permanently in the area of displacement; or emigrate outside Iraq. Each option brings its own challenges and limitations, and although some of the displaced have moved ahead with one of these options, the fate of the majority remains unclear. This lack of clarity puts the future of the entire Yazidi community into question, since the permanent displacement of Yazidi IDPs undermines the diversity of their ancestral homelands.

However, forcing Yazidi to return is unacceptable. As Yazidi IDPs find themselves under increasing pressure and stress to resolve their displacement, it is critical that national and international actors better understand their situation, in order to offer appropriate support.

This study aims to support the Government of Iraq (GoI), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the international community to make informed choices regarding the future of the Yazidi community and sustainable solutions for resolving the displacement of Yazidi IDPs, particularly in light of the recent Sinjar Agreement, which was signed between the GoI and KRG in October 2020 and concerns the administration of Sinjar.

This study pursues three objectives:

1. Understand how political conflict regarding the administration of Sinjar affects the return and reintegration of Yazidi IDPs;
2. Understand how divisions within the Yazidi community affect the sustainability of IDP return; and
3. Identify ways for national and international actors to address these issues.

The study also recognizes that IDP return is taking place within complex global and local circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, was a significant push factor encouraging the return of displaced families, linked to restrictions on movement between federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) which resulted in a large number of families being split between Nineveh (located in federal Iraq) and

1 Alon Conno, Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

2 According to the latest statistics from the Yazidi Abducted Rescue Office. These statistics refer to the last update on 09.02.2020, an interview with Hussain Al-Qaidi, director of the Office for the Rescue of Abducted Yazidis in the Governorate of Dohuk on 08.07.2019, and with Khairy Bouzani, Director of Yazidi Endowments, Erbil, 24.09.2020.

Dohuk (located in the KRI.)[3]. A second issue is the timing of three elections, each of which may affect the fate of the displaced and areas of return: the US presidential elections in November 2020; the Iranian elections scheduled for June 2021; and the Iraqi federal elections also scheduled for June 2021. Will US policy towards Iraq and its minorities change following the election? Could the progress of conservatives or reformists in the Iranian elections lead to change in policy towards Sinjar? And will Iraq see its traditional political forces win again, or will it witness the rise of new reformists, with potentially different views on disputed areas such as Sinjar?

We hope that the study will provide a vision that will help alleviate the reality of extreme polarization in Sinjar, which is likely to become more complex the closer we get to the Iraqi elections set for June 2021.

The success of the ideas proposed in this study will depend upon their uptake by policy actors and their implementation in a way that rebuilds confidence and trust Yazidis and other ethno-sectarian groups (especially the Sunni Arabs in Sinjar), as well as between the minorities and the government (specifically: the local government in Nineveh Governorate, the KRG, and the GoI).

3 The movement restrictions implemented in the KRI and federal Iraq prevented Yazidis working outside Dohuk governorate from rejoining their families inside the Dohuk camps (especially those working in the security services or those involved in the various armed Yazidi factions in Sinjar or on the borders with Syria). They waited for days, and sometimes weeks, in security checkpoints until being allowed to enter the governorate, after being quarantined for two weeks on their personal expense. When they could not bear family separation any longer, the remaining members of these families (typically wives and children) returned to Sinjar to reunite with the working family member (typically the head of household). Interviews with displaced Yazidis, Dohuk on 10.02.2020, and interviews with Yazidi members of the security services and armed factions in Sinjar on 28.09.2020.

The study builds on a study produced by the author (in conjunction with IOM Iraq) in January 2020. This earlier study was written on the basis of interviews and discussions conducted by the author in Erbil, Dohuk, and Bashiqa in mid-August 2019. The new study, produced in late 2020, reconsiders how the situation has changed since 2019 in light of significant shifts in displacement, security, and the October 2020 Sinjar Agreement.

This study is based upon interviews and discussions conducted by the author in September 2020 with representatives of the Yazidi community and other key stakeholders representing government officials, security actors, community leaders, and others. The author shared parts of the text with key informants for the purpose of discussion, and to support information validation. As a result, the study turned into a long debate with the various representatives of the Yazidi community, some of whom were also interviewed for the earlier report. Returning to the same key informants provided insight to the evolution of the Yazidi reality, and also revealed the lack of change on certain issues. As such, this iterative approach helped shed light on the persistent challenges facing Yazidi society, as well as changing hopes and opportunities.

This study also benefited from three lines of engagement between the author and the Yazidi community. First, the author engaged in discussions during the two-day annual international conference initiated by the Yazda Foundation on 2-3 August to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide. Second, the author engaged in discussions with the Yazidi leadership, organized by the Yazda Foundation on September 6, 2020. Third, the author participated in discussions via a virtual workshop on 9 October 2020, held by the Carnegie Middle East Center in cooperation with IMPACT organization and MASARAT Foundation, concerning conflict on the border between Iraq and Syria.

Finally, the study also reflects on the author's experiences and relationship with the Yazidi community over the past fifteen years.

STUDY OUTLINE

The study proceeds along the following lines:

of the study analyzes the nature of the divisions within the Yazidi community, including political conflict in Sinjar, and how this affects prospects for IDP return and other durable solutions. It considers vertical divisions – that is, those between Yazidis and their own leadership – and horizontal divisions, such as those based on location (Sinjar-based Yazidis versus Yazidis located in Lalish valley), generational differences, and divisions related to gender.

It is essential to understand these divisions in order to make sense of the complex internal dynamics of the Yazidi community, and the effect these divisions have on Yazidi identity and prospects for return. In the words of one Yazidi activist, "Our problem is, first and foremost, internal. We cannot have a dialogue with the Muslim majority, Kurdish parties, Erbil, Baghdad, or our Sunni neighbors in Mosul without reaching an agreement on some of our internal issues." While the Yazidi community has undoubtedly experienced manipulation and co-optation by larger political actors, this study also seeks to understand the role that the Yazidi community itself played in the fractured dynamics that currently exist.

In particular, internal divisions affect the way the Yazidi community represents itself and makes its demands to the outside world. Sometimes it results in sending conflicting messages to both the Iraqi government and the international community, which obscure Yazidi wishes and demands. This, in turn, makes it easy to co-opt parts of the Yazidi community as part of the struggle between major political groups, heightened by the fact that Sinjar is in a highly strategic location within Iraq's disputed territories, located just 50 kilometers from the Turkish-Iraqi-Syrian border triangle.

of the study identifies opportunities for national and international actors to support sustainable peace in Sinjar and encourage the conditions necessary for sustainable IDP return to take place. Sinjar hosts a multiplicity of local and regional political actors, which creates competing security frameworks, hinders the sustainable return of IDPs, and undermines the trust Yazidis feel in a safe future. These realities generate secondary displacement, when IDPs return and then displace again, which some fear may turn into recurrent instances of

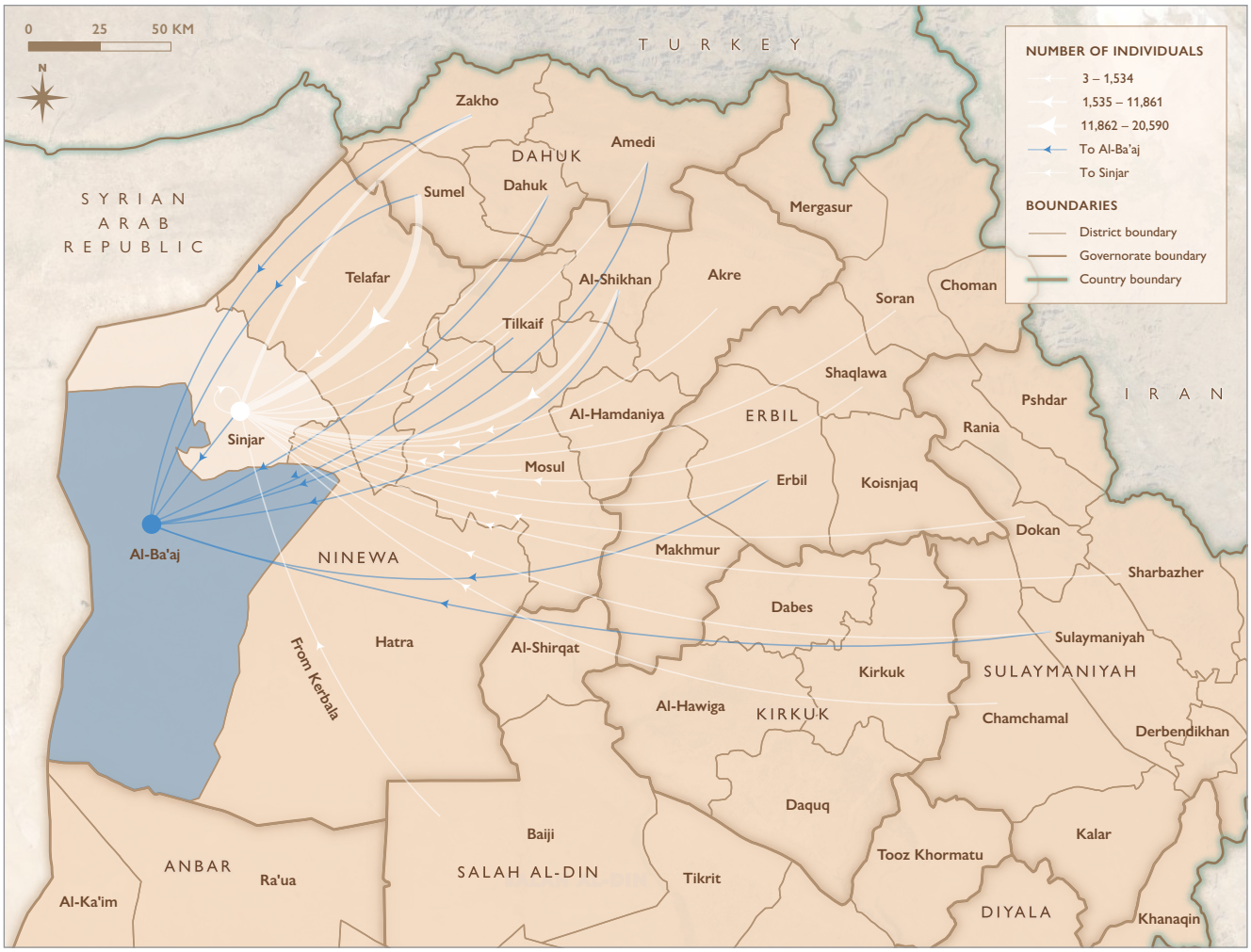
displacement or a "migration with no return," suspending people in permanent displacement.

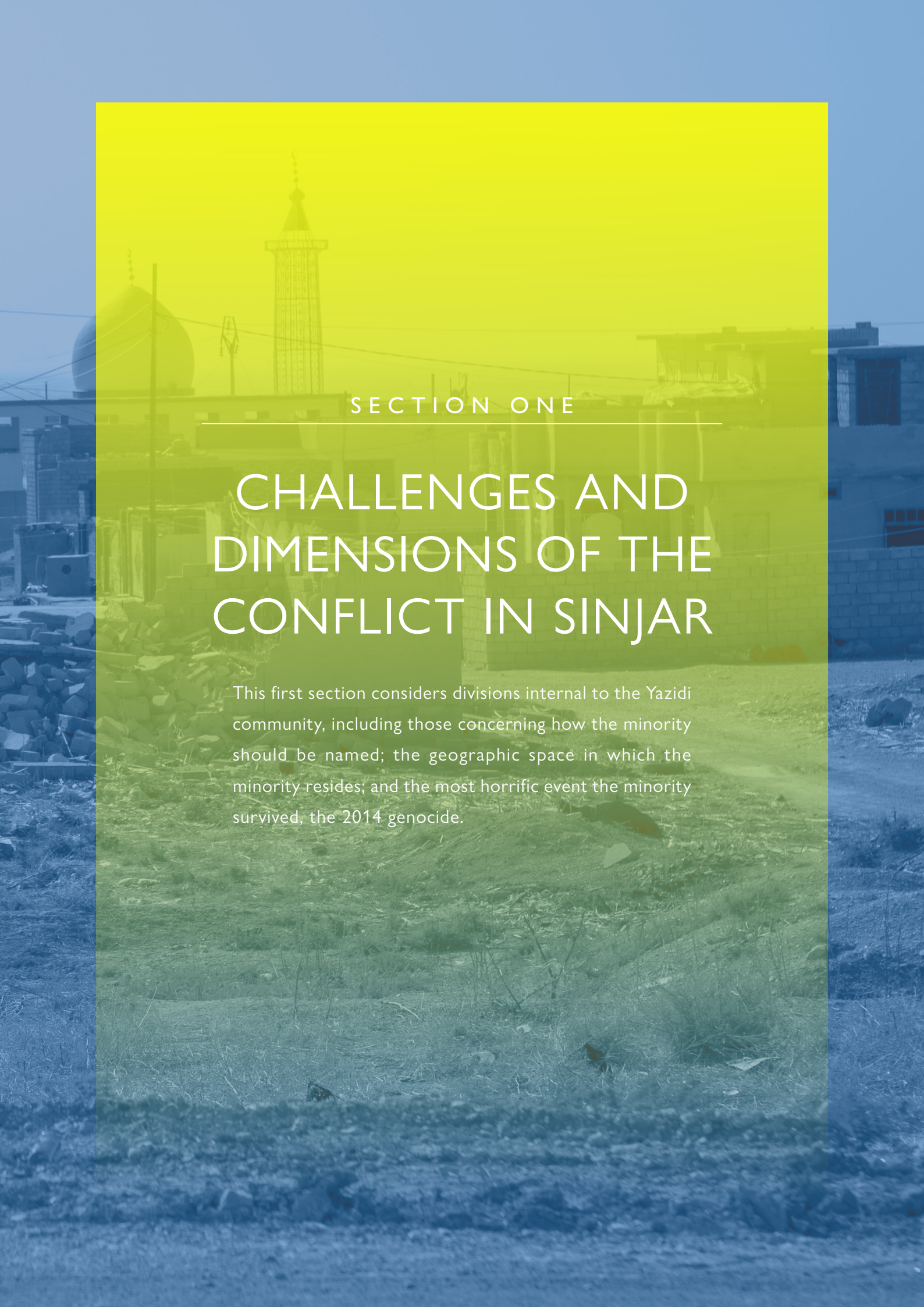
In this context, it is critical for national and international actors to address the structural issues impeding durable solutions for Yazidis, including return to Sinjar, permanent integration in the host community, and emigration outside Iraq. These options are subject to the influence of internal divisions and external dynamics such as security and political administration which affect perceptions of identity and belonging.

In the search for the way forward, the study addresses the options for the administration of Sinjar. This is particularly critical since the Baghdad-Erbil agreement on Sinjar was announced on October 9 2020, and offers a new framework that may contribute to better governance and prospects for sustainable peace in Sinjar. The study considers the position of the Iraqi constitution, the visions of the major political parties, and representatives of the concerned minorities on the administration of Sinjar. The complexities inherent in Sinjar make it imperative to build the capabilities of the Yazidi community and stabilize its social structure through continuous dialogue, while also attempting to rebuild trust with other ethno-sectarian groups in Sinjar. In more explicit terms, this study recognizes the importance of repairing the relationship between Yazidis and Muslims in Sinjar in the long term, not just proposing temporary or quick policies.

Ultimately, this study aspires to present a roadmap for change. It offers an alternative vision for a post-conflict society, which we hope can contribute to a new paradigm for sustainable peace in Sinjar. This is not only important for the Yazidis, but for the future of the whole country Although Sinjar has become an example of Iraq's failure as a state to protect its minorities, this does not need to be the end of the story, and this study envisages a time whereby Sinjar can offer an example of Iraq's success as a viable state.

Map 1: Population Movements to Sinjar and Al-Ba'aj districts in December 2020





SECTION ONE

CHALLENGES AND DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT IN SINJAR

This first section considers divisions internal to the Yazidi community, including those concerning how the minority should be named; the geographic space in which the minority resides; and the most horrific event the minority survived, the 2014 genocide.

It also considers other deeper divisions regarding identity: how the Yazidis define themselves; relationship between Yazidis, between Yazidis and others, and between Yazidis and the outside world; gender divisions related to the position of women in the Yazidi community; and generational divisions.

The importance of understanding these divisions lies in clarifying the complex internal dynamics of the Yazidi community, and recognizing the negative role these divisions play to undermine unified discourse on identity, political representation, and demands related to IDP return.

1. DIVISION REGARDING NAMES / LABELS

The naming of the Yazidis as a minority is a matter of dispute in itself. While some use the term "Yazidis", which is the old name that was used before 2003 to refer to the minority in the media, official documents, maps, studies, and laws[4], the Iraqi constitution of 2005 coined a new name, "Êzidîs". In spite of all the justifications given for the introduction of the new name, it is clear that it was a successful attempt to decipher the confusion surrounding the old name (Yazidi) that refers to the Umayyad Caliph (Yazid), which established a stereotype of the Yazidis being the followers of (Yazid bin Muawiyah, the Umayyad), and thus being nothing but the remnants of a splinter Islamic sect.

What makes this stereotype dangerous is that the Shia majority has a deep hatred for the Umayyad Caliph Yazid (647–683 AD), since he killed Imam Husayn (the most prominent figure for the Shias). The Ba'ath regime during Saddam Hussein's era skillfully manipulated this label by changing the name of the minority officially in the Law of Official Sects in Iraq 1981 as "Umayyad Yazidis." By doing this, the Ba'ath regime tightly linked the minority's religious identity with the Umayyad Caliph, which served the strategy of the regime at the time by incorporating the Yazidis within the framework of (Sunni) Arab nationalism. Later, however, this created rumors that the Yazidis were an essential component of the armed units in the Republican Guard used by Saddam Hussein's regime to bomb Imam Ali shrine in Najaf, holy to Shias. This was an opportunistic attempt to avoid portraying the suppression of the Shia uprising after the end of the Gulf War in 1991 as a Sunni retaliation against the rising Shia public[5]. However, many of the most prominent representatives and leaders of the Yazidi community have vehemently denied these rumors and accusations[6].

