

PROJECT REPORT / 2020

Flight from Iraq: The impact of religious and ethnic identity

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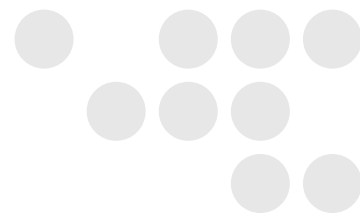


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Mausoleum of the Malak Miran of the Yazidi in the city of Bashiqa. Photo by Mesopotamia.

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1. Introduction

The report looks at the flight of Yazidis and Assyrian Christians from Iraq, both before and after 2014, and examines:

- the extent to which ethnic and/or religious identity figured among the reasons for seeking refuge;
- how these considerations influence the prospect for return; and
- what measures – including rights-based protection and institutional systems – are considered necessary to ensure conditions for safety and inclusion.

In the aftermath of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS) taking of Mosul in northern Iraq on 10 June 2014 and the extreme violence it meted out to civilians, many Iraqis fled overseas. People who fled during and after 2014 followed earlier exoduses, including those who fled the insurgency in Iraq which started a decade earlier. In the years prior to 2003, numerous Iraqis left to escape the brutality of the Ba'athist regime under Saddam Hussein. Among the Iraqis who have sought refuge, many belong to ethno-religious minority communities.

While their history of displacement goes back decades, the intensified targeting of these communities during the rise and reign of ISIS has reignited discussions within the minority groups now living abroad about their future, their place in Iraq, and the conditions under which return might one day be possible. This report provides insight into how the ongoing exodus of minorities from Iraq is understood by some of those affected.

As a part of the work within the Minority Network Inclusive Citizenship program,¹ The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-senteret) conducted a qualitative pilot study of 10 interviews with Iraqi refugees in Norway: three Assyrian Christians (including one woman) and seven Yazidis (including three women).

The Assyrians have family roots in the Nineveh Plains, but fled from Baghdad during the 1990s. The Assyrian interviewees defined themselves as Christian, but distinct from other Christian communities, such as the Chaldeans. They emphasized their ethnic and linguistic identity as Assyrians as distinct from the Arabs and the Kurds.

Three of the Yazidis who were interviewed fled Iraq following ISIS's attack on the Yazidi community in August 2014. Some of the Yazidis came from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and some from Sinjar. Some Yazidis identified as ethnic Kurds, while others viewed being Yazidi as a distinct religious and ethnic identity. All referred to Yazidism as a basis for their distinct religious identity.

Throughout the analysis, the report provides a thematically structured presentation of findings and quotes from the 10 interviews. The findings of this qualitative pilot survey were interpreted using a research-based contextual and comparative analysis, augmented by findings from other studies of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons in other countries, and analyses performed by



Spires in Lalish, the holy city of the Yazidi in Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo by Steffen Aaland.



The Rabban Hormizd monastery of the Christian city Alqosh, build about 640 A.D. Photo by Steffen Aaland.

country experts. This report presents exploratory findings supplemented by the existing literature and the authors' own reflections. It should therefore be considered a work of soft empiricism and an invitation for further research rather than an exhaustive or conclusive assessment.

Numerous different religious communities have left Iraq in large numbers during the past decades, including other Christian communities and Muslims belonging to the Sunni and Shia communities. Yazidi and Assyrian Christians were selected as interviewees for this pilot survey because they represent groups in a numeric minority in the Iraqi context and because their number is significant among Iraqi refugees in Norway (consisting of several hundred from each group), thus facilitating research to be conducted while anonymity could be preserved.

The selection of specific interviewees was made by asking persons active in organised activities for each of the groups in Norway to propose individuals of different ages, gender and time since arrival in Norway. The individuals selected were based in different regions of Norway, though most of them were based in the eastern and southern parts of the country.

The main findings in this Norwegian survey seem to largely correspond with findings from research conducted on Iraqi refugees in other countries from other religious and ethnic groups, including Muslims and other Christian communities.⁴ Still, the limited number of interviewees and the fact that individuals from only two communities were included make it necessary to see this as a pilot survey.

The report presents the personal understandings and experiences of the refugees and their subjective considerations of how their identity of belonging to a religious and/or ethnic minority community in Iraq may have influenced their flight and possibilities of

return. The report does not purport to present a general explanation of why ethnic and religious minorities such as Assyrian Christians and Yazidis in Iraq have left Iraq in disproportionate numbers over the past decades. Rather, it presents contextual factors and possible interpretations that may help understand and explain the concerns expressed by Iraqi refugees pertaining to these minority communities residing in Norway.

The first main part of the report (chapter 2) presents the historical background and a set of contextual factors that may assist in interpreting the findings presented and analysed in the second main part (chapter 3). The report also includes a brief comparison with the findings of the Syria pilot survey (chapter 4).

The pilot survey has been supported financially by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a part of a comparative project about reasons for flight among refugees from Iraq and Syria initiated and carried under the project 'Flight from Iraq and Syria: The impact of religious and ethnic identity'.²

A pilot survey among 12 Syrian refugees in Norway was conducted as a part of this project in 2018-19. The results are presented in a separate report.³ For the Syrian interviewees, question 3 in the study, listed above, could not be considered as long as the war lasts and the Assad government remains in power.

The main editor of this report is Ingvoll Plesner, who is also project manager of the comparative survey and main researcher for the Iraq survey. Sareta Ashraph and Cecilie Hellestveit have served as co-editors of the report, writing chapter 2 and co-authoring the rest of the report together with Plesner. Sidsel Wiborg has been project assistant. Alexa Døving was in charge of the Syria survey, presented in a separate report.



View of Alqosh, a town in Iraqi Kurdistan that is home to many Assyrian Christians in Iraq

2. Context: Understanding Iraq⁵

Ethnic and religious composition

In demographic terms, Iraq consists of three main parts. The south is dominated by Shia Arabs. The KRI, in the country's north, is dominated by Sunni Muslim Kurds, while central Iraq outside of the capital Baghdad consists mainly of Sunni Arabs. The third-largest ethnic group, behind Arabs and Kurds, consists of the Turkmen, most of whom are Sunni, and who live in Kirkuk and Tel Afar, to the west of Mosul.

The geographical areas stretching from Baghdad into the Kurdish north and across Sunni Arab heartland are still home to a variety of ethno-religious minorities with long histories in the region, despite the radical decline over the last decades. These include among others, the Christian communities (Assyrians, Chaldeans and Armenians), most of whom live in the KRI, Mosul and the Nineveh Plains; the Yazidis, the majority of whom lived in the disputed border region of Sinjar; the Kaka'is, who live mainly in Kirkuk; and the Shabak, who are often defined, though not entirely accurately, as Shia and who also live in the Nineveh Plains. The Mandaean have originally been based in the south but some have in recent years sought refuge in the KRI. The religious diversity of Iraq also includes other groups such as Zoroastrians, Baha'is and some Jews.

