NINEWA PLAINS AND WESTERN NINEWA BARRIERS TO RETURN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
ASFL	Azidi Fraternity & Solidarity League
AoO	Area of Origin
BCF	Barzani Charity Foundation
C4W	Cash for Work
CNSF	Critical Needs Support Foundation
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAMA	Doctors Aid for Medical Activities
DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DCA	DanChurchAid
DDG	Danish Demining Group
DoLSA	Department of Labour and Social Affairs
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EU	European Union
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
FAO	Farm and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFES	Funding Facility for Expanded Stabilization
FFS	Funding Facility for Stabilization
FFIS	Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSD	Fondation Suisse de Deminage
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBVIM	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
GoI	Government of Iraq
GRC	Governorate Returns Committee
GW	GardaWorld
HA	Human Appeal
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
ICRRP	Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme
ID	Identification
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IHAO	Iraq Health Access Organization
IHF	Iraq Humanitarian Fund
IIC	IDP Information Centre
IKMAA	Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency
IMC	International Medical Corps
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
IS	Islamic State
JDA	Joint Development Associates International
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
LADP	Local Area Development Programme
LHSF	Local, Hybrid and Sub-state Force
MAG	Mines Advisory Group
MCNA	Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment

MDM	Médecins du Monde
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NAP	National Action Plan
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSS	National Security Service
PAO	Public Aid Organization
PHCC	Primary Health Care Centre
PIN	People In Need
PPP	Private Public Partnership
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PSS	Psychosocial Support
PUI	Première Urgence Internationale
PWJ	Peace Winds Japan
QRC	Qatar Red Crescent
REACH	Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health
RIRP	Rebuild Iraq Recruitment Program
RNVDO	Representative of Ninewa Voluntary for IDPs
SCI	Save the Children Iraq
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Assault
SEDO	Sahara Economic Development Organization
SFHH	Single Female Headed Households
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SP	Samaritans Purse
TAD	Al-Tahreer Association for Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UPP	Un Ponte Per
U.S.	United States
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WHH	Welthungerhilfe
WHO	World Health Organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WVI	World Vision International

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sustainable return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq occupies many international donor projects and resources. However, in the context of the Ninewa province, this problem is not straightforward. Both the concept of displacement and expectation of return are complicated by a long history and atrocious waves of violence, including war, genocide, state-discrimination and systematic demographic changes.

Displacement is ingrained in the history of Ninewa and forms part and parcel of community narratives about survival, identity and belonging. In this way, displacement cannot be conceptualized as a linear process or a uniform experience, but rather as a transformative experience conditioned on geographical, gender and identity factors.

This report is a meta-analysis of the vast literature on Ninewa IDPs and the barriers to their return. It covers important analytical and contextual gaps with firsthand research to inform and enhance stakeholder policies. The various sections of this report will delineate the following primary findings:

- The crisis of displacement should be studied through a combination of multiple causes and circumstances, constituting the environment or conditions of diffused long-term insecurity and uncertainty at both the local and national levels.

- An absence of trust in the government (central, regional and local), political institutions and security forces to safeguard Ninewa's citizens has cascaded into conflictual inter- and intra-community relationships and proliferated opportunistic security actors. This distrust is a fundamental barrier to both return and the building of community resilience.

- The dynamics of displacement and return are happening in a context and cannot be understood in isolation. The movements of IDPs are outcomes of a variety of complex developments, requiring in-depth understanding and contextual analysis, in order to develop effective and long-term policy and programming.

- Before, during and following stages of displacement, women are targeted and made vulnerable in different ways than men. Women's experiences of displacement are marginalized in both research and literature, which subsequently affects their participation and agency in political and development realms. Highlighting women's experiences of displacement is essential in order to adopt transformative approaches to safe and sustainable IDP return, promoting gender equality upon INGO exit.

- The recent crisis of displacement has contributed to the increase of social tensions, in particular between Shabaks and Christians, in the districts of Hamdaniya and Tal Keif. The high rate of Shabak returnees and their territorial expansion, empowered by units from the Popular Mobilization Forces in the area, are perceived by Christians as a threat to their future existence in the Ninewa Plain. The fear of demographic change, as well as a strong sense of political marginalization, characterizes the Christian community and contributes to a pervasive sense of uncertainty. This, in turn, influences their decisions to remain in displacement or migrate. Fears of demographic change and the sense of marginalization extends to other minority groups in Ninewa.

- Reconciliation efforts are critical for the return of IDPs to Ninewa. These are mostly led by International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), in the absence of a clear policy and implementation structure of the Iraqi government to pave the road to community cohesion. In

order for reconciliation to succeed, it is critical to understand the transformation of violence and its effect on identity politics and female participation, pivotal to sustainable peacekeeping.

The data for this report has been collected during the time period of January through June 2019.

The meta-analysis situates IDP return and stabilization into Ninewa's history of displacement, which forms the backbone of the remaining analysis. The identified barriers to return are categorized into district, identity and gender specific barriers to return. Within each category, primary barriers to return are identified and discussed.

Several factors are relevant for IDP return (see Table 1). These are often interlinked and should not be understood as mutually exclusive (i.e. IDPs belong to all three barrier categories). The barriers and the solutions to overcome them are identified through quantitative research, literature and qualitative research to fill research gaps. This is carried out by focusing on the following:

- District-specific barriers in Hamdaniya, Mosul, Sheikhan, Sinjar, Tal Keif, and Tal Afar;
- Community specific barriers (Yazidis (Ezidis), Christians and Shabaks); and
- Gender-specific barriers (women).

BARRIERS TO RETURN AND DISTABILIZING FACTORS		
DISTRICT	**MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN**	**MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS**
Hamdaniya	Trauma Housing destruction Demographic change and discrimination	Security concerns and high presence of Popular Mobilization Forces Compensation and reconstruction needs INGO lack of coordination with local authorities Disputed status of the district and competition between Government of Iraq (GoI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
Mosul	Trauma Lack of livelihood opportunities and services Security concerns, including high presence of different armed groups, ongoing IS attacks, and mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)	Reconciliation and coexistence concerns Large-scale corruption ingrained in local authority Unclear justice and accountability procedures Social cohesion between populations in East and West Mosul are affected by stigmatization and revenge acts toward the former Risk of local political backlash against the increased visibility and influence of military and political groups affiliated with the Shia community. Marginalization of the majority of the population (women, children and youth) vis-a-vis old tribal structures
Sheikhan	Demographic change of the district Security concerns Housing destruction	Presence of a large number of IDPs

Sinjar	Security issues Lack of serious investment into reconstruction efforts Lack of HLP documentation of IDPs and returnees	Lack of livelihood opportunities causing unrest Lack of serious investment into reconciliation and community traumas Presence of a multitude of security forces, controlling the district's political and security landscape in a non-inclusive way The lack of a unified security force or command-and-control may create a vacuum for a renewed IS establishment
Tal Afar	Lack of livelihood opportunities Lack of HLP Documentation and reconstruction activities Lack of safety and security	For Single Female Headed Households (SFHHs): discrimination and harassment or worse For youth: limited education or employment opportunities Internal disputes within the Shia and Sunni Turkmen communities Presence of various security forces, with the dominant Shia forces supporting only Shia communities
Tal Keif	Lack of housing, land and property (HLP) documentation Lack of financial means to return Housing destruction	Presence of various security factions Demographic change effects on social cohesion Community distrust and minority representation Disputed status of the district Rise in local, hybrid and sub-state forces (LHSFs) and the high militarization of formerly high-population towns Economic disenfranchisement in farming due to explosives and lack of water Lack of compensation and access to drinking water Heightened pre-existing inter- and intra-community frictions

SECT AND RELIGION SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN	
ETHNO-SECTARIAN COMMUNITY	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN
Yezidi	Feeling of insecurity in areas of origin Militarization of Yazidis internal divisions Lack of political settlement between conflict parties, mainly in Sinjar Trauma of the crimes committed by IS Migration of more than 100,000 Yazidis to Europe following the occupation Absence of justice and reconciliation with Sunni Arab
Christian	Awaiting improved security and the lack of international protection

	Decreasing employment and economic opportunities
	Lack of hope in Iraq and strong pull factor abroad
	Majority of Christians have already left the country, creating an imbalance between the number those who stayed and those who migrated
	Territorial expansion of Shabaks in traditionally Christian areas
Shabak	Better job opportunities in areas of displacement
	Social tensions with the returnees

GENDER-SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN

GENDER	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN
Female	Restriction of movement due to intimidation, assault, harassment, child caring responsibilities and social norms
	Protection needs during and following return movements
	New opportunities and aspiration since displacement
	Unwillingness to return to old oppressive power structures

METHODOLOGY

A significant body of literature exists on the topic of IDP return and stabilization. This part of the project focuses on contextualizing internal displacement in Ninewa and understanding current barriers to IDP stabilization and return. Our meta-analysis identified the gaps in extant literature and allowed us to conduct research to fill those gaps. The meta-analysis will explore underlying political, security, social, and economic factors inhibiting the return and resilience of IDPs from Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa.

In order to answer this question, the meta-analysis identifies key historical developments in displacement within the Ninewa region; political and security developments inhibiting stabilization and IDP return, and, in particular, the return of women; three separate categories of barriers to IDP return; and socio-economic factors for reconciliation, including the transformation of violence and the Women Peace and Security (WPS) discourse in Iraq.

We summarized the extensive quantitative research conducted by the IOM (via their via their displacement tracking matrix, or DTM, dashboard, district Area of Origin profiles, district of displacement profiles, barriers to return, protracted displacement, etc.). We then triangulated this evidence with information received from research-focused institutes, including the Global Public Policy Institute, United States Institute for Peace, International Republican Institute, International Crisis Group, European Council on Foreign Relations, Heinrich Bøll Institute, Brookings Institute, and the Middle East Research Institute's previous work on minorities. We utilized news outlets to ensure our maintenance of an updated context analysis, particularly with regard to the political developments in the IDP's districts of origin. The districts we focused on in Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa included: Hamdaniya (Ninewa Plains), where Christian and Shabak communities continue to struggle to coexist peacefully; Tal Kaif (Ninewa Plains), which is comprised of a mix of Arab Sunni and Christian communities; Sheikhan (Ninewa Plains), home to Yazidis and Christian communities; Sinjar (Western Ninewa), populated by members from the Yazidi and Sunni Arab communities; and Tal Afar (Western Ninewa), inhabited mainly by Sunni and Shia Turkmen, with smaller Yazidi communities surrounding it.

The literature on IDP return is mainly quantitative, survey-based and conducted by NGOs and INGOs. We found it lacked historical and political contextualization, as well as an analysis of current political and security developments. We believed that by deploying academic work and theory, we could develop a deeper analytical approach to the topic. For example, through the application of academic sources, we explored the concept of belonging; the transformation of violence; and the displacement experiences of women. These were all themes that we used to unpack the contextual specificities and factors influencing people's barriers and motivations to return. In addition, we caution against assuming IDP return as an indicator or pre-condition for stabilization, as many districts of IDP origin are experiencing conflict between different security forces and are contaminated with IEDs. We found that the assumption of stabilization through return is not sufficiently proven or verified.

The gaps we identified in the existing literature were primarily clustered around gender, sect, and district-specific belonging. In order to fill these gaps, we interviewed INGOs and women's organisations (amongst others, al Mesalla, Women Empowerment Organisation, Danish Refugee Council, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Suzanne Aref, Seed Foundation, Non-Violent Peace Force and PAX for Peace). In addition, in coordination with USIP at the first partner meeting, we created a focus group for women. We decided to recruit the participants through Women Empowerment Organization, who ensured that 15 IDP women from Ninewa would attend the event. The FGD was held at the Kaznazan Community Centre, a place which would be familiar and comfortable for the participants. In addition, since we were warned by Sanad that

women usually arrive with children due to their domestic responsibilities, we chose a community center with facilities where mothers and their friends could look after children outside the room. Furthermore, since we do not compensate participants besides providing transportation and refreshments (which they were unable to receive due to Ramadan), the women's participation was coordinated to facilitate their ability to run any necessary errands through the services at the facility (including signing up for programs and procuring medicine) following the FGD.

MAP OF NINEWA PROVINCE DISTRICTS
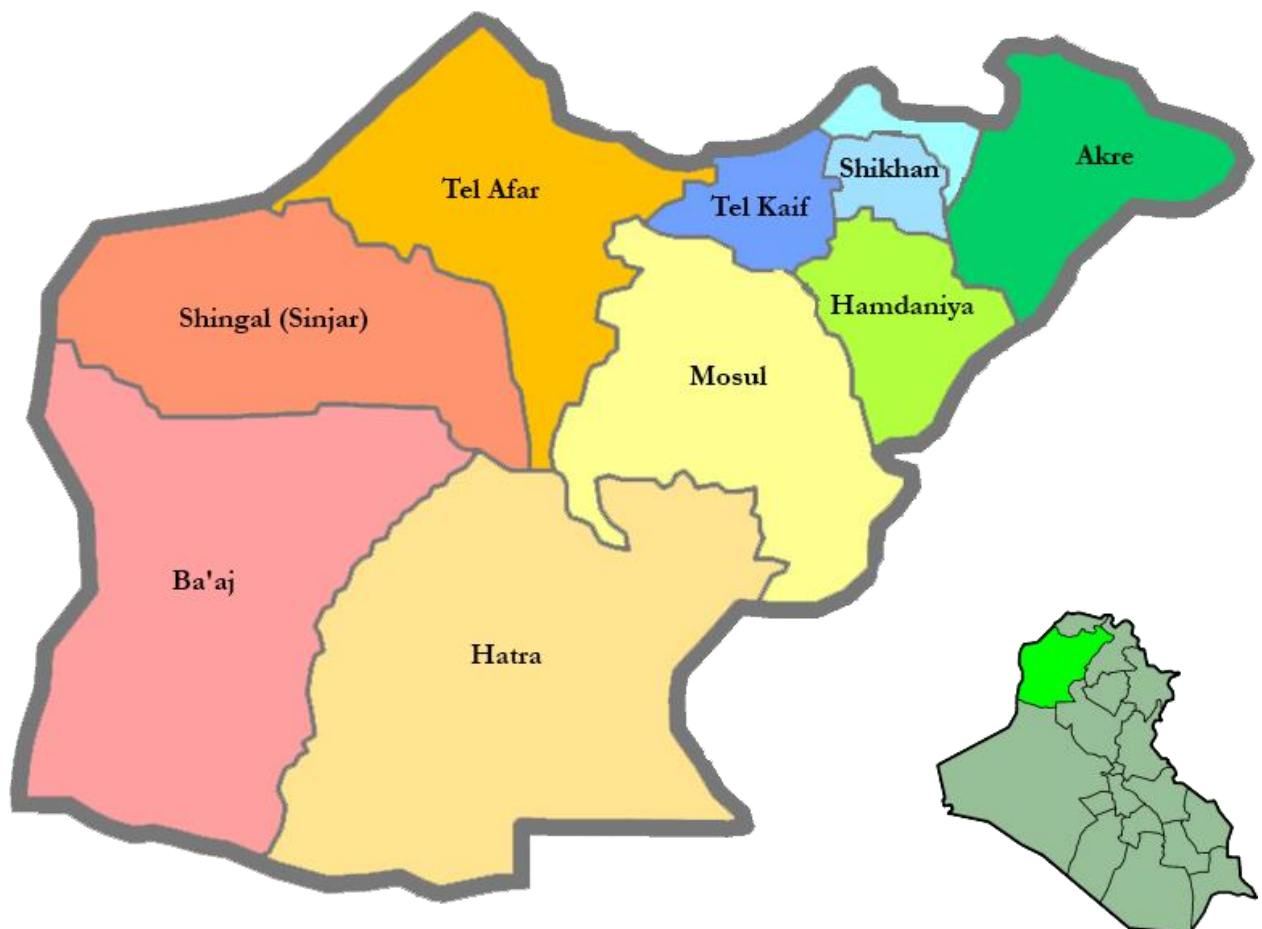
PART I: BACKGROUND ON DISPLACEMENT IN NINEWA

This section analyses the political and historical context of displacement in Ninewa, central to the understanding of displacement and expectation of return. It looks at the impact of waves of displacement during the Ba'athist rule (1968-2003), post-regime change (2003-2014) and the rise and fall of the Islamic State (2014-present). The second half of the section analyses current return and displacement dynamics and the experiences of women prior, during and following displacement in the Ninewa province.

Though the focus of this study is on recent population displacements in the Ninewa province resulting from the Islamic State (IS) conquests since June 2014, this phenomenon is not without precedent and should be contextualized within a broader crisis of governance and statehood in Iraq. Such understanding is critical in analyzing the current conditions that invoke internal displacement, cross-border migration, as well as the barriers to safe and voluntary return. The causes and circumstances responsible for the diffused long-term insecurity at the local and national levels and the uncertainty about the future need to be identified. These are the factors that determine displacement, return or onward migration (the shifting of status from IDP to refugee).