Likewise, there are differences in naming the geographical space which is considered the homeland of the Yazidi people and where a large portion of the Yazidi community lives, known alternatively as Sinjar and Shingal. Kurdish media typically uses the name "Shingal," while the official Arabic name "Sinjar" has been fixed in the official media since the establishment of Iraq as a state in 1921. This is not only a linguistic difference but signals the politicization of, and conflict over the Yazidi homeland and identity. Many other Yazidi-majority cities that are less geopolitically important than Sinjar have preserved their ancient Aramaic names, such as Bashiqa[7], meaning "House of Love", and Bahzani[8] meaning "House of Grief". The same applies to Sheikhan, whose name is not subject to any disagreement.

The term genocide is subject to similar controversy. A debate arose between educated Yazidi elites on the necessity of using the term genocide, and whether they should insist to end the use of alternative words that have no legal connotations such as disaster, calamity, tragedy, and suffering (and which have each been used to describe the events of 2014.) Yazidi activists led a campaign to end the use of terms such as 'the Sinjar disaster' or 'the Sinjar catastrophe' and replace them with the term 'the genocide of the Yazidis'. These activists argue that the former terms undermine collective recognition that what happened to the Yazidis is considered a genocide. Moreover, they limit the scope of the genocide to the geographical area (Sinjar) and fail to link it to the target group of the genocide (the Yazidis) which suggests a division between Yazidis living in different areas, and implies

4 See, for example, Law No. 32 of the officially recognized sects in Iraq, 1981. http://wiki.dorar-aliraq.net/iraqilaws/law/20491.html.

5 Saad Salloum, Yazidis in Iraq, Memory, Beliefs, Genocide, UPP, 2nd Edition of 2020, pg.99.

6 Interview with Eido Baba Sheikh, Yazidi writer and researcher, Erbil, 25.09.2020.

7 A sub-district where the majority of the population is Yazidis.

8 Kasbah in Ba'shiqa district.

that Yazidis living in places such as Sheikhan, Bashiqa, and Dohuk were not affected by the most tragic and important event that defines the group's identity in the modern era[9].

Many Yazidis prefer to use the term "Farmān" to refer to genocide, which is a Persian term also used in the Turkish language. Farmān is a decision or law issued by an order from the Sublime Porte, the Ottoman Sultan himself, with immediate effect. This name was reinforced by the repeated massacres against the Yazidis by the Ottomans and their local rulers, which were issued through Farmāns[10]. Therefore, the name (Farmān) was preferred in the Yazidi collective consciousness to refer to the historical continuity of the persecution of the Yazidis. In other words, the term was used to refer to the genocide committed by ISIL as a chain link in the entire history of massacres and genocides that befell the Yazidis in the past. The difference this time (in 2014) is that the entire international community is watching Farmān no. 74 at the hands of ISIL thanks to the media and social media.

Moreover, the parameters of the genocide are disputed: that is, which precise actions constitute part of the genocide. Yazidi perceptions of what the genocide entails often go far beyond the physical violence of the 2014 ISIL attacks. For instance, Yazidis often say that "the genocide continues" when talking about the political or social conflict that continues over their land and identity, an understanding that transcends the legal definition of genocide. According to this view, while ISIL focused on the physical destruction of the identity of the Yazidis, other political actors continue to undermine or attack the non-physical dimensions (culture, identity, and land) of Yazidi identity. Yazidis points to the political conflict over the administration of Sinjar, for instance, as one manifestation of this ongoing destruction. The pervasiveness of this understanding means that fear of return and chronic anxiety have become hallmarks of the Yazidi character.

Equally, many Yazidis point to the intentional destruction of Sinjar city as an example of 'urbicide,' a term that became popular during the 1992–1995 Bosnian War as a way to refer to widespread and deliberate destruction of the urban environment. Some people argue that urbicide should be understood as part of genocide, because destroying people's homes means destroying their identity[11]. In the case of Sinjar, urbicide was accompanied by the destruction of the agricultural environment, which is the mainstay of the economy of the people of Sinjar. This destruction transformed the city into a "dead land", according to the title chosen by Amnesty International for its study of ISIL's deliberate destruction of agricultural lands in Sinjar. In its report, Amnesty relayed evidence that ISIL deliberately targeted the rural environment of Sinjar, destroying not only the source of the population's livelihood but also the cradle of one of the oldest agricultural civilizations in history.[12]

There are also divisions between Yazidis and other minorities concerning the hierarchy of victims associated with ISIL atrocities. Some Christian activists (and to a lesser extent, Shabak and Shia Turkmen) support the idea of referring to the genocide as "the genocide of the Yazidis, Christians, and other minorities."[13] The mere mention of this idea, for many Yazidis, triggers accusations of a lack of awareness of the horrors committed against them, or an attempt to dilute the severity of the violence they experienced. At the same time, it reveals the competition related to victim status that exists between minorities and which functions to undermine their potential unity.[14] Typically, Christians are opposed to a Yazidi monopoly on victim status, while the Yazidis are critical of the Christian monopoly of minority representation in Parliament (and the government more broadly) attained through parliamentary seats and executive positions won in isolation from the rest of the minorities. Although the Yazidis stress that focusing on their suffering does not mean the abolition of the suffering of others, this controversy reveals the nature of competition within minority communities in obtaining recognition of their suffering. It also sheds light on the importance of the relationship between recognition and a feeling of injustice and societal marginalization on a small stage on which narratives of victims are crowded and competing.

This rivalry may partly explain the federal government's neglect of the official commemoration of the Yazidi genocide during the past years, and the fact that government officials typically only attend events initiated by civil society organizations. In 2020, for example, government participation in commemorations

9 Zoom interview with Hasso Hormi, a Yazidi activist residing in the Netherlands and the head of the (Yazidi Foundation Against Genocide), 24.09.2020.

10 For more on these Farmāns, see: Adnan Zayan Farhan and Qadir Salim Shamo, The Tragedy of the Yazidis: The Farmāns and the Extermination Campaigns Against the Yazidi Kurds Throughout History, Dohuk, 2009.

11 Coward, Martin, Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction, Routledge, 2009.

12 Iraq: Dead Land: Islamic State's Deliberate Destruction of Iraq's Farmland, Amnesty International 2018. https://www.amnesty.org/download/documents/mde1495102018english.pdf.

13 Interview with Diaa Boutros, head of the Independent Commission for Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Erbil, 26.09.2020, and an interview with representatives of Shabak and Turkmen, Erbil, 25.09.2020.

14 Interviews with representatives of the Yazidi community in Erbil, 25.09.2020, and Sinjar, 28.09.2020.

of the 2014 genocide didn't exceed the Iraqi Prime Minister (Mustafa Al-Kazimi) receiving a delegation of Yazidi survivors from Sinjar.[15] This is perceived by Yazidis as a sign of neglect and disrespect, and Yazidis typically accuse the government of celebrating the liberation of Iraqi lands from ISIL and condemning the crimes of ISIL against all components of society, without specific recognition of the genocide against Yazidis.

Some activists point to the multiplicity of commemoration events hosted by the GoI and KRG as another example of the political exploitation of the genocide, since it is used as a tool in the competition between Baghdad and Erbil. Yet other Yazidi activists argue that the plethora of events is a positive sign that the Yazidis have entered the stage of consolidating historical events so that victims are not forgotten, especially since some Yazidis fear that the genocide will be forgotten before the transitional justice process begins and the perpetrators are brought to justice. This requires Yazidi human rights defenders and others to actively strive to entrench this genocide in the collective memory, including through voices in the diaspora who organize demonstrations and rallies to express their perspective[16].

2. DIVISIONS IN THE WAY YAZIDI IDENTITY IS DEFINED

The reality of the struggle for power between Iraq's major ethno-sectarian groups (Kurds, Shias, and Sunnis) has led to co-optation of the Yazidis and created internal fragmentation and disputes over their identity. Political actors associated with each of the major ethnic groups has demonstrated an interest in co-opting the Yazidi identity in a way that furthers their own interests. Internal Yazidi discussions demonstrate the influence of external actors on the Yazidis' perception of their own identity, and the way they define Arab-Kurdish conflict in areas where Yazidis reside. This has created internal divisions that greatly affects Yezidi unity and decision-making regarding issues such as where IDPs displace to and whether they decide to return Often, these divisions showcase the aspirations of competing figures within the Yazidi elite. The following sections outline the competing narratives concerning Yazidi identity and the impact this has on the Yazidi community in Iraq.

Yazidis are Kurds

The official Kurdish discourse describes the Yazidis as the "original Kurds." In a meeting between Mr. Masoud Barzani, the former president of the Kurdistan region, and Yezidi figures in Sheikhan district, Mr. Barzani stressed that he would never submit to anyone trying to impose an alternate identity on the Yazidis, stressing that they are "pure Kurds.[17]" Supporters of this opinion point to factors such as geography, in that Yazidi community live in areas inhabited by Kurds, and that the language spoken by the Yazidis and used in their religious texts and supplications is Kurdish. Proponents of this believe argue that Yazidism is the original Kurdish religion, until most Kurds converted to Islam[18]. One positive effect of this perspective was the alleviation of hatred and tension between Kurdish Muslims and the Yazidis in Kurdistan by creating a unified national base. At the same time, this narrative has sparked a heated internal debate amongst Yazidis about the independence of Yazidi representatives within Kurdish political parties (such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)) as well as the ability of these Kurdish political parties to represent Yazidi interests. Members of the Yazidi elite who agree with the Kurdish narrative typically reflect the views of the KRG when it comes to IDP return, which is that a basic condition for the return of Yazidis to Sinjar is that Sinjar must fall under the administrative control of the KRG.

Yazidis are Arabs

Between the late 1960s and 2003, the Ba'ath Party regime tried to 'Arabize' the Yazidis by imposing an Arab identity on them. This created a split within the Yazidi community, since some Yazidis supported this identity, represented by Prince Bayazidi al-Umayyad (officially appointed by the authority as the Prince of the sect in 1980), while others rejected it, represented by the late Prince Tahseen Bek[19]. Today, the Arabization movement is represented by Prince Anwar Muawiya, who stands against what he calls: the Kurdish parties' attempt to "Kurdify the Yazidi sect[20]". In his opinion, the Kurdish movement represents an attempt by the Kurdish political elites to separate the Yazidis from the Iraqi identity,

15 Al-Kadhimi: to internationalize the efforts to find missing Yazidis, Shafaq News, 03.08.2020. https://shafaaq.com/en/Kurdistan/Al-Kadhimi-to-internationalize-the-efforts-to-find-missing-Yazidis.

16 Interview with Yazidi activist, Mirza Dinnayi, Director of the Air Bridge Iraq Organization, Erbil, 23.09.2020.

17 The President of the Kurdistan Region: We will not allow anyone to impose any identity on the Yazidis, because they are genuine Kurds. The official website of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, link: http://www.krg.org/a/print.aspx?l=14&smap=010000&a=27533.

18 An interview with Karim Suleiman, senior advisor to the Supreme Spiritual Council of Yazidis, on different dates, 2018–2019.

19 Details of the division are available in Saad Salloum's book, Yazidis in Iraq, Memory, Beliefs, and Group Identity, 2020.

20 The Prince of the Yazidi sect determines its national affiliation: An interview conducted by Intisar Al-Alusi with Princee Anwar Muawiya is published on the following link: http://www.al-yezidi.net/Arabic.htm.

and as he put it: "the fact that some Yazidis speak the Kurdish language does not mean their ethnic-national affiliation is to the Kurds, as not all Arabic speakers are ethnically Arab[21]". Prince Anwar reiterated his vision in similar statements issued after ISIL fighters occupied Sinjar in 2014. He held the PDK and its leadership responsible for abandoning the Yazidis when the Peshmerga gave up on protecting the Yazidi areas and left them to their fate[22]. He restated his positions on other occasions, confirming his accusations that the Kurdish authorities sought to Kurdify the Yazidis[23].

Pushing for Religious Particularity

The politicization of the Yazidi identity led to a compromised narrative and an alternate understanding of Yazidi identity, whereby the Yazdis are affirmed as a unique ethno-sectarian group within an overarching Kurdish framework. This position was established by the late Prince of the Yazidis (Tahsin Saeed), who emphasized that the Yazidis are Kurds, but they have their own particularity and rights that the Kurds must respect and protect. According to this view, the Yazidi particularities must be protected but, at the same time, the Yazidis are not alienated from their Kurdishness[24]. Advocates of this narrative created a middle position between the movement trying to Kurdify the Yazidis and others advocating for the Yazidis to be perceived as independent in heritage by inventing the term "Yazidi particularity." This grants the Yazidis the minimum independence of identity without arousing the ire of the Kurdish nationalist movement[25]. The founder of this centrist view, Prince Tahsin, in fact changed his position in an interview on Al-Arabiya TV after the invasion of Sinjar by ISIL, noting that the Yazidis preserve their religion and nationalism, and stated that Yazidism is a religion and a nationalism, meanwhile describing the Kurds as friends[26]. This position also indicates the loss of trust experienced by the Yazidis towards Muslims (both Arabs and Kurds) following the attacks by ISIL and the failure of the GoI or KRG to come to their defense.

Yazidis are an Independent Ethno-Religious Minority

Since 2014, there has been a rise in the narrative that confirms the independence of the Yazidis. The 2014 genocide, vast displacement, and mass migration, led to a new narrative that calls for a separate identity for the Yazidis, placing emphasis on the religious elements that separate the Yazidis from Muslims. This movement is exerting an increasing influence within circles of the young elites[27], since it highlights the impact of the genocide as a foundational event of identity. It is worth noting that the new Prince (Hazem Bay) is a follower of the first movement (Kurdish nationalism) which fuels significant disagreement regarding his appointment, as many Yazidis believe that he will not be independent in his decisions and might be influenced by Kurdish political parties and positions.

The new narrative around independence makes religion central to identity. In other words, the narrative translates religious affiliation into a form of identity nationalism. In fact, this narrative is not new, but dates back to an ancient period preceding the genocide. One of its most prominent advocates at the political level was "Amin Farhan Jjo," head of the Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress, who in 2010 published a book on Yazidi nationalism[28]. In 2013, he issued an Arabic-Yazidi dictionary, where he explained that the Yazidi language and its ancient Mesopotamian vocabulary was evidence of the connection of the Yazidis with ancient populations in Sumer and Babylon[29]. One consequence of this narrative is a call for independent political representation for the Yazidis, and a demand to recognize Yazidis as a fourth ethno-religious minority alongside Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen. In recent times, it appears that many Yazidi activists have shifted from following the first (Kurdish) movement to the new (Yazidi nationalist) movement, due in large part to their experiences during the genocide, even if they did not declare this publicly. As such, it appears to be a strong movement that exercises great influence on large sectors

21 Muawiya al-Umayyad, The identity of the Yazidi sect between history and politics: Its roots are ancient Iraqi and it's called Umayyad and has nothing to do with the Kurds. Available at: https://www.aljaml.com/node/32192.

22 Saad Salloum, Yazidis in Iraq, Memory, Beliefs, Genocide, UPP, 2nd Edition of 2020, pg.66. سعد سلوم، الإيزيديون في العراق، الذاكرة، المعتقدات، الإبادة الجماعية، UPP، ط٢ لسنة ٢٠٢٠، ص٦٦

23 Ibid.

24 Saad Salloum, Minorities in Iraq: Memory, Identity, Challenges, Masarat Foundation for Cultural and Media Development, Baghdad, 2013.

25 Wissam Jawhar, Yazidi nationalism is a legitimate right, The Civilized Dialogue Online Bulletin, Issue: 1798, 17.01.2007.

26 The meeting is available at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc6Hpjv8t30.

27 A meeting with representatives of the Yazidi youth, Dohuk, 07.08.2019 and 29.09.2020.

28 Amin Farhan Jjo, Yazidi Nationalism: Roots, Constituents, and Sufferings, Baghdad, 2010.

29 Amin Farhan Jjo, Arabic-Yazidi Dictionary, Baghdad, 2013, p.7.

of the Yazidi elite. It illustrates the effect of genocide as a foundational event that supports a new narrative of identity.

Yazidis are Zoroastrians

A new player and a different narrative on the border with Syria

The year 2014 witnessed the entry of a new player on the Yazidi scene, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The PKK exercised its strong influence on the Yazidis after its intervention to rescue besieged Yazidis on Mount Sinjar during the first weeks of ISIL's invasion of Sinjar. The PKK then went a step further and supported the establishment of Resistance Units in Sinjar (known as the YBS) which consists mostly of Iraqi Yazidis and includes a special unit for women called the "Women Protection Units" (YPJ). A number of European Yazidis joined the unit, particularly from Germany. Thereafter, the PKK continued its political ambitions in Sinjar by supporting the establishment of an administrative unit called "Autonomous Administration of Sinjar" at the end of 2014, as well as the "Sinjar Yazidis Council," which included 27 members representing the displaced Yazidis in the Nowruz camp in Dirk / Al-Malikiyah, Hasaka governorate, and the camps located in Turkey and on Mount Sinjar. The Council also undertook the task of establishing an autonomous administration in the governorate of Hasaka. In January 2015, President Masoud Barzani described this as "a step by the PKK in the direction of forming the Sinjar canton[30]."