The Assyrian Christians⁶, who constitute the most populous Christian group in Iraq, speak their own languages, notably Syriac, and do not identify as Arab. They regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as a distinct ethnic group. Assyrian Christians live predominantly in Mosul and Baghdad, and in villages such as Qaraqosh and Bartella in the Nineveh Plains in northern Iraq.⁷

The Yazidis historically have their roots in Sinjar and other parts of Northern Iraq and in what is now Iraqi Kurdistan, and are predominantly Kurdish speaking. While many Yazidis identify as ethnic Kurds, some see themselves as a distinct ethnic group in addition to being a religious community. Between 2003 and 2017, much of the Yazidi homeland of Sinjar was under the control of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), though it officially remained under the jurisdiction of the central government of Iraq. In September 2017, the KRG held a referendum on Kurdish independence, the legality of which was rejected by the central government. The holding of the referendum led to a military conflict with the central government in which the KRG lost some of its territory, including effective control of the Sinjar region.

Political regime

Ba'athism became the dominant political ideology in Iraq following a military coup in 1968. Although theoretically non-sectarian and pan-Arabist, during Saddam Hussein's rule from 1979 to 2003 the Ba'athist regime became increasingly dominated by the Arab Sunni community, with some Arab Christian representation. It came to pursue violent and suppressive policies towards the Kurds, Shia Muslims, and other ethnic and religious minorities. Under Hussein's arabisation campaigns, Yazidis were among those forced to move from their homes and relocate to collectivised villages in other areas. Assyrians were obliged to choose between Arab or Kurdish identity in the 1977, 1987 and 1997 national censuses. Those who insisted on identifying as Assyrian were struck off the list or arbitrarily registered as Arab or Kurd.¹⁰ The unequal treatment of Iraq's communities has played a decisive role in steering the sectarian and political landscapes up to the present time.¹¹

The political history of contemporary Iraq begins with the dramatic changes caused by the 2003 US-led invasion that removed Saddam Hussein from power, and led to the disbanding of the Iraqi army and the purge of the Ba'ath party.¹² This major event moved Iraq from an authoritarian secular regime centred around Sunni Arab identity towards an electoral regime where political positions are linked to major ethnic and religious communities. Iraq now holds 19 governorates and one autonomous region of Iraq, the KRI. Several regions, notably Sinjar and Kirkuk, are claimed by both the central government and the KRI and are referred to as "the disputed regions".¹³

Under the 2005 constitution, Iraq is a federal republic with democratic elections and a legislation influenced by Islamic law. The constitution recognises the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Iraq. Article 2 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution, while referencing the "Islamic identity" of most Iraqis, also states that it guarantees freedom of religious belief and practice of "all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabians."

In practice, however, religion and ethnicity continue to be used to determine status, power and rights in Iraq. The result is continued marginalization of certain ethno-religious groups. Minorities are discriminated against in different spheres of life, including access to public services, employment and property ownership.¹⁴

The highest political offices are reserved for Sunni and Shia Arabs and the Kurds. This system of representation aims to ensure distribution of power between dominant groups. However, in practice it results in exclusion of various other components of society from these high offices.

In the last decade, and especially after 2014, certain steps have been taken to ensure the political representation and participation also of religious and ethnic groups that are numeric minorities at both the national and regional level. For example, the 2015 law on diversity of KRI states that the directorate which was previously a directorate for Islamic affairs, is henceforth to ensure recognition and representation of diverse religions.

In the federal parliament, eight of 320 seats are reserved for religious minorities (five Christians, one Mandaean, one Yazidi and one Shabak.) Out of the 111 seats in the KRI parliament, eleven seats are reserved for ethno-religious minorities (5 Assyrian-Chaldeans, 5 Turkmen and 1 Armenian).¹⁵

Iraqi constitution on religious and ethnic diversity

Iraqi constitution, Article 2, 2nd section: This Constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabeans.

Article 4, 1st section: The Arabic language and the Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq. The right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian shall be guaranteed in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions.

Post-2003 Iraq

Following the disbanding of the Iraqi army in 2003 and the start of a major de-Ba'athification process, former members of the Iraqi armed forces and ousted Ba'athists found common ground with Salafi-Jihadism Islamists and foreign jihadi fighters, prompting a broad and violent insurgency to fight the new Iraqi regime and its foreign backers, including the US forces on the ground in Iraq.¹⁶

This conflict would lead to the rise of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The insurgency deepened the sectarian divide through its attacks on the Shia majority now in power. However, the insurgents also targeted the vulnerable Assyrian and Yazidi minorities. Infamous attacks include AQI's August 2007 coordinated bombings in Yazidi villages in Sinjar – still the most lethal bombing in Iraq's history¹⁷ – and ISI's 2010 massacre of Assyrians in a Baghdad church.¹⁸

The Iraqi Ministry for Migration and Displacement estimated in 2009 that nearly half of religious minority communities had left the country since 2003.¹⁹ Some Christians had links to the old Ba'ath regime, and were now unprotected and at risk of reprisals. Other Christians were targeted because their faith was associated with the West and the multinational force backing the new regime.



The map is designed by Glitch Studios for this project report

The Yazidis, historically a persecuted group, were at risk of attack from extremists both because they are not “People of the Book”²⁰ and because a misreading of their faith had given them an undeserved reputation for being “devil-worshippers”. A week before the August 2007 bombings in Sinjar, leaflets had been distributed warning residents that an attack was imminent because Yazidis were “anti-Islamic”.²¹

Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi became leader of ISI in May 2010.²² In April 2013, following the expansion of operations into Syria, he announced that the group would be known as ISIS.²³ Within weeks of its seizing Mosul on 10 June 2014, it declared its ‘caliphate’, stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq.²⁴ ISIS – a Salafi-Jihadi group fixated on a puritan, literal and extremely violent interpretation of Islam and bent on purging all external and internal enemies – increasingly targeted other groups.²⁵ It is well known that ISIS targeted non-Muslim communities, notably the Yazidis and the Christian community. But ISIS also targeted Muslims. Shia Muslims were attacked because they are perceived as apostates by ISIS. Many Sunni Muslims, accused of having forsaken Islam by not accepting ISIS’s radical interpretations, also suffered violent attacks.