1.1 PHASES OF DISPLACEMENT IN IRAQ

In the modern history of the state of Iraq, Iraqis have experienced waves of forced population movements, which can be separated into three different historical periods:
* 1968-2003: under the Ba'ath Party regime (including the displacements caused by the Anfal campaigns against Kurdish and non-Arab communities in northern Iraq)
* 2003-2014: from the toppling of the Ba'athist regime to the invasion of IS
* 2014 to date: the IS and post-IS era

Within each phase, the country experienced the division and fragmentation of its communities, protracted internal displacement and extensive demographic changes.

1968-2003: Under the Ba'ath Party Regime

In the early 1970s, the Ba'ath Party regime used forced population displacement as a tool for power consolidation and the implementation of its ultra-nationalist doctrines. They used Arabization policies to change the demography and identity texture of non-Arab territories across many provinces in northern Iraq, including Ninewa, Kirkuk, Tikrit and Diyala (later defined as disputed territories in the Iraqi constitution) (HRW:2004). In Ninewa, the districts of Hamdaniya, Sheikhan, Sinjar and Tal Keif were amongst the worst affected by such policies. The regime razed thousands of Kurdish and other non-Arab minority villages, evicting hundreds of thousands from their ancestral homes and farmlands. Simultaneously, they confiscated land and property from those evicted and redistributed to Arab settlers.

The regime successfully exploited the socio-political clout of regional Sunni Arab tribal leaders to enforce and sustain the new social order. They established the Northern Affairs Committee which was authorized to incentivize Sunni Arabs to settle in the northern provinces and gain their loyalty by providing 200-250 donims (1 donim ~ 900-1000 square meters) of agricultural land to the tribal leaders and lured Sunni Arab families with 50 donims per settler family. All were awarded lump sums, house furniture (confiscated from the displaced) and newly built vital water and electricity infrastructure.

2003-2014: From the toppling of the Ba'athist regime to the invasion of IS

Regime change in 2003 did not stop internal displacement or improve the situation in the disputed territories, where the ethno-religious minorities live. The districts in these territories remained grossly underdeveloped and under-resourced.

After winning a decisive military victory in 2003, the U.S.-led coalition formed the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), headed by former U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremer. The CPA ratified the Law of Administering the State for the Transitional Period in March 2004. Though the interim document was designed to rectify the damages and suffering incurred under Saddam Hussein's rule, it created new problems with regards to housing, land and property (HLP) matters, fueling Arab-Kurd tensions. Tens of thousands of non-Arab (mostly Kurdish) returnees scrambled to regain ownership of their homes, agricultural land, and businesses that were appropriated during the Arabization campaign. The Arabs perceived their eviction as 'exile' whilst Kurds perceived the homecoming as 'return.' Moreover, the violence that followed the regime change in 2006 resulted in new waves of internal displacement, particularly in Ninewa. Large numbers amongst vulnerable minorities were forced to leave the country or move to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). While the high level of insecurity at home was a strong push factor, the IDPs were pulled by numerous other factors to settle in the KRI or migrate abroad.

At the heart of the post-2003 conflict in Ninewa was the Sunni Arabs' opposition to the presence of the U.S. forces in Iraq and the ascent of Shias to power. Sunni Arabs perceived the U.S. administration as allowing the pro-Iranian Shia political parties to dominate the system of governance, making it difficult for them to maintain loyalty towards the new Iraq. Furthermore, whilst former opponents of the Ba'athist Regime assumed positions of power, former affiliates of the Ba'ath party were excluded. This radical shift in the balance of power generated concern within the Sunni components of Ninewa, including Arab and Turkman Sunnis, some of whom resorted to violence as a form of resistance. Districts like Tal Afar became a center for Sunni objection to the new authorities. As a result, Ninewa became a base for the Sunni insurgency which would engulf the country for years to come. The violence committed over the course of this insurgency impacted relations between Shias and Sunnis and inter-community relations with other ethno-religious groups (Van Zoonen & Wirya:2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

The level of sectarian conflict between the two main Islamic denominations, Shia and Sunni, rose considerably in the years following 2003, causing security vacuums and arousing communal grievances among all segments of society. This atmosphere allowed for extremist groups to emerge and thrive. Vulnerable and defenseless, ethno-religious minorities, particularly Christians and Yazidis, fell prey to extremism. They suffered relentless attacks, most severely in Baghdad and Mosul. From the literature, it is ascertained that during this period the Iraqi security forces (ISF) and other related forces were not received as a legitimate force by the people, and a sense of ownership and partnership was missing, widening the gap between the people and the authorities.

In 2000, UN-Habitat estimated the number of IDPs at 800,000, inhabiting the three (3) KRI governorates of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimaniyah (Norwegian Refugee Council:2002, p. 25). The number of IDPs remained high over the following decade. By November 2013, there were 759,000 people registered as IDPs, despite major changes in the social, political and security circumstances (Higel:2016). By June 2014, the dynamics in Ninewa Plain remained unstable, inter- and intra-communal relations were strained, the political landscape was divisive, and the quality of services was poor. Moreover, the Government of Iraq (GoI), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the local government of Ninewa (LGN) engaged in unhealthy competition over power and resources. This worsened the on-going polarization, under-development, and strained relationships.

2014 to date: The IS and post-IS era

Following the Islamic State's onslaught on Iraqi territories in June 2014, more than 3 million people in Sunni-majority provinces fled their homes (Costantini & Palani:2018). Of these, around 1.3 million found refuge in the KRI, and other Iraqis chose to migrate abroad. In 2015, for example, Iraqis were among the top three nationalities, after the Syrians and Afghanis, reaching Europe through the Mediterranean routes.

The Iraqi displacement further intensified during the counter-IS military campaigns, especially during the operation to retake Mosul, resulting in over one million IDPs between 17 October 2016 and 29 June 2017 (IOM:2017). The cumulative effect of IS occupation, the war of liberation and the mass destruction and displacement further undermined people's confidence in the political, economic and social future of an already fragile Ninewa province. Nonetheless, since the liberation of the entirety of Ninewa province in 2017, large numbers of IDPs started returning to their areas of origin (AoO). However, this was not always sustained, and large numbers of IDPs remained in displacement, primarily in the Duhok and Erbil governorates.

The governorate of Duhok received a large number of IDPs from the outset, originating mostly from northern Ninewa. Yazidis, whose highest concentration is in Sinjar, composed around 62% of the governorate's total IDP population. Duhok's IDPs are mostly accommodated within camps situated in the districts of Sumel, Zakho, as well as Sheikhan and Faida (currently under the KRG security control). Interestingly, many areas within the Duhok governorate witnessed an ethno-religious compositional shift due to the large influx of IDPs, especially Yazidis, from across Iraq, which implied an additional change in the demographics of IDPs' places of origin (IOM:2017).

Similarly, the Erbil governorate has hosted a large concentration of IDPs since the December 2013 crisis in Anbar. Given the central position of Erbil, the governorate attracted IDPs from many Sunni Arab-majority provinces, particularly from the Anbar province. Most of these IDPs live outside camps because of the relatively higher cost of living in the city (IOM:2017). Erbil continues to host a significant share of Christians from Mosul and Ninewa Plains, who live mainly in the Christian neighborhood of Ankawa.

1.2 STATISTICS ON DISPLACEMENT

By the end of 2017, the number of returnees began exceeding displacement rates across Iraq for the first time since December 2013. This development was particularly pronounced in Ninewa, which figures as the top governorate for both displacement (478,638) and return (1,677,912), with a return rate of 64% as of August 2019 (IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019c, 2019d). However, due to a number of factors, the return of IDPs has not always proved sustainable and has resulted in both econdary displacements and episodic or partial returns[1] (see section 1.3) (IOM, RWG, & Social Inquiry:2018).

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[1] Episodic or partial returns refer to those who commute to their AoO for salaries but live elsewhere or to families who split up to accrue dual benefits.

IDPs from Ninewa face cumulative barriers to return to their AoO and are considered to be in protracted displacement[2] or at high risk thereof (IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019a, RWG Meeting: 2019b). A survey indicated that IDP intention to return decreased from 88% in 2018 to 61% in 2019 (REACH Iraq:2019). Intentions to return vary according to several factors unexclusive to IDPs' conditions in displacement as well as district of origin. For IDPs from Sinjar district, only 13% of displaced households intended to return, which contrasts with 43% of households from Ba'aj and 48% from Tal Afar (RWG Meeting:2019c, REACH Iraq:2019).

Ninewa currently sees the highest number of people in need of humanitarian assistance (estimated at 2,168,222) (UN OCHA:2018). Meanwhile, the protracted nature of the current displacement crisis has led to high competition over increasingly scarce resources in various return provinces (IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019a). In the districts most impacted by military operations against IS, the poverty level exceeds 40%, which adversely affects the capacity of IDPs and returnees to rebuild their lives independently (UN OCHA:2018). Subsequently, the governorate also sees the highest need for humanitarian assistance, required for an estimated 2,168,222 individuals and incurs the highest number of IDPs living in unsafe and severe conditions (213,372) (IOM:2019a, 2019b; UN OCHA:2018).

Recent quantitative research has documented key factors for continued displacement, including housing, livelihoods, basic services, lack of social cohesion, security concerns, mental health and psychosocial distress (IOM, RWG, & Social Inquiry:2018). Return is not only conditioned on the barriers towards it but also on reasons to remain in displacement and the effects of protracted displacement, including integration into host communities. The return of IDPs from Ninewa cannot be entirely understood in quantitative relation to barriers, nor is its completion a necessary indicator of stabilization success. Understanding the population movements in Ninewa requires analysis of less quantifiable datasets, not exclusive to expectations of IDP return and contextual of socio-political transformation.

1.3 DISPLACEMENT DYNAMICS

Ninewa is often described as a 'small Iraq', as it is comprised of diverse ethno-religious groups, including Shia and Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Chaldeans, Sabean-Mandeans, Yazidis, Kakai, Turkmen and Shabaks. When IS invaded the Ninewa governorate in 2014, the intimidation and violence was targeted and experienced differently among the various districts, sects and genders. The intensity of violence and onslaught is reflected in the population movements following the IS liberation. This explains, for example, why Sinjar and Mosul city are the AoO for 41% of the national IDP caseload (RWG:2019b).

With a caution not to essentialize[3] sectarian belonging, sectarianism remains important to comprehend how current administrative, social, security and political structures (formal and informal) have created a sectarian reality within which people navigate during periods of peace, war, displacement and return. When displacement dynamics are seen to heighten sectarian lines, it may

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[2] Protracted displacement is defined here as being displaced for three or more years.

[3] In this context, the word "essentialize" is used to mean 'reduced to essence' or 'simplify'.

buttress strategies for survival and gain through pre-existing systems of sectarian patronage, rather than a deep-felt sectarian belonging. For minority community groups, such as the Yazidi, genocide and targeted attacks have severely endangered return and given rise to renewed appeal for national and international justice and recognition. In this way, their trust in protection through existing ethno-sectarian systems or patronage has faded and needs replacing with rule of law.

"We need the law to defend us, we want something to get us to feel we are safe. And the problem now in Iraq, the law is so weak, the government is so weak, the government of Baghdad. And everything is the same and we should study the reasons [which] bring ISIS and to change those reasons but everything it was before ISIS it's the same now (...). And we cannot trust the guarantees of the government of Baghdad. We need international guarantees and Iraqi guarantees."

Religious authority KII, 2019

Administrative and security vacuum

An administrative and security vacuum was created by the GoI and KRG's collective failure to settle their conflict over the disputed territories. Ninewa's history has often a source of conflict due to its oil reserves as well as its strategically favorable position as the connecting tissue between Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. For the inhabitants of the governorate, sentiments of disenfranchisement from the GoI and KRG have strengthened dependency on informal structures and authorities (including religious or tribal leaders) to advocate for protection, rights and entitlements. In turn this renders citizens and local administrations of Ninewa vulnerable to exploitation and intimidation. This 'governmentality' - a term coined by Michel Foucault - helps to explain how Ninewa's citizens make sense of the conduct of governance (Gaston & Schulz:2019, Hamasaeed:2019). Against the backdrop of state disenfranchisement, fear and intimidation easily render central to new 'patrons" (e.g. security actors') intimidation into allegiance of various 'client' groups in times of crisis and displacement. Following the formal liberation from IS' control in Ninewa, militarization and security differentiation ascended under various sectarian, ethnic, religious or political banners, filling an administrative and security vacuum that predated the IS invasion. The absence of a unified statutory security force proliferated opportunist local, hybrid and sub-state forces (LHSFs)[4] to foster divisive control in the disputed districts in Ninewa. Security forces were suspected to be partially fueled by foreign actors and various criminal businesses including smuggling. This development has been well-documented as a catalyst on any pre-existing factors of instability in the region and has been

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[4] LHSFs include: (1) the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) forces, also known as the Peshmerga (200,000), and (2) the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) (>160,000), also known as Hashd Al-Shaabi in Arabic. The PMF is an umbrella of militia or sub-state factions accredited 'formal status' by GoI in November 2016 and a myriad of small local forces responding to the invasion of IS. The Popular Mobilization Forces are a majority Shia force but contains minority forces of Sunni, Turkmen, Yazidi, Christian and Shabak communities (Gaston & Derzsi-Hovath:2017).

reported to cultivate an environment of widespread distrust and vigilantism within and between communities (Gaston & Schulz: 2019, Mercy Corps & IQCM:2017).

Distrust and Demographic Changes

Corruption, distrust in governance and securitization are recurring concerns amongst IDPs from Ninewa. The encroachment of the LHSFs on local administrations and their perceived economic advancements are amongst the many barriers to the return of minorities and considered a major factor for destabilization and intra-community conflict (including Shia and Sunni components of the same sectarian community). The Popular Mobilization Forces groups have been politically relevant in the deployment of shadow administrations in parts of the disputed territories. During great protests on corruption and nepotism, Mansour al-Mareed was selected as the new governor of Ninewa in May 2019. His background in the Ataa movement, closely aligned with Popular Mobilization Forces led people to accuse him and the local authorities of corruption and of buying himself the governorship.

Another factor of distrust amongst IDPs and various stakeholders is the lack of transparency with which IS affiliation is documented, determined, cleared or assumed. This is further complicated by the variety of security actors operating the database of affiliates; the resemblance of names; corruption; and the intention and professionalism of the operating security actor. The security clearance is a premise to obtaining identity documents, required for Iraqis to enjoy their rights and entitlements to services, including healthcare, education and mobility. It is particularly challenging for women and Single Female Headed Household (SFHHs) to access these processes due to a number of gender restrictions and discrimination (IOM:2019c; NPC:2019d). In the absence of transparency of this fundamental process, security actors can easily disenfranchise or favor subsets of the population (NPC:2019d).

Distrust within the communities in Northern Ninewa and Ninewa Plains can be seen as both an indicator and an outcome of demographic change. Following the last wave of displacement, certain groups, such as the Yazidis and Christians, perceived to be pushed into onward migration (NGO KIIs:2019) and, conversely, fortified others (like the Shia components of Turkmen and Shabaks) within Ninewa's disputed areas (Local authority KIIs:2019). Meanwhile, families of former IS fighters and individuals with assumed affiliation are particularly vulnerable and feel insecure, especially inside the villages. Families coming to west Ninewa from the north, hide themselves under acquired names. A similar trend has been detected with some former Ba'aj residents who geographically dispersed themselves into other areas of Ninewa to escape their district's reputation as a former IS stronghold (Subject matter expert KII:2019).

"Ninewa Plains is a strategic place. I feel that the delayed process of liberating the Plains was driven by a different agenda than the liberation of these areas. There was a different ambition there. It is part of the Iranian Shia Crescent project. Christians are the biggest losers of this project. The delayed process and three years in displacement discouraged Christians to think of the return."

Christian KRG politician, KII

Involuntary Return

The LHSFs have positioned themselves with leverage to impact displacement and return, which has in some places instigated demographic change (Gaston & Derzsi-Horvath:2017). They are believed to have used their positions to harass their opponents into accepting return conditions or further

displacement using various methods, such as detaining or abusing families or individuals or simply preventing them from returning to their AoO (Gaston & Schulz:2019). Delays by local authorities in processing the documentation required to organize return have been perceived as a deliberate and calculated measure to hinder return (NPC:2019b) (See Section 2.2 Sect- and Religion-specific Barriers to Return). Concurrently, some IDPs have been forced to return through violence, abuse, harassment, shaming and confiscation of documentation or threats thereof. Human rights violations are often reported from the IDP camps, and perpetrators are often security and military personnel, rendering camps unsafe and increasing the fear of forced return. Camp-based IDPs have repeatedly been victimized by camp closures or the summoning of tribal and community leaders to IDP camps to intimidate and shame residents to return, occasionally with threats of confiscating security batches or assigning IS affiliation upon camp residents (NPC:2019c, RWG:2019b).