The decision by the PKK to enter Sinjar as a political actor draws on a specific narrative, advocated by the PKK, that draws a link between Zoroastrianism and Yazidism. According to this view, the origin of all Kurds is Yazidism and the origin of the Yazidis is Zoroastrian. As a secular party, the PKK was interested to revive a religion that has disappeared for 15 centuries from the region (Zoroastrianism) among the Kurds and Yazidis alike, and to present it as an umbrella to unify the fighters around a single axis of affiliation for all Kurds. This approach aimed to overcome the deep link between the Kurds and Islam, and to create a long-standing and deep-rooted link between the Kurds and the space in which they live[31]. Helping the PKK in its narrative was a decision in 2015 to officially recognize Zoroastrianism as one of the religious components of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in accordance with Law No. 5 of 2015, aimed at protecting the rights of minorities in Iraqi Kurdistan[32].

The strength of the PKK narrative draws on the feeling of gratitude on the part of the Yazidis towards the PKK, following the PKK intervention to save Yazidis during the ISIL attacks of 2014. The PKK differentiated itself from other Kurdish parties on this point, since, by contrast, Yazidis feel betrayed by the Kurdish Peshmerga forces that abandoned their protection when ISIL first attacked. Yet the presence of the PKK in Sinjar and the introduction of the Zoroastrian narrative has generated additional fragmentation of the Yazidi identity and co-opted the Yazidis into a conflict to which they are not a party (namely, the conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK.) This has generated serious consequences, as areas of Sinjar have been bombed on several occasions by Turkish forces claiming to target the PKK, while at the same time killing residents of Sinjar[33].

At the same time, the presence of the PKK generates intra-Kurdish tensions that directly affect Yazidis. Yazidi youth in Dohuk who visit areas under the influence of the PKK report that they are subject to investigations by the KDP Asayish forces, although they themselves are not fighters.[34] The KDP has also instructed local organizations not to provide humanitarian or other assistance to areas under the influence of the PKK, thus depriving residents of essential services[35]. Yet Yazidis who live in areas under PKK influence (such as Tal Uzair, Khansour, and the areas within Sinjar mountain) cannot avoid interacting with the group. This includes the possibility of marriage between Yazidi female fighters in the party and other fighters of different religious origins.

30 Saad Salloum, Yazidi infighting, disputes over Sinjar stall battle against Islamic State, Al-monitor, August 18, 2015. https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/kurdistan-yazidis-armed-forces-influence-sinjar.html.

31 Phone calls and correspondence with Yazidi fighters in the PKK, and interviews with Yazidis sympathetic to the aforementioned party.

32 Saad Salloum, Freedom of Religion and Belief for Religious Minorities in Iraq, Baghdad, Masarat Foundation, 2016, p.91.

33 Interview with Talal Huskani, activist from Sinjar, Dohuk, 06.08.2019 and 29.09.2020.

34 A meeting with Yazidi activists at the Genocide Studies Center, University of Dohuk, 07.08.2019.

35 Ibid.

3. THE YAZIDI GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION

The geographical division between Sinjar (which is the primary area where the genocide took place, and the main demographic concentration of the Yazidis) and Sheikhan (which is the headquarters of the main temple of the Yazidis, the spiritual council, and the headquarters of the Emirate) creates another form of division with the Yazidi community. After the passing of Prince Tahsin Bek, Yazidi leaders from Sinjar made their support for the new Prince (Prince Hazem from Sheikhan) subject to several conditions, including: granting Yazidis from Sinjar a more influential role in decision-making on Yazidi affairs, forming a higher Yazidi council in which the representation from Yazidis from Sinjar should reached 70%, and expanding the Supreme Spiritual Council for the Yazidis to introduce Yazidis from Sinjar to the Council[36]. The lack of response to these demands has pushed the geographical / regional division to the surface between the Sheikhan elites that lead the representation of the Yazidis at the political and religious levels and the Sinjari elites who are demanding to improve their representation in light of their greater demographic weight. The Sinjari Yazdisi also cite the fact that they were the centre of the genocide by ISIL in 2014.

When the new Prince of the Yazidis was crowned on Saturday, July 27, 2019 in the Lalish Temple in Sheikhan, his coronation sparked a division within the family of the late Prince, as the Prince's grandson, Sarmad Sarhad Tahsin Bek, condemned the coronation for not respecting the Sinjari Yazidis' opinion, which he believed also violated the will of the late Prince. The young Yazidi elites in Sheikhan shared the view of the Prince's grandson, and questioned the legitimacy of the new Prince, declaring that he " did not respect the will of the Yazidis, does not receive the acceptance of the Yazidis, and did not respect the will of the late Prince Tahsin Bek who recommended that the coronation get the approval of the Sinjari Yazidis[37]". Baghdad responded with silence and tacit approval[38] to Prince Hazem's appointment in Sheikhan, as did the KDP government in Erbil.

In a remarkable development, Prince Nayef bin Dawood then declared himself Prince of Sinjar with the approval of the clerics, tribal elders, and main figures in a religious shrine in Sinjar[39]. This move appeared to be supported by Kurdish parties opposed to the PDK party, including the PKK. Although the source of the new Prince's power is that he is a member of the royal family, lives in Sinjar, and has the respect of the Sinjari Yazidi elites, his selection was made by traditional elites and based on political and regional influences, without consulting the younger generations[40]. Thus, and for the first time in the history of the Yazidis, two Emirates of the Yazidis exist: the first in Sheikhan and the second in Sinjar. This is a new division that will cast a shadow over the conditions and return of the displaced to Sinjar: Will the returnees follow the Prince of Sheikhan or the Prince of Sinjar?

In a later development, a third Prince "Umayya Muawiya" inaugurated himself as Prince of the Yazidis outside Iraq. The new Prince inaugurated himself in Germany, the country with the most Yazidis outside Iraq, estimated at between 140,000 and 200,000 people, according to Yazidi activists. He issued a statement addressed to the Yazidi diaspora on August 9, 2019, in which he stated, "I bear the historical responsibility of establishing the Yazidi Emirate in the diaspora, based in Federal Germany, where I will manage the affairs of the Yazidi community and endeavor to reunite them, relieve their pain and grief, and stand by them in difficult circumstances". The new Prince justified this step in seeking to unify the Yazidis after the genocide on August 3, 2014, noting that "the Yazidis are going through critical circumstances after the genocide weakened and paralyzed our Yazidi unity and inflicted sorrows and poverty upon our societies." The third Prince promised to follow in the footsteps of the previous Princes, such as Prince Gul Bek, Prince Ismail Bek, and Prince Muawiya Bek[41].

This competition for the leadership of the Yazidis introduces a new layer of division into the Yazidi community, which threatens the future of the minority and the ability of its leaders to achieve a unified opinion. It raises a serious question: who will the displaced Yazidis follow upon their return to Sinjar? With the emergence of the third Emirate in Germany, will the new (diasporic) Prince exercise his influence over the Yazidi immigrants abroad? Three competing Princes mean three loyalty and identity options: a Prince for the displaced, a Prince for returnees, and a Prince for immigrants, implying that the Yazidis are divided between these three cohorts.

36 The dignitaries and clans of Sinjar present a list of demands in exchange for the support of the new Prince of the Yazidis, Kirkuk Now Agency, 26.07.2019, available at: http://kirkuknow.com/ar/news/59831.

37 Saad Salloum, Yazidis divided over selection of new leader, al-monitor, February 17, 2019. https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/iraq-minorities-yazidis.html.

38 Interview with Khairy Bouzani, Director of Yazidi Endowments at the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs in the Kurdistan Region, Erbil, 24.09.2020.

39 Prince Nayef bin Dawood bin Sulaiman is officially appointed Prince of Sinjar, available at: https://sotkurdistan.net/2019/08/04/تنصيب-الامير-نايف-بن-داود-أميرا-رسميا-ل/

40 Interview with Talal Haskani, activist from Sinjar, Dohuk, 06.08.2019 and 29.09.2020.

41 Umayya Muawiya announces his inauguration as Prince of Yazidis in Diaspora, Kanye Press, August 9, 2019. Available at: http://kanipress.net/2019/08/09/أمية-معاوية-يعلن-عن-تنصيب-نفسه-أميرا-لل/

4. GENERATION & GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Gender Perspective: Representing the Opinion of Women in the Previous Discussions

During discussions with the author, many Yazidi activists objected to the patriarchal character that typically prevails in discussions about the future of the Yazidis. They noted the absence of the voice of women in the Yazidi traditions and their low representation in decision-making. In the words of a female Yazidi activist from Sinjar, "Yazidi women are the ones who paid the highest price during the genocide, and yet they are still a neglected figure in the internal political and social balances[42]". Female Yazidi activists argue that that women demonstrated strength and courage during the genocide and assumed the burden of providing for their families during displacement, especially since many men (who were the primary breadwinners) were killed. On this basis, they argue for greater recognition of the role of Yazidi women in society and greater involvement in decision-making within the community[43].

Contemporary Yazidi history also includes evidence of the ability of women to lead in challenging situations. For example, Princess Mian Hatun, 1873–1956, who is a descendant of the Yazidi Princes, succeeded in playing an important role in managing the affairs of her religious minority after the assassination of her husband, Prince Ali Bek in 1913 CE. With unparalleled acumen and intelligence, she was able to persuade the Iraqi government and the majority of the notables and executors of the Yazidis to appoint her son (Saeed Bek) as the Prince of the Yazidis and appoint her as his guardian. By doing this, she became the de facto ruler of the Yazidis and succeeded in managing their affairs with competence and expertise. After the death of her son Prince Saeed Bek in 1944, she chose her grandson (Tahseen) to lead the Emirate, although he was not more than thirteen years old, but she was able to impose her choice, and became his guardian until he reached the age of adulthood. This meant that she was able to impose the continuation of her de facto rule over the Yazidis for decades[44]. In addition, Yazidis frequently celebrate the work and advocacy of the Yazidi woman Nadia Murad, whose Nobel Peace Prize win has made her an icon of courage across the world. Adding to these examples, Princess Orouba Ismail expressed her willingness to lead the Yazidi community (before Prince Hazem was chosen to lead the Yazidis), and stated that "if given the opportunity, women are able to lead the Yazidi community better than men who failed to protect the Yazidi community during the genocide." She also expressed her desire to run for the leadership of the Yazidi Emirate in the event that there are fair nominations and a fair competition[45].

With this in mind, it is essential that discussion about the future of the Yazidis and the options for their migration or return must include the voice of women, with support to enable them to manage the influence of traditional stakeholders, such as the Spiritual Council and the Amiri family (House of the Prince). Encouraging the strengthening of the status of women within the Yazidi community should become a priority for international stakeholders, especially in light of women's role in maintaining the cohesion of the Yazidi family and the Yazidi community in general.

Generational Perspective: Representing the Opinion of Youth in Previous Discussions

The youth interviewed for this study were divided between two groups: one that sees Yazidis as independent and wishes to preserve religion as part of their identity, and a more secular group that strives to develop a completely non-religious identity, without defining the terms of this new, non-religious identity. Youth who belong to the latter movement usually focus on the importance of individual choice and the need to reform traditional approaches, such as abolishing the strict caste system within the Yazidis that forbids inter-class marriage, while celebrating the ritual and cultural aspects of the religion such as festivals, symbols, and temples. Common to both sides, according to a youth advisor to the Yazidi Spiritual Council, is the separation between religious and political beliefs. He explained that the younger generation have "a greater awareness of the distinction between political loyalty and religious belief. They would never sacrifice the second for the sake of the first or put the second in service of the first as the previous generation did."[46].

42 Basma Haji Khader, a social researcher and activist from Sinjar, Dohuk, 07.08.2019.

43 A meeting with Yazidi activists at the Genocide Prevention Center, the University of Dohuk, 07.08.2019 and a meeting with representatives of Yazidi youth, Dohuk, 29.09.2020.

44 Saad Salloum, A Princess is selected to lead the Yazidis in the next stage, Al-Mada newspaper, available at the link: https://www.almadapaper.net/view.php?cat=216281.

45 Saad Salloum, Yazidis divided over selection of new leader, al-monito, February 17, 2019, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/iraq-minorities-yazidis.html.

46 An interview with Faris Koti, advisor to the Yazidi Spiritual Council, Erbil, 03.08.2019.

During discussions with young Yazidi elites from Dohuk, Erbil, Sinjar, Sheikhan, and Bashiqa, the following opinions characterized their views:

1. The movement that considers Yazidis as Kurds is opportunistic. If the situation is good and there is positive news related to the Yazidis, the Yazidis are portrayed in the Kurdish media as Kurds, e.g. When Nadia Murad wins the Nobel Prize, the Kurdish media described her as a "Kurdish Yazidi". If the news is negative, the media only says "Yazidis"[47].
2. Before 2014, the Yazidi community was divided between those who identify as Kurdish and those who identify as independent; however, the genocide alienated those ho identified as Kurdish, even when they displaced to Kurdistan. After the genocide, Yazidis started considering their isolation and how different they are from their surroundings. This makes Kurdish identity a tentative option for the Yazidis, since the Kurds are religiously different from the Yazidis. On top of that, the Yazidis are afraid of the spread of political Islam in Kurdistan, since they fear it will generate discriminatory views towards Yazidis on the part of the Kurdish people. This was particularly of concern for the Yazidis in Dohuk, where Salafi ideologies are growing[48].
3. Some youth turned to civic action in order to modernize the Yazidi community and spread reform ideas. They explained that most of the youth are motivated to reduce the importance of ethnic or religious identity and focus on the individual as the bearer of basic rights, regardless their background. As such, everyone should be free and comfortable to practice his religious rites without fear of the other. These youth note that even if the constitution grants formal rights to minorities, unless a culture of tolerance spreads within society, an individual will be unable to hold his own independent identity.
4. Youth want to liberate Yazidis from conflict associated with identity, while simultaneously modernizing the Yazidi religion. Moreover, they make cautious demands to abolish the caste system within the Yazidi community and limit the power of the traditional leadership represented by the Prince, the Spiritual Council, and tribal leaders in Sheikhan, Sinjar, Bashiqa, and other regions. They believe that empowering educated youth will support a reform movement that preserves the Yazidi presence from the dangers of extinction, while protecting Yazidis from the rule of outdated traditions and political co-optation.

47 For discussions on this point, refer to: Saad Salloum, Our Religious Diversity: Medi and Minorites Issues in Iraq, IMS, 2019, p.65. https://www.academia.edu/38905402/Media_and_Minorities_issues_in_Iraq.

48 On the spread of political Islam in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, see: Abd al-Fattah Bhutani, Political Islam in the Kurdistan Region – Iraq Historical and Political Notes and Impressions, 1st Edition, (Duhok, Duhok University Press, 2012).

Sinjar occupies an important strategic location, 50 kilometers from the Turkish-Iraqi-Syrian border. The areas on both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border are characterized by religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and significant cross-border links. This region also constitutes a critical border between federal and Kurdish Iraq, with long-standing friction over who administers the area, as one of the so-called disputed territories.

The KRG currently controls Faysh Khabur crossing with Syria, and therefore supervises the movement of equipment and people, including American military forces whose framework of engagement focuses on supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces and countering Iranian influence[49].

The aforementioned details complicate the political and security situation in Sinjar more than other areas such as the Nineveh Plains. Sinjar is particularly susceptible to the struggles of regional powers, such as Turkey and Iran, each of whom engage local actors or allies. On top of that, the ambiguity of Sinjar's administrative status between the GoI and KRG introduces further instability. Finally, and linked to both these factors, the multiplicity of political actors present in Sinjar, and in turn the plethora of security or armed actors, creates highly complex dynamics.

Returnees and IDPs from Sinjar bear the effects of this conflict on three levels: first, because they are caught between the different political parties that share influence on the ground, second because they are co-opted by both the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and third because they are stuck in the midst of the Turkish-Iranian-American conflict. Each of these factors are discussed in turn.

1. THE INTERNAL DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT IN SINJAR

Sinjar's position within Iraq's disputed territories has resulted in a dual system of administration. The Mayor of Sinjar as appointed by the KRG and recognized by provincial authorities is District Commissioner Mahma Khalil, a KDP member. However, he resides in Dohuk, while in Sinjar itself a shadow administration exists, being the District Commissioner associated with the central government, Fahd Hamed, who also has the support of some Yazidi security forces present in Sinjar as well as the PKK.

ISIL's invasion of Sinjar in 2014 introduced new actors to the political and military arena of Sinjar. This changed the balance of power in Sinjar in favor of the actors who contributed to Sinjar's liberation from ISIL. In particular, the events of 2014 introduced the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to the region while causing a decline in the influence of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK). The latter remains focused on restoring its influence in in the region and pushes for the removal of the PKK from Sinjar. As part of this dynamic, the Mayor of Sinjar, PDK member Mahma Khalil, sent a letter to the US embassy to request US support to reduce the influence of the PKK and remove it from Sinjar,[50] revealing a desire on the part of the KDP to include the United States as an active player in competition for administration over Sinjar.

Intra-Kurdish Conflict: PKK vs. PDK

Sinjar is the site of substantial tensions between two Kurdish factions, the PKK and the PDK. Both sides hold the other party responsible for the non-return of the Yezidi IDPs and accuse each other of committing atrocities and crimes. For instance, the PKK accuses the PDK of exploiting the displaced in a political game against the federal government and adopting arbitrary measures that impede the return of the displaced Yazidis to Sinjar, while the PDK accuses the PKK of perpetrating human rights violations which dissuade IDPs from returning to Sinjar.

49 A virtual workshop on the Syrian-Iraqi borders in which the researcher participated, Carnegie Middle East Center, Friday, 10.10.2020.

50 Kaymakam of Sinjar addresses the US embassy to expel the PKK from the judiciary, Baghdad today, available at https://akhbaar.org/home/2019/8/261324.html.