2014: Genocide and other mass atrocities

In June 2014, following its conquest of Mosul, ISIS ordered that the Christian community remaining in the city convert to Islam, pay jizyah,²⁶ or face execution.²⁷ Christians who refused to comply were ordered to “leave the borders of the Islamic Caliphate”, taking nothing with them.²⁸ Many of Mosul’s displaced Christians initially sought refuge in Christian-populated villages on the Nineveh plains. On 6 August 2014, ISIS attacked this area, causing the community to flee towards Erbil, and then abroad. The terrorist group reportedly executed men and older boys, looted civilian property, and destroyed churches and monasteries.²⁹

Unlike the Christians, the Yazidis were offered no such alternatives. In an article entitled ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour’ published in ISIS’s magazine Dabiq a month after its attack on Sinjar, ISIS discussed how its interpretation of Islam dictated the group’s treatment of the Yazidis.³⁰ ISIS concluded that the Yazidis were mushrikun – polytheists and idol worshippers from a period pre-dating Islam.³¹ ISIS cited a Quranic passage stating that mushrikun are only to be offered the choice between conversion or death during Muslim campaigns.³²

During and after the August 2014 attack, and as outlined in Dabiq, the terrorist’s groups treatment of the Yazidis – notably, the enslavement of Yazidi women and girls – appeared to cleave more closely to the writings of a narrow subsection of Islamic jurists commonly relied upon by Salafi-Jihadi groups.³³

ISIS commenced its attack on Sinjar on 3 August 2014. With few military objectives in the area, ISIS focused its attention on capturing Yazidis.³⁴ After controlling the main roads and strategic junctions, fighters set up checkpoints and sent mobile patrols to search for fleeing Yazidi families. Within hours, Yazidis who had been unable to escape to the KRI found themselves surrounded.

In the days that followed, reports emerged of ISIS militants executing Yazidi men, older boys, and women past child-bearing age. Yazidi women and girls were abducted, sold as chattel within ISIS’s “caliphate”, where they were sexually enslaved and beaten while younger Yazidi boys were forcibly recruited, indoctrinated in ISIS training camps, and became part of ISIS fighting forces, a process which stripped them of their Yazidi identity and recast them as followers of Islam as interpreted by ISIS.³⁵

No other community was targeted by ISIS in this way. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum and the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria in 2015 and 2016 independently determined that ISIS was committing genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in its campaign against the Yazidis.³⁶

“In August 2014, ISIL seized the districts of Sinjar, Tel Afar and the Ninewa Plains. Allegations began to surface of serious human rights abuses perpetrated by ISIL and associated armed groups, including the intentional and systematic targeting of members of ethnic and religious communities in areas seized. This led to a mass exodus of Yazidis, Christians and members of other ethnic and religious groups from the Ninewa Plains.”

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups, A/HRC/28/18, paragraph 5, 27 March 2015.

The Yazidis of Iraq

The Yazidis number approximately one million people globally and are indigenous to Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Armenia, with larger diaspora communities in Germany and the United States.

Prior to 2014, the majority – approximately 550,000 – lived in Sinjar, Sheikan, and Ba'shiiqah and Bahzan in Nineveh Governorate in Iraq. Following ISIS's August 2014 attack on Sinjar, a majority were displaced into and around Dohuk. Many sought (and received) asylum abroad, notably in Germany and Canada.

The Yazidis count 74 genocidal attacks in their history, locally known as “firman”, the concept derived from the Persian “farmān”, meaning decree or order.⁴⁰ They include massacres of Yazidis in Sinjar in 1640, 1715, 1832, and 1890.⁴¹ Many of the campaigns of violence stem from the same root as their marginalisation and othering in Iraqi society: a fundamental misconception of the Yazidi faith.⁴² With no written scriptures, disputes continue as when Yazidism came into being. Yazidis believe theirs to be one of the world's oldest religions. Others assert that the religion came about in the twelfth century, when an isolated community began to follow the teachings of a Sufi mystic known as Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir.⁴³ Regardless, it is accepted that Yazidism is not one of the Abrahamic faiths, though it includes elements that has some similarities with these monotheistic religions.

Yazidis are often referred to as an ethno-religious group.³⁷ Whether the Yazidis are a separate ethnic group is a matter of dispute within the community itself. Most traditionally view themselves as ethnically Kurdish but followers of the Yazidi religion.³⁸ Following their perceived abandonment by the Iraqi Kurdish forces, the Peshmerga, which withdrew from Sinjar as ISIS commenced its 2014 attack, some Iraqi Yazidis have begun to assert themselves as ethnically distinct.³⁹

Yazidis believe in one God whose power on Earth is delegated to seven angels. The angels are led by the Peacock Angel, Malek Taūs, who is the intermediary between God and the Yazidis. At the core of the Yazidis' marginalisation is their veneration of Malek Taūs, a fallen angel who – unlike the Satan of the Judeo-Christian tradition – was forgiven by God and returned to heaven. The importance of Malek Taūs to the Yazidis has given them an undeserved reputation for being devil worshippers. This misreading of their faith and the consequent othering and socio-economic marginalisation has been deeply ingrained in Iraqi society, long predating the rise of the terrorist groups in Iraq, the most recent of which is ISIS.



From entrance to the Yazidi holy site in Lalesh. Photo by Håvard Bjelland.

The Assyrian Christians of Iraq

After the insurgency which followed the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi Christian population declined steadily from a pre-2003 estimate of more than 1 million to an estimate of 250,000 Christians remaining in the country as of November 2016.⁴⁴ A population project run by Shlama Foundation determined the Assyrian population of Iraq to total 151,047 as of March 2020.⁴⁵

Assyrian Christians belong to one of the three main denominations within the Iraqi Christian community: the Assyrian Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church. Assyrians regard themselves as ethnically distinct from Arabs and Kurds, and claim descent from Assyria, one of the world's oldest civilisations.⁴⁶

One of the indigenous populations of modern-day Iraq, the Assyrians' ancestral homeland is spread over northern Iraq, northern Iran, south-eastern Turkey and southern Syria, with Nineveh as its historic capital.