Dynamics of Protracted Displacement

The protracted mode of Iraq's displacement crisis has led to three (3) central dynamics which can harden barriers to return.

1. Poverty: For the vulnerable IDPs with limited access to livelihood opportunities, there is an increase in poverty, debt and humanitarian needs. Women and children, who are living in IDP camps and have come to rely on aid, can face hardship during the international donors' transition from humanitarian response to development in urban and peri-urban settings. This shift in donor prioritization provides livelihood opportunities but mainly in areas where the most vulnerable IDPs are unable or unlikely to reach. Therefore, despite its intended consequence, the transition has pushed those IDPs to resort to exploitative dependency relations or methods to survive in times of decreasing aid provisions (UNFPA:2016). In addition, the resource scarcity has increased community tensions within return areas, over perceived favoritism and discrimination in allocation.
2. Vulnerability: The protracted mode of displacement has increased protection needs for IDPs. The rising inter- and intra-community distrust and lack of livelihood opportunities have rendered vulnerable groups more vulnerable. A symptom of this can be seen in the case of SFHHs who are often suspected of IS-affiliation and suffer discriminatory and/or revenge practices (INGO KIIs:2019).
3. Lower return motivation and new sense of belonging: For IDPs with resources to set up their life after displacement, it has led to increased emigration or integration into host communities. In Dohuk and Erbil the Yazidi and Christian IDPs fear demographic changes in their the AoO and find safety in numbers by being displaced together (IOM:2019a). Furthermore, new life opportunities and better social services vis-a-vis the ongoing instability in Ninewa have led IDPs to settle outside the governorate.

Governance and community vigilantism

During displacement, IDPs have been exposed to new systems of governance under INGO and KRI auspices. This governance in displacement has put the legitimacy and governance of former leaders (GoI, local authorities, tribal, religious or others) into question. Some IDP women have been exposed to new, less restrictive conditions during their life in displacement, and fear the return to conservative dogma (INGO:2019). Some women fear they may face revenge on return, such as rape or harassment, from the community or individual perpetrators should they or their family be assumed to be associated with IS. Community vigilantism has proved particularly lethal and hostile towards vulnerable demographics, including SFHHs (see Section 1.4 Women and Displacement).

The decreasing in humanitarian actors is a critical issue given the number of IDPs relied on during the crisis of war and displacement in Ninewa. In January 2018, a total of 240 actors were operating

to respond to the humanitarian needs of IDPs; one year later, as of January 2019, this number reduced to less than half at 116. The increasing gap in humanitarian response is acutely felt within IDP camps, according to the KRG's Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCCC). It estimated a $1.9B (U.S. dollar) budget to cover the needs of hosting IDPs and refugees, of which 25% are covered by INGOs (JCCC:2018, KII:2019).

In this way, the current gaps in resources, protection and administration are particularly concerning for minorities and women. The unmet needs subsequently fuel sentiments of state repudiation and marginalization, creating an environment of vigilantism, instability and ruptures in the social fabric of Ninewa.

1.4 WOMEN AND DISPLACEMENT

Women and children constitute 75% of the estimated 6.7 million people currently in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in Iraq (UN OCHA:2018). Women bear the brunt of family care and child-rearing responsibilities for the estimated 3.3 million affected children. Nevertheless, there is an evident silence around women's perspectives, and their voices are grossly under-represented in the literature in relation to displacement and return in Ninewa.

Women's experiences of the IS invasion, displacement and return are vastly different from their male counterparts. Women and girls navigate more restrictive and high-risk paths for survival, which will hereby be mapped out from invasion into displacement.

Figure 1 - IDPs from Sinjar in a camp in Duhok

Prior to the IS invasion of Ninewa, women were traditionally made dependent on men for protection and income. Across the country, despite reforms for change, women only comprised 20% of the workforce, partly due to a culture of female exclusion in the labor market (World Bank Group:2018). Women in Ninewa marry earlier, have larger families, and lower literacy levels than

women in other areas of Iraq (World Bank Group:2018, IOM:2013). These factors make them vulnerable to exploitation both from within and without their family or community, prior, during and following IS' invasion of Ninewa (IDP Women FGD:2019). Women from minority groups rendered particularly vulnerable due to prior social marginalization and the ways in which they are targeted according to their conviction or belonging.

Organization and Shame

In Iraq's conservative communities, a woman's sexuality beholds the so-called 'family organization' which places societal pressures on her maintained through severe community scrutiny (UNFPA:2016). As the guardian of organization and caregiver of the family, women subsequently become paramount to preserving and restoring its kinship extension of the community, be it national, tribal, or religious. This inducts a centrality of women to the collective identity cultivation which on the one hand, works to control her body and the reproduction of the family, and on the other, transposes women to figure as the 'Mother of the Nation' and symbolize the group (Yuval-Davies:1997, Alinia:2004). In times of social disorder, scholars argue that women experience increased intra-community oppression and restrictions for the purpose of preserving this organization, as a symbol of the collective identity.

According to this sense-making, women are not only the subjects of intense scrutiny and tough restrictions from her own community, but also render vulnerable to exploitation by opponents who seek to bring about shame - harm, or even extinction - onto the collective identity of their community. In this sense, genocides targeting a particular collective identity group render female bodies battlefields for the struggle of survival, recognition and empowerment of a social group. A dynamic which is all too familiar for minority women, including Yazidis and Kurdish struggle for recognition (Alinia:2004). During such social upheaval, shame-based violence including rape becomes a weapon of war to signal conquest or subduction. In response to this shaming some communities attempt to 'purify' the organization of its collective identity, by ostracizing her, force her to commit suicide or kill her (organization killing) (Danish Immigration Service:2018, GBV Sub-Cluster:2019b). In this way, organization and shame form part and parcel of a larger patriarchal axiom for community survival and identity.

Women's Experience of the Military Invasion

Regardless of the flag with which it is championed, the invasions of Iraq have affected women disproportionately. Severely underreported sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and general restriction on women's rights and movements often originate from a variety of authorities within and outside community or sectarian lines (Al-Salhy & Coles:2013, GBV Sub-Cluster:2019b). A comprehensive SGBV assessment amongst women in Iraq found that SGBV incidents were largely perpetrated and legitimized by partners or other family members upon whom the victim was completely dependent for protection and survival (UNFPA:2016).

Under IS' rule, women and girls suffered sexual enslavement, rape and other forms of CRSV. Women and girls who were abducted by IS were traded as commodities and sexually enslaved by IS fighters and mass graves were built for the women who were no longer desired by the fighters. In Mosul and Tal Afar, Shia Turkmen women were reportedly taken by IS, raped and burned alive, whilst others were raped by different actors trying to flee from East to West Mosul (BBC:2017, Baghdad Post:2017, NGO KII:2019).

"[IS] restricted her freedom considerably (...) The women were as if they were buried alive."

Female IDP, FGD

Currently, there are over 3,000 abducted captives unaccounted for (Ali:2019). Some of the women and girls who survived trafficking and abduction or endured forced marriage to IS fighters, or were perceived as such, have now become stigmatized and targeted once more.

Women's Experience of Displacement

"When they take your husband and kill him, then you become responsible for your children. You would also be responsible for your husband's sister and mother if he had any. You need to shoulder all of that. Similarly, if your husband is detained. All of the responsibility has to be assumed by the wife."

Female IDP, FGD

Displacement heightens the challenges for women and girls to fulfill their roles of upholding extensive family responsibilities to nurture life and protect the family honor. Meanwhile, they also face higher insecurities during displacement than men. In times of displacement, women have been reported to face severe and restricting levels of intimidation, exploitation and violence (UN OCHA:2018, INGO KIIs:2019). In particular, women's limited access independent livelihood and access to services render them ever more vulnerable to exploitation in displacement.

"After the displacement, exploitation increased. For instance, they would marry a 13-year-old girl to a 60-year-old man (…) When she found out that the man was married to another woman, she left him. Now she has a daughter. When she was about to give birth to her daughter, she was taken to the hospital. They asked her about her husband. She was separated from him by then, and she did not even have a marriage certificate. They, therefore, took her personal identification card. Her daughter is 6 months old. The mother does not have a marriage certificate, nor a personal identification card, nor do her daughter have a birth certificate."

Female IDP, FGD

Identity and marriage documentation have become high concerns for women in displacement as it regulates her movements, ability to retrieve lost property, incur subsidies, protection and services. Identity documentation (ID) is needed in order to access services, cross checkpoints and exercise their rights. In Iraq, as a pre-condition for obtaining ID documentation, IDPs must successfully obtain a security clearance. According to research by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), 8% of IDPs in camps and 10% of IDPs residing outside of camps have no such documentation. Over half of the women from the study felt too uncomfortable to start the process due to heavy male presence at the offices and limited childcare services restricting their movement. However, women have a higher need for protection and health provision, in particular reproductive health services. This measure has subsequently seen women turned away from hospital delivery rooms and found in perilous situations. The study also highlighted

that undocumented children are denied or conditionally admitted to schools, constituting another burden for their mothers (NPC:2019d - DRC & IRC presentation).

SFHHs struggle to provide for their households due to the lack of livelihood opportunities available to them and the cultural exclusion of women to the labor market. Ninewa has the highest level of children affected by conflict and a relatively high percentage of SFHHs, constituting 21% of in-camp households and 15% out of camp (REACH:2018a). Therefore, should these women want to navigate the socially and culturally restricted spaces for independent survival, they often come to rely on negative coping strategies such as 'survival sex' or exploitative dependency relations (Dietrich & Carter:2017, UNFPA:2016).

"There is a considerable amount of pressure on women. She cannot start a business or have her own; she will be pressured by her family, neighbors, and the larger community and the perception would be that she is not a well-regarded woman. This is our Iraqi community."

Female IDP, FGD

Sexual Exploitation and Assault

"Any way you can think they [SFHH] can be exploited, they are."

INGO KII:2019

Displacement heighten the vulnerability of women to sexual exploitation and assault (SEA). In particular, SFHHs are targeted due to the lack of guardianship, a community assumption - or crime justification - about their IS affiliation, due to their single status. Women and girls with assumed IS affiliation have reportedly faced systematic violence and murder, enforced suicide, rape, community marginalization, and are often subject to discriminatory practices related to the access of humanitarian assistance and services provision (UN OCHA:2018, Farrell:2018, Dietrich & Carter:2017, INGO KIIs:2019). In addition, SFHH have reported SEA from landlords and other challenges in reclaiming their property. SFHH face an additional host of hostilities and violence including destruction of their belongings or eviction from their houses upon return. Unable to retrieve missing ownership documents or reclaim possession of occupied property due to discriminatory barriers in accessing courts, women are restrained from filing compensation claims for lost properties (UNDP:2018). Women do not file complaints or open court cases against the perpetrators due to the fear of eviction, further SEA, inheritance exclusion or transfer of possession (UNDP:2018, Dietrich & Carter:2019).

The harassment and fear of SEA has led to restriction and regulation of women's movements. SFHH who travelled alone in Tal Afar have been reported to be detained at checkpoints, under the pretext of assumed IS affiliation. In turn, this has intimidated other women to restrict their solo movements. Rumoring women of such affiliation is easy and has been used as an intimidation tool by tribal leaders in the Anbar region to push SFHHs and other women back to their AoO (RWG:2019c, NPC:2019d).

"If you go to them [police], they would exploit your vulnerability. In other words, they would sexually harass you. If you are nice to them, they take

advantage of it. If you are not nice to them, then they would not process your work."

Female IDP, FGD

"The men at the checkpoint, whenever they saw women passing by, they would delay the process. There was an elderly man with two girls next to him sat in front of us. The military personnel looked at the girls and said to the elderly man, are they your daughters? Yes, he said. The militant said, "Would you give me one of them?" The elderly man could not say anything because he was afraid. He bent forward, speechless."

Female IDP, FGD

Since the displacement crisis, various forms of CRSV have been deployed as revenge, recruitment and intimidation. Periodically, it has amounted to 'dual purpose' violence, i.e. both in the interest of the perpetrator as well as a part of a discursive message of shaming or community revenge. Women survivors refrain from reporting and opening cases against the perpetrators.

Reporting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The widespread underreporting of SGBV excludes the issue from political agendas particularly in the GoI where the issue is largely politically disengaged (UNFPA:2016, NGO KII:2019). The underreporting results in a lack of statistical evidence and thus response, research and lobbying for statutory change. As a case in point, despite a newly developed and government endorsed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV), the cultural barriers to reporting persist.

"At Tikrit check point, [we] went to the computer room, where they run background checks. They took my personal status identification card. After they were done with my case, they started with the other woman. They asked about her husband and she was worried to tell them that he is a detainee. She told them he was home. They told her that the computer tells them that he is imprisoned. She got nervous. She was young and beautiful and had her auntie with her. It was during the night. The military personnel asked the young lady to stay in the computer room and for her auntie to leave. Then, they asked for her phone number. She refused. Then they asked for her auntie's phone number. She refused as well. Then, they said to her go to the restrooms until we run a more thorough background check. Why would they ask that? She started to weep. She began insulting the military personnel by saying "don't you have a spec of organization? Are you not ashamed of yourself by requesting me to go to the restroom?" I wanted to intervene, but I knew if I did, I would put myself into trouble. My heart was all burning to say something. Why did they exploit her situation? They should be upholding the law instead.

But there is no law implementation even by 1% by the police or even by tribes."

Female IDP, FGD

Women refrain from reporting SGBV and honor-based violence committed against them due to a number of factors. One concern reported in INGO interviews is the victim's fear of IS affiliation, stigmatization and the loss of community or male patronage which often follows reporting (SGBV KIIs:2019, UNDP:2018). Another challenge is the fear of being met with shaming, intimidation, exploitation or disbelief by individuals from the reporting line including local authorities, security and military actors, non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, and family members (GBV Sub-Cluster:2019a). A third challenge to reporting is the limited capacity of shelters and the 'best possible outcome' scenario which offers limited incentive to report. The current statutory system in KRI is arguably not victim-centered, as it requires opening a legal case against the perpetrator to enter the shelter and eventually aims to reintegrate the victim from the shelter back under the male patronage (sometimes of her perpetrator), following casework processes. However, no thorough monitoring of her condition or survival can be made beyond this point. Traditionally, family and community-based mediation, protection and conflict resolution mechanisms are by far the most common pathways selected by women to resolve SGBV issues (UNFPA:2016, NGO KII:2019).

The gradual re-prioritization of donor priorities from emergency response inside IDP camps to development will increase SGBV protection challenges for IDP women inside camps and rural settlements. This is due to their inability to cover the dwindling aid distributions with new urban livelihood opportunities that risk pushing women into exploitative dependency relationships or negative coping strategies. Meanwhile, humanitarian actors are dealing with increasingly complex SGBV caseloads, limited legal aid provision and inadequate statutory response, including SGBV accountability measures and long-term protection plans for women (GBV Sub-Cluster:2019a, NGO KIIs:2019).

Part II: BARRIERS TO RETURN & STABILISATION

This section summarizes the specific district, sectarian and gender barriers to IDP return, based on existing literature, quantitative research available from IOM and interviews with key informants.

Statistics on Return

Ninewa is currently seeing a return rate of 64% with 1,677,912 recorded returnees according to the IOM DTM. Mosul has seen the highest levels of return at 992,046, followed by Tal Afar (334,572) and Hamdaniya (160,308) (IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard: 2019d).

Although returns are ongoing, many returnees end up being displaced again within Ninewa (IOM, RWG & Social Inquiry:2018). One of the reasons for the secondary displacement is the extremely severe return conditions found in 26% of the locations in Ninewa (IOM:2019b). According to the IOM, about 100,000 returnees live in critical shelter upon return, but the far majority (1.6 million) reside in private housing (IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard: 2019d).

Due to the protracted nature of the large population displacement, the service and resource needs of IDPs and returnees have increased. According to recent livelihood studies, many returnees and IDPs are incurring ever higher levels of debt. Almost 69% of 12,262 households are indebted, and between 12% to 15% of those are SFHHs (UN OCHA:2018). Studies have shown that 62% of IDPs living inside camps and 65% of those living outside camps have no plans to return to their AoOs in Ninewa within the next year (REACH Iraq:2019).