One example came on 13 August 2019, when the Mayor of Sinjar, Mahma Khalil, issued a statement that Sinjar had become a safe haven for the PKK, who he accused of kidnapping, imposing royalties, and accusing abductees of crimes without due process, and complained that Sinjar had become a source of both funding and weapons for the PKK[51]. Khalil stated that the PKK had appointed directors of the sub-districts (towns) within the city of Sinjar from his subordinates in the city, stressing in a statement that these practices "terrify the displaced and prevent them from returning to their areas," and accusing the PKK of committing "widespread, arbitrary, and inhumane violations."[52]

For their part, Yazidi sources affiliated with the PKK denied these allegations, describing them as rumors and lies by political parties. Haval Teresh Shankali, the public relations official associated with the Sinjar Resistance Units YBŞ, stated that the PKK had announced its withdrawal from Sinjar after the end of its mission to "save the people and liberate the lands of the region from ISIL, in coordination with the Iraqi government, officially and publicly on 1/4/2018, and since that date there have been no PKK fighters in Sinjar[53]."

Although the PKK may not maintain a direct presence in Sinjar, the PDK argues that the PKK retains its presence in Sinjar through its associated military and political wing called the Sinjar Resistance Units (known as the YBŞ), which is a recognized force in Sinjar affiliated with the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces. The PDK complains that the YBS receive their salaries from the Iraqi government (as part of the PMF) which indirectly contributes to financing the PKK[54].

PDK opposition to the PKK in Sinjar led to the closure of Skhela border crossing several years ago, which prevented the displaced from returning to Sinjar. As Human Rights Watch (HRW) has noted, the KRG has placed disproportionate restrictions on the movement of goods to and from the Sinjar region, due to concern regarding PKK activities. HRW believe that these unfair restrictions are disproportionate to any potential security considerations, and impede people's access to food, water, livelihoods, and other basic rights. Yazidis and an international diplomat have reported to HRW that the restrictions were a punishment for the Yazidis accepting PKK into the region[55]. The crossing remained closed even after the area was liberated from ISIL, which led to an increase in the difficulties faced by the Yazidis to move from the displacement camps in the region to the district of Sinjar, as they need more than seven hours to reach the district via Dohuk-Erbil-Mosul-Sinjar road. When the crossing is open, it takes only 2 hours to get to Sinjar via Suhaila road, which passes through Rabia district located on the Syrian-Iraqi border.

The punishment of the Yazidis due to the presence of the PKK did not stop at the closure of Suhaila crossing. Since June 2017, Yazidis have complained to Human Rights Watch that they are deported or threatened with forced expulsion from the KRG if they or their relatives participate in groups that receive funding from the federal government, particularly if it involves membership in the YBS. For example, the Iraqi "Al-Alam Al-Jadid" newspaper indicated that 200 families had been expelled from Dohuk because of their children's affiliation with the Popular Mobilization Forces[56]. Human Rights Watch reported on the expulsion of Yazidi families from the Kurdistan region of Iraq because their relatives had joined the Popular Mobilization Forces, and argued that such action amounts to collective punishment, which is a violation of international law[57].

The Sinjar YBŞ Protection Units deny having any organizational relationship with the PKK. The public relations officer states that: "the PKK is a friend of the Yazidi people, and the YBŞ is now an official force affiliated with the Iraqi state that operates in coordination with the military and security forces in the region, participates in all cleansing campaigns to rid the region of ISIL cells, and undertakes the tasks of maintaining internal safety[58]." Since the YBS is comprised of Yazidis who are residents of the region, it is difficult to imagine expelling them entirely from their region of origin, especially given the ongoing insecurity and their widespread popular acceptance following their sacrifices in the fight

51 Khalil: We asked the Commander-in-Chief and the American embassy to remove the PPK troops from Sinjar, available at: https://aliraqnews.com/خليلطلبنا-من-القائد-العام-والسفارة-ال/

52 Al Araby, "Rise in Sinjar: Appointing loyal local officials, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed on May 6, 2019.

53 Correspondence between the researcher and Haval Teresh ankali, Public Relations Officer in the Sinjar YBŞ Resistance Units.

54 Interview with Ziryan Rojhilati, Director of the Rudaw Center for Studies, Erbil, 27.09.2020.

55 Iraq: KRG Restrictions Harm Yazidi Recovery: Disproportionate Limits on Goods Entering, Leaving Sinjar, December 4, 2016. https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/04/iraq-krg-restrictions-harm-Yazidi-recovery.

56 Al-Alam Al-Jadeed exclusively publishes the names of the Yazidi families deported from the Kurdistan region because of their affiliation with the Popular Mobilization Forces, available at the link: https://al-aalem.com/news/43329-43329-2.

57 Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Yazidi Fighters' Families Expelled. https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/09/kurdistan-region-iraq-Yazidi-fighters-families-expelled.

58 Correspondence between the researcher and Haval Teresh Shankali, Public Relations Officer in the Sinjar YBŞ Resistance Units.

against ISIL. As such, the YBS benefits from the gratitude the Yazidi minority carry to those who rescued them during what they described as "the most difficult circumstances the Yazidi community ever endured[59]."

Multiplicity of Security References and Armed Factions

Although the political conflict, explained above, has left its impact on Sinjar in different ways, its most prominent effect is the creation of multiple security forces and armed factions, each of which insists upon its own legitimacy. Armed factions include Yazidi forces operating under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces; Yazidi forces operating under the umbrella of the Peshmerga; and Yazidi forces that have their own direct links to the PKK. In addition, there are Shia forces operating under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces, as well as various Sunni tribal mobilization forces, as well as the various Iraqi security forces such as the army and federal police. To give an example of how this affects ordinary Sinjaris, when the author traveled from Sinjar Mountain to the Sharaf al-Din Shrine – a journey of several kilometers – the car was stopped at five separate checkpoints: the first belonged to the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ), the second to the Federal Police and associated government forces, the third a control point set up by the Popular Mobilization Forces, the fourth a control point established by the Yazidi Protection Forces (led by Yazidi Haydar Shasho) and finally, a checkpoint manned by members of the Yazidi faction of the Peshmerga forces (led by Yazidi Qasim Shasho) located at the entrance to the Shrine.

2. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE CONFLICT IN SINJAR

Turkey opposes the presence of PKK in Sinjar for security and economic reasons, fearing that its presence not only threatens Turkish national security but will also empower the PKK to increase its influence within the triangle of the Turkish-Syrian-Iraqi borderlands. More specifically, Turkey fears the establishment of a geographical path connecting the Qandil Mountains (the main fortress of the PKK) with Mount Sinjar and the Syrian Democratic Forces, (which Ankara considers an extension of the PKK). Such a path would thereby establish a corridor for the transportation of fighters, weapons, and logistical support against Turkish interests[60].

For some Yazidi observers, Turkey uses its policy of containment of the PKK as a pretext to gain a foothold in Iraqi territory, a view supported by Sinjar's position adjacent to the Kurdish Syrian territories known as "Rojava". Control of Sinjar is key to controlling the triangle of the Syrian-Iraqi-Turkish borders[61] and communications between Iraq and Syria. Parts of the Sinjar population also fears that the Turkish project to revive the Ottoman Empire is real and tangible, targeting Kirkuk and Mosul, but starting with Sinjar, as the gateway to accessing neighboring Tel Afar district, which has a Turkmen majority[62].

These fears of Turkish policy in the region may be exaggerated, but they generate real concerns amongst Sinjar residents nonetheless. Besides security, Turkey also has significant economic interests in the region, demonstrated by its recent efforts to open the new "Faysh Khabur crossing" with Iraq, which will pass through Tel Afar and Sinjar and onwards to Mosul, Baghdad, and southern Iraq, which would raise the volume of trade between Iraq and Turkey considerably and reduce Iraq's dependence on Iran. However, Tehran does not favor such a move as it does not want any competitor for its influence and trade in southern Iraq. This is even more relevant after the restoration of Iraq's relations with the Gulf States, Egypt, and Jordan, which form part of Washington's efforts to reduce Iranian influence in the country.

In any case, any national (between Erbil and Baghdad) or international agreement to remove the PKK from Sinjar or the Iraqi-Syrian border region, or to contain any local forces related to it, must coincide with stopping the Turkish intervention and blocking the road on any Turkish occupation of Iraqi territories. Any plan to remove the PKK must also need to consult with leaders, chiefs, and representatives of the Yazidi community and all its groups. The exclusion of the interested party (the Yazidi community) in this case is an indicated of top-to-bottom solutions, which will generate repulsive reactions in the community who already feels like a neglected figure in the equation. This explains the anger of various representatives of the Yazidi community at the Baghdad-Erbil agreement on Sinjar, which was announced on October 9, 2020 without consulting with large sectors of Sinjar society or with the Yazidi community generally.

59 Correspondence between the researcher and Haval Teresh Shankali, Public Relations Officer in the Sinjar YBŞ Resistance Units.

60 Saad Salloum, Turkey bombs Yazidi militia in Iraq affiliated with PKK, al-monitor, January 24, 2020. https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/01/iraq-sinjar-kurdistan-yazidis-turkey.html.

61 An interview with Faris Harbou, relations officer in the Autonomous Administration in Sinjar, Baghdad, 01.10.2020.

62 Zoom interview with Saman Daoud, journalist and blogger on Lalish Post page, 01.10.2020.

Iranian interests are also at stake in Sinjar. Iran seeks to extend its influence in the borderlands between Iraq and Syria through its proxies or allies, since Sinjar is a key component of the land corridor arguably connecting Tehran and the Mediterranean Sea. The American garrison located in al-Tanf in eastern Syria on the main highway from Baghdad to Damascus is blocking one path, while the US forces and their local partners in northern Syria are blocking the path further north[63].

Together, these factors turn Sinjar into an "internationalized" region, with regional and international conflict dimensions. The return of IDPs must be supported by efforts to find a political settlement that would turn the Sinjar region from a corridor that feeds regional and international conflict into an economic competition zone that guarantees the interests of everyone, including Turkey and Iran. The international community must push towards this direction by finding a political solution at the negotiation table that takes into account the omitted party from the equation (i.e. the Yazidi population).

63 David Adesnik and Behnam Ben Taleblu, Burning Bridge: The Iranian Land Corridor to the Mediterranean, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Washington, DC, 2019. P.7 https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2019/06/18/burning-bridge/.

Displaced Yazidis face three general options to resolve their displacement: migrate outside the country, remain permanently in their host communities (within the Kurdistan region), or return to Sinjar. The choice each individual or family makes is influences by a number of factors, including material conditions in Sinjar, the political situation in Sinjar, and the changing identity of Yazidis themselves (among others.) This section analyses each of these options, based on recent interviews conducted with members of the Yazidi community.

1. OPTION 1: EMMIGRATION

"If mass immigration were an available or easy option, most Yazidis would choose to leave the country." That was a Yazidi activist's opening statement, said with certainty, since there is a "lack of alternative options that would ensure the stability of the Yazidi community." Throughout this study, most discussions with representatives of the Yazidi community were dominated by despair and almost absolute loss of confidence and trust in the future. Direct violence towards Yazidis is not the driving logic behind their decision to migrate; rather, interviewees spoke of structural issues such as social discrimination, the rise of militant Islamic currents, political conflict within the disputed territories including Sinjar, loss of confidence in other communities and in the future, weak political representation of Yazidis at the national level and the Kurdistan region, the prevalence of religious hate speech, and the lack of freedom of opinion[64].

What we are witnessing today is not an optional migration, but rather a collective emigration, the like of which the country has never witnessed before. The extent of Yazidi (and Christian) emigration might be the end of diversity in the region[65]. Many Yazidis in the areas of Sheikhan, Dohuk, Sharia, Khank, and Zakho have put their properties up for sale, intending to emigrate, due to fear of the religious extremism rising around them, which they perceive as no different from the environment that harbored ISIL[66]. Therefore, any solutions put in place to curb emigration must take into account these structural factors that compel Yazidis to leave their country. The solution must provide an attractive environment for the survival of the Yazidis and offer alternative options to mass migration.

2. INTEGRATION WITHIN THE HOST COMMUNITY

Many Yazidis who cannot or prefer not to emigrate consider the prospect of local integration favourably, because they believe that Sinjar is unsafe, unstable, ruled by multiple and unreliable security forces, and fear future conflict.

Administrative Duplication and Issues of Security and Justice

Infrastructure and housing in Sinjar remain devasted in large part, and many areas face an absence of infrastructure to provide the minimum basic requirements, such as health and education. Many locations remain contaminated by explosives, mines, and other remnants of combat operations. Some homes of IDPs are booby-trapped, requiring a major campaign to remove the explosives, and Yazidis bitterly

64 See the words and comments during Yazda Conference on the Sixth Anniversary of the Yazidi Genocide, 2-3 August 2020, at the following link: https://1d794d56-3144-4c41-9ea6-5ff51b5f9f3b.usrfiles.com/ugd/1d794d_85ded64ab41e4df68dc857da3996a595.pdf.

65 Saad Salloum, End of Diversity in Iraq, History under the Sword: Tracking Cultural Heritage Destruction, Human Migration, and the Dynamic Nature of Conflict in Iraq, Exploratory Seminar at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, USA,Thursday and Friday, July 9-10, 2015.

66 Meeting with representatives of the Yazidi youth, Dohuk, 29.09.2020, and a lengthy interview with the activist (Jalal Lazkini) from Sharia district in Dohuk, 30.09.2020, and a Zoom interview with Yazidi activist Hussam Salem, 15.09.2020.

circulate story pertaining to injuries or deaths associated with remnants of war as evidence that return is not an option now.

Throughout interviews for this study, the primary complaint by Yezidi IDPs was the multiplicity of security forces in the region. They fear that if a similar attack happens again in future, it won't be clear who should address it. Moreover, IDPs report that security breaches and military skirmishes take place between the conflicting parties in Sinjar from time to time. On top of this, the Sinjar YBŞ protection units are periodically exposed to Turkish bombardment under the pretext of being the local wing of the PKK, which also threatens the civilian population.

Security in northern Sinjar (Sinuni) is markedly better compared to the situation in southern Sinjar (Al-Qahtaniyah sub-district). The town of Sinuni was retaken from ISIL in 2015, and experienced less damage compared to the areas south of Sinjar mountain. Returns have taken place to Sinuni since 2015, and it has become a hub for humanitarian and development actors. However, the liberation of southern Sinjar, and Qahtaniyah sub-district in particular, only took place at the end of 2017. Still, areas in the south of Sinjar remain almost completely destroyed and face greater challenges regarding the return of IDPs, due in part to fears that individuals and tribes who participated in the genocide live in areas south of the mountain.[67].

Another tension affecting return to southern Sinjar is that while the displaced Yazidi population remains hesitant to return, a portion of the Muslim Arab community have returned already. This creates anxiety amongst the Yezidi population, who fear that neighboring Arab communities may deprive them of their lands and properties and build a geographical line that puts Yazidis in North Sinjar while placing the Arabs in the south[68].

Yazidi IDPs also fear that perpetrators, associates, or collaborators of the genocide are now living in southern Sinjar, and no action has been taken against them. The Yazidi Organization for Documentation, for instance, published a statement on the sixth anniversary of the genocide complaining about presence of perpetrators in Sinjar without any accountability or even acknowledgement of their role in the atrocities[69]. In this context of fear and anger, achieving justice will encourage the return of the displaced as well as sustainable peace in communities that are home to both Yazidis and Arabs.

Underpinning all the above issues is the issue of dual administration in Sinjar. Ultimately, resolving the above issues and thereby supporting the return of Yezidi IDPs remains dependent upon solving the administrative duplication and the presence of two district administrators: one representing the Kurdistan government, and another representing the Baghdad government. This issue drives all fears, outlined above, that the Sinjar region remains the center of unresolved political conflict. Therefore, it is imperative to work on a political agreement that facilitates the return of the displaced and resolves the issue of administrative duplication. Equally, it is vital that the implementation of the Sinjar Agreement resolves the administrative duplication that current exists.

Changing Identity while Displaced

For some Yazidis, conditions in the host community has enabled their social and economic reality to improve, a variable rarely mentioned in public discussions or in the media due to expectations that Yazidis maintain the identity of victim. Moreover, Yazidis fear that by revealing this reality they may expose themselves or their community to criticism for relying too much on the generosity of the host community.

During interviews with displaced Yazidis, the following views highlighted the way that identity has been shaped by the experiences of displacement:

1. A displaced person from Sinjar who works as an employee in the Yazidi Abducted Rescue Office in Dohuk Governorate pointed out that some young people from Sinjar have improved their situation while displaced within the KRG. Many have completed their studies in Dohuk, and some were able to obtain jobs that provide a stable income and can now work in urban centers rather than the more limited options available in Sinjar[70]. Another Yazidi IDP who completed his studies at the University of Dohuk reported that displacement provided unprecedented opportunities for some youth, such as completing their studies outside the country. Jamil, who is completing his postgraduate studies in political science at the University of Barcelona, established a WhatsApp group for communication between Yazidi students studying abroad (in Canada and various European countries) and the group now has 50 Yazidi members, all of whom were displaced from Sinjar[71].

67 Interview with Khairy Ali Ibrahim, representative of the Yazidi Organization for Documentation in Sinjar, 28.09.2020.

68 Interview with Talal Huskani, activist from Sinjar, Dohuk, 06.08.2019 and 29.09.2020.

69 Interview with Hussam Abdullah, director of the Yazidi Organization for Documentation, Erbil, 28.07.2019 and 24.09.2020.