Like the Yazidis, Assyrian Christians have a centuries-long history of persecution and attempted annihilation. The 1933 massacre of Assyrians in Semele in modern-day Dohuk Governorate by Iraqi soldiers and Kurdish militia would influence Raphael Lemkin as he developed his understanding and definition of the crime that would come to be known as 'genocide.'⁴⁷

In the years following the fall of the Saddam Hussein government in 2003, the Iraqi Christian community was targeted by various terrorist groups AQI being the most notorious. The first attack, on 1 August 2004, was a series of car bombings outside six churches in Baghdad and Mosul during Sunday evening mass.⁴⁸ Five of the churches were Assyrian, and the sixth, Armenian Orthodox.⁴⁹ Twelve Assyrian congregants were killed. Between August 2006 and April 2008, four Assyrian priests and three deacons were murdered; five priests were abducted and released on payment of a ransom.⁵⁰

Between 2004 and 2013, 118 churches were bombed. In one brutal attack, a church in the Baghdad suburb of Karrada was stormed by an AQI-affiliated group and 52 Christians were killed, including two priests.⁵¹ The AQI-led insurgency caused many Iraqis to flee the country. Of more than 1 million Christians in Iraq before 2003, it is estimated that only 250,000 remain.⁵²



Easter celebration 2019 in Bashiqa. Photo by HL-senteret.

3. Main findings and analysis

Reasons for flight

Main findings

With regard to the reasons for seeking refuge, the Yazidi and Assyrian interviewees indicated their belonging to ethno-religious minorities meant:

- Heightened physical insecurity/fear of attack
- Discrimination, both structural and social
- Poor socio-economic conditions resulting in part from discriminatory practices

While the interviewees give diverse explanations for why they sought refuge from Iraq, their ethno-religious identity as Yazidi or Assyrian figures prominently.⁵³ Both the Yazidis and the Assyrians understand that their exposure to and fear of persecution and targeting are due mainly to their minority identity. Notably, they fear physical attacks by Salafi-jihadi groups such as ISIS.

Most interviewees also point to broader discrimination by society and authorities on account of their ethno-religious background. This tends to exacerbate their vulnerability compared to the general population in terms of safety, opportunity and socio-economic conditions, exposing the minorities to a range of negative effects.

A shared impression between interviewees who fled Iraq many years ago and recent arrivals is that the conditions for their respective groups have worsened in recent years, especially after 2014.

Heightened physical insecurity/fear of attack due to ethno-religious identity

In the pilot survey, both Assyrian and Yazidi interviewees expressed a general mistrust in Iraqi national and regional authorities, stemming from what they perceive to be the state's inability and/or unwillingness to protect them from attacks.

For the Assyrians, who fled during the 1990s, the jihadist attacks of 2004–2013 that affected fellow believers then residing in Iraq contributed to the mistrust and lack of faith in future protection. One Assyrian male interviewee, now residing in Norway, stated:

"I fled after the Kuwait War in the early 1990s. Then many other Assyrians fled because we did not expect Iraq to become stable in the long run. In particular, we were afraid that conditions would be difficult for Christians. This turned out to be true, unfortunately. From 2006 to 2010, many churches were bombed in Iraq, which made more Assyrians and other Christians flee. This exodus has increased even more after 2014 with ISIS."

There was a strong sense among the Assyrians that conditions for Christians in Iraq were steadily worsening. As one Assyrian said: "There is nowhere safe for Christians in Iraq right now."

Among the Yazidi interviewees, there was a belief that their community was particularly exposed due to widely shared negative attitudes in broader Iraqi society towards their religious beliefs. One Yazidi interviewee expressed it as follows: "We are judged solely by our religion." Another stated: "As Yazidi, we can never be safe in a Muslim country, since they think we are non-believers and worship the devil." This, some asserted, means that there is a higher tolerance for violent attacks on the Yazidis. "Being Yazidi in Iraq is not easy. You can be killed just by saying that you are Yazidi." Another stated: "We could not sleep in safety. We were constantly living in fear of being killed."

There was dismay at the lack of protection during the 2014 campaign against the Yazidis. Anger and mistrust were directed both at the local and national authorities in Iraq and at the international community more broadly. One Yazidi stated: “There is always such a fear deep inside us, and our security is not guaranteed.” ISIS’s August 2014 attack on the Yazidis of Sinjar confirmed many of the worst fears held by Yazidis who were residing in Norway at the time:

“Yazidis have never felt safe. This sense of insecurity has only been reinforced after ISIS’s invasion in 2014.”

In particular those who arrived after 2014 emphasised the fear expressed by one interviewee that “[e]veryone is afraid it will happen again”. The Yazidis also expressed conviction that the authorities would not prioritise their safety or well-being, affecting how they saw the future for their families. “We cannot ensure a secure future for our children in Iraq. I want to see my children grow and have a secure future. I want to give them hope that they can live in peace and safety and give them the life they deserve and where they can develop. That’s why we fled Iraq,” said one female Yazidi interviewee who fled Iraq in the 1990s.

Discrimination or lack of recognition

Interviewees from both groups also explained their mistrust of what they perceive as a lack of constitutional recognition and political representation of their community in the new Iraq.

Assyrian interviewees were concerned about support for cultural and linguistic rights, and for legal recognition and political representation as a distinct ethnic group. While Article 4 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution explicitly preserves the rights of the Assyrians “to educate their children in their mother tongue”, interviewees saw the need for more expansive legal protections of their rights.

“In general, we have weaker rights and worse conditions than other Iraqis.” One Assyrian explained:

“We are sometimes regarded as a religious minority. But we are also an ethnic group in line with Kurds and Arabs. This is not recognised.”

For the Yazidis the mistrust was also founded on and bolstered by experiences of discrimination and negative attitudes towards their communities on the part of other Iraqis. This was also the case for those arriving in the 1990s. A Yazidi woman, who fled after the 2014 attack, commented, “There is so much unequal treatment between religions and between people in Iraq. The majority of the population are Muslims, so Yazidi and Christians and the other minorities are almost invisible and do not have the same rights as the Muslims.” A Yazidi man explained how this affected their living conditions.

“Yazidis were generally subject to discrimination, both under the law and by others. Yazidis generally received little respect from other (non-Yazidi) Kurds. Other Kurds refused to buy food from Yazidis, which made it difficult for many of us to make a living. The outlook was generally poor in the country. As a Yazidi, I was always more vulnerable.”

Female interviewees also alluded to gender discrimination which intersected with a lack of protection of minority rights. One, a Yazidi woman who arrived in Norway before 2014, stated:

“It was generally difficult to be a woman in Kurdistan and Iraq, which was a very male-dominated society. Yazidi women felt especially affected in many areas. My daughter entered university in Mosul, but was told that she had to cover herself (with hijab) in order to study there.”



Yazidi women at genocide memorial, close to Baadre.
Photo by Steffen Aaland.

Poor socio-economic conditions

Several of the Yazidis interviewed talked of how they sought refuge partly because of the poor socio-economic conditions under which they lived. This was very closely linked to the general impoverished situation facing many Yazidi communities.

“Many of the Yazidis are very poor and try to make a living by small-scale farming with grain, vegetables, sheep and cows. Those who have farms and sheep are ‘richer’ than those who don’t. So it is difficult to support yourself if you do not have a farm or a shop or a workplace.”