Barriers to Return in Context

Barriers should be understood as part of a much larger structure that requires contextual analysis and in-depth understanding in order to develop effective and long-term programming. According to recent IOM research, inconsistent returns are due to a lack of means to remain in displacement (37% of returnee locations across Iraq), pressures to return from authorities in the AoO or location of displacement or both (11%), and finally camp closures, as in the case of Christian IDPs in the KRI (IOM:2018c, IOM:2019a).

Numerous barriers to return are found in the literature and identified by major INGOs who are active in Ninewa. Barriers to return are taken into account and categorized under district-specific, sect-and-religion-specific, and gender-specific barriers. The barriers are interlinked and should not be understood as mutually exclusive as IDPs are a part of all three categories at once.

Sense of Belonging

Among international peace and reconciliation actors, IDP return is often seen as an indicator or premise for stabilization and reconciliation. However, the three aforementioned waves of displacement in Iraq's recent history have changed ideas of belonging amongst various social components. This dynamic should be reflected in discussion regarding expectations of return.

In order to understand return in Ninewa, the sense of belonging must be understood as dynamic and not necessarily a territorially-bounded phenomenon. In the case of minorities, it can largely depend on wherever is safest and recognition granted. Although reconstruction, education and healthcare provision are essential to start a life in one's area of origin, if 'home' is no longer territorially bounded, it becomes necessary to unpack the dynamics that are conducive to, or erode, this

connection as basis for beginning to study barriers to return to it. Therefore, return is not entirely based on palpable or physical developments, such as housing, infrastructure and services.

The following sections will seek to determine primary and secondary barriers. However, some groups lack the motivation or interest to return due to successful integration and the availability of new opportunities within their host communities. The urgency and primacy of several barriers (e.g., services; Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) documentation; security; belonging; trauma; and destruction of housing) may not be staggered into primary and secondary categories, as a single barrier may be enough for IDPs not to return at all. However, in the subsequent sections, primary and other barriers to IDP return are discussed as recorded in the literature and within the context within which they are conditioned.

Diversity of Experience

The various districts of Ninewa have experienced waves of violence and displacement differently due to their different geo-political and strategic positions, demographic compositions and levels of security protection. Some districts have subsequently become more dynamic or stagnant regarding return movements. IDPs of Tal Afar, which has incurred relatively high return traffic, face barriers specific to this development, including a lack of livelihood opportunities and fear of increased social tension. IDPs of Sinjar, which is considered a more stagnant districts, identify the deterioration of infrastructure, housing, HLP documentation and essential service provision as their central barriers to return (IOM:2019a, 2019b). Expanding the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Durable Solutions Framework for IDPs, in which return is conditioned upon a structure and environment conducive to the enjoyment of rights, this section considers socio-political developments affecting durable return in Mosul, Hamdaniya, Tal Afar, Tal Keif, Sinjar and Sheikhan.

The sectarian composition of Ninewa's districts plays a central role in belonging and return. The various identity groups of Ninewa were targeted differently by IS which destabilized the already fragile social cohesion of the governorate. New affiliations, scapegoats, and retaliation fueled pre-existing narratives about inter-community distrust, while cultivating a fertile ground for divide-and-rule powers. The presence of a range of security actors has been reported as a part of this destabilizing power strategy, which provides safety to some and not others, thereby encouraging demographic change. This has created further distrust and has led to intra- and inter-community violence and new allegiances. These internal and external dynamics are vital to understanding sect- and religion-specific barriers to return.

The final section outlines gender specific barriers to IDP return. A woman's barrier to return differ from that of a man, due to her unique experience in displacement as well as their pre-existing peace-time barriers including restriction of movement, societal expectation and scrutiny. A woman might identify housing destruction or poor infrastructure but removing this barrier in itself will not facilitate her return. Her ability to return is conditioned by larger protection and patronage systems upon which her movement, livelihood and life choices rely. However, in times of displacement these systems have at times become corrupted, exploitative or dysfunctional, in particular for SFHH. As women and their children comprise the overwhelming majority of the IDP population - particularly in camp settings - their barriers must be central to the study on safe, voluntary return upon the consolidation and closing of these camps.

2.1 DISTRICT-SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN

2.1.1. HAMDANIYA DISTRICT

Hamdaniya, in the Ninewa Plains, is part of the disputed territory between the GoI and the KRG. The district is divided into four sub-districts: Aski Kalak (Khabat), Bartella (Baritleh), al-Namrud (al-Khidhr) and Qaraqosh (Bakhdida). The latter is where the largest Christian city is located. The Hamdaniya district is home to many minority groups which live in Ninewa, including Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen and Shabaks.

Even though Hamdaniya is historically home to a large Christian community, demographic changes have been taking place over the past several decades since the Arabization policies of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s (Gaston:2017). According to local authorities in Hamdaniya, Christians and Yazidis have been economically marginalized by the Shia Shabaks who are believed to receive external financial assistance from other Shia groups in Iraq. This is particularly the case since 2017. The recent empowerment of Shabaks has led to an increase in their movement from Shabak-majority villages to Christian or Yazidi-majority town centers, which has, in turn, caused tensions between these communities (local authority KII). An example of these tensions is given by a local authority in a key informant interview (KII) who stated:

"We respect Shabak symbols and flags, but they should not raise them in our streets and villages. Provocations have happened. In 2010 or 2011, the birth of Jesus and the death of Hussein occurred together at the same time. For us, Christmas is a moment of celebration, and the death of Hussein is a moment of mourning and sadness for Shabaks. There were clashes and shootings"

Local authority KII:2019.

Rise and Fall of IS

The town of Qaraqosh was taken by IS on the night of August 6, 2014. Under IS, the district virtually emptied its historical majority Christian population. It is estimated that around 125,000 people fled the district, out of the estimated pre-IS population level of 226,367; those who stayed behind were enslaved or executed (Gaston:2017). Whereas many from the Christian community fled to the KRI, or in less numbers to other parts of Iraq, others left the country entirely. In practical terms, displacement from the district was absolute and remained so until the district was liberated by joint operations between the Kurdish forces and the Iraqi security forces (ISF) in late October 2016.

Returns and Further Displacement

Although IOM records a high return rate to Hamdaniya, concerns regarding social cohesion and demographic change were expressed by the Christian IDPs (Christian IDP KIIs:2019). According to local authorities, a major issue is demographic change and land disputes which started long before the arrival of IS but worsened after liberation. In late 2018, the GoI's Ministry of Municipality issued a decree to distribute residential lands to members of Popular Mobilization Forces and the families of Popular Mobilization Forces martyrs in Ninewa, which, if enacted, would subsequently change the demography of government-owned lands and lead to further disputes. The mayor of Hamdaniya attempted to stop this decree by pushing for the establishment of new administrative structures in Ninewa to the Iraqi Council of Ministers. At the time of writing, the mayor was able to stop the distribution of land in the district. However, it is not clear how long he will be able to do so. In addition to concerns over demographic change and land disputes, as mentioned above, local authorities stated that the lack of employment opportunities is a factor that has prompted displacement and an increase in emigration as former residents search for a better future. Bahnam also pointed to a growing air of uneasiness amongst locals as "the district has been turned into a military base where a large number of different forces exist" (Nawzad:2019).

Additionally, it is important to mention that the Khazir and Hassan Sham camps are witnessing influxes of secondary IDPs returning to camp settings. The key factors for their secondary displacement include the lack of job opportunities, the slow reconstruction process, threats, and the fear of clashes amongst the existing security and armed forces.

Living Conditions and Barriers to Return

Since the liberation from IS, Popular Mobilization Forces has further enhanced the empowerment of Shia factions and components within Shabak and Turkmen communities in this district. According to observations by youth from the area, Shabaks living outside Bartella before 2014 have migrated into the city in search for job opportunities and have received lands and shops through private companies like George Kabuna (youth KII:2019). This coincides with the onward migration of the Christians, as well as their settlement in the KRI in search of protection.

Across sub-districts and towns, there is a pervasive distrust of security actors. In Bashiqa, the Peshmerga forces safeguard less than half of the villages whilst the majority remain under a group affiliated with the Shabak component (Brigade 30 under Waad Qaddo) of the Popular Mobilization Forces. Local authorities are struggling to coordinate and navigate between factions and wish to see a unified effort between Peshmerga and the ISF. This reflects the disputed status of the area, the lack of coordination between GoI and KRG to protect minorities in this district, and the subsequent surge in sectarian patronage over statutory protections neglected by GoI. In turn, the new demography, in the absence of state or LHSF protection of minorities, causes palpable security threats. Both mayors from Bashiqa and Hamdaniya state that this security void pushes the minorities they represent, who used to be the majority, into the margins.

The destruction of the houses in the district has seen no compensation, and this constitutes a barrier to return for the majority of IDPs from Hamdaniya (IOM:2019a). According to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework (CSMF), Christians in Hamdaniya responded that destruction and livelihood were the two most significant barriers to return (USIP CSMF:2018a, 2018b). In addition, the lack of civil and HLP documentation has been reported by families as an obstacle to their return (IOM:2019a). Social services currently rely on INGOs and will require a local handover as part of the stabilization process. Despite the poor supply of electricity and water, the devastation of available housing, and the continued clearing of explosive hazards, a total of 157,272 persons returned by April 2010. According to the IOM, the three primary barriers for IDP return are housing destruction, fear of discrimination, and trauma (IOM:2019a).

HAMDANIYA DISTRICT		
RETURNS	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN:	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
157,272 (80%) (IOM:2019a, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019b)	Trauma Housing destruction Demographic change and discrimination	Security concerns and high presence of Popular Mobilization Forces Compensation and reconstruction needs INGO lack of coordination with local authorities Disputed status of the district and competition between GoI and KRG

2.1.2. MOSUL CITY

Mosul is the provincial capital of the Ninewa governorate and Iraq's second largest city. It comprises a diverse community of Arabs (majority Sunni and some Shia), Assyrians, Armenians, Turkmen (both Shia and Sunni), Kurds (Yazidis and Sunni Muslims), Shabaks (both Shia and Sunni), Sabean-Mandaeans, Kawliya, Circassians and other smaller minorities.

Rise and Fall of IS

As a Sunni Arab stronghold, Mosul was disenfranchised by various political and security developments after the regime change in Iraq. These included the U.S. invasion, the instating of a Shia-dominated government and security force, the alienation of former Baathist leadership, and the rise of strong Al Qaeda elements. The Sunni-Shia dynamics in the city paved the way for Sunni backlash against heavy-handed security and extrajudicial killings, which Moslawis (people from Mosul) had experienced under the administration of former Prime Minister Noori Al-Maliki (Gaston:2017).

The IS invasion in June 2014 sent large waves of Moslawais, up to 30% of its population, into displacement while the remaining 70% stayed behind in Mosul (Gaston:2017). After intense ground and air military operations, the ISF liberated East Mosul in January 2017 and West Mosul later that same year, in July. The casualties of these efforts have not been officially counted or declared, but recent figures estimate that between 9,000 to 11,000 people died (Oakford:2019).

Although Mosul was officially liberated from IS in 2017, people on the outskirts of Mosul are still afraid to talk freely against the jihadist group, fearing the IS sleeper cells that remain inside Ninewa's center (Kurdistan24:2019). Hundreds of people also disappeared during and following the liberation of Mosul, many of whom were captured by security forces due to alleged IS affiliation. Apart from fear of recurring violence, the public memory of mass killings and mass destruction in the populous city have acted as barriers to return. The impact of such collective trauma and memories of violence should not be underestimated (MacDonald:2019).

Current Concerns

West Mosul, where the Old City is located, is still severely impacted by the conflict. The Old City is completely destroyed, as are more than half of the houses in residential areas; the remaining structures are in need of repair. Due to large-scale corruption inside Mosul's executive institutions, development and reconstruction processes remain slow and difficult. In addition, security differentiation remains an issue as it complicates IDP returns, particularly those requiring security clearance and ID documentation, due to a system that now involves myriad security and administration actors.

Currently, there are at least fourteen (14) Local, Hybrid and Sub-state Forces (LHSFs) active inside the city of Mosul. After East Mosul's liberation, it was reported that Shia military factions influenced and controlled much of the liberated areas, despite having no official role within the city limits. Key informants also reported the tendencies of Shia forces to allegedly fuel inter-militia tensions by discriminately opening and closing access to areas. In addition, ten new Shia Popular Mobilization Forces offices have been erected inside West Mosul (Subject matter expert KII:2019). There has also been conflict between people from the East and West sides of Mosul. The latter stayed behind during the IS occupation and have since become stigmatized and accused of supporting IS. Sunni Arab women who escaped from the East to the West during the IS occupation have reportedly been raped in punishment and are now feared to be IS affiliates. Many SFHHs still experience discrimination over this suspicion (INGO and NGO KIIs: 2019).

The high proportion of vulnerable population groups in Mosul, including SFHHs and children, have given rise to frequent exploitative dependency relations and other negative coping mechanisms, which highlights the need for legal aid, accountability, and transitional justice mechanisms. Human rights organizations have raised concerns over judicial procedures. For example, Human Rights Watch reported the use of torture inside three of Mosul's detention centers run by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (HRW:2018). In some cases, abuse has resulted in death and could be connected to the reports of missing people. This violence breaks with the Iraqi Constitution and Criminal Procedure Code, and human rights organizations continue to alert the international community to the absence of tools that would allow judges to respond to the rampant use of torture.

There are numerous unclear and unmapped ways in which various authorities can instigate IS affiliation and confiscate or deny the issuance of security badges. When combined with the lack of legal protection, this renders existing judicial processes a potential destabilizing factor (HRW:2018, RWG:2019c). The high presence of LHSFs inside Mosul has increased the risk of impunity by certain actors and complicated the reinstatement of rule of law (Gaston & Schulz: 2019).

In a recent study of the socio-political perspectives of Mosul IDPs, interreligious reconciliation was considered a priority after liberation from IS. The desire for reconciliation was strongest amongst the Moslawi study participants (as compared to other Ninewa IDP participants), but most said they could never reconcile with former or current IS supporters (IRI:2018). This highlights a key issue: though reconciliation within and between communities is central for the normalization of Ninewa, the lack of clear and common definitions for 'IS supporter' and 'affiliation with IS' complicates reconciliation efforts. The IRI (2018) study also showed wide concern for corruption across the political spectrum, as well as a perception of political and economic favoritism according to sectarian or religious identity. A general fear of losing identity and revealing affiliations were reported amongst IDPs, as was host communities' fear of culture denigration with continued immigration from Ninewa (IRI:2018).

Return Barriers

By April 2019, a total of 159,190 households had returned to Mosul despite the fact that basic services have only partially resumed while water and electricity still rely on private suppliers (IOM:2019a). In preparation for return, two new bridges were constructed to ease traffic congestion and facilitate movement. IDPs from other districts have also moved to Mosul in search of livelihood opportunities in the city's new development projects.

Water is available three days a week, but this provision covers only about half the need of returnees. Improvement on electricity provision is slow. Reportedly, residents have limited access to primary healthcare or basic education (IOM:2019a, DTM:2019c, 2019d). Recent concerns raised by the National Protection Cluster (NPC) relate to the exacerbation of tribal tensions and social cohesion issues due to the lack of livelihood opportunities (NPC:2019a).

Around 76,200 households from Mosul are yet to return due primarily to trauma and the destruction of housing which has caused IDP intentions of return to dwindle below 10%. IDPs living outside of camps (83%) are mostly within the district or in the KRI (18% are in Erbil District) and have reported that their primary barrier to return is the lack of security. IDPs living in camps (17%) within Mosul and Hamdaniya have reported livelihood as their main barrier to return (IOM:2019a).

MOSUL DISTRICT		
RETURNS	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN:	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
984,588 (68%) (IOM:2019a, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019b)	Trauma Lack of livelihood opportunities and services Security concerns, including high presence of different militia and the ongoing IS attacks, mines and IEDs	Reconciliation and coexistence concerns Large-scale corruption ingrained in local authority, currently unravelling by actors such as the Integrity Commission Unclear justice and accountability procedures Social cohesion between populations in East and West Mosul are affected by stigmatization and revenge acts toward the former

2.1.3. SHEIKHAN DISTRICT

The Sheikhan district is located in northeast Ninewa and is a disputed territory between the GoI and KRG. There seems to be high support for the KRG presence in the district. Pro-Kurdish parties usually win about 70% of the votes in elections (Gaston:2017), and the center of the district has been under the control of Kurdish forces since 1991.