70 An interview with Maysar Al-Adani, the Kidnapped Yazidis Rescue Office, Dohuk, 07.08.2019 and 29.09.2020.

71 Zoom interview with researcher Jamil Barakat, residing in Spain, 29.09.2020.

2. A Yazidi immigrant, who just returned to the country from Germany to visit his family, points out that the option to emigrate has become more easily available, and those who find work after resettlement can remit money to their families, many of whom remain displaced in camps. This helps provide stability not only to the immigrant, but also to their family who may remain reluctant to return to Sinjar[72].
3. Some Yazidis have developed additional skills and capabilities while displaced, as they have been involved in new experiences in the labor market, or have gained work with international or local civil society organizations that address the conditions of the displaced Yazidis (opportunities which were not present in Sinjar previously.)
4. Gender roles have also changed markedly. Most of the Yazidi women interviewed for this study indicated that they have more independence and freedom in the area of displacement compared to Sinjar. The new environment enables more flexible options in terms of work, space for mixing with men, and control over decision-making. Women compete with men in the labor market in certain sectors, such as government jobs as well as local and international organizations, which has expanded women's options in terms of livelihoods – a situation that is often compelled by necessity, since many family lost their male breadwinner in the genocide. One Yazidi woman noted that in Sinjar, "We only knew the field, the needs of our houses, and what men wanted." Another indicated, "I can now wear jeans and put on makeup, which is something I did not know at all in Sinjar." Some Yazidi women also note that they overcome the fear and hesitation they used to feel when in an environment characterized by a different religion or community[73]. Displacement has also increased understanding on issues such as children's and women's rights, according to female IDPs interviewed for this study.

It is worth noting that it is not only the identity of the IDPs which changes as the result of the displacement crisis. As is the case with many war economies, in Sinjar a new class of stakeholders emerged, linked to the conflict and vast displacement, both of which provide opportunities for economic profit. The political economy of displacement can offer rapid profit opportunities to elites, by way of rents, cheap labor, and greater demand for goods and services (due to the large population of IDPs). As a result, a new class of stakeholders has emerged, whose financial security depends upon the continuation of this 'displacement economy'.

3. IDENTITY, GEOGRAPHY, AND THE CHOICE TO RETURN TO SINJAR: A GENERATIONAL CONTROVERSY

The option of return to Sinjar raises a heated debate within the Yazidi community. This debate reveals an inter-generational debate about the future of the minority and its historical lands. For some, particularly the older generation, emigration away from Sinjar is anathema: they fear that it will lead to the loss of the distinct Yazidi ethnic and cultural identity as diaspora members assimilate into their host country. If too many Yazidis emigrate, they fear that Sinjar will lose its symbolic appeal as the spiritual heart of the Yazidis. Some make the same criticism of integration in host communities in Iraq also, and argue that living amongst a Muslim majority community may lead to gradual dissolution of the closed and unique Yazidi identity. The older generation fear reports or rumours that suggest youth displaced from Sinjar now disobey tenants of the Yazidi religion, or that Yazidi women engage in relationships with non-Yazidi men, as well as the circulation of stories about the sexual exploitation of Yazidi women[74]. As a result, the older generation typically pushes for return to Sinjar as the ideal durable solution.

In contrast to the views the older generation, the younger generation is typically skeptical about the importance of Sinjar as the minority's historical home. The symbolism of Sinjar is no longer as important for the new generation, who look instead for opportunities to improve their lives. They also have the desire to reform the traditional structure of their society, which they believe is no longer compatible with the challenges of globalization[75]. Therefore, the younger generation calls for radical reforms to Yazidi society. They highlight the need to reform the religious establishment and hierarchy and open the door to marriage between castes within the Yazidi religion. Opposing them is the older generation of conservatives, who believe that the reforms would encourage foreign marriage and eliminate the pure character of the Yazidi religion and cause it to merge into a wider Kurdish Muslim identity or a western Christian one.

Yet despite the opposition they face, the younger generation retains hope, and many youth believe that reform is inevitable with the passage of time, especially the reform of the caste system. For example, "Badal Faqeer Hajji", who is a Yazidi immigrant in Germany, has called for the addition of a new caste to the existing six social castes that form part of the Yazidi religion. He proposed the new caste to

72 An interview with Farouk Sheikh Elias, Ba'adra, 07.08.2019.

73 An interview with Hadiya Hussein, a member of the Supreme Authority of Lalish Cultural Center, Dohuk, 07.08.2019.

74 Saad Salloum, Forgotten Voices, Minority Women in Iraq, Masarat Foundation, Baghdad, 2017, pp. 91-94.

75 Discussions on different dates with activists and representatives of the minority from Sinjar, Shekhan and Ba'shiqa, 2019–2020.

overcome the problem that inter-caste marriages create amongst the Yazidi diaspora. According to his proposal, the seventh caste would symbolize the "seventh Yazidi marital group that was created and founded by a group of young people in the diaspora. It is a caste that does not derive its Yazidi identity from any guardianship or mandate from any religious or traditional authority in its original society. It represents a social force to push for partial natural reforms to a number of the six other vulnerable marital groups that will not have the ability to resist the forces of change without reform, change, and renewal[76]." It is undoubtable that such a reform is a complex, or almost impossible step in the eyes of those close to the traditional institutions of the Yazidi community, because it requires a revolution on the theological and social level[77]. The acceptance of marriage between different casts between diaspora members is a key reason why the older generation decries the cultural annihilation of the Yazidi identity, which they believe constitutes as serious a risk as the physical destruction caused during the genocide committed by ISIL.

This divergence in views creates confusion and tension between generations, who see return to Sinjar in vastly different terms: the older generation see it as a fundamental part of the fight for Yazidi existence, whereas the youth describe return to Sinjar not in terms of collective identity but as a matter of individual choice. The youth demand the freedom to define a more flexible identity, while the older generation uphold a static identity linked to a specific geographic location.

The generational conflict indicates that for many Yazidis, and particularly the older generation, identity is closely related to geography, whether we talk about Sheikhan where the Sacred Lalish temple is located, or in Sinjar, where the mountain holds symbolic significance. The older generation often consider displacement and emigration a threat to Yazidi identity because it disrupts the connection with this land. As one Yazidi activist noted, removing Yazidis from their land is akin to a "genocide whose effect is slowly evident". Those who share this view also believe that the political struggle over Sinjar is an act complementary to the genocide. They suggest that the survival of the Yazidi community is contingent upon their remaining within their own lands, and not anywhere else, as there is no other Lalish, nor a second Mount Sinjar anywhere in the world.

76 Badil Faqir Hajji, Yazidis and Islah: Reforming the System and Laws of Castes and Marital Groups of Yazidis, 2012, p.5.

77 Interview with Eido Baba Sheikh, Yazidi writer and researcher, Erbil, 25.09.2020.

There are several scenarios available regarding the administration of the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar. This section outlines the most prominent options, and analyses how they relate to the Iraqi constitution of 2005, the visions of the respective federal and Kurdish governments, and the views of the Yazidis community. In doing so, this section hopes to support next steps of the Sinjar Agreement as authorities grapple with suitable arrangements to govern the district administratively.

SCENARIO 1: AN INDEPENDENT SUB-ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT

An option contemplated by the Iraqi constitution of 2005 is to grant Yazidis in Sinjar a form of administrative independence within the framework of the federal state, and under the umbrella of Nineveh Governorate. The Constitution states that "the federal system in the Republic of Iraq consists of a decentralized capital, regions, governorates, and local administrations,[78]" and included provisions relating to the regions, governorates, and capital[79]. Under the heading "Local Administration," the 2005 Constitution states that "this Constitution guarantees the administrative, political, cultural, and educational rights of the various ethnicities, such as Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and all other components, and shall regulate said rights by law[80]." The implementation of this important article requires the state to determine the extent of the powers and authorities of the sub-national units granted to Christians and Yazidis and the degree of their autonomy. The Constitution envisages a degree of autonomy within the federal system as an alternative to dividing or partitioning Iraq on ethno-sectarian basis, and intends to establish self-government at the level of the (sub-governorate) and (sub-region)[81]. This approach is in line with the federal government's endeavor in Baghdad to preserve the foundations of the federal system and preserve the country's unity. The approach, if applied to Sinjar, is also consistent with the federal government's vision to provide autonomy to minorities in accordance with Article 125 of the Constitution.

The idea of administrative independence recognizes the need to grant Yazidis the right to independently manage their political, economic, and educational affairs. Yet it requires certain safeguards. Power and decision-making authority should be transferred to local administrations located in districts and sub-districts within Sinjar, and kept away from the partisan influences of political actors. It is also crucial to involve the region's residents in discussions about the best course of implementation. For example, the appointment of a district administrator (kaymakam) representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party (Mahma Khalil) and another representing the federal government (Fahd Hamed) hindered the implementation of this approach and failed to support the rational management of Sinjar or create an appropriate environment for the return of the displaced Yazidis from the Kurdistan region. This scenario is typically the one that appeals to the majority of the Yazidi community, and, despite its inherent challenges, is the most feasible option to implement. However, establishing an independent administration in Sinjar would require extremely complex compromises between the competing political actors (namely, the GoI and KRG).

78 Article 116 of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

79 Articles 117 to 124 of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

80 Article 125 of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

81 Saad Salloum, Creative Diversity – A Roadmap to Promote Pluralism in Iraq, (Baghdad, Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue Publications, 2013), p. 43.

SCENARIO 2: A NEW GOVERNORATE WITHIN THE FEDERAL STATE

Governorate Law No. 21 of 2008 authorized the creation of districts and sub-districts but did not address the creation of new governorates[82]. The only available way to create a governorate is for the Council of Ministers to prepare a draft law proposing the creation of a new governorate. The draft law would then be submitted to Parliament for discussion and approval. This is what happened in 2014, when the Council of Ministers attempted to convert some districts into a governorate (including the districts of Tuz, Fallujah, and the Nineveh Plains). Subsequently, a committee headed by the Minister of State for Governorates Affairs was assigned to regulate the process, indicating that the government at the time was actively trying to adopt the proposal to create new governorates[83].

The main challenge to this project is that submitting a draft law to make Sinjar an independent governorate will face strong opposition from the major Sunni Arab blocs in Nineveh Governorate, along with their allies in Parliament. These blocs will consider this proposal an attempt to divide Nineveh governorate, or fragment areas under the influence of Sunni political forces. As such, they will mobilize support in Parliament to block such a motion. Therefore, if this scenario is to be considered, it is important to first initiate dialogue between the Sunni Arab political forces in Nineveh governorate and the federal government in Baghdad, as well as between the representatives of the Yazidis and these Sunni Arab political forces. Such discussions would help formulate a realistic approach, especially given the demographic diversity of Sinjar.

The appeal of this scenario is that as an independent governorate, Sinjar would receive a direct budget allocation from the federal government, which would provide the necessary financial resources to rebuild infrastructure and restore services, as well as reform the security sector, which would likely involve the formation of Yazidi units under the Iraqi army or police, and affiliated with the Federal Ministry of Interior. The establishment of an independent governorate would also likely encourage investors both inside and outside Iraq to invest in Sinjar, which would stimulate the local economy and provide new job opportunities. This, in turn, would incentivize the return of IDPs and migrants. Moreover, and most importantly, it has the potential to transform ethnic conflict into a shared goal of developing the governorate. Thus, this scenario may also support sustainable peace in Sinjar.

SCENARIO 3: A DISPUTED AREA

A third scenario expresses the ambition of the KRG to administer Sinjar as part of the territory it governs (in other words, as part of the KRI). The KRG appears willing to grant Sinjar independent administrative status, provided that remains under the overall governance framework of the KRG and formally part of the KRI. This scenario reflects the Sinjar's status as one of Iraq's so-called "disputed territories[84]." Yet Sinjar's inclusion as part of the disputed territories is itself disputed. Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution establishes a process to resolve conflict over the ownership of the disputed territories, and in 2003, the Federal Court defined the disputed territories as those areas that were administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government as at 19 March 2003, in the governorates of Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Nineveh, and in accordance with the State Administration Law of the Transitional Period[85]. According to this decision, Sinjar is not part of the disputed areas, since it was not administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government during the period identified by the Federal Court. However, the Federal Court met shortly thereafter to answer new inquiries regarding its decision, and decided to delete the date of March 2003,[86] thus introducing ample room for the inclusion of Sinjar within the disputed territories.

There is a risk that implementing this scenario of Kurdish administration over Sinjar will exacerbate divisions and clashes between Arabs and Kurds, and between the governments of Baghdad and Erbil. Regional competition between Turkey and Iran is likely to complicate this scenario further.

82 Law on Governorates not Organized into Regions. No. 12 of 2008, Al-Waqa'yat Al-Iraqiya, Vol. 4070, 31.03.2008.

83 Republic of Iraq, General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, available at the following link: http://cabinet.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?id=4226&lang=A.

84 Disputed Areas: a term that the Kurdistan Regional Government gave to a group of specific districts and sub-districts that the Kurdistan government is attempting to annex. They mainly include Kirkuk governorate, which the Kurdistan government has historically considered a Kurdish city, as well as areas of Nineveh governorate that include Sinjar, which is predominantly Yazidi, and the Nineveh Plain, which includes Christians, Shabaks, Turkmen, Kaka'is, and other minorities, and finally Zammar sub-district in the Tal Afar district, which has a Turkmen majority. As is evident, they are areas with a concentration of minorities.

85 Federal Supreme Court, Decision 113 / Federal / 29.10.2017.

86 Federal Supreme Court, Issue 113 / Federal / 21.11.2017.

SCENARIO 4: A GOVERNORATE WITHIN THE NINEVEH REGION

A fourth scenario was proposed by Sunni Arab political actors within the Nineveh Governorate Council and in the Federal Parliament in 2017. This scenario stresses the importance of keeping the minority areas within the boundaries of the Nineveh Governorate Administrative Council, but introduces a new political configuration by transforming Nineveh from a governorate into a region. This suggestion came in response to minority demands for independence, which Sunni Arab political actors staunchly oppose on the grounds that it would disrupt the unity of Nineveh governorate. The idea of Nineveh becoming independent stokes a fear held by Sunni Arabs in Nineveh governorate regarding an alliance between Kurds, Shias, and minorities, which they worry would undermine the position of Sunni Arabs in the governorate. Therefore, to counter the request for independence with an arrangement that is acceptable to (some) Sunni Arabs, Sunni Arab political actors proposed to transform the governorate of Nineveh into a region that consists of three separate governorates: Western Nineveh (comprising Tal Afar district), Eastern Nineveh (comprising the three districts of the Nineveh Plains), and southern Nineveh (comprising the city of Mosul and the rest of Nineveh governorate, including Sinjar district.)

The Nineveh Governorate Council prepared a formal submission to the Federal Parliament concerning this proposal and lodged it in January 2014[87]. The most prominent advocate of the proposal to transform Nineveh from a governorate into a region was former governor of Nineveh, Ethel Al-Nujaifi. In the words of Al-Nujaifi: "The proposal to create a region would result in three governorates, and every governorate would have decentralized authority, so that it can deal with the problems that arise (after ISIL). Each of the existing security forces affiliated with the various ethno-sectarian components in the governorate will continue to protect its own region, with joint training for all of them. This will create a link between these forces so that they do not get into internal conflicts but cooperate with each other to combat terrorism and provide security[88]." Al-Nujaifi stressed that he seeks to form a national guard for the Nineveh region that includes all components of Nineveh, which would receive training and support from the international coalition. He also stated that following the formation of the Nineveh region, the authorities could issue appropriate internal legislation to regulate these security forces and ensure adequate representation of all ethno-sectarian components[89].

The difficulty in realizing this scenario is that it requires consensus between representatives of the Sunni Arab community and representatives of minority communities. From a legal standpoint, the transformation of a governorate into a region is fraught with difficulties that render it near impossible to achieve. The Law of Executive Procedures Concerning the Formation of Regions No. (13) of 2008[90] stipulates that a region consists of one or more governorates,[91] while the Iraqi constitution clarified the mechanism for forming regions by stipulating the right of each governorate or more to form a region based on a request for a referendum[92]. In order to hold a referendum, at least one-third of the members of each of the governmental councils that intend to form a region must submit a request to the federal Parliament. Alternatively, an application for a referendum can be made if 1 out of 10 of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region submit an application to federal Parliament. A third option is that an application is submitted to federal Parliament by one-third of the members of the governmental council with the approval of one-third of the members of the legislative council of the regions[93]. Although a theoretical legal pathway may exist to pursue this option, in reality it will only be successful if it has sufficient buy-in at the political level, including with substantial political support from Baghdad. This scenario appears highly unlikely, since the idea of forming an independent region in Nineveh is typically rejected by political leaders outside Nineveh lest it be used to justify other requests for independent governorates, particularly amongst those who fear that new governorates may be annexed to the KRI.

87 Roland Bigamov, What comes after the decision to create new Iraqi governorates?, Voice of Russia Today (International News and Radio Agency-Sputnik) on January 31, 2014, available at the following link: https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arabic.ruvr.ru/2014_01_31/128119497/.

88 Al-Nujaifi: Nineveh region will create 8 decentralized governorates. Al-Khulasah website, 04.08.2016, available at: https://www.alkulasa.net/artical/2979/التجيفي-اقليم-نينوى-سينشأ8--محافظات-لام/

89 Saad Salloum, Barriers to Return of Ethnoreligious Minorities in Iraq, International Organization for Migration, 2020, p.26.

90 Law No. (13) of 2008 Executive Procedures Concerning the Formation of Regions, Al-Waqa'i Al-Iraqiya No. 4060, 02.11.2008.

91 The first article of the law.

92 Article 119 of the permanent Iraqi constitution of 2005.

93 The second article of the law.

SCENARIO 5: A GOVERNORATE WITHIN AL-RAFIDEIN REGION FOR MINORITIES

The fifth scenario reflects the idea of establishing a safe zone for minorities with international sponsorship. It goes a step further, by calling for the establishment of a sub-administrative unit in accordance with Article 125 of the constitution, or the creation of an independent governorates for minorities in the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar, while simultaneously working towards establishing a region for minorities. In this context, representatives of the Christians, Turkmen, and Yazidis in Baghdad established on Sunday, March 5, 2017, a tripartite alliance which they named the National Coalition for the Al-Rafidein Region in Iraq[94]. The alliance unites Christians, Turkmen, and Yazidi minorities in a project that proposes self-administration of a joint region, which would fall under the broader governance of the federal government. It would include three contiguous areas: the Nineveh Plains, Tal Afar, and Sinjar[95]. The Al-Rafidein Region for minorities was announced in a statement released by three institutions: Al-Rafidain Organization, which represents Assyrians, the Independent Supreme Yazidi Council, which represents Yazidis, and the Turkmen Rescue Foundation, which represents Turkmen.