The poor living conditions affecting the Yazidis were in part explained by discrimination on the basis of their ethno-religious identity. One interviewee explained: “If there is a Yazidi man who has a restaurant or a grocery store, then the Muslims do not come to the store or restaurant because it is owned by a Yazidi.” Some underlined the particular exposure of women whose male relatives were killed by ISIS, and their struggle to provide for their families. “If there is no man in the family it is very difficult for a woman to support herself and her children,” one Yazidi woman explained.

Prospects and conditions for return

Main findings

As preconditions for future security for their communities, Yazidi and Assyrian interviewees pointed to:

- Physical protection against future atrocities
- Legal recognition and equal rights under Iraqi law
- Rehabilitation of minority core areas in Sinjar and the Nineveh Plains
- Justice in the form of criminal accountability

Interviewees partly diverged with respect to how these considerations of flight influenced their reflections of return⁵⁴, and which conditions must be secured to ensure safety and inclusion.⁵⁵ All emphasized measures to ensure protection against future atrocities and physical attacks. For some, this included accountability for genocide. Better integration of their rightful legal recognition under domestic law was also important. Finally, the possibility of return to and rehabilitation of core minority areas figured among the responses.

Physical protection against future atrocities

When asked about their considerations of return, the lack of physical safety and security in the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar was a key factor for both the Assyrians and the Yazidis. Both Assyrian and Yazidi interviewees voiced a hopelessness about the possibility of ever being safe in Iraq. An Assyrian man who arrived in Norway before 2014 underscored the point:

“[Y]ou never know how long it will be possible to use the churches and be safe there. We saw what happened in 2010 and in 2014. Then ISIS passed easily through the control posts. No one protected us. We have learned from history.”

A Yazidi woman echoed this sentiment: “If we could live safely without fearing for our lives in Iraq, I do not think that a single Yazidi [would have] fled their homeland. We can’t even call Iraq our homeland anymore because we can’t live there in safety.”

For the Yazidi interviewees, there was a belief that their community would never be safe in Iraq, due to the widely shared negative attitudes in society toward their religious beliefs. The failure to protect the Yazidis against the ISIS attack was cited as proof that safety in Iraq was illusory. One female interviewee said:

"[T]here is no hope for the Yazidi in Iraq anymore when almost an entire group was wiped out while the world looked on and did nothing about it."

Similarly, the lack of prosecutions for ISIS's crimes against the Yazidis appeared to confirm for some a culture of impunity: "ISIS carried out genocide on Yazidi without any consequences. And they will continue with this because they know that nobody is doing anything to them."

When it came to suggesting ways in which physical security could be increased, there were important differences between the Assyrian and Yazidi interviewees. One Assyrian said:

"People are scared, nobody is really safe. All those who oppose the regime are targets, but especially Christians because their voices are not heard or represented. Nobody can protect them, they don't have weapons."

Another Assyrian added to the sentiment by referencing a lack of protection by the authorities: "What is needed is the ability to protect Christians from attacks by other groups, especially from extreme Muslims such as ISIS. The Christians and several other minorities have no confidence that the country's authorities are protecting them, learning from history, particularly from 2010 and 2014." Assyrian interviewees suggested local self-governance with their own security system (with one interviewee raising the idea of an armed Christian defence) to protect against future terrorist attacks as a possible solution, if national and regional authorities as well as international actors failed to protect them.

Yazidi interviewees did not suggest self-governance as an option. On the whole they expressed a deeper mistrust

than the Assyrians towards the authorities, based on the failure of the central and regional government to protect them from successive atrocities by AQL, ISI, and ISIS. Several referred to decades-old marginalisation and othering of the Yazidis, even by Iraqi minority groups, based on extensively shared misconceptions and prejudice towards the Yazidi religion, pointing to a broader societal prejudice towards them, and an atmosphere of impunity.

Some of the Yazidis who arrived after 2014 expressed fears of the Muslim community, in particular Sunni Arabs. They feared that Yazidis would never be fully accepted, and consequently would never be safe in Iraq. The ISIS campaign in 2014 and the failure of the KRG – whose forces were in Sinjar but withdrew – to protect them has affected conceptions of identity, with those arriving after 2014 being more likely to reject Kurdish ethnicity and to hold Yazidis to be a distinct ethnic and religious group.

Consequently, the Yazidis were much more focused on the idea of the international community providing protection for them, and potentially for Sinjar, signalling their lack of belief in Iraq and Kurdish authorities to guarantee their security.

This pilot survey finding that both Iraqi Yazidis and Assyrian Christians now living abroad saw no possibility of returning echoes a 2016 analysis from the World Council of Churches and Norwegian Church Aid: "The sense of their sudden betrayal by Muslim neighbours and friends – and the trauma that minority communities have suffered, and continue to suffer, in Iraq – means that minorities who fled to neighbouring countries had few plans to return."⁵⁶



Church ceremony 2019 in Bashiqa. Photo by HL-senteret,

Legal recognition and equal rights in Iraqi law

Another element influencing considerations of return and a safe environment was legal recognition and equal rights under Iraqi law. This was suggested to be a necessary precondition for members of both communities.

“For the future of Yazidis in Iraq, it is important that discriminatory laws be changed. As long as the Yazidi are not equal to other groups in Iraq under the law, the future is uncertain.”

One Yazidi interviewee highlighted the need for a revision of the 2006 Iraqi Nationality Law, which obliges all children with Muslim fathers to be registered as Muslims.⁵⁷ This has distressing consequences for Yazidi women who bore children as a result of rape by ISIS fighters, and for the parts of the community that continue to struggle with accepting these children, who are deemed Muslims under Iraqi law. It perpetuates the crimes committed by ISIS against the Yazidis, as explained by a female interviewee:

“The ID law primarily affects women who have children born of rape during IS captivity. Their children become Muslim by law because their fathers are registered as unknown. This means that children of Yazidi mothers are excluded under the law. Because the Yazidi population has already been reduced as a result of the IS attacks, this legislation will contribute to further reducing and splitting the group, making it an indirect effect of the genocide. Furthermore, the law is highly discriminatory, since the religion and identity of the child is determined by that of the father, not of the mother.”

The Assyrians expressed fear of ongoing changes that would complicate a return for the Assyrian community as a consequence of weak protection of their rights. “There is nowhere safe for Christians in Iraq right now. In general, it is slightly better in northern Iraq than in the south. But we hear that entire villages and places in the north that used to be inhabited by Assyrians are now being taken over by Kurds who show false documents claiming ownership of places, homes and other properties. In Baghdad too, some authorities or others are trying to take over properties, empty churches, etc. that belonged to Assyrians.”