Sheikhan is one of the districts where Yazidi and Christian communities live. Yazidi communities are especially drawn towards this area as their holiest place, the Lalish temple, is located here. This resonates with the displaced population who are now staying in camps and settlements in the sub-districts. The majority of IDPs currently residing in Sheikhan district are Yazidis; of these, 5,273 households are accommodated inside one of five camps and the remaining 3,822 households live outside the camps. Almost 6% of the households are SFHHs, which is, interestingly, below the national average. The Sheikhan district accommodates many more IDPs within its urban settings (outside camps), and the majority are from Mosul and Sinjar. The numbers have fluctuated in past years but increased between May and December 2018. Those who originally came from Hamdaniya and Tal Keif returned in this same period. Living conditions for IDPs in Sheikhan are harsh, with 25% living in critical shelters with minimal access to important services or resources (IOM:2019b).

Currently, there is not a lot of data focusing on the Sheikhan district as an AoO. In order to be able to address the barriers to return that IDPs from Sheikhan face, more documentation on the district is necessary. Key informants highlighted the Yazidis' high desire for migration. This district was not occupied by IS, but since the IS presence came quite near the district, many residents left, and many Yazidis migrated. Since then, the number of Yazidis has decreased in the district whilst the number of Muslim Kurds has increased.

There are 26 active humanitarian actors in Sheikhan. This is a much lower representation compared to other Ninewa districts such as Mosul and Hamdaniya. There are also gaps in existing efforts to address issues facing youth and women. For youth, unemployment and ex-combatants are two key issues deserving more attention. For women, there is too little attention on SFHHs, divorced women, women's activism, and female student communities (PRWG:2019a).

When the IDPs currently residing in Sheikhan are asked about their intentions, 99% state they want to stay in the short to medium term (less than 12 months) and 80% wish to return in the long term (more than 12 months). This implies that the return numbers are relatively low with 98% of the IDPs being in protracted displacement (IOM:2019b). It is difficult to find statistics that focus on people

returning to Sheikhan's sub-districts and villages. According to recent assessments, however, "returnees have no access to basic services, electricity, water supply, livelihood options, education opportunities or health facility, as well as inadequate shelter" (DRC:2018b). All protection concerns are aggravated because of the unclear jurisdictional status of the villages. Both the GoI and KRG lay claim to this area, but have, thus far, failed to support villages with basic services or improve their infrastructure (DRC:2018b). Based on the above and IOM data, the primary barriers inhibiting IDP return to Sheikhan are fear of demographic change within the district, lack of security, and house destruction (IOM:2019a). However, Sheikhan is more an IDP-hosting than IDP-producing district.

SHEIKHAN DISTRICT		
RETURNS	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN:	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
2,142 (IOM:2019a, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019b)	Demographic change of the district Security concerns Housing destruction	Presence of a large number of IDPs

2.1.4. SINJAR DISTRICT

The Sinjar district is divided between three sub-districts: al-Shimal in the north, al-Qayrawan in the southeast, and Markaz Sinjar, the district's center and immediate surroundings. Sinjar has an ethnically and religiously diverse demography, hosting its Yazidi majority as well as Sunni Kurds and Sunni and Shia Arabs.

Rise and Fall of IS

On August 3, 2014, IS began its siege on Sinjar and initiated a genocidal campaign that targeted the entire community; in the process, they kidnapped thousands of men, women and girls, of which over 2,000 are still reported missing (Sanad for Peacebuilding & Social Inquiry:2018, Abuzeid:2018). Around 200,000 residents reportedly fled from the town of Sinjar and its surrounding villages in early August 2014. Around 130,000, primarily Yazidis, became trapped on Mount Sinjar and remain in IDP camps there. Through a corridor established by forces from the KRG or the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), most of those who were stranded were able to escape. The Yazidi population that remained in Sinjar faced human rights abuses, including systematic killing, kidnapping, and sexual enslavement (Abuzeid:2018). As IS took over larger swaths of territory in the Ninewa province, 315,000 Yazidis fled and became IDPs in other parts of Ninewa or in Duhok. Additionally, 105,000 found refuge abroad (Abuzeid:2018).

In December 2014, Peshmerga forces and PKK-affiliated groups liberated towns and villages north of Mount Sinjar, and ISF and Popular Mobilization Forces took over control in October 2017. A deep lack of trust and security remains prevalent amongst the Yazidis because the Peshmerga forces initially withdrew from Sinjar, leaving minorities defenseless until the PKK and its Syrian affiliates, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), came to their rescue. During the subsequent liberation of the area, all remaining Muslim Arabs in Sinjar were displaced as they were assumed to be affiliated with IS.

The violent events following the KRG-led referendum in October 2017 significantly impacted Sinjar when Popular Mobilization Forces replaced the Peshmerga in much of the district. They also ousted the displaced District Mayor and District Council and replaced them with a non-elected, Popular

Mobilization Forces-selected interim District Mayor and District Council. Popular Mobilization Forces have been accused of implementing an intentional campaign to achieve demographic change. Other state-ISF units are reportedly not in control, and although the GoI formally denounced the new Popular Mobilization Forces-backed administration, it has informally legitimized them by conducting business with them (Local government KII:2019). Additionally, local PKK- and YPG-affiliates still hold territories in the district. Under such circumstances, the lack of security and profound uncertainty about the future are amongst the most pressing barriers to return for IDPs from Sinjar (IOM Fact sheet District of Displacement profile 14, 2019).

Returns and Further Displacement

Around 20,000 families were convinced to return and resettle in Sinjar following the liberation in December of 2014, despite the security conditions and the continued threat from IS. Further displacement happened when relatively speedy development projects, as well as better camp and settlement conditions, were found in nearby KRI districts, Democratic Union Party (PYD)-run territories in Syria, or Sunni sub-districts of Ninewa (Sanad for Peacebuilding & Social Inquiry:2018). Due to the 2017 security reconfiguration, mostly Shia Arab families returned to the nearby sub-districts whilst their Sunni counterparts remained in the Rabi'a sub-district and Yazidis remained displaced with no apparent collective plan to return (Sanad for Peacebuilding & Social Inquiry:2018). Overall, 9,617 households have returned to the Sinjar district (IOM:2019a), representing only 16% of the IDPs who fled, and their sustainable return rates are the lowest relative to the national average (Ibid). Moreover, many villages near the town, especially to the south, have not seen any returns (REACH & RWG:2018).

Living Conditions and Barriers to Return

Since liberation, the towns within the Sinjar district have remained relatively empty with extensive residential destruction and little to no basic services available. Key informants reported that more than half of the residences are severely destroyed with hardly any reconstruction underway. There are still very few functioning businesses within the private sector, and minimal market functionality. A major issue is the lack of property. This complicates return because people cannot prove ownership of their houses. The issue of missing HLP documentation applies to all Yazidi households, as they lacked documentation prior to the IS invasion due to their marginalization and discrimination in the north of Iraq during the Ba'ath regime. Around 23% of these households are also missing civil documentation. For 58% of households, destruction or damage to their homes is a key barrier to return (IOM DTM:2019b).

Additionally, there is a scarcity of available market goods in 70% of locations, and markets remain closed in another 20% of locations. These are all factors that limited the return of IDPs following liberation (Sanad for Peacebuilding & Social Inquiry:2018). Furthermore, 87% of families living outside of camps experience barriers to employment and have the lowest monthly median income per capita of all districts (IQD 24,698). Meanwhile, Sinjar is one of the Iraqi districts with the highest number of people living in severe conditions. Around 15% of households are female-headed, and one third cope with a disabled family member, placing this group at a heightened level of livelihood risk (IOM:2019b).

According to the USIP CSMF, the Arab population of Sinuni described destruction and security issues as major concerns impacting returning. Six months later, after an additional round of data collection, livelihood increased in salience as a barrier to return for this population. The majority of respondents had experienced, or knew others who experienced, being blocked from returning (58%, USIP CSMF:2018a, 2018b). On the other hand, Yazidi IDPs from Sinuni responded that services,

security, and destruction were their main barriers to return. Eleven percent of Yazidis cited that members of their religious group had been blocked from returning (USIP CSMF: 2018b). Based on the above, the primary barriers to securing IDP return in Sinjar are the lack of security and reconstruction efforts. The lack of livelihood opportunities is also central to this endeavor but cannot be established given the current environmental insecurity.

SINJAR DISTRICT		
RETURNS	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN:	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
59, 868 (16%) (IOM:2019a, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019b)	Security issues Lack of serious investment into reconstruction efforts Lack of HLP documentation of IDPs and returnees	Lack of livelihood opportunities causing unrest Lack of serious investment into reconciliation and community traumas Presence of a multitude of security forces, controlling the district's political and security landscape in a non-inclusive way The lack of a unified security force or command-and-control may create a vacuum for a renewed IS establishment

2.1.5. TAL AFAR DISTRICT

Located in northwestern Ninewa, Tal Afar is one of the largest districts of the province and consists of several sub-districts: Tal Afar center, Zummar, Ayadhiya and Rabi'a. The Zummar and Rabi'a sub-districts form the border regions with Syria. Prior to the IS invasion, the Tal Afar district population consisted mainly of Sunni and Shia Turkmen and a minority of Sunni and Shia Arabs and Kurds.

Rise and Fall of IS

Internal disputes within the Turkmen community formed a fertile ground for IS and have not yet been resolved. According to some residents, Shia police and troops rocketed Sunni neighborhoods prior to the IS invasion of the Tal Afar town center. Upon the arrival of IS, 80,000 to 100,000 Shia Turkmen, representing almost all Shia Turkmen in the district, left Tal Afar for Sinjar and Rabi'a before moving on to Syria and Shia-dominated areas within Iraq (Maas & Gaston:2017). Tal Afar became a strategic territory for IS due to its location near a highway that connects Mosul to the city of Raqqa, Syria, which facilitated access and evacuation between the two strongholds.

Tal Afar was one of the last districts to be liberated from IS control. Following liberation, most of the IS fighters were smuggled across the border to Syria. Today, smugglers are taking the same roads between Rabi'a and Sinjar and are involved in the trade of contraband valuable assets. There is a strong and differentiated security presence inside the districts. Tensions remain high between joint forces and the host community, and blocked return has been widely reported, especially in Zummar, Rabi'a, Ayadhiya and the Tal Afar town (IOM:2019a, Activist & Subject matter expert KIIs:2019). In the town of Tal Afar, the main security forces surrounding the district during the final days of IS occupation were the Popular Mobilization Forces from the south. Following liberation, these forces managed to retake the mixed Sunni-Shia Turkman district center, possibly instigating further sectarian and regional conflict in the process (Gaston & Derzsi-Horvath:2017). Tensions between Popular Mobilization Forces and the Turkmen and Arab Sunni components of the population

manifest in targeted blocked returns, as well as discriminatory processes for obtaining permissions and security clearances for the latter groups. Community tensions and restrictions on certain groups are justified by Popular Mobilization Forces leaders on the assumption that the Sunni population is affiliated with IS and possibly responsible for violations against Yazidis and Shia Turkmen.

Return and Further Displacement

In Tal Afar, displacement occurred in multiple stages. The initial large-scale displacement started when IS established control in Ninewa, and a subsequent substantive displacement began during the offensive to retake the city of Mosul in October 2016. Between April and August of that year, almost 30,000 residents were displaced from Tal Afar district. As a result, nearly all inhabitants had fled from the town center by the time the ISF commenced operations to liberate Tal Afar in August 2017 (IOM:2018a). Tal Afar city sustained significant infrastructure damage during these operations. Around 73,000 persons who had remained in Tal Afar during occupation, primarily Sunni Turkmen, departed the town and headed for Turkey; simultaneously, 28,000 IDPs traveled to the south of Mosul and to the Yahiyawa camps in the south of Duhok (Subject matter expert KII:2019).

When the ISF re-established control and villages were perceived to be partially cleared of explosive hazards, IDP return to Tal Afar began in August 2017. Families continue to move back from their refuge in Mosul, as well as from other areas of Zummar and Rabi'a (INGO KII:2019, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019a, 2019b). Inside Ayadhiya, most of the Shia residents have returned. Around Ayadhiya, however, Sunni communities accused of being affiliated with IS are rumored to have avoided security clearance procedures in exchange for fee payments. Between 17 and 18 Sunni Arab villages are reported to have paid for such clearances in 2017. In Ayadhiya, therefore, very few Sunni residents have returned despite both media promotion and their tribal code of ethics.

Living Conditions and Barriers to Return

Protracted displacement in the KRI and Turkey have offered the Tal Afar IDPs new perspectives and horizons for the future. The latent friction between the Shia and Sunni Turkmen, combined with limited livelihood opportunities, render IDPs less likely to return (IOM:2019a). The two primary sources of employment for Tal Afar residents prior to IS occupation were in the governmental and agricultural sectors (REACH:2018b). Agricultural production is now struggling to restart due to infrastructure damage, loss of crops, and HLP disputes. House destruction is another barrier in both Ayadhiya and Zummar; reconstruction activities are still not occurring despite the fact that 50% of houses have been destroyed in some locations (IOM:2019d). Fifteen villages remain uninhabited across Zummar, Rabi'a, Ayadhiya and the Tal Afar center due to the lack of reconstruction, the presence of armed forces blocking return, and Shia-Sunni tensions (IOM:2019a).

Those who have returned are increasingly concerned and fear renewed violence. Security actor differentiation and the lack of transparent accountability for those actors have left residents feeling insecure. Within the Zummar sub-district, more than five different actors are in control of security provision. Community reconciliation is taking place across the districts but remains in early stages. A tribal peace agreement was signed and, at the time of writing, is beginning to be implemented (INGO KIIs:2019, PRWG:2019a, 2019b). In Ayadhiya and Zummar, there is a great need (in 90% of locations) for community reconciliation. In Markaz, the center of Tal Afar, 90% of locations report that returnees are being denied access. For remaining IDPs to return, predominantly from KRI and Turkey, there is a serious need for reconstruction and international engagement within the district. After four years of adjusting to the KRI or Turkish ways of life, the slow pace of current reconstruction efforts fails to attract IDPs to their AoO. In addition, it feeds into a strong narrative

of victimhood and disenfranchisement amongst Tal Afar's local authorities and ethnic and religious leaders, who feel neglected by the Ninewa governorate.

Another major issue in Tal Afar is the suspicion directed toward SFHHs. SFHHs comprise 17% of the IDP population in the district. Reportedly, Tal Afar increased restrictions on women's movement, sexuality, and agency during the IS invasion and since liberation from IS' patronage (INGO KII:2019). Within the community, the Sunni Arab and Turkmen SFHHs are immediately perceived to be IS affiliates when they arrive at checkpoints unaccompanied by a male patron. SFHHs have been forced into child marriages and have engaged in negative coping mechanisms, including survival sex, in response to their lack of livelihood opportunity and high protection needs in protracted displacement (INGO KIIs:2019). In addition, predominantly Sunni SFHHs are accused of association with IS; this has been widely reported to lead to stigmatization, revenge rape, harassment, and marginalization by their families and communities (INGO and GBV KIIs:2019). In Tal Afar, this practice and a conservative conceptualization of women's roles discourages women from reporting or speaking about the struggles they face (INGO KIIs:2019).

There is a sizable discrepancy between the concerns and priorities voiced by youth and women and those expressed by tribal leadership (INGO KIIs:2019). The exclusion of youth and women in tribal and peace agreement discussions could be a destabilizing factor, as youth and women constitute the majority of IDP and returnee populations. The significant proportion of students who have dropped out of school or missed critical years due to displacement, combined with the damaged state of educational facilities and shortages of teachers and equipment, amass to another destabilizing factor. The need for youth inclusion from across the communities, irrespective of sectarian affiliation, is manifested in an increase in youth activist backlash and in their distrust of governance legitimacy.

According to IOM data on IDP returns, the intention to return in the short to medium terms are quite high for IDPs living outside of camps at 23%. IDPs living inside camps are more undecided than willing to return, polling at 32% and 9%, respectively (IOM:2019a). The primary barriers include trauma, lack of finances and livelihood opportunities, and HLP documentation. However, considering the above analysis, these barriers exist within a context marked by shifting political and military actors, which breed fear amongst the different components of Tal Afar's IDP population, and particularly amongst youth, women and Sunni Muslim demographics.

TAL AFAR DISTRICT		
RETURNS	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN:	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
331, 164 (76%) (IOM:2019a, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019b)	Lack of livelihood opportunities Lack of HLP Documentation and reconstruction activities Lack of safety and security	For SFHH: discrimination and harassment or worse For youth: limited education or employment opportunities Internal disputes within the Shia and Sunni Turkman communities Presence of various security forces, with the dominant Shia forces supporting only Shia communities

Tal Keif is located in northern Ninewa, within the Ninewa Plains, and is a disputed territory. This district is comprised of a diverse ethnic and religious population with Christian (Assyrian /Chaldean) and Yazidi majorities, as well as Kurd and Arab minorities. The widespread presence of road blockages and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) severed farmers' efforts to re-establish agricultural production. According to a household survey held in the third quarter of 2018 in the affected areas, 38% of inhabitants suffer from food insecurity, experience economic uncertainty, and have limited access to cultivable lands (DRC:2018a). What differentiates the district from others is the complexity of the territorial division between federal, Popular Mobilization Forces, and Peshmerga forces, as well as the increasing militarization of its youth.