The geography of the proposed Al-Rafidein Region extends over the disputed territories of Nineveh, which are home to various minorities. The Nineveh Plain hosts Christians, Shabak, and other minorities; Tal Afar hosts a Turkmen majority; and Sinjar is the largest stronghold of the Yazidis. The founders of the project advocate that " establishing a region for minorities in Nineveh governorate comprised of three governorates, namely Tal Afar, Sinjar, and the Nineveh Plain, is the best way to strengthen the ethno-sectarian components of this region by motivating them to ally with each other on security, political, social, and economic levels[96]." Two of the project's founders occupy prominent positions within the components: Ali Al-Bayati (head of the Turkmen Rescue Foundation) who became a member of the Human Rights Commission in the federal government in 2017, and Nayef bin Daoud (head of the independent Supreme Yazidi Council) who announced himself the Prince of Sinjar in 2019. The founders of the al-Rafidein Region proposal have announced that they seek international support for the project[97].

The weakness of this approach is that it has not yet succeeded in creating a formal governorate (or multiple governorates) to make up the proposed region. Moreover, the proposal is based primarily on the views of the elite, lacks inclusivity, and is isolated from broader minority viewpoints (there was no internal discussion between the Yazidis, Turkmen, or Christians to formulate the project, for instance, and the proposal also excludes other minorities, such as Shabaks and Kaka'is who also reside in the targeted areas).

94 Official project website: https://alrafideincoalition.wordpress.com/.

95 The statement is available in English on the official website of the project at the following link: https://alrafideincoalition.wordpress.com/2017/03/07/national-coalition-for-al-rafidein-region/.

96 Ali Akram Al-Bayati, President of the Turkmen Rescue Foundation, a personal interview conducted by the researcher, Baghdad, 13.06.2019, Daoud William Lazar, head of the Rafidain Organization, a phone call made by the researcher on the same date.

97 Prince "Nayef Daoud", head of the independent Supreme Yazidi Council, a phone call made by the researcher on 06.12.2019.

SCENARIO 6: A SAFE ZONE WITH INTERNATIONAL SPONSORSHIP

Scenario six is the proposal to recognize Sinjar as an "internationalized" Yazidi region with international sponsorship, a proposal that achieved widespread awareness after the 2014 genocide. It is an expression of frustration towards the failure and weakness of the GoI and KRG to protect minorities during the period of extreme ISIL violence. The international recognition of the Yazidi genocide reinforced the Yazidi elites' quest to find an international party to support the protection of their region, especially in light of the lack of sufficient internal political will to implement alternate arrangements (such as those outlined in the above scenarios), and the lack of alternative solutions proposed by the GoI or KRG that satisfy the Yazidis. Therefore, the Yazidi community announced their desire to obtain international guarantees that they could establish what they refer to as a safe zone, with international sponsorship. According to its proponents, this would remove Sinjar from the cycle of Arab-Kurdish or Baghdad-Erbil conflict, and guarantee the safe and speedy return of IDPs.

Although no agreement has been reached to date regarding the nature of this scenario, the idea of international protection and a safe zone is typically linked to one of the following scenarios:

- A Yazidi governorate is established in Sinjar by national or international decision, or by de facto arrangement;
- An autonomous region below the level of the governorate whose security is internationally guaranteed by way of international forces providing air cover, similar to the safe zone that was established in Kurdistan in 1991, and in accordance with Security Council Resolution 660 of 1991;
- A region with a special status, administrated under the supervision of the international community in a way that guarantees non-interference in its internal affairs and guarantees its independence

This scenario faces a number of significant implementation challenges. The representatives of the Christians and Yazidis often talk about the need to establish a safe zone, but do not provide a constitutional reference or the proposed method of self- or joint- administration of the proposed region. They also typically exclude other minorities who also reside in the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar.

The recognition by the US Congress in March 2016 of the genocide of Christians and minorities in Iraq encouraged advocates of the international scenario and gave them (seemingly unrealistic) hope of unconditional US support[98]. In September 2016, the advocates of the safe zone scenario then received historic recognition by the US House of Representatives via Resolution No. 152, which supported the idea of establishing a Christian governorate in the Nineveh Plains[99] and emphasized that "the Iraqi communities of the indigenous people from the Nineveh Plains, including the Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac Christians, Yazidis, and others, have the right to security and self-determination within the federal structure of the Republic of Iraq[100]."

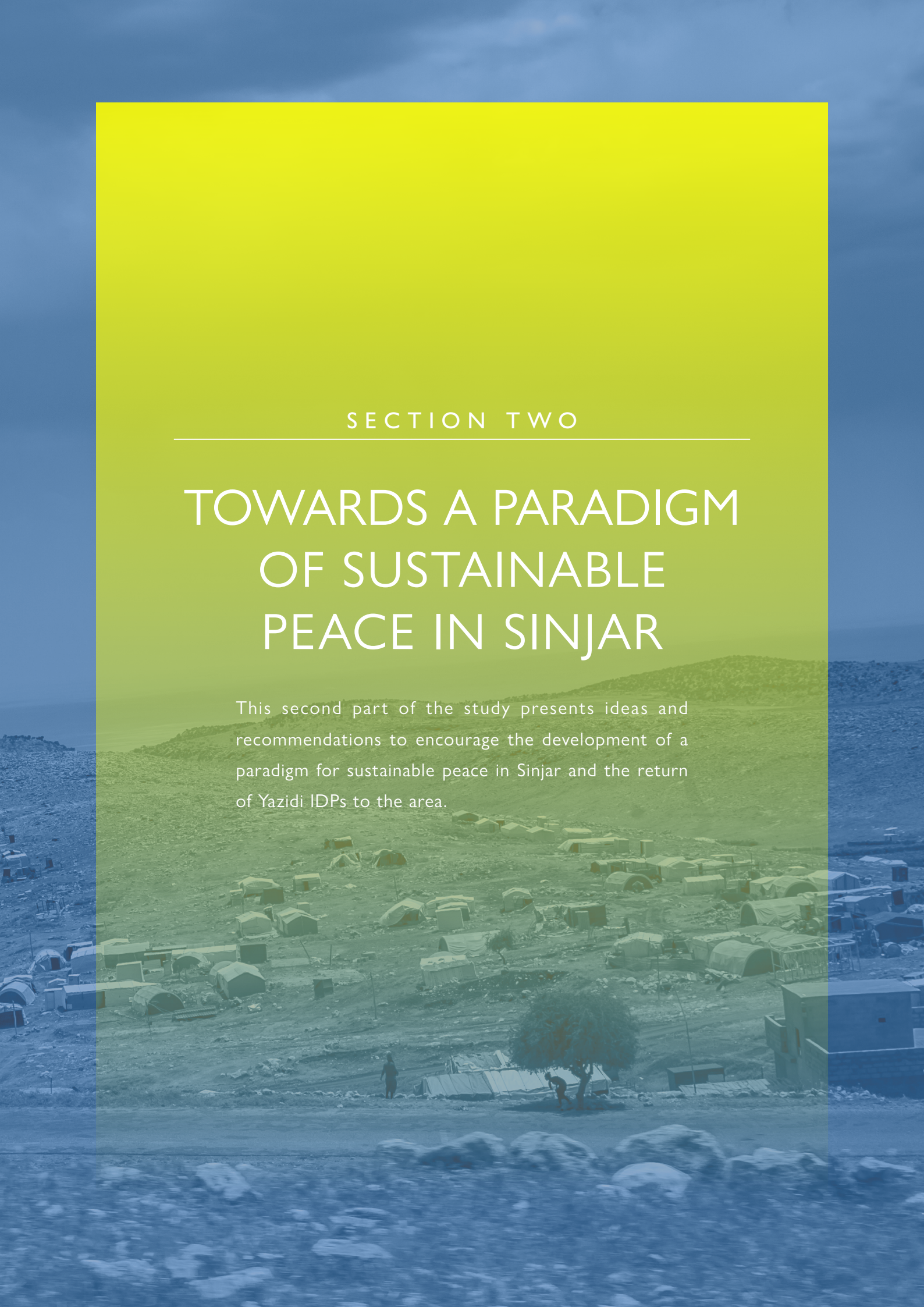
The emphasis within this Resolution was the Nineveh Plains, with prominent reference to the Christian minority (and much less recognition of the Yazidis, whose presence is marginal in the Nineveh Plains compared to Sinjar.) The Resolution also excluded Shabaks, which created a dangerous and deceptive impression that Iraqi Christians are politically aligned with and protected by the United States, a perception that fuels stereotypes which might provoke anger against Assyrians or Christians by other minorities.

Despite the optimism of the advocates of this scenario in 2016, since then the proposal has not progressed, and there is no clear vision of how the US Resolution No. 152 will be implemented, or how the executive institutions in Iraq will be involved in its implementation. Moreover, for this scenario to be successful, it requires unifying the vision of the Yazidis, and establishing an agreement between Baghdad and Erbil regarding the fate of the region, both of which appear difficult amid the ongoing political conflict over the disputed territories as well as the Yazidi dispersion due to displacement.

98 Expressing the sense of Congress that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria include war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. H. CON. RES. 75, March 15, 2016. Available on the link: https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hconres75/BILLS-114hconres75rfs.pdf.

99 Expressing the sense of Congress that the United States and the international community should support the Republic of Iraq and its people to recognize a province in the Nineveh Plain region, consistent with lawful expressions of self-determination by its indigenous peoples, H.CON. RES.152. SEPTEMBER 9, 2016. Available on the link: https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hconres152/BILLS-114hconres152ih.pdf.

100 Ibid.



SECTION TWO

TOWARDS A PARADIGM OF SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SINJAR

This second part of the study presents ideas and recommendations to encourage the development of a paradigm for sustainable peace in Sinjar and the return of Yazidi IDPs to the area.

Formal recognition of the genocide is the founding justice claim made by Yazidis towards the Iraqi government and the international community. In addition to holding the perpetrators accountable, the victims of the genocide must be compensated in a way that rebuilds the trust of the Yazidis in the Iraqi government.

If these proposals are considered an appropriate mechanism for rebuilding trust vertically with the authorities, rebuilding it horizontally with the rest of the community components is a necessary entry point for any community reconciliation process that seeks to establish a sustainable peace.

1. RECOGNITION AND COMMEMORATION

Memorialization or commemoration is an important tool to honor victims of human rights violations. It may help authorities address the deep anger felt by victims, since it involves recognizing and demonstrating respect for the past, creating an official record of history, and indicating the intention to prevent recurrence of violations. In this way, memorialization not only addresses the past but also offers a lesson for future generations.

In this context, the official recognition of the Yazidi genocide is a critical policy for the Iraqi government to adopt as a form of justice. It is vital that such commemoration is free from competing political or victimhood narratives that may undermine its reconciliatory potential. For instance, while 'genocide' is a specific term and the extent of violations against the Yazdis should not be under-stated, it is also true that Christians, Turkmen, and Shabaks in the Nineveh Plains and other regions, as well as Shias (for example in the Speicher massacre) and Sunnis in Mosul, Salah al-Din, and Anbar were also subjected to terrible violations by ISIL. As such, the memory of the genocide should be addressed in a way that acknowledges multiple narratives while not equating them. These narratives should also be reproduced in public or educational spaces, as a catalyst for a broad and lasting societal discussion on the painful lessons of the past. In this light, it may be beneficial to establish a museum of ISIL crimes against all minorities, with particular regard to the Yazidi genocide in Sinjar, the capital of the genocide, with specific recognition of the village of Koju, where the first heinous massacre was committed on 3 August 2014.[101].

2. ESTABLISHING JUSTICE: COMPENSATION AND HOLDING THE PERPETRATORS ACCOUNTABLE

A second vital component for victims is compensation. In March 2019, Iraqi President Barham Salih submitted the "Yazidi Female Survivors Law" to Parliament for review.[102] The draft law introduces significant reparation measures for Yazidi women captured by ISIL, including compensation, rehabilitation, medical treatment, and economic opportunities. The draft law also recognizes the crimes against the Yazidis as genocide and stipulates that perpetrators of "abduction and captivity" not be included in any "general or special amnesty." The development of the draft law in consultation with the victims themselves established a first step in obtaining justice for ISIL violations and crimes against the Yazidis and other minorities. There is a pressing need to design a comprehensive compensation program to accompany the draft law, which is capable of addressing the justice demands of Yazidi survivors and the Yazidi community in Sinjar more widely, many of whom lost family members to ISIL crimes. Such a program would benefit from an initiative entitled "Consultations on Reparations: Enhancing Victims' Participation to Develop a Comprehensive Compensation Policy[103]",

101 A proposal presented by the researcher at an expert meeting organized by the NGO Directorate of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in cooperation with the UNESCO Office in Iraq in Baghdad on February 18, 2019, in which he participated with many experts, most notably: Karim Khan, head of the international investigation team for ISIL crimes UNITAD, Elizabeth Silks, Executive Director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, Elizabeth Schaeffer Brown, Co-Executive Director of the Nadia Initiative, Giovanni Fontana Antonelli, Senior Adviser at UNESCO Iraq Office, and representatives of the Yazidi community and the Iraqi government. The researcher also discussed this proposal with representatives of the Yazidi community at different periods 2019–2020, the last of which was on a visit to Kocho village in Sinjar on September 28, 2020.

102 https://presidency.iq/EN/Details.aspx?id=1343.

103 Final Report: Consultations for Reparations: Enhancing Victims Participation towards the Development of a Comprehensive Reparation Policy, The Commission for Investigation & Gathering Evidence (CIGE), August 2020. Available at: http://www.cice.gov.krd/2020/11/30/cige-releases-a-report-on-reparations-for-yazidi-survivors/

through which the Commission for Investigation & Gathering Evidence (CIGE) has sought to understand the needs of Yazidi survivors regarding compensation and reparation[104].

3. ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Many within the Yazidi community express that rebuilding trust and reconciliation cannot be achieved without perpetrator accountability, as well as compensation for victims. Therefore, it is equally important for the Iraqi government to expedite the use of the findings and evidence reached by the UNITAD International Crime Investigation Team established under Security Council Resolution 2379 (2017)[105] and headed by Karim Khan, to hold ISIL operatives accountable for actions that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

There is a clear fear expressed by the Yazidi community that perpetrators of the genocide and other war crimes against them will get away with their actions. Consequently, they call on the Iraqi government to end impunity, and activate national judicial procedures against all perpetrators and those who instigate violence against minorities in general. Such measures appear vital to affirming the rule of law and restoring the trust of the Yazidis and other minorities in the authority and protection of the state

In addition to supporting the work of UNITAD, there is a compelling need for Iraq to join the Rome Statute, as a way of strengthening legal responsibility towards the protection of minorities. It may also be useful to include the crime of genocide in the national legal framework, by adding an appendix on international crimes to the Iraqi Penal Code currently in force, No. 111 of 1969[106]. The amendment would provide a clear national legal framework to hold perpetrators accountable, either now or in future. Others also advocate establishing a special criminal court to look into ISIL crimes in Iraq[107].

4. REBUILDING TRUST HORIZONTALLY BETWEEN ETHNO-SECTARIAN GROUPS

Efforts to establish justice are an important entry point for rebuilding the trust of the Yazidis vertically with the state, as well as horizontally with the ethno-sectarian groups with which the Yazdis lost trust as a result of the atrocities. The idea of repairing social relations is complex and sensitive, especially since the loss of trust often exceeds individual people and extends to entire communities, including those who were not directly involved in any crimes.

It appears possible for community initiatives around the repair of social relations to take place, albeit slowly. Yazidi leaders note the importance of outreach on the part of Muslim community leaders who represent Muslim communities in Nineveh, suggesting that they should share messages with the Yazidi community that may contribute to rebuilding trust between the Yazidi community and the Muslim majority. This type of local outreach may also help diverse communities to redefine or re-establish their relationship. In an interview conducted by the researcher with Baba Sheikh in mid-2018 in Sheikhan, the late spiritual leader expressed his willingness to forgive the crimes that befell the Yazidi community, and stressed that building trust between Yazidis and Muslims was the only way to guarantee a future without conflict. However, he made it very clear that he is not the guardian or decider of the broader Yazidi perceptions, and that he has no authority over the feelings of those who have lost their loved ones. Baba Sheikh considered forgiveness to be complex psychological processes linked to societal reconciliation and trust rebuilding, which cannot succeed without receiving positive messages from the wider community. On the basis of this wisdom, and the views of other respondents shared during the study, we strongly encourage efforts to build bridges of support that might help to restore the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Yazidi minority in Sinjar, as well as minority in Nineveh more broadly. Such messages might include, for example, the Sunni Islamic endowments launching a campaign to rebuild Yazidi religious shrines that were destroyed by ISIL; launching charitable projects to support the displaced Yazidis; organizing systematic visits to Yazidi survivors by Muslim religious leaders; and building schools / health clinics / service projects in Sinjar that contribute to serving the groups affected by the genocide.

104 The headquarters of the Commission is located in Dohuk Governorate / Kurdistan Region of Iraq. One of its tasks is investigating and collecting evidence of crimes and violations committed by ISIL classified as genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. For more about the work and objectives of the authority, the commission's website can be found at: http://www.cice.gov.krd/

105 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2379 (2017): https://undocs.org/S/RES/2379 (2017).