Both Assyrians and Yazidis referred to constitutional recognition of their group as an important symbolic gesture that may prevent new cycles of persecution and discrimination. The Assyrians called for recognition of their long history as an ethnic group predating the Arabs and the Kurds. The Yazidis sought legal recognition and representation mainly as a religious group, though, as noted, more recent arrivals defined themselves as a distinct ethnic group, separate from the Kurds.

While many interviewees acknowledged that adjusting to life in Norway was challenging, several emphasised the importance of having equal rights under Norwegian law. One male interviewee said: “We are doing very well in Norway because we have the same rights as everyone, in working life and in general, despite the fact that we are Yazidi, unlike in our home country.”

Rehabilitation of minority core areas in Sinjar

The Yazidis were more concerned about their poor socio-economic conditions as well as the threat of a resurgence of ISIS. Their fear, as they described it, was based on their community’s profound marginalisation and the fact that their heartland lies in a disputed area – two factors which have deprived them of economic and educational opportunities and increased their sense of isolation and insecurity. They underlined the failure of Iraq’s central and regional governments to either protect them or to ameliorate their conditions. One Yazidi said: “Most people do not even get help to rebuild their lives. Many are homeless and struggle every day to survive.”

A profound shared concern among the Yazidis was the right to return to Sinjar. Almost six years after the attack in 2014, one Yazidi woman said: “Hundreds of thousands of Yazidi live in refugee camps with poor conditions. With thin summer tents and poor access to water and heat in the winter, and with little power and cooling in summer.” Several Yazidis expressed fears that the current displacement of Yazidis would be prolonged indefinitely. As one interviewee put it:

“We are very worried that Yazidis will never be able to return to Sinjar and that they will remain in the refugee camps for many years to come.”

They also underlined that living in IDP camps further threatened the safety of the Yazidis. “As long as Yazidis live in refugee camps and cannot return to their homes, they will not be safe.” Return was seen by interviewees both as a gesture by the authorities in KRI and Baghdad despite the status of the areas as “disputed”, and as a way for the Yazidis to attempt to normalise their situation post ISIS and end the increased vulnerability to displacement in camps.

Justice in the form of criminal accountability

Several of the Yazidi interviewees placed a clear emphasis on the need for accountability in the form of criminal trials, particularly after the ISIS genocide on their community. One Yazidi woman said:

“It is important to have a legal settlement for the victims, and that IS fighters are brought to justice. Otherwise, there is still a fear of new attacks”

In particular the Yazidi women interviewed seem to view accountability as an important measure to reduce the risk of similar atrocities in the future. One Yazidi woman said: “ISIS carried out genocide on the Yazidi without any

consequences. They will continue with this because they know that nobody will do anything to them.” Another explained that they fear the return of ISIS: “What happened in 2014 has made a lasting impact on the Yazidi community. What we fear could jeopardise security in the future is the rebuilding of IS.” This fear was echoed by another Yazidi woman: “Yazidis will always be threatened as long as IS is out there and not brought to justice for what they have done.”

This corresponds with the results of a larger survey of over 1000 Iraqis, most of whom were Yazidis, about their conceptions of justice. In this survey, Yazidi interviewees indicated most strongly that justice meant international protection against further harm (69%) and fair trial of the perpetrators followed by punishment in the event of conviction (61.7%).⁵⁸

Other findings in this pilot survey among Assyrian and Yazidi refugees from Iraq in Norway also finds support in the broader international survey of 2016.⁵⁹ Most of the interviewees were internally displaced Christians and refugees in the surrounding region. They expressed a fear for religious extremists and a lack of trust in the authorities ability to protect them. The 2016 report also presents the experiences of some of the numerous Muslims from both countries that have had to seek refuge due to the ongoing violent conflicts and not least after the attacks of ISIS. In Iraq, the Muslim minority community identifying as Shabak (most of which are Shia oriented) have been particularly targeted by ISIS as infidels. In Syria, the Sunni majority has been in a particularly vulnerable position under the Alawite (Shia oriented) Assad regime.⁶⁰



Reconstruction in Ninevah. Photo by Håvard Bjelland.

4. Comparison With Syria Survey

In the project “Flight from Iraq and Syria: The impact of religious and ethnic identity”, 12 refugees from Syria were interviewed, all with a minimum of three years in Norway. All of them arrived after 2011, most of them after 2013 when the uprising had developed into a full-fledged civil war. Nine identified as Sunni Muslim, four of them as Arab, four as Kurdish, and one as Palestinian. One gave his identity as Christian Assyrian, one Christian Armenian, and one as belonging to the Alawite community, all of whom identify as Arab. They originate from different regions of Syria and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. There were three women among the twelve interviewees.

Main findings

Most of the interviewees expressed the view that Syrian nationality was an overarching identity for various groups in the period prior to the uprising in 2011. They all identified themselves as affiliated with specific religious and/or ethnic groups. However, religious and ethnic divisions were not central to the motivation and aims of the uprising.

As the interviewees’ accounts extended into the years of war and escape, ‘divisions’ increasingly became a central theme. References to ethnic and religious divides were more frequent. First and foremost, interviewees attributed this to the Assad government’s exploitation of such divisions as part of the war tactics. This may also be understood in light of their affiliation with the opposition to the regime. The deep and persistent line of conflict was perceived by the interviewees to be first between the government and a relatively unified people prior to the uprising, and then between the government and an ever-growing number of armed actors, many of them anti-Assad, present in Syria after 2011.

Virtually all the interviewees believed that the Syrian people had been betrayed by the world community. They considered the interventions in the war by the superpowers (USA, Russia) and neighbouring states (e.g. Turkey) to be a contributing factor in keeping the war going. ISIS figured as a much less important factor for the ongoing war, though this view may be influenced by where they came from and when they fled Syria.

During the civil unrest and conflict, social media served as an essential information channel; now they are used primarily to maintaining contact with family members in Syria and other countries.

The interviewees had little or no faith in a stable or secure life for inhabitants in Syria. Several underlined that they considered this highly unlikely as long as Assad remained in power

Comparative analysis

A feature among all Iraqi and Syrian refugees interviewed is the pivotal role that the general conditions of war and violent conflict played in their motivation for fleeing. Lack of trust in the ability and/or willingness of the government to provide security for citizens in general – and in the case of Iraq, to ensure protection against extremist groups in particular – is a main reason for their fear of return or for their concern for family members or others still living in the homeland.