Rise and Fall of IS

The town of Tal Keif fell under IS control in early August 2014, along with the nearby sub-districts of Qaraqosh, Bartella and Karamlish. As a result, Tal Keif's diverse population of Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Sunni Turkmen, Sunni and Shia Shabaks, Yazidis and Christians were driven into displacement, which disproportionately affected the latter two groups. Due to the spread of violence north and east of Mosul in the Ninewa Plains, a second wave of displacement occurred amongst Shia Shabak and Turkman IDPs, most of whom moved east to the KRI and then south to Iraqi Shia-dominated districts including Wassit, Tiqar, Al-Najaf, Qadissiya and Missan (DRC:2018a).

Tal Keif was liberated from IS in early 2017, and control of the district was split between the GoI and the KRG. Similar to the Hamdaniya district, Tal Keif also saw an influx of predominantly Sunni Arabs from Mosul. Few of the already dwindling Christian inhabitants, such as the elderly and ill or disabled persons, stayed behind because of their vulnerabilities. They faced IS violence and forced allegiance for a full two years and six months during occupation. Christians were mostly displaced to the KRI and to the villages of Alqosh and Tel Askof. The Yazidis were primarily displaced to Duhok or chose to migrate abroad, where most still remain.

Returns and Further Displacement

Since January 2018, Tal Keif has seen families returning to their AoO despite many burned down houses and the initial lack of electricity and water supplies across the district's villages. Most Christians from this district have emigrated to Europe, with the exception of around 350 families who stayed behind and are currently living in IDP camps in the KRI or rest of Iraq (Local Authority KII:2019). However, 3,200 households, of which 97% live outside of camps, have not yet returned and report a very low intention to return; 83% wish to stay in displacement whilst the remaining 17% are undecided (IOM:2019). IDP's reluctance to return is due largely to the lack of safe housing and financial assistance that could facilitate the rebuilding of their lives.

Reconstruction in Tal Keif is slowly taking place, and basic services have resumed. The district's IDPs, specifically Christians from Alqosh and Tel Asquf, are also concerned with marginalization. There are currently five empty villages (two in Alqosh) that have seen no returns. This can be linked to the fact that district control is divided between various armed groups; the Peshmerga dominate in the north and Popular Mobilization Forces in the south, particularly in Tal Keif center and Batnaya.

Around 50% of the 2,546 IDP households currently living in the Tal Keif district (in out-of-camp settings) are intra-district IDPs. The other half are from Sinjar, Mosul and Ba'aj. IDPs face difficult barriers to find income, and 22% are living in critical shelters. They rely on negative coping mechanisms for income, and 43% rely on being hosted by other families. The large presence of IEDs and poor external investment have led to difficulties in housing reconstruction.

Living Conditions and Barriers to Return

Although the IOM-DTM records a relatively high rate of return of 83% to Tal Keif, Christian key informants expressed that only a handful of Christian families have returned since liberation (Christian KIIs:2019). Instead, more Sunni Arabs and Shabaks have returned -- the first during IS occupation of the district, the latter following liberation. A former local authority of Tal Keif stated, "Now there are only 100 Christian people living in Tal Keif, and most of these people were disabled and ill, [and] could not leave the town when IS arrived. Only around 10-15 families returned after the liberation because they were poor, had no place to stay" (Local authority KII:2019).

A process of demographic change in the district has been unfolding since the 1980s, when the Ba'athist government started distributing Christian lands to Arab families of martyrs and missing persons from the Iraq-Iran war in Hamam al-Alil and Shirqat. There is a widespread community perception that the demographic changes occurring since 2003 were indirectly supported by the Iraqi government through the empowerment of certain people and communities in Christian-majority areas (INGO KIIs, minority KIIs). Community distrust exists, therefore, between Yazidis, Christians and Shabaks, the latter of whom have been empowered by Popular Mobilization Forces. Reportedly, Shia leaders have not discouraged this division amongst minorities in the district but have, in fact, re-cast themselves as central to reconciliation while they are "on the ground having a different agenda" (INGO KII:2019, Religious KIIs:2019). As Yazidi community leaders are currently reluctant to return to the area, the control of Shia Shabaks grows. In addition, within the northern Wana sub-district, there is an ongoing conflict within the Muslim community. This community has differentiated into three components: IS affiliates, IDPs who are in displacement inside the KRI or the rest of Iraq, and those who remained in their areas of origin.

The gradual marginalization of Christians has led to their emigration. In the context of a militarized Tal Keif, without any significant tribal or armed forces to defend them, Christians face difficulty claiming their rights. There is a perception that the so-called Babylon forces, under the auspices of Osama Kildani, failed to represent the Christian community and were recruited in a tokenistic manner (Local authority KIIs:2019).

The lack of security is a key barrier to return for people displaced from Tal Keif. The fragile security situation in Tal Keif is currently dominated by largely Shia armed factions including Kataeb Hizb'Allah, Asaib Ahli Haqq, Kataeb Imam Ali, and Kataeb Imam Hussein. IDPs who returned to Tal Keif have been exposed to robbery and kidnapping. Before 2014, the Tal Keif District center was under the control of the Kurdish Peshmerga and security forces (Asayish). After the October 2017 events and Peshmerga withdrawal from Tilesqof and Alqosh, however, some Christians from Tal Keif moved to villages under Peshmerga rule where they reportedly feel safer than under Popular Mobilization Forces (INGO KIIs:2019).

Finally, recent CSFM data shows that IDPs from Tal Keif view the lack of services and livelihood opportunities as the main barriers to a permanent return (CSFMa, b:2018). In addition, CSFM data from September 2018 revealed that 25% of Christian IDPs in Tal Keif experienced having members of their community blocked from returning to their homes by security forces, armed actors, or local authorities (CSFMb:2018). According to the IOM, the primary barriers to IDP return include HLP documentation, lack of financial means to return, and housing destruction (IOM: 2019a). However, due to demographic changes within the district, these barriers exist within larger transformations that could create primary barriers of insecurity and discrimination for minorities within the district (see section 2.2 Sect- and Religion-specific Barriers).

TAL KEIF DISTRICT		
RETURNS	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN:	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
95, 472 (83%) (IOM:2019a, IOM Iraq DTM Dashboard:2019b)	Lack of HLP documentation Lack of financial means to return Housing destruction	Presence of various security factions Demographic change effects on social cohesion Community distrust and minority representation Disputed status of the district Rise in LHSFs and the high militarization of formerly high-population towns Economic disenfranchisement in farming due to explosives and lack of water Lack of compensation and access to drinking water Heightened pre-existing inter- and intra-community frictions

2.2 SECT- AND RELIGION-SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN

Parts of the Ninewa province are within the boundaries of the disputed territories and therefore, also at the heart of the conflict between the GoI and the KRG. Observing the tendency of both Erbil and Baghdad agendas to rally patronage systems in the disputed territories of Ninewa, divisions will widen and could reflect sect- and religion-specific repatriation patterns. With the IS occupation of Mosul in June 2014, Ninewa minorities became victims of persecution and genocide, and the campaign of violence acted as a catalyst to latent sectarian division. As a whole, the Ninewa province saw an increase in sectarian division and militarization. Disputes over land and property remain significant to Ninewa's minorities and has recently engendered a renewed opportunity for militarization in the absence of state authority.

Ninewa's social fabric is currently embellished in mistrust between IDPs who left following IS occupation in 2014, IDPs who fled during the 2016 liberation operations and the people who have remained. In Tal Afar, for example, 150,000 Shia Turkmen fled the district, whereas Sunni Turkmen largely remained, which raised suspicion about the latter's affiliation with IS. Revenge and intra-sectarian suspicions have remained key drivers of conflict (Mercy Corps & IQCM:2017). Indeed, the IOM reported that 17% of IDPs list fear of discrimination as one of the reasons why they do not plan to return to their places of origin within the coming year (IOM:2019).

In addition to district-based barriers, as explained in Section 2.1, there are sect- or religion-based drivers constraining the decision to return or not to return. Ethnic and religious minorities have been the primary target of the IS's systematic strategy to remove or eliminate them (most notably is the case of the Yazidi massacre in 2014). Additionally, ethno-religious considerations have influenced population movement with communities clustering in specific parts of the country. For instance, Yazidis are concentrated in Duhok governorate where they represent 62% of IDPs (IOM 2017a, 18), but Shia-majority governorates such as Kerbela, Babylon and Najaf have attracted mostly Shia IDPs belonging to different ethnicities (IOM:2017a). In all, displacement has changed, at least temporarily, the demographics of some places of origin and resettlement.

The comparison between IDPs and returnees based on ethno-religious identities indicates that the return process has been more attractive to Arabs and Shabaks than their minority counterparts (Yazidis, Christians and Sunni Turkmen) who mostly choose to remain in displacement.

2.2.1. YAZIDIS

Prior to the 2014 attack, there were roughly 550,000 Yazidis in the KRI and Iraq. As IS took over large swaths of territory in the Ninewa province, a total of 360,000 Yazidis escaped and found refuge according to the KRG's Yazidi Rescue Office (Ali:2019). The Yazidi community shows a higher proportion wishing or planning to leave the country or remain in displacement (Costantini & Palani:2018). For Yazidis, the lack of improvement in security, the reconstruction process and the political situation are three primary barriers to return as observed in the literature and in interviews with Yazidi stakeholders. In addition, grievances persist over the affiliation of Sunni Arab tribes with acts of violence and sexual slavery committed by IS as well as the Shabaks' territorial expansion and empowerment by the Popular Mobilization Forces. In addition to the resulting fear and trauma from the IS crimes committed against Yazidis in Sinjar, the main obstacles to return include lack of security and fear of demographic change in their AoO.

Though the lack of trust in security forces is a common issue amongst all minorities in Ninewa Plains, this feeling is much stronger amongst the Yazidis. Many perceive the lack of investment in district development and the Peshmerga withdrawal in August 2014 as sufficient evidence that the

KRG is acting based on self-interest instead of community needs. In addition, the GoI has refused to recognize the genocide inflicted on their community, and this has led to feelings of further disenfranchisement. Recently, the Iraqi President's Office proposed a bill to parliament aimed to compensate the Yazidi survivors financially and psychologically and rehabilitating them into society (Iraqi News Agency:2019). However, the bill has not yet been voted on by the Iraqi parliament. For reconciliation and transitional justice to happen, Sunni-Yazidi peacebuilding needs to be cultivated, and resorting to international courts is seen as the preferred option by Yazidis to hold those accountable for the genocide against them.

In addition, interviews with Yazidi IDPs in Sharya camp and other informants showed that the majority of Yazidis believe provincial, national and regional governing institutions and their local leaders are ineffective and unresponsive to their needs. They claim to have experienced a lack of government protection, participation in decision-making, and recognition of their concerns. Many would now prefer to see international entities deploying forces to the region.

While social cohesion is becoming conditioned on judicial progress made for Yazidi communities (Subject matter expert KII:2019, Local authority KII:2019), Christians only see viable solutions in the attainment of international protection or some form of autonomy as a way to protect themselves (National authority (MP) KII:2019). Economic needs and feelings of insecurity are perceived to be the main drivers of armed group recruitment for Christians and Shabaks in Hamdaniya and Yazidis in Sinjar and Sinuni.
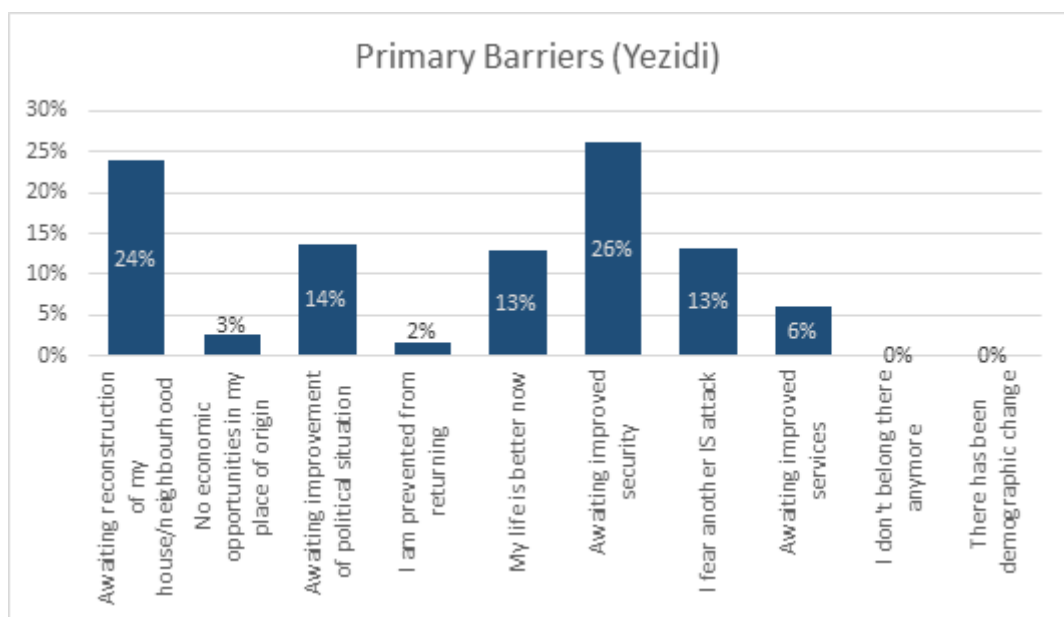

Figure 2 – In a survey, 26% of Yazidis responded that their primary barrier is the lack of improvement in the security situation; 24% said that their main barrier is the reconstruction of housing (MERI forthcoming report:2019).

As noted in the previous section, the militarization of minorities has become a key obstacle in the way of return and stabilization. For example, a government official in Sinjar stated,

"The Iraqi government as part of the Popular Mobilization Forces budget gives [a] salary to 1,000 YBS members, each member 90,000 IQD. But the YBS distributes to 3,000 people, each militant with 300,000 IQD. So, the actual number of YBS fighters is more than the official number. In many Yazidi areas, this is the only job available, [as] Yazidis have become more vulnerable to

external agendas…..each village now has its own militia. The situation is outside the capacity of the state. The Arab villages can be under the Iraqi army and Kurdish/Yazidi villages under the KRG Peshmerga forces (KII:2019)".

As a result of the barriers, more than 100,000 Yazidis have already emigrated. This has further complicated the process of return; family members who stayed in displacement but are planning to leave the country and seek the support of those who have settled in Europe.

YEZIDIS
KEY SECT OR RELIGION BASED BARRIERS TO RETURN
Feeling of insecurity in areas of origin
Militarization of Yazidis internal divisions
Lack of political settlement between conflict parties, mainly in Sinjar
Trauma of the crimes committed by IS
Migration of more than 100,000 Yazidis to Europe following the occupation
Absence of justice and reconciliation with Sunni Arab

2.2.2. CHRISTIANS

Recent studies found that Christians are more inclined to leave Iraq than remain in the country. The presence of family, relatives and friends as well as the confidence of receiving a refugee status appear to be amongst the most important pull factors. In addition, the option of leaving Iraq for Christians seems to be mostly influenced by a perception of insecurity (Costantini & Palani:2018). Key informant interviews, supported by other data like USIP's CSMF, highlighted three issues representing key barriers to return: 1) awaiting improved security conditions and the lack of international protection, 2) finding a better life in areas of displacement and migration, and 3) decreasing employment and economic opportunities.

Along with Yazidis in the Sinjar region, the majority of Christian returnees and IDPs from Hamdaniya and Tal Keif districts underscores deep concerns about changing demographics in their areas that have occurred since 2014. Christians from Hamdaniya and Tal Keif districts, strongly believe that local Shia-dominated political authorities provoke identity divisions in order to gain advantage. A strong sense of political and social marginalization characterizes the Christian community in the Ninewa Plains.