106 Interview with Dr. Mona Yaqo, Professor of Constitutional Law, Salah al-Din University, Erbil, 26.09.2020.

107 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, Professor of International Criminal Law, College of Law, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, 01.10.2020.

1. BUILDING THE CAPACITIES OF THE YAZIDI COMMUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION

Following the genocide and the subsequent displacement crisis, a great desire has grown within the Yazidi community to develop its capabilities through education. Many Yazidi families took advantage of the access to education while displaced in the Kurdistan region, and there are numerous occasions where Yazidi students living in IDP camps scored the highest marks in end-of-year exams, despite the difficult conditions in which they live[108]. A journalist covering the issue noted the difficulties associated with this achievement, pointing to the lack of teaching staff, schools, and support while displaced, as well as having to attend schools located far away from the camps[109]. Similarly, Yazidi returnees to Sinjar have displayed a real desire to complete their studies despite all the associated difficulties, including very low internet speed in Sinjar that hinders e-learning, leaving them no choice but to attend schools despite the risks of COVID-19; the remote locations of these schools; and the lack of a suitable psychological approach to education in a post-genocidal society[110].

Yazidi female survivors in particular show an enhanced desire for education, and special attention should be given to their specific educational needs. Ensuring that Yazidi women have access to education on an equal basis with others may require establishing a dialogue with traditional leaders, such as tribal leaders, the religious establishment, and the Amiri House, who should be encouraged to support Yazidi women's access to education and influence a shift in conservative cultural values, which ordinarily prevent Yazidi girls from accessing education on an equal basis. It is important to confront stereotypical ideas about the status of women, and encourage their positive role in developing society and the importance of imposing equality between women and men in all fields.[111] Providing access to education for Yazidi women is an important step in the process of recovery and could strengthen their trust in their own abilities.

Equally, there is a compelling need to offer eligible Yazidi students scholarships or other support to pursue higher education, particularly in universities abroad from where they could return with new experiences that may contribute to the development of their society[112]. A first step in this regard could be taken by drafting a special law for scholarships and quotas for minorities in Iraq and the Kurdistan region that provides scholarships for members of minorities enabling them to study in the local and international colleges and universities[113] Such a program would also enable the state to combat discrimination in educational opportunities that currently exists.

2. SUPPORTING DIVERSITY THROUGH EDUCATION

A second, and equally important component of education is the revision of curriculum as it pertains to minorities and identity in Iraq. The state has an essential obligation to eliminate prejudice and concepts that are inconsistent with freedom of religion or belief, in order to protect the rights of all citizens. The roots of discrimination against the Yazidis are ancient and deep within the wider community, and build upon a fear of other religious groups, the stereotyping of the Yazidis as "devil worshipers", and the widespread rumors that Yazidis are a heretical group against Islam. The latter rumor in particular has a long history going back decades. Egyptian writer Ahmed Taymour Basha published a book about the Yazidis in Cairo nearly a century ago stereotyping Yazidis as a sect outside Islam[114]. A series of historians have repeated his false narrative about the Yazidis for decades, including the Iraqi historian Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, a famous historian of the Iraqi state[115], who was the most influential writer in shaping the image of the minority in the public's mind.

In this context, there is a need to develop knowledge about diversity and to design curricula that reflect Iraq's diverse population in a respectful and factual way, and one that

108 See, for example: A displaced Yazidi woman from Sinjar scored the highest mark in Iraq at ministerial exams, Al-Hall's website.

109 Zoom interview with Saman Daoud, journalist and blogger, Lalish Post page, 01.10.2020.

110 Interview with Hassan Saeed Hassan, director of planning in the Sinjar Education Directorate, 28.09.2020.

111 Zoom interview with Murad Ismail, a Yazidi activist residing in the United States, and one of the founders of Yazad organization, 03.10.2020, and a meeting with representatives of Yazidi youth, Dohuk, 29.09.2020, and Sinjar, 28.09.2020.

112 Zoom interview with Murad Ismail, a Yazidi activist residing in the United States, and one of the founders of Yazad, 03.10.2020.

113 A meeting with representatives of Yazidi youth, Dohuk, 29.09.2020, and Sinjar, 28.09.2020.

114 Ahmad Taymur Pasha, Yazidis and the Origin of their Sect, The Salafi Press, Cairo, 1925.

115 Abdul Razzaq Al-Hasani, Devil Worshipers, Al Irfan Press, Sidon, 1931, and see also his book: The Yazidis, Present and Past, sryah Press, Sidon, 1967.

does not incite religious hatred or bigotry. Textbooks in educational institutions should not contain stereotypes or prejudices that may incite discrimination or stoke hostile feelings towards any religious group. Rather, school curricula should contribute to eliminating negative stereotyping or preconceptions against those who are different religiously and avoid any bias towards any belief over another. Since the genocide brought widespread recognition of the Yazidi population and the vile consequences or religious hatred, there is an opportunity to correct stereotypes about the Yazidi community through revised educational policies.

One example of reformist education in diversity may be drawn from the establishment of the Institute for Studies of Religious Diversity in Baghdad, which teaches non-Islamic religions to Muslim clerics[116]. The Institute has issued a special curriculum entitled (Understanding the Yazidi Religion) authored by Professor (Khalil Jundi), one of the most prominent experts in the Yazidi religion, who described this step as a unique progress in spreading, writing, and teaching the oral religious heritage of the Yazidis for the first time in contemporary Iraqi history[117]. The Ministry of Education in the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government should adopt similar approaches to correct misconceptions and stereotypes about Yazidism, and partner with similar projects that promote the culture of religious diversity and ensure freedom of religion and belief.

The state should also encourage society, in general, to learn about the history, languages, and cultures of religious minorities, and reference the role of these minorities in shaping national history. The stereotyping of the Yazidis as passive victims obscures the reality of the richness of the Yazidi culture and its vitality, despite the 74 massacres and genocides the Yazidis have been subjected to over the previous centuries. The Yazidi community has been forced to develop remarkable resilience and adaptability in social structures in response to the devastation caused by genocide, such as the religious establishment's decision to welcome Yazidi female survivors in a way that contradicts the traditions of Middle Eastern societies[118].

The government should present and celebrate the rich aspects of Yazidi traditions, customs, and culture that have their roots in the ancient civilizations of Iraq. Here, the Iraqi Ministry of Culture has taken a positive step to form a committee concerned with the affairs of religious diversity, and has shown willingness to promote both the Yazidi culture and a culture of diversity in the Iraqi society generally[119].

3. COMBATING HATE SPEECH

Finally, alongside education, it is vital that the Iraqi state develop policies and strategies to prevent and respond to hate speech or violence associated with racism or religious bigotry. This should start by monitoring hate speech and incitement to violence, so that the state can be alerted to, and then respond to, a risk of conflict. This could involve the Iraqi government establishing or supporting specialized centers that collect data on hate crimes against minorities, including monitoring the media and social media. This data would then be used to develop policies to combat hate crimes and could support the authorities to identify and prosecute perpetrators. In short, violence must be anticipated before it develops. However, for this proposal to be effective, it requires legislation that includes deterrent penalties for anyone who encourages hate speech and violence against minorities. An alternative would be to activate the punitive articles stipulated in Iraqi legislation regarding incitement of hatred and crimes affecting the religious feeling of members of minorities.

116 Gilgamesh Nabeel, A Diversity Institute Teaches Iraqi Students About Religious Minorities, Al-Fanar Media, 29 June 2020. https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2020/06/a-diversity-institute-teaches-iraqi-students-about-religious-minorities/.

117 Interview with Professor Khalil Jundi, Yazidi diplomat and thinker, Baghdad, 22.09.2020.

118 Saad Salloum, Yazidis in Iraq, Memory, Beliefs, and Genocide, UPP, 2nd Edition, 2020, p. 114.

119 Interview with the Iraqi Minister of Culture, Dr. Hassan Nazim, Baghdad, 25.08.2020.

Some members of the Yazidi elite call for internal reforms that would modify the traditional structure of the group, both in terms of the religious establishment and the traditional caste system.

There are both supporters and opponents within the Yazidi community regarding reform of traditional institutions. Opponents believe that maintaining Yazidi traditions and heritage without change is essential to preserve the Yazidi religion. These opinions are an echo of the seclusion the minority has practiced for centuries. Opponents fear that modernization would lead to the demise of their unique religious ideology, which has maintained its stability for centuries and despite dozens of genocides, which they argue was only possible because the Yazidis adheres to their traditional religious structure and its castes.

However, since 2014, the Yazidi community has been forced to become much less secluded as genocide and displacement forced people from their traditional lands in Sinjar. The experience of living in an ethnically-mixed environment (namely, the Kurdistan region) as well as vast levels of emigration to Europe has changed the character of the society, and exposed people to a culturally different environment. Cases of marriage between castes that are considered prohibited have increased, as well as marriages to foreign men and women (amongst the diaspora), which is a departure from the fundamentals of this closed religion that prohibits external marriage (with other religions). Therefore, the issue of reform become highly practical

1. REFORMING THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT

The first area associated with calls for reform is the Yazidi religious establishment, which establishes a theocratic caste system. In order to take this forward, while also addressing the lack of a unified reference (e.g. Prince) for the Yazidis, some Yazidi leaders have proposed the formation of a Supreme Yazidi Council. The proposed Supreme Council would expand the representation of the various segments and castes of the Yazidi community, while broadening the base of their participation in managing the group's affairs. As such, the Council would act as a "quasi-parliament" for the Yazidi community. Yazidi leaders recognize the imperative to maintain the neutrality of such a Council and protect it from political influence or co-optation from other (larger) political groups. If implemented effectively, the Council would increase the level of Yazidi participation in public life, and would present a unified body that includes the various castes of the Yazidi community and represents its intellectual and cultural orientations[120]. So far, the lack of consensus on the establishing such a Council has created deep division amongst the Yazidi community in Iraq and amongst the diaspora; an example is seen in the Georgia Yazidi Council declaring independence from the Supreme Yazidi Council (Lalish) in terms of organization and administration[121].

2. THE YAZIDI TROIKA

The second area associated with calls for reform is to expand the spiritual council of the Yazidi religion to include a balanced representation of all Yazidi voices in all areas of their demographic distribution. This would help confront the geographical divide between Sinjar and Sheikhan on one hand, and between the Yazidis within the country and the Yazidis in the diaspora on the other. For the purpose of bridging the rift in the tripartite representation of the Princes in Sheikhan, Sinjar, and Germany, reformists suggest that Yazidis agree internally on a central representation of the Emirate in Sheikhan, following the ancient Yazidi traditions, and that the prince of Sinjar becomes a representative of the Emirate in Sinjar (equally, the Prince in Germany would become a representative of the Emirate in Germany, whhere the largest diaspora community exists.) This Yazidi troika of the Emirate would not entail dividing the Emirate, but distributing tasks in a way that addresses the demands of the Yazidis for reform, and maintains and strengthens their relationship with their traditional institutions.

120 Meeting / interviews with Yazidis representatives in Bashiqa, Dohuk, and Erbil on various dates 2019–2020.

121 Zoom interview with (Badal Faqir Haji), a Yazidi researcher and thinker residing in Germany, 23.09.2020.

On a related note, we hope that the passing of Baba Sheikh, the spiritual leader of the Yazidi community, will not trigger a similar division when choosing a successor. It is important to emphasize that the new "Baba Sheikh" should continue the traditions represented by the late spiritual leader, especially his religious tolerance, and his courageous fatwa regarding the welcoming of Yazidi female survivors, which was a very important step in encouraging the return of survivors of ISIL captivity[122].

3. IMPROVING THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The second area associated with calls for reform is the status of women. The genocide and the ensuing displacement placed Yazidi women in harsh and unprecedented conditions. Notwithstanding the travesty that forced them into such a position, Yazidi women demonstrated resilience and creative capabilities that should be nurtured and appreciated as much as possible to confront the post-genocide psychological, social, and economic effects. For example, a unified strategy should be developed between the Yazidi religious establishment, the Iraqi government and civil society organizations to improve the status of Yazidi women within conservative Yazidi religious beliefs and traditions. Although the traditional Yazidi institutions have taken steps to welcome and support women who survived ISIL violence, all Yazidi women require sustained support to strengthen their social standing and support for their capabilities in the face of new challenges. Reformists urge that Yazidi women should not be constrained by social mechanisms that deprive them of their rights, such as freedom to travel, freedom of passage, freedom to work or study in mixed places, the right to own property, or freedom to choose a spouse. According to advocates for reform, a feasible path would be to link the reform of customs and traditions to the development of women's economic and social conditions, in a manner that supports their role and responsibilities within and outside the family and broader Yazidi society, and which are related to achieving economic independence. Women should be included in any political and social dialogues regarding the future of the Yazidis in a manner that is consistent with their equal partnership with men.

122 The late Baba Sheikh Al-Zaeem passed away before the completion of this study at the beginning of October 2020, and his passing left a gap in the Yazidi community. He was a spiritual leader who witnessed important political transformations in Iraq, as well as the 2014 genocide event, which is considered a foundational event and a turning point in Contemporary Yazidi History.

Sinjar is characterized by intense polarization and competition between regional political actors and their local allies, given its strategic location within Iraq and regionally. This section considers the most pressing issues which need to be resolved in the short-term to address the immediate issues of polarization and instability.

1. CONTROLLING THE BORDERS WITH SYRIA FROM SINJAR'S SIDE

The PKK and its local allies move actively within the Syrian-Iraqi border areas, which has enabled Turkey to justify a bombing campaign in parts of Sinjar linked to an attempt to politically reshape the border region. This introduces yet another form of rivalry and conflict in Sinjar, further complicating the existing conflict between Baghdad and Erbil, and causing Sinjar to be overrun with competing security actors.[123].

This geostrategic aspect interacts with the mafia border economy on the borders with Syria, which depends on traditional smuggling networks or ones that belong to stakeholders from the armed units of the various armed factions active in Sinjar. These networks rely on smuggling oil, weapons, livestock, and various types of goods (and according to some sources smuggling ISIL fighters, as well[124]). According to other sources, attempts to stop smuggling operations has caused armed clashes between the PKK and the Iraqi army[125]. This demonstrates the way that the informal economy in Sinjar fuels competition between security actors and undermines security – and, by extension, negatively affects the return of IDPs. Strengthening the regulation of border areas is therefore essential to preserving security, as well as regularizing the local economy.[126]. The process of dismantling smuggling networks and controlling the borders would benefit from international oversight and training by suitable border control professionals. It also demands that border forces are loyal and immune from corruption[127].

2. SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Sinjar hosts a multiplicity of security forces, including the national army, national security police, PMF, Tribal Mobilization Forces, YBŞ, PKK, Yazidi Peshmerga forces led by Qasim Shasho,and the Yazidikhan Protection Force led by Haydar Shasho. The multiplicity of security forces creates parallel power structures that compete with the authority of the state and undermine its sovereignty. Moreover, the existence of these competing powers shakes the confidence of the Yazidi citizens in the state and instills anxiety about the prospects for future stability.

The Head of the United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, recently gave a critique of the multiplicity of armed factions and urged the Iraqi government to dismantle non-state armed entities or formally integrate them under the full control of the state, without delay[128]. The international community could play an important role here by pushing the various parties towards a security settlement. Overall, any security settlement should aim to curb the influence of the irregular armed forces and ultimately remove them from Sinjar, while giving the Iraqi army a greater role with local police forces drawn from the residents of the region. With this formation, the role of the army would be to secure areas outside urban centres, whereas the police force would be responsible to protect villages and towns.

Giving Sinjari youth the opportunity to join the army or the police may also help to shift their loyalty from the different armed factions (who are currently perceived as necessary, to different extents, for the protection of Sinjar) in favor of the state[129]. Involving the local Yazidi population in the local policy or army forces would also generate legitimacy for the government's monopoly of force in the eyes of residents. However, any security sector reform aimed at strengthening the government's legitimate monopoly on the use of force must also be accompanied by measures that monitor and enforce human rights and the rule of law in the security sector in the long term, and contribute to the transparency of the state's work in the security sector (e.g. by promoting good governance[130]).

123 Virtual workshop in which the researcher on the Syrian-Iraqi borders participated, Carnegie Middle East Center, Friday, 10.10.2020.

124 Interview with Hossein Aslan, researcher specializing in Turkish affairs, Baghdad, 10.08.2020.

125 Interviews with members of the armed forces of the federal government, Sinjar, 28.09.2020, and interviews with Yazidi figures from Sinjar, 28.09.2020.

126 Interview with Hossein Aslan, researcher specializing in Turkish affairs, Baghdad, 10.08.2020.

127 Interview with Dr. Hussein Allawi, Professor of National Security, Nahrain University, Baghdad, 27.09.2020, and Dr. Ali Agwan, a security expert in Nineveh Governorate affairs and professor of international relations at Bayan University, Erbil, 24.09.2020.

128 From Plasschaert's speech at the Security Council meeting on March 3, 2020, UN document: S / PV.8739: The situation concerning Iraq-03.03.2020 https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.8739.

129 Interview with Ali Omar Kabao, Deputy Governor of Nineveh for IDP Affairs, Erbil, 23.09.2020.

130 Interministerial Strategy to Support Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the Context of Crisis Prevention, Confict Resolution and Peacebuilding,The Federal government, German Federal Foreign Offce, July 2019, p. 12.