The Iraqi interviewees were significantly more influenced by ethnic and religious identity factors as decisive considerations for flight compared to the displaced Syrians. This is unsurprising, given that it was largely, if not entirely, on those grounds that they were targeted or experienced threats. The Syrian interviewees, on the other hand, cited the ongoing war, the commission of crimes with impunity, and the policies of the government as primary reasons for flight.

The sectarian dimension was also slightly different with respect to the interviewees’ considerations for return. While ethno-religious identity figured as an important explanation for (lack of) trust in existing institutions for the Iraqi interviewees, the Syrians emphasized their mistrust in the politics of the Assad government as a major reason for the lack of confidence that return would be safe.

Information via social media and mobile phones allows the interviewees to follow developments in Syria and Iraq and to keep in touch with family members still there. For the Iraqi refugees too, contact with their respective religious communities also plays an important role in maintaining ties with their country and receiving information about new developments.

The differences in the findings on the impact of ethnic and religious identity on the reasons for flight among the interviewees of the Syria and Iraq section of this pilot survey may partly be understood in light of the ongoing war in Syria and other recent political processes. The differences may however also be interpreted in light of the different models of national identity and the degree and kind of ethno-religious identification in the two countries, related to the different state-building processes.

While Syria has had a centralized state with little room for expression of ethno-religious sectarianism, Iraq has a number of ethno-religious groups with a long history of sectarian fragmentation also due to a weaker central state. The two countries may even be seen as examples of different regime types, despite the apparent similarities in ethno-religious composition.⁶¹ If a similar Syria study had been undertaken with more Kurds, not least after the recent political turmoil with Turkey in 2019 in the traditional Kurdish territories of Syria and the resulting displacement, the results might have been different.



Qaraqosh, a mainly Assyrian Christian city close to Mosul, was taken by ISIS in August 2014, forcing all inhabitants to flee. This is the destroyed interior of St. Mary al-Tahira. Photo by Chris McGrath.

5. Conclusions

Members of the Assyrian and Yazidi communities interviewed for this pilot survey were significantly influenced by ethnic and religious identity factors as decisive considerations for flight. This is unsurprising, given that it was largely, if not entirely, on those grounds that they were targeted or experienced threats.

The roots of these profound misgivings are found primarily in the minority communities' relationship with the Iraqi state. Both Yazidi and Assyrian interviewees expressed mistrust in the ability of the Iraqi government to protect their communities. The fragility of the Iraqi state was brought sharply into focus by the total collapse of the Iraqi army in and around Mosul in June 2014. It is important to recognise, however, that the roots of this mistrust extend deeper than the central and regional government's failure to protect the Yazidi and Assyrian community from ISIS. Since 2004, the government has proved largely unable to keep Iraq's minority communities safe, with incidents such as the 2007 Sinjar bombings and the 2010 Baghdad church bombing embedded in their collective memory.

The unravelling of Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 affected religious and ethno-religious communities deeply. This is reflected in the vision for the future expressed by the Iraqi Assyrian and Yazidi interviewees. Interviewees from both communities viewed their ethnic and religious affiliation both as the origins of their targeting as well as a major threat to their safe and secure return to their homeland.

There is considerable doubt among the interviewees concerning the ability and/or will of the central and regional governments of Iraq to ensure sufficient protection to minority identity groups under existing circumstances. Moreover, the power struggles between larger sectarian groups – between the Sunni and Shia Arabs, and between the Arabs and the Kurds – exacerbate the vulnerability of minority communities. For the Yazidis, the ongoing problem of Sinjar being a disputed area, claimed by both the central government and the KRG, increases the risk of conflict and threat to the communities who live there, and makes it unlikely that those who have left will return.

Mistrust of the Yazidi interviewees is directed both at the central government and at the Kurdish Regional Government. Retreat by the Peshmerga, the Kurdish forces of the KRG, as ISIS advanced into Sinjar August 2014 was

said to be a result of their efforts to secure new strategic territories further south. Their failure or delay in protecting the Yazidi from ISIS in August 2014 caused a deep fracture between parts of the Yazidi community and the KRG. This may help explain why some of the Yazidi interviewees, in particular those who left Iraq after 2014, have returned to asserting Yazidi ethnicity.

The territorial defeat of ISIS has not resolved the underlying threats to Iraqi minority communities, expressed not least by renewed attacks by the group. An unflinching look at the history of the Assyrians and Yazidis in Iraq underscores that the threat of violence and violation outlasts any one particular perpetrator.

Article 2 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution refers to Yazidis and Christians as groups that should enjoy religious freedom. Nevertheless, several of the interviewees refer to lack of recognition and political representation of their communities and of equal protection of their identity and rights under Iraqi law as well as in practice. There are ample grounds for the Assyrian and Yazidi interviewees to believe that their communities were and are not fully accepted into Iraqi society, given their status as numeric minorities.

For the Assyrian Christian community, this is reinforced by the fact that its members identify as belonging to a distinct ethnic group outside of the two major Iraqi ethnicities (Arab and Kurdish). For the Yazidis, their targeting by ISIS recalled the enduring misreading of their faith as one of “devil-worshippers”, and the deeply-ingrained prejudice and marginalization they are routinely subjected to in Iraqi society. Consequently, several Assyrian and Yazidi interviewees express that they cannot place the fate of their physical security, and that of their families, in the hands of the Iraqi authorities. “We have learned from history”, reflected one Assyrian man. Several of the interviewees expressed similar sentiments.

A particular concern expressed by the Yazidi was the Iraqi identity legislation that makes all children with Muslim fathers register as Muslims, including children conceived during genocidal rape. The effect is that Yazidi women who want to keep their child born during ISIS captivity are precluded from registering them as Yazidi. The clause therefore perpetuates the genocidal effects, continuing the spilt between the Yazidi community and their offspring

that ISIS initiated in 2014. One of the Yazidi interviewees suggested that this law should be adjusted to provide for an exemption for children born out of genocidal rape.

The marginalisation of Yazidis in the Iraqi society drives discrimination and ultimately heightens the threat against them. The Assyrian Christians interviewed also expressed fear of continued discrimination and lack of recognition. Until Iraq takes steps to address prejudices and the structural and social discrimination that underpin them, Yazidis, Assyrians and other ethno-religious minorities are likely to continue to seek refuge outside of Iraq, with few plans to return.

This report is a pilot survey which comprises the experiences of only ten Iraqi refugees in Norway. It therefore cannot serve to draw general conclusions or as basis for policy recommendations. Nevertheless, its findings based

on these few samples are coherent, and they correspond to broader international surveys, revealing Iraqi minorities distrust in authorities' ability to protect them, to represent them and to ensure their equal rights. It also confirms that the experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation go beyond the atrocities of ISIS.