According to the Christians, the Shia Shabaks are thought to pose a security concern in the Ninewa Plains due to their involvement with Shia armed groups. The post-2003 political and security landscape, including the sectarian war from 2006 to 2008 and the recent IS violence, encouraged local Christian political parties to demand the creation of a Christian zone in the Ninewa Plains. Christians have complained about neglect and marginalization by both the GoI and the KRG. Interviews with Christians and local Christian leaders demonstrated that there is also a lack of trust towards the KRG because of its former policies in the Ninewa Plains and its failure to defend the area from the IS onslaught in 2014. After the collapse of the Iraqi army in the face of IS in Ninewa and their failure to reach an agreement with the KRG about the future of the disputed territories, the Christians' trust in the GoI further diminished. Furthermore, the perceived ambivalence of the

Iraqi authorities about extremists preaching religious violence or extreme interpretations of Islam is believed to have led to increased discrimination and marginalization.
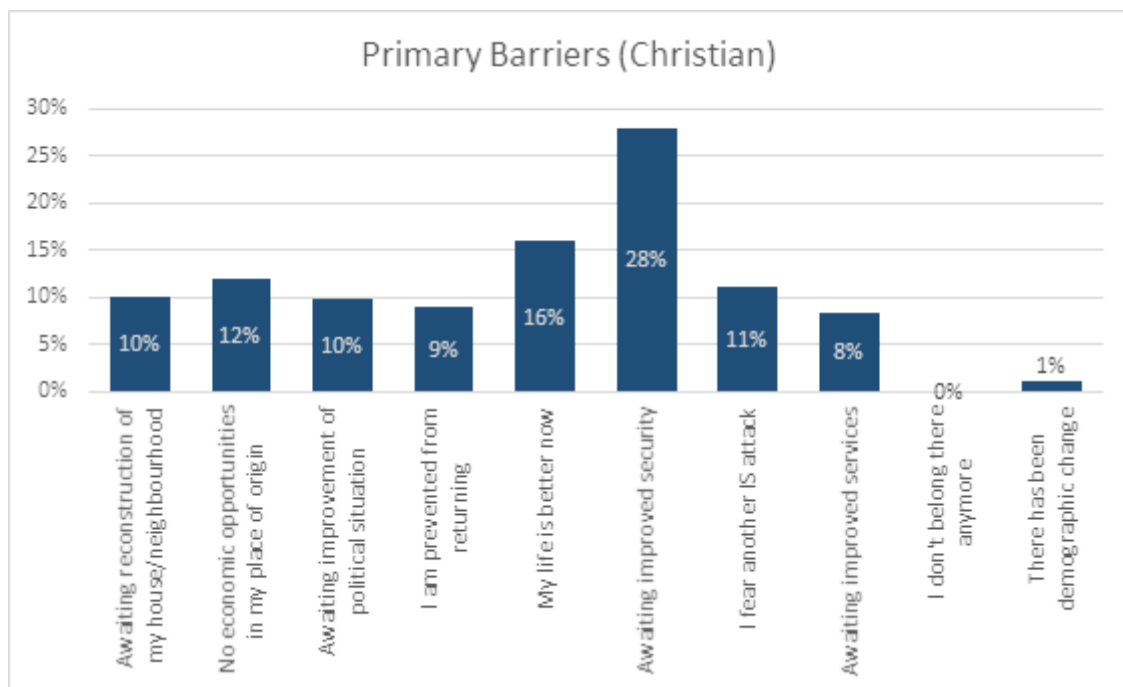

Figure 3 - According to the survey, 28% of the Christian IDPs responded that their primary barrier is the lack of improvement of the security situation. Secondly, 16% said that their life has become better since displacement discouraging them from returning (MERI forthcoming report:2019).

The Christian community speaks about reduced employment opportunities due to the Shabaks' increased power at the local level taking the largest share of employment opportunities as security deteriorates. According to local authorities in Hamdaniya, Christians and Yazidis have been economically marginalized vis-a-vis the Shabaks (in particular, the Shia Shabaks) who are rumored to receive external financial assistance. This support has led to an increase in Shabak presence in the area (moving from villages to two centers) and subsequently resulted in tensions between Shabak and Christian communities (Local authority KII:2019, Gaston:2017). In a KII, a local authority gave an example of these tensions: "In the town of Bashiqa, Shabak flags are hung and Shia culture has become more prevalent, at times clashing with Yazidi and Christian traditions" (Local authority KII:2019).

Apart from resolving grievances between Christians and the Shabaks in Ninewa, the role of an independent judicial institution is crucial to bring IS perpetrators to trial.

CHRISTIANS

KEY SECT OR RELIGION BASED BARRIERS TO RETURN

Awaiting improved security and the lack of international protection

Decreasing employment and economic opportunities

Lack of hope in Iraq and strong pull factor abroad

Majority of Christians have already left the country, creating an imbalance between the number those who stayed and those who migrated

2.2.3. SHABAKS

The Shabak community is comprised of both Sunni and Shias, yet the community's religious identity has significantly evolved over time, moving from a distinctly heterodox to a more orthodox set of beliefs and rituals. With their geographic location in the disputed territories in close proximity to other minorities, this makes their views on conflict and reconciliation particularly relevant for future coexistence in Ninewa (Van Zoonen & Wirya:2017a). The Shabak community suffers from conflicts in relation to other ethno-religious communities, specifically Sunni Arabs and Christians, and from divisions within the community itself related to ethnic and religious identity and demographic changes.

According to IOM data and interviews with Shabak leaders, around 90% of the Shabaks have returned to their areas of origin. A local Shabak leader stated, "All the inhabitants left. Those who have not returned are either because of local security concerns or personal reasons, such as employment, business, feuds…" (Shabak KII:2019). The empowerment of the Shia Shabaks by the presence of Popular Mobilization Forces is a key driver behind the return of Shabaks. As mentioned above, the Shabaks' territorial expansion or their movement to the centers of the Ninewa Plains have created tensions with Christians and Yazidis. In KIIs, the Shabak informants do not interpret this as an intentional and systematic demographic change as perceived by other communities, but rather as a natural movement of people from rural to urban areas where there are better employment opportunities.

SHABAKS
KEY SECT OR RELIGION BASED BARRIERS TO RETURN
Better job opportunities in areas of displacement
Social tensions with the returnees

2.3 GENDER-SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN

During and after conflict, women face different barriers to return than men. Conflict-related sexual exploitation and abuse are common practices during times of conflict and within IDP camps, and these cases are severely underreported. While female concerns are thus heightened during and after conflict, their issues have low levels of statutory protection, and their specific needs are not systematically addressed. The issue of women's return is, however, of great importance for various reasons.

- There are great protection concerns when it comes to displaced women and their return. Together with their children, they make up the majority of the IDP population but face a lack of protection upon returning.

- Women have a more barriers to access livelihood opportunities including stabilization funded projects. They are more restricted in their movement because they are dependent on men to accompany them for protection and there is a culture of excluding women from the labor market.

- Due to the protracted nature of this displacement crisis, women get exposed to new ideas about their roles in society in their current places of residency and in their AoO. They learn that they have new and more agency and opportunity for development and public participation, which sometimes discourages women from returning.

This section focuses on female-specific barriers to return. It will not address male-specific barriers since these can be seen a priori as the same barriers faced by communities documented in quantitative research.

Protection

Due to the protracted mode of displacement, women face heightened protection needs. Women have concerns specific to their role in society, which changes according to district and where they reside. When women decide to return to their AoO, it is made possible through their community or male patronage. For some SFHHs, they get stuck inside IDP camps due to this condition or find dependency relations for protection and overcoming restrictions on movement (INGO KIIs:2019).

When returns to the AoO are made possible, women return to a place with a lack of functional justice systems. This puts vulnerable groups in society at risk and fails to secure the accountability of the crimes suffered by women during the invasion and displacement. These voids in justice and protection often bring about a lack of trust in the ability of local authorities to represent women's concerns and can also be seen as a symptom thereof. A key informant explained, "If there are no mechanisms in place, who will protect the women?" (NGO KII:2019).

According to a national NGO, women generally have a strong sentiment of distrust in official protection structures and its actors to secure them and bring the perpetrators of crimes to trial. Since many women have experienced violence before, during, and/or following the IS invasion, there is no guarantee that she will be protected by these structures now. In the aftermath of the IS occupation, the ISF were found to "view the solution to IS as one of eliminations rather than rehabilitation" (Revkin:2018). The security premise for identification documentation and discrimination of people associated with IS can be seen as an example of this elimination approach. By only giving security clearances to people that are believed to be 'safe', a society with different layers of trust and allegiance is being created. The arbitrary nature of these actions shows that there are no legal processes in place and creates an atmosphere that encourages vigilantism. The lack of

justice can therefore marginalize women, disregard their experiences of violence and necessitate them to rely on informal dependency relations for protection upon which return depends (INGO & NGO KIIs:2019, Dietrich & Carter:2017).

Restriction of Movement

In comparison with male counterparts, women are relatively immobile and face multiple barriers:

- Some districts or communities do not allow women to travel without male company, particularly single women, SFHHs and women who are suspected of IS affiliation.

- Some widows are labeled as former IS wives and subsequently face marginalization. Rumors of IS affiliation put women at risk of harassment and often lead to denial of legal identity documentation as the security clearance process is ambiguous and arbitrary. As this clearance is a precondition for obtaining an ID document, SFHHs face high barriers for leaving the camp. For housing, land and property (HLP) documentation, women have been asked to return to their AoO to retrieve official documents from previous addresses, but the authorities are unlikely to help a woman rumored to be IS-affiliated (INGO KII:2019, NPC:2019b).

- SFHHs are put in vulnerable positions via procedures required for accessing the ID documentation (see Section 1.4), cross checkpoints or verify legal documentation (HLP, education certificates, etc.). In addition, there have been instances reported in Tal Afar of detention and harassment at checkpoints on SFHHs trying to return to their AoO. Upon return, SFHHs reported facing SEA by landlords. These stories intimidate others who would want to attempt similar journeys (INGO KIIs:2019, UN OCHA:2018).

- SFHHs depend on informal security networks for their return. If their informal security networks do not return, their safety cannot be ensured (INGO KII:2019). Consequently, they will have to stay in the camps and remain dependent on the movement of others.

It has been reported that women feel more secure in IDP camps due to the access to amenities, food provisions and services. Since Iraq entered its stabilization and recovery stage, donors have increasingly prioritized reconstruction and basic development in urban areas over humanitarian response inside camp settings. This is meant to facilitate return and lower the prolonged limbo status of IDPs' camp locations or temporary semi-urban residencies. A by-product for women who are not able to enjoy the new livelihood opportunities generated in this stage have reportedly had to engage in survival sex or other modes of exploitation to sustain themselves and their families. Thus, as a consequence of the prolonged displacement and loss of a partner on whom women depended on for security and income, movement, return and survival are challenging for single women and SFHHs during the out-phasing period of humanitarian response (INGO KIIs:2019).

New Ideas and Opportunities

Displacement for some women has meant exposure to new windows of opportunity, including increased public participation, vocational training and education (INGO KIIs:2019). A couple of examples illustrate this change and awareness of new possibilities. NGOs report that women are able to discover their potential in the setting of displacement and have been given platforms to express themselves under INGO auspices and in camp settings. Some Yazidi women in the Shariya Camp found out that Yazidis living in or near Duhok city enjoyed greater freedom than those who lived in the Sinjar district where life is more conservative. While living in the camp, they were able to

discover the opportunities that other Yazidis in the area enjoy, and this changed their perception of life and the possibilities they can explore as women. Therefore, many women prefer to stay in their new camp community because re-integrating into their old role in their AoO is either too difficult or unfavorable (NGO KIIs:2019).

New concerns have been raised by tribal and religious leaders over the unwillingness of some women to return and, as a consequence, local leaders have been seen in camps attempting to 'shame them back' to their AoO (NPC:2019a). Threats about confiscation of security badges and ascribing IS affiliation are tactics deployed in some parts of Ninewa to push women back from their camp settings. In this way, women's reluctance to return to their AoO can be seen as an act of resistance to a culture that did not provide them with the same opportunities and recognition.

During times of displacement, women's return barriers can be invisible, as they may not be detected in regular quantitative data collection due to their cultural 'taken for grantedness' by informants. Therefore, these fundamental barriers to women's return will not necessarily be identified in surveys as primary barrier by respondents. Highlighting the socio-economic context within which women navigate is central to understanding these invisible barriers and secure sustainable returns, especially for single women.

Part III: THE TRANSFORMATION OF VIOLENCE AND RECONCILIATION

This section maps the relevant literature available on transformation of violence, corresponding to the three waves of displacement outlined in Part I. It argues for the recognition of communities' collective memories of violence, tragedy and survival and the need for justice as the significant steps towards stabilization and IDP return. In turn, these have impacted identity politics and governmentality and are therefore necessary to understand reconciliation and social cohesion for returnees. This section will track the effects of transformation of violence on women's movements and why women are now considered central to stabilization and reconciliation efforts. However, the lack of a comprehensive policy by the Iraqi government on the ground has constrained NGO-led efforts towards reconciliation within and between the communities in Ninewa.

Security and community trust is central to ensuring voluntary and sustainable IDP returns. The IS onslaught and defeat in Ninewa brought with it both physical destruction and violence, as well as imageries that play into narratives of war and survival amongst, against and despite other communities. Maintaining the focus on IS and terrorism will fail to secure sustainable solutions to the current crises as it ignores key historical developments that cultivated the current environment for social tension and reconciliation. In addition, the nature of the inter- and intra-community violence we see today is far more complex than what the hotly debated concepts of 'terrorism' or 'sectarianism' can comprise.

The following sections analyze the transformation of violence along Iraq's three waves of displacement (as described in Part I) and the utilization of the notions of honor, shame and victimhood in construing collective identities and Othering. A key problem to reconciliation efforts in Ninewa has been the lack of a whole-of-society and government approach that connects top-down and bottom-up efforts in line with the factors mentioned above (see sections 3.1 and 3.2). Against this contextualization and historical backdrop, an understanding of governmentality and its consequences on current reconciliation efforts can begin.

3.1 TRANSFORMATION OF VIOLENCE

Academic and policy research make clear that violent histories play an important role in the contemporary understanding of community cohesion and identity. Violence does not originate in a vacuum; it is invariably legitimized before complicit perpetrators enact them (Schmidt & Schröder:2001). Understanding this process of legitimation begins with analyzing violent histories. Wars or violence of the past are often used as legitimization of current violent behaviors. An oppressed group under a specific regime is easily mobilized when that regime is weakened. Violent pasts help constitute narratives, performances and inscriptions that in turn are capitalized on to incite or renew cycles of violence.

Narratives about the collective can take the shape of family histories told at the dinner table but can also be disseminated through media outlets. These collective memories and identities come to manifest themselves as a category of practices that can "structure perception, inform thought and experience, [and] to organize discourse and political action," creating systems of denied resemblance (Brubaker:1996, Harrison:2003). These systems have the power to justify violent and extraordinary judicial segregation and protection practices in their pursuit of rejecting the 'other.' The community attachment can be worth dying for and encompass horizontal relationships with families as the central social foundation unified through collective memory and with clear boundaries (Anderson:1983).

In order to shed light on which violent imaginaries and systems of denied resemblance have been created in Iraq's history, this section will focus on three (3) designated time periods, corresponding to the waves of displacement described in Part I.

1968-2003: Under the Ba'ath Party Regime

The violence under the Ba'thist regime primarily came from the state and was aimed at further extending the power of the party and Saddam Hussein himself. State violence was highly regulated, organized and predictable. It became a part of daily life and focused on equating the regime with the people to slowly establish an authoritarian system. This was achieved via the following two processes:

1. <u>Honor and shame</u>. As the Ba'ath party's most publicized purpose was the unity of the Arab nation, it portrayed itself as the most important and single pathway for the people to set forth. In essence, the party represented itself as the people. This meant that treason to the party meant betrayal of the whole people, and crimes against the state became a revolt of the people's honor. Thus, shame was turned into a control mechanism of the state.

2. <u>Fear and punishment</u>. There was a system in place to 1) monitor anything close to treason, and 2) make sure that such behavior did not go unnoticed but was punished. Such punishment was at such a level of cruelty that protest was simply eradicated, and too often this is literally what happened with traitors. In effect, the state managed to put mechanisms in place to control the people's every move (or make them feel like that) and punish them at every opportunity. The result was fear in its most all-encompassing form (Al-Khalil & Makiya:1989).

There were several institutions to help the regime reach these goals. First and foremost were the secret police who were always on the lookout for citizens not behaving accordingly (Al-Khalil & Makiya:1989). Additionally, the armed forces consisted of an official, regular army and a militia- style popular army called the Jaysh al-Shaabi. The latter was comprised of 50,000 men in the 1970s and grew to an estimated 175,000 fighters by 1980 (Al-Khalil & Makiya:1989). The large numbers of the popular army can be understood in terms of the regime wanting to express its level of popular support as it was comprised largely of volunteers. One reason to join this popular army could have been to secure the family's position as loyal to the regime which, in turn, highlights the extent to which fear of being viewed negatively by the regime had permeated society.

The official army also grew considerably, making it the second largest in the Middle East, after Egypt, by 1980. At that point, 20% of Iraq's total workforce was "institutionally charged (…) with one form or another of violence" (Al-Khalil & Makiya:1989). This increase of institutional violence shows a trend of militarization, influencing Iraqi society as a whole. In addition to general threats of violence, expressed through the omnipresence of government employees, party loyalists or armed men, Saddam Hussein also used excessive amounts of violence against minorities. As these groups did not fit into the idea of pan-Arabism, they were considered a threat. The genocidal Anfal Campaign (1986 - 1989) demonstrates Saddam Hussein's regime strategies to eradicate perceived threats.

In conclusion, this phase in Iraqi history was essential in establishing specific state-society relations whereby the former was extremely violent and used armament to control citizens. Punishment was extraordinarily cruel and harsh and only required mere suspicion or an enemy willing to harm. These policies may have been taken away after regime change, however, the sentiments underneath persist in society's veins for a longer period of time. The reality for more than thirty years was a strong state with hierarchies dominating citizens in every aspect of their lives. Additionally, the oppression of some to dominate others signifies that there is a lot of anger, grief and feelings of revenge towards the perpetrators. These three elements of (1) hierarchy built to sustain a violent and

oppressive system, (2) oppression of some alongside the privilege of others, and (3) the collective interpretation of honor and shame will form the foundation upon which later history develops.

2003-2014: From the fall of the Ba'athist regime to the rise of IS

On March 20, 2003, U.S. President George W. Bush announced the invasion of Iraq. What followed was not a peaceful transition into a stable and democratic state, as what some had envisioned. Although victory over Saddam Hussein was declared as soon as May 2003, two major decisions may have laid the groundwork for continued violence over the following decade.

The first detrimental decision was Order 1 of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), otherwise known as Order 1 of 'de-baathification'. This order fired more than 80,000 former regime bureaucrats, ministry employees and Ba'ath party leaders. Although a credible action of the U.S. at the time, the execution of the policy was nonetheless fiercely critiqued. Not only did it affect groups of people that were merely part of the Ba'ath Party to sustain incomes and provide for their families, it also debilitated the country's administration as those fired were also the bureaucrats responsible for administering utilities, hospitals, and universities. Without them and no replacement in sight, chaos ensued (Pfiffner:2010).

Shortly after Order 1, the CPA published and executed Order 2. This focused on disbanding the Iraqi army, rendering 385,000 army soldiers, 28,500 policemen and 50,000 presidential guards unemployed and angry. In the weeks before Order 2 was executed, U.S. forces had previously negotiated with Iraqi army generals that they would be entitled to keep their jobs if they refrained from fighting the U.S. However, with Order 2 breaking those promises on the U.S. side, distrust and rage worsened in post-2003 Iraq (Pfiffner:2010). In addition, the practices of torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison was another breach of trust when the pictures and narratives became public (Hersh:2004). These practices may have resonated to some extent with the extreme forms of state violence happening under Saddam's regime, however, the "scars of Abu Ghraib" were just as much personal as they may have been collective (Fenton & Abedine:2016). Here was another state actor abusing, torturing and even killing Iraqis, although it (the U.S.) had promised the opposite. Although Abu Ghraib directly affected a few hundred prisoners, its visuals affected the entire nation.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, a new form of violence transpired. With an absence of state control and a new government incapable of regaining a grip on violence, various groups of insurgents began a violent struggle for power. After three decades of state violence, Iraq became the scene of non-state actor violence. Some of them remained loyal to the former regime, some fought against foreign troops, and others saw the security vacuum as an opportunity for individual gain. These groups managed to politicize and capitalize on previous divisions between groups. Moral populism emerged and was used to "mobilize and divide populations by deploying exclusivist religious and ethnic rhetoric" (Dodge et al.:2018). Additionally, public authority was severely crippled due to the U.S. invasion. Not only did the army have to be rebuilt after CPA Order 2, central authority was destabilized due to the violent aftermath of the U.S. invasion. Gaps left by the state were filled by religious institutions, which were mostly Shia oriented and gained a strong grip on governance in Iraq (Dodge et al.:2018).

The violence of this period including 'dual-purpose' crimes serving discursive messages as well as individual needs or interests. Essentially, it reduces to "a combination of identity politics and competition for material resources" (Green & Ward:2009).

2014 to date: The IS and Post-IS Era

The developments after the fall of the Ba'ath regime provided opportunities for extremists to build up their organizations relatively unnoticed while at the same time planning and executing terrorist attacks. One of the prominent figures was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who joined Al Qaeda in Iraq along with his own organization and after his death would be recognized as one of the starting points for the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006.

Although ISI's relevance diminished in 2007 and 2008, their Sunni-oriented extremism was felt in Iraq with several deadly bombing attacks. When the U.S. withdrawal was implemented between 2009 and 2010, ISI took this opportunity to grow and establish itself. Their local rivals, U.S.-backed Sahwa militias fighting the Sunni extremism of ISI, were crippled due to the loss of financial and technical support. Moreover, the Iraqi government under former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki failed to invest enough in security, allowing ISI to grow and develop further (Lister:2014). Subsequently, the ISI evolved into what later became known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL, or Da'esh) and is currently known as the Islamic State (IS). In 2014, it conquered the Sunni Arab majority territories of Iraq without much resistance.

This lack of resistance to the rise of IS is partly explained through the incapacity of the state and its security forces, but it also requires an understanding of the lines of the popular support that IS gained during its rise. The Shia-dominated al-Maliki government marginalized Sunni Iraqis through policies and violence. The Islamic State had learned the importance of governance in establishing popular support; they attempted to apply these lessons in 2014 looking to improve services in some of their newly conquered areas (Kaltenthaler, Silverman & Dagher:2018).

When the ISF were defeated in their attempt to protect Ninewa, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (Iraq's most senior Islamic (Shia) leader) issued a fatwa to encourage all able-bodied men to join the ISF and fight IS. Due to serious credibility and capacity problems, these men were not too keen on joining the regular state ISF. Instead, they joined and formed different militias, bound together under the name of the Popular Mobilization Forces. The Popular Mobilization Forces now represents a variety of groups, some of which emerged after the fatwa was issued and others already existed and remobilized. The Popular Mobilization Forces forces quickly grew to over 100,000 fighters and cooperated with ISF, Peshmerga and the International Coalition against IS (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen:2017). The Iraqi government even recognized and legally legitimized the Popular Mobilization Forces as "a government entity operating alongside the military" commanded by the Prime Minister's office and providing government salaries and pensions (Al Jazeera:2016).

Identity and Governmentality

The economic, strategic and political instrumentalization of identity sent waves of violence throughout the country, cultivating sentiments of disenfranchisement, revenge, and intimidation that continue to reverberate across the districts of Ninewa. The high level of diversity within Ninewa means that groups are targeted differently and have different resources and strategies for survival. In turn, they have different experiences and narratives that fit their collective memory about what had unfolded and led to their current conditions. These narratives have the power to galvanize belonging and subsequently create derogatory myths and legitimize violence against an out-group identity. The collective memories of victimhood or resilience during these waves of violence are successfully adapted and bent towards strategically favorable goals on multiple levels (Brubaker:1996). Thus, with a view to embarking on reconciliation in Ninewa, identity groups (religious, sectarian or ethnic) must be understood as social constructs that cyclically become instrumentalized by state or security actors, which creates experiences that become interpolated through the prism of the respective groups' collective memories. This narrative design in turn affects their decisions in relation to peace, violence and reconciliation.

The politicization of sectarian identities becomes apparent in the Muhasasa Al-Ta'ifia, a sectarian apportionment system, which is in action at the federal government level. This system was designed to achieve governments of unity but it "deliberately used moral populism to disguise the evolution of a nationwide patronage system (the political marketplace) and to legitimize the use of violence during the civil war" (Dodge et al.:2018). This confessional system demonstrates itself in two ways:

1. Three powerful positions in the political system are allotted along ethno-sectarian divides. The position of Prime Minister is filled by an Arab Shia Muslim, the office of the Presidency is occupied by an ethnic Kurd and the presidency of the Parliament is an Arab Sunni Muslim.

2. The system has provided room for ethno-sectarian representation, wherein political parties build constituencies around ethno-sectarian groups and advance the interests of these groups. It has become difficult to dismantle this system as Iraq's electoral law favors bigger political parties over smaller ones. This is why alliances between bigger and smaller parties are not uncommon. An independent candidate is very unlikely to meet the electoral threshold necessary to gain seats in parliament, while a bigger party is favored and might thus help any smaller parties and their candidates (Kouti & Ala'Aldeen:2018).

Through these systems, designed and enforced through constitutional law, politicization of ethno-sectarian divisions is ingrained in Iraqi national politics and seeps through to governorate, district and sub-district levels.

Securitization and Sectarian Lines

Ninewa's disputed status between the KRG and the GoI has created a statutory protection void and dissolution of local social contracts and community trust. Many minorities fear inter- and intra-community conflicts, complicated by socio-political tensions and escalating militarization within communities (O'Driscoll & Van Zoonen:2017). In response to the waves of violence, Ninewa province has seen an increase in security presence and differentiation by LHSFs which have come to engender a destabilization catalyst to fragile inter- and intra-sectarian dynamics (Gaston & Derzsi-Horvath:2017).

Through the three waves of violence, any fragile social contract with the GoI or the KRG or between components were effectively broken. The lack of state accountability for the crimes committed and the extent to which the Iraqi state could legitimize violence were significant (Revkin:2018). This left minorities exposed, feeling unrecognized and unprotected. The disputed status of the minorities' districts in Ninewa further weakened the social contract with, and trust in, the GoI and the KRG and created a space for the hardening of parochial identities and networks. In search of safety, people tap into patron-client relations at personal (women, in particular), community and regional levels. In the absence of a social contract with the government, a sentiment of community vigilantism has been detected - for example, revenge rape against assumed IS affiliates or punishment of 'stayers' under IS occupation. The violence is thus not re-circulated due to identity group differences per se, but rather how and in which context they have been instrumentalized.

Two New Dynamics in Belonging

The protracted nature of displacement faced by IDPs from Ninewa has put a strain on the scarce resources. With an increase in needs and demographic change, the following two trends emerge:

1. The importance of collective identity and its patronage increases along with the erosion of statutory services and social contracts (or its change-over and then, absence, within disputed territories) (USIP's Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework (USIP CSMF):2018a, 2018b).

2. Boundaries and belonging become more fluid and groups more permeable when people are faced with increasing needs, which at times requires cross-sectarian bargaining and engagement.

Desperate for an income, Ninewa's youth are more likely to join military factions and follow their salaries to join others. According to the CSMF, IDPs perceive salaries as the primary incentive for conscripting to security factions, despite the overwhelmingly experienced political violence committed by these actors with impunity (USIP CSMF:2018b). Regardless of affiliation and feeling of belonging, people in need can override or emphasize their group affiliation interchangeably to strategically cover their needs (youth KIIs:2019).

Figure 4 - Yazidi youth in an IDP camp

Apart from Christians in Tal Keif, the CSMF shows a general feeling of marginalization amongst minorities in northern Ninewa and a call for secular governance, i.e. at governorate level, there should not be political parties based on ethno-religious identity but based on common cause across groups (USIP CSMF:2018b). In parallel, when asked about what would help promote their 'component' in their sub-district, IDPs perceived the establishment of a designated security faction of high importance, as well as international or regional backing or a strong civilian leadership (USIP CSMF:2018b). In this way, short-term security patronage is played up against a desire to move across sectarian lines to improve governance in the long term.

These processes are further conceptualized through the notion of governmentality "as techniques and procedures for directing human behavior" (Sending & Neumann:2006 as cited in Terpstra & Frerks:2018). When trying to understand political processes, political actors need to be analyzed in addition to the interpretation and deployment of these processes on communal and personal levels of scale.

In the case of Ninewa, governmentality becomes apparent through the politicization of sectarian divides in which political actors have capitalized on identities to achieve their political goals. Governmentality can unpack discords between intended political actions, and their at times contradictory outcomes on the ground as they transcend political spheres and enter the daily lives of communities and individuals. In the case of implementing tribal or religious group leaders' mutual peace agreements, the translation into practice can bring about new unintended developments. For example, a religious leader may lose legitimacy within his congregation by either signing or refusing to sign a local peace agreement. In this way, governmentality of the congregation puts into question the legitimacy of governance, based on the new political process. In addition, IDPs who have been under the provision of INGOs were accustomed to a new governmentality which will need to be taken into consideration by future patrons (state or non-state actors) in reconciliation efforts. New components to post-INGO local governance would arguably need higher level of female participation, transparency, and democratic engagement in order for the governance to be defined as legitimate and representative.

Contemplating these theoretical frameworks in reconciliation efforts renders any mutual recognition of different communities' collective memories of violence, tragedy and survival and the need for justice significant in the steps towards stabilization and IDP return. An overemphasis on sectarian divisions can further cultivate a breeding ground for extremist violence and foreign invasion, in particular in Ninewa's disputed territories.

Figure 5 - IDP girl and her relatives from Ninewa

3.2 WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

"Peace for women does not mean the cessation of armed conflict. Women's security needs are not necessarily met in 'post-conflict' situations, as gender-based violence still remains rampant in reconstruction periods (Al-Ali:2005, p. 741)".

Little attention has been given to the role of women in stabilization and reconciliation processes after violent conflict (Fransen & Bilgili:2018). In Iraq's conservative societies, women fulfill roles within the private sphere and are therefore less often part of public reconciliation processes. This section will first look into the participation of Iraqi women during and following conflict from a historical perspective since women's participation and resistance have important roots in the region. Thereafter, the current involvement of women in peace and reconciliation processes in Ninewa will be reviewed, followed by an analysis uncovering possible gaps and needs.

The initial codification of gender roles in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan took place during the time of ethnic oppression, mass killings, genocide, militarization and armed struggle. Colonial settlers' engagement and alliance-building with the most conservative structures within society affected a 're-tribalization' of policies, a process which has been described as the 're-subordination of women' (Efrati:2012). As a result, the issue of defending honor "occup[ies] a considerable place in the Iraqi criminal justice system" according to Noga Efrati (Efrati in Begikhani, Gill & Hague:2010). Honor was seen as a 'mitigating circumstance,' which legitimized killing a woman as the 'easiest way' to solve a problem, according to articles 128 and 130–132 of the Iraqi Penal Code (IPC) from 1969. Tribal agreements instrumentalized girls as leverage of honor to mediate conflict and settle disputes, as exemplified by fasl marriages.[5] Although both the Iraqi penal code and Personal Status Codes have since been reviewed, this development can be seen as a cautionary tale over the power of foreign intervention to legitimize concepts or ideas despite its subsequent oppression of half the population.

Origins of Movements for Equality in Iraq

Social movements for women's rights were organized by Iraqi intellectuals as early as the 1920s, with Iraq's first women's magazine Layla launched in 1923. The Iraqi League for the Defense of Women's Rights was founded in 1952 by Naziha al-Dulaimi, who served from 1959 until 1962 as country's Minister of Municipalities and hereby became the first female minister of state in the entire Arab world (Mamouri:2014). Not only is there a long history of women's rights activism in the central part of Iraq, the KRI has also witnessed significant women's rights activism and resistance (Kaya:2017). The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) established the Kurdistan Women's Union in 1952, and there were multiple other political women's groups that followed. However, after Iraq's 1974-1975 war on the Kurds, the only legal women's group that survived was the General Union of Iraqi Women (Fischer-Tahir:2010).

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[5] Enforcement of tribal law and conservative Islamic law "in Basra alone since the beginning of that year [2012] eight hundred women found themselves in fasl marriages—handed over in the settlement of disputes" (Efrati:2012).

It is frequently that since the 1958 Revolution, the Iraqi authorities started to promote the cultural, economic, political and social progress of women. This led to the establishment of a renewed Personal Status Code in 1959 which drove the modernization of women's increased public participation. The Code promoted women's participation in the workforce, raised the age of marriage, and strengthened rules around polygamy (Fischer-Tahir:2010; Heinrich Böll Stiftung:2014). This code replaced local customs and tribal rules with regards to issues of child marriage, inheritance and divorce (Fischer-Tahir:2010).

Following these changes, the ruling Ba'ath party made some efforts to modernize the rights and rules concerning women in the 1970s. Iraqi women were amongst the most educated in the region during the early days of the Ba'ath regime. Women were part of the labor force and were represented on the majority of levels within state institutions and bureaucracy (Al-Ali:2005). Whether these steps were carried out as acts of state feminism is however unlikely; they might rather be seen as a political tool. Additionally, it differed greatly whether a woman lived in a city or in the countryside and to what class she belonged to indicate whether or not these improvements were applicable (Al-Ali:2005).

Women's Rights under the Ba'athists

The decades of the Ba'athist regime were characterized by a series of wars, which resulted in changes being made to the Personal Status Code again, but this