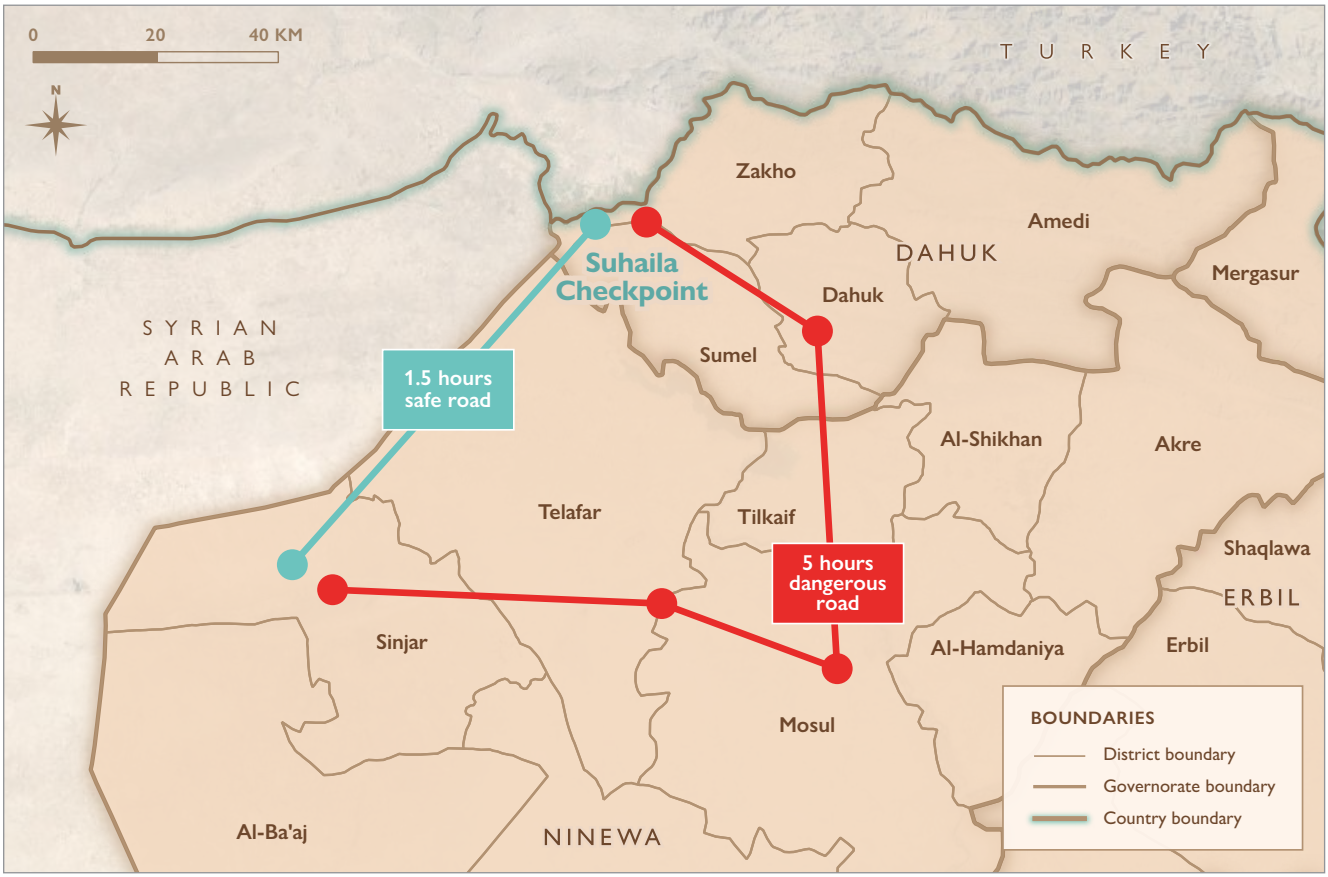
3. ENDING ADMINISTRATIVE DUPLICATION

One of the keys to resolving administrative duplication is appointing an independent Yazidi official to administer Sinjar. Appointing an independent figure would address the Yazidis' distrust of political figures coming from traditional partisan circles or a figure close to the parties to the current conflict in Sinjar. A move such as this could be considered a step to restore the trust of the Yazidi public in the government, ridding the Yazidi cause from excessive politicization, and helping to liberate the land from the great game of internal / regional balances of power. Most important, this step would help to improve trust in future stability, which is a key issue for IDP return. A settlement that satisfies all parties could be reached through an appropriate troika based around an independent Yazidi representative, alongside figures appointed by the federal and Kurdish governments respectively.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF SUHAILA CROSSING

The Suhaila Bridge crossing is located 2 km away from the Syrian border, within the district of Sinjar. After the ISIL attack on Sinjar in 2014, it became the only road connecting Sinjar to unoccupied areas of Iraq. The Suhaila border crossing was opened in order to encourage the return of Yazidi IDPs who became displaced during the ISIL crisis. This proved to be a positive step, and not only facilitated return but also improved the conditions of displaced Yazidis by offering greater movement options and relieving the political pressure they faced to choose political 'sides' based on their geographic location.[131] However, Suhaila is yet to be opened fully: currently, it is only open to movement in one direction (from Dohuk to Sinjar.) A key request from Yazidi leaders is to open Suhaila Crossing from both directions, in order to revitalize the region economically. If the Suhaila Crossing is opened, it could be developed in a way that supports economic revitalization of the region by transporting agricultural and livestock materials and production of Yazidi farmers in Sinjar to and from the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This, in turn, would also encourage sustainable return of the displaced.

Map 2: Suhaila Crossing



131 For the IOM data on returnees to Sinjar, see http://iraqdtm.iom.int/IdpMovements. Other data related to the return index can be found at the following link http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex.

Promoting the political participation of minorities may contribute to greater vertical trust between minorities and their state. In the case of Yazidis, this is particularly important during any negotiations related to the Sinjar Agreement and its implementation, since the process has not been sufficiently inclusive of the Yazidi community to date.

Moreover, discrimination, symbolic violence, cultural exclusion, incomplete and ineffective political representation, and the dominance of major groups' political parties are responsible for significant harm and should not be considered separately from outright violence. Yazidi IDPs are particularly frustrated because they see that they are co-opted and used by political parties, rather than having sufficient representation themselves. In the end, if Yazidis, as well as other minorities, do not have the authority to make fundamental and influential decisions on matters of importance to their communities, their participation will be ineffective and likely insufficient to rebuild trust with the state[132].

1. CURBING THE HEGEMONY OF MAJOR POLITICAL CURRENTS

In order to enhance the political participation of the Yazidis in a way that restores their confidence in the political system as a whole, it is necessary first to curb the influence of major political parties and their control over the political representation of minorities. Guarantees must exist to ensure that these parties do not interfere in determining the candidates for the electoral lists of minorities, or influence voters to vote for a specific candidate or a specific list. In addition, political parties should not be allowed to: support the formation of electoral lists through their supporters (which can includes members of minorities) in order to compete with the quota seats allocated to the minority, disperse the votes of minorities, or impede the victory of a list that the party does not support; or issue directives to members of minorities, instructing them to vote for certain lists or candidates, or assign non-minority members (such as public officials, members of the army, police, and security services) to vote for certain electoral lists.

Instead, the major political parties should promote the diversity that exists in Iraqi society and make efforts to highlight this diversity through their political programs. These major parties should also adopt the representation of diversity in the ranks of their members and lay down plans for the participation of minorities in their membership. Moreover, they should allocate part of their resources to support the effective participation of minorities in political, economic, and social life, and to involve minorities in their consultations aimed at gathering large sectors of society to adopt national policies that enjoy the support of the public.

2. A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT: THE CHRISTIAN REPRESENTATION

The state must seriously consider Yazidi demands for additional allocation of executive positions in Iraqi Parliament. Some Yezidi elites criticize the Christian monopoly of representing minorities, since Christians hold five quota seats, the only minister representing minorities in the federal government is Christian, and Christians hold other executive positions, such as: Adviser to the Prime Minister for Minority Affairs; Head of the Office of Endowments for Christians, Yazidis, and Sabean Mandaeans; and Chairman of the Investment Authority. The dominance of a single minority makes Yazidis feel excluded and sidelined, and leads to perceptions that the Iraqi government is siding with one minority at the expense of another. Representatives of the Shabak minority have expressed similar reservations towards the Christian monopoly of administrative positions in the Nineveh Plains as well[133].

On the other hand, the debate within the Yazidi community regarding how to strengthen national political participation focuses on decision-making at the federal level. Yazidis call for an increase in the number of quota seats from one seat to five seats, similar to that of Christians[134]. However, the change likely to result from an increased allocation will be limited, because even with increased seats, Yazidis will still only hold a

132 Saad Salloum, Political Participation of Minorities in Iraq, Masarat Foundation for Cultural and Media Development, Baghdad, 2017, p.19.

133 Interview with Muhammad al-Shabaki, a member of the Democratic Shabak Party, Baghdad, on 7 October 2020.

134 Interview with Saeb Khadr, representative of the Yazidi component in the Iraqi Parliament, Baghdad, on September 18, 2020.

minority of seats in Parliament. This will not generate decisive voting weight, even if they form an alliance that includes all minority quota representatives. Therefore, in addition to the increased quota, another important step is to provide minorities with the right to veto (that is, to object) to specific issues that affect minorities, such as the right to identity, freedom of religion and belief, and the administration of minority areas, such as the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar. This would allow them to block proposals that potentially violate minority rights, even if they only hold one seat in Parliament, but without the risk of disrupting the entire legislative process.

3. PARTICIPATION IN 2021 EARLY ELECTIONS

Early elections are scheduled to take place in Iraq in June 2021. In the context of high rates of IDP return and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that the Independent High Electoral Commission and the supervising judicial authority take intentional steps to ensure the effective participation of the Yazidis in these elections.

To achieve this purpose, the following measures are proposed:

- Early consultation with the Yazidi community to understand how their participation can be effectively supported and to develop specific actions to ensure their participation, such as those listed below.
- The Independent High Electoral Commission in Iraq should reduce the elections registration fee to (15) fifteen million dinars for minority parties instead of fifty million dinars. This will enable small Yazidi parties and independent individuals to register and participate in the elections. Alternatively, these parties should be exempted from registration fees, since the electoral competition requires other sums of money that the major parties are able to produce because of their more expansive resources;
- Arrangements should be taken to protect the displaced Yazidis' right to political participation, especially for those who lost their identity documents during displacement, or who do not yet have proof of their new place of residence.
- Measures should be taken to overcome the linguistic barriers related to electoral activities and all obstacles to the exercise of the right to vote, such as illiteracy or poverty. These barriers can prevent some individuals from exercising their voting rights, especially if the polling stations are relatively far from their places of residence, or obstacles are placed that prevent them from moving freely.
- Training programs supported by the international community, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and international organizations should focus on capacity-building and training to ensure the effective participation of Yazidi representatives. Such feet can be accomplished by ensuring the Yazidis' participation and in all steps leading to the development of educational programs and campaigns promoting political participation. Moreover, educational programs should be created to raise electoral awareness by providing adequate information on how to participate in the elections, while stimulating a sense of responsibility towards the exercise of their electoral right. These programs should be led by qualified and knowledgeable persons from the concerned minority community, and appropriate training should be provided to Yazidi youth and women on the skills of negotiation, communication, advocacy, policy-making, and good governance. Such training will encourage broad groups of society to participate in public life. Also, trainings should be provided to political representatives of minorities on governance, alliance building, public outreach, programing, and strategic planning.

4. ALLIANCE OF YAZIDI PARTIES

Finally, members of the Yazidi elite recognize the importance of translating the political competition that currently exists within the Yazidi community due to difference political allegiances or co-optation, into a coalition of Yazidi parties that could provide an umbrella for common issues, such as the return of IDPs and a more independent administration of Sinjar[135].

Some initial steps to form a coalition do exist. The Yazidi Freedom and Democracy Party, which receives support from the PKK, created a Yazidi political alliance of four Yazidi parties. This coalition consists of the Yazidi Democratic Party, which is close to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (much like the Freedom Party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party believes in Kurdish nationalism despite ideological and political differences. Both parties have links to other active Shia or Kurdish political currents), and two nationalist Yazidi parties, the Yazidi Progress Party and the Yazidi Movement for Reform (Advocates of Yazidi nationalism.) The latter two do not express any official objection against the presence of forces loyal to the PKK[136].

135 Some representatives of the Yazidi community and its observers believe that agreement between these parties is an "impossible task" due to the differences in the interests of their leaders, their connections, and their loyalties to non-Yazidi political parties. They even believe that these parties in itself constitutes a barrier to any independent Yazidi tendencies. A Zoom interview with the Yazidi activist Issa Barakat, residing in Germany, 03.10.2020.

136 Saad Salloum, Turkey targets Yazidi militia in Iraq over PKK links, al-monitor, October 7, 2020, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/10/sinjar-resistance-units-ybs-iraq-yazidis-pkk-turkey.html.

Although this coalition was originally formed to run for the Nineveh Provincial Council elections, reconfiguring it on a more stable or permanent basis and linked to running at the next parliamentary elections in June 2021 could provide an incentive to present a unified vision for the reconstruction of Sinjar, and a unified strategy to support the return of IDPs. The previous declarations made by the coalition highlighted a number of key policy issues, including forming a unified list, and establishing a military force comprised at least 50% by local Yazidi residents with the purposes of protecting region[137]. With the 2021 elections coming up, it seems a timely opportunity to advocate again for security sector reform in Sinjar and the unification of the various politicized security forces.

Despite the importance of this alliance between Yazidi political parties, the ideological differences between those parties, especially on the issue of Yazidi identity, remains a factor of division and an obstacle hindering the creation of a joint strategy for the administration of Sinjar. Therefore, the alliance between these parties may only last as long as the election, since its immediate purpose is to participate on a unified list at the June 2021 elections. Nonetheless, transforming this temporary alliance into an alliance with more stable foundations is still possible, and could offer a new balance of power to create greater influence for the Yazidis. Some final suggestions are therefore made on how the alliance between Yazidi political parties may be strengthened:[138]

1. Work to bridge the rifts that exist within this alliance. The parties of the alliance should be encouraged to adopt a clear and decisive strategy with feasible and long-term shared goals. For instance, this would likely include the return of the displaced and the reconstruction of Sinjar
2. Rid the alliance of divisive rivalry driven by competition between the different Kurdish parties, especially between the PDK and the PKK;
3. Open a dialogue with the major Arab and Kurdish political parties. If the alliance decides that it is important for its electoral success to maintain strong relations with some of these parties, such connections must not undermine the Yazidi's own context and case;
4. Link the future of the alliance to the establishment of an autonomous administration in Sinjar in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Constitution, which guarantees independence for the Yazidis outside the Arab-Kurdish, Kurdish-Kurdish, or Turkish-Iranian conflict, since this appears to be a central demand across the Yazidi community and may help to stabilize the alliance and drive it towards longer-term goals. This demand should be supported by the international community and the federal Iraqi government, and be used as a pressure factor on the Kurdish and Arab parties that are also competing to find a final solution to the tragedy of the displaced residents of Sinjar who are caught in reconciliatory political games.

137 Announcement of a unified Yazidi agreement in Sinjar, by Kani Press, available at: http://kanipress.net/2019/08/08/الإتفاق-عن-تحالف-إيزيدي-موحد-في-سنجار/

138 These proposals were the result of long and painstaking discussions with representatives of the Yazidi political currents and external observers. Despite the despair that overwhelmed the future of the alliance, and the fact that it had transformed into an aspect of the Yazidi community political division, the development of the alliance into a unified political option remains the goal of an internal and urgent Yazidi dialogue as the early elections in June 2021 approach.

This study's emphasis on presenting a new paradigm model in Sinjar implies a growing feeling that Sinjar is more than a local area caught within the complex Iraqi political landscape. It is clear that the intertwining of internal conflict with regional competition and international intervention is turning Sinjar into an "internationalized" region.

As such, this study urges the international community to use its influence to reconnect Sinjar to its Yazidi population and protect it from local and regional political rivalries. Emphasizing the role of the international community does not mean, in any case, neglecting the role of the federal government. On the contrary, the international community's support for Sinjar will help restore its position and the stability of the communities who live there. Sinjar became an example of Iraq's failure as a state to protect its minorities, but it may equally become a measure of Iraq's success as a viable country. The second section of the study attempted to present a roadmap for achieving this goal by emphasizing the idea an alternative, post-conflict society in Sinjar, where a new paradigm model for success could be made.

It may be a utopian ambition, but there is a compelling need for Iraq to consolidate a new idea of conflict transformation, or in other words, to move from a conflict resolution approach to a conflict transformation approach. Such a transformation would transform Sinjar from a source of ethnic conflict into a protected environment where competition supports economic development of the region, rather than conflict.

As many Yazidis have started to return to Sinjar, Pope Francis of the Catholic Church announced a planned visit to Iraq in March 2021. This might be a lucky coincidence, but will be a historical first, and a visit that has spiritual meaning for a multitude of ethno-sectarian minorities in Iraq, not only Christians, and is a particular sign of solidarity towards Yazidis after the genocide.

If the new paradigm is to support sustainable peace in Sinjar by transforming ethnic conflict into productive economic competition and developing a positive model of recovery in the post-ISIL period, it requires the commitment of all actors to transform or adapt their own behaviour, to a more peaceful vision. This study offers this vision with hope, on the sixth anniversary of the Yazidi genocide and the centenary of the founding of contemporary Iraq.

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Professor Salloum has authored 16 books on various issues of diversity, the most prominent of which are: Minorities in Iraq 2013; Christians in Iraq 2014; Unity in Diversity 2015; Yazidis in Iraq 2016; Protection of Religious, Ethnic, and Linguistic Minorities in Iraq 2017; Iraqi Media and Religious Diversity Issues 2018; The End of Diversity in Iraq 2019.

Professor Salloum was awarded the Stefanus Alliance International Award / Oslo 2018 for his efforts in defending issues of freedom of religion and belief in Iraq and the Middle East, the Chaldean Patriarchate award for his book (Christians in Iraq: Comprehensive History and Current Challenges), and the Kamel Shia'a Award for Enlightenment Culture for his entire intellectual work and activities in spreading the culture of diversity in Iraqi society.

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