Besides the need for guarantees for personal security, a broad spectrum of measures is needed to combat the roots of marginalisation, including stronger legal recognition and political representation. Education about diversity is among the most efficient arenas for combatting prejudice or ignorance based on lack of knowledge, recognition and respect among the broader population. The introduction of a new curriculum on diversity introduced in KRI in 2019 for the high school level could be seen as a step in the right direction.



Photo by Heshmat Narenji.

Footnotes

1. www.inclusive-citizenship.no
2. <https://www.inclusive-citizenship.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HL-Report-flight-from-iraq-3.pdf>
3. Alexa Døving: «Personlig og politisk: Flyktningers tolkning av krigen i Syria», HL-senteret 2020 («Personal and political: Refugees narratives about the war in Syria»)
4. See for instance <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/international-affairs/the-protection-needs-of-minorities-from-syria-and-iraq>.
5. Written by Sareta Ashraph and Cecilie Hellestveit as external consultants for this project
6. Chaldo Assyrian Syriac
7. Saad Salloum, Christians in Iraq - a comprehensive history and current challenges, Masarat MCMC, Baghdad 2014
8. Saad Salloum, Minorities in Iraq - Memory, Identity, Challenges, Masarat MCMC, Baghdad 2013
9. Cecilie Hellestveit (2016) Saving the Religious Mosaic of the Middle East – Conflict, Constitutions and Confessional Minorities in Iraq and Syria, p.58. NCA Report (2016).
10. T. Preti (2007) Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's Minority Communities since 2003. London: MRG.
11. World Council of Churches and Norwegian Church Aid (2016) The Protection Needs of Minorities from Syria and Iraq. (Norwegian Church Aid, Protection Needs), p. 13.
12. Charles Tripp (2010) A History of Iraq, p. 282. Cambridge University Press. See also Coalition Provisional Authority, Order No 1: De-Baathification of Iraqi Society, 16 May 2003; and Order No. 2: Dissolution of Entities, 23 May 2003.
13. For more information on the nature of the conflict in the disputed areas: Saad Salloum's articles at Al-Monitor <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/authors/saad-salloum.html>
14. European Parliament Briefing. Minorities in Iraq: Pushed to the brink of existence. February 2015, p. 4. See also Norwegian Church Aid, Protection Needs
15. Saad Salloum et al (2015). Political participation of minorities in Iraq (https://www.academia.edu/35153146/Political_Participation_of_Minorities_in_Iraq)
16. Tripp, p. 287.
17. National Public Radio (US). General calls attack on the Yazidis 'Ethnic Cleansing', 15 August 2007.
18. Anthony Shadid. Church Attack Seen as Strike at Iraq's Core. New York Times, 1 November 2010.
19. Norwegian Church Aid. Protection Needs, p. 15.
20. An Islamic term which refers to Jews, Christians and Sabaeans. See John L. Esposito (ed.) 'Ahl al-Kitab'. In The Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014).
21. CBS. Up To 500 Killed In War's Deadliest Attack. 15 August 2007.
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24. Adam Withnall. Iraq crisis: Isis changes name and declares its territories a new Islamic state with 'restoration of caliphate' in Middle East. The Independent (UK), 30 June 2014.
25. Cecilie Hellestveit (2016) "The Islamic State – Roots, Means and Ideology". In: Sørensen, Hagtvet and Brandal (eds). Islamism: Ideology and Threat, pp 212–243.
26. Jizyah is a de facto tax levied on specified non-Muslim subjects who are permitted to live in a state governed by Islamic law. It is paid as a sign of submission and provides military and legal protection in return.
27. Reuters. Convert, pay tax, or die, Islamic State warns Christians. 18 July 2014.
28. BBC News. Iraqi Christians flee after Isis issue Mosul ultimatum. 18 July 2014.
29. United Nations. Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups. A/HRC/28/18, 13 March 2015.
30. Dabiq, Issue No. 4. The Renewal of Slavery before the Hour, pp. 14: "Prior to the taking of Sinjar, Shari'ah students in the Islamic State were tasked to research the Yazidis to determine if they should be treated as an originally mushrik group or one that originated as Muslims and then apostates, due to many of the related Islamic rulings that would apply to the group, its individuals, and their families"
31. Ibid., p. 15: "upon further research, it was determined that this group is one that existed since the pre-Islamic jāhiliyyah, but became 'Islam' by the surrounding Muslim population, language, and culture, although they never accepted Islam nor claimed to have adopted it."
32. Hellestveit (2016) Surat 9-5 in the Quran states "Kill the mushrikun wherever you find them."
33. Dabiq, p.15: "Accordingly, the Islamic State dealt with this group as the majority of fuqahā' have indicated how mushrikūn should be dealt with. Unlike the Jews and Christians, there was no room for jizyah payment. Also, their women could be enslaved unlike female apostates who the majority of the fuqahā' say cannot be enslaved and can only be given an ultimatum to repent or face the sword."
34. International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis, A/HRC/32/CRP.2, 16 June 2016 (Col Syria - They Came To Destroy). para. 26.
35. Saad Salloum, Êzidis in Iraq : Memory, Beliefs, and Current Genocide , UPP, Second Edition 2020 , p. 109-112
36. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Our Generation is Gone": The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa, p. 20. This stands as the first legal analysis of whether ISIS had committed the crime of genocide in its attack on the Yazidis. There had, however, been a number of political entities that issued statements referring to ISIL's attack on the Yazidis as 'genocide'. See, for example, European Parliament, Resolution of 4 February 2016 on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh', 2016/2529 (RSP), 4 February 2016. See also, Col Syria - They Came To Destroy.
37. For example, UNHCR's Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-seekers.
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39. Col Syria - They Came To Destroy, para. 185. See also, Saad Saloom, Barriers to Return for Ethno-Religious Minorities in Iraq, IOM Iraq, January 2020, p. 21
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53. Cf. question 1 of the study
54. Cf. question 2 of the study
55. Cf. question 3 of the study
56. Norwegian Church Aid. Protection Needs. p. 31.
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59. "The protection needs of minorities from Syria and Iraq" (2016) undertaken by the World Council of Churches and Norwegian Church Aid. Two of the authors of this report, Cecilie Hellestveit and Ingvill Plesner, contributed to the work on the 2016 report.
60. Ibid.
61. Power-Sharing in Conflict-Ridden Societies. Challenges for Building Peace and Democratic Stability, London: Routledge (Ashgate) 2015, 360 p. (Butenshön, Stiansen og Vollen).
62. Col Syria - They Came To Destroy, paras. 24 and 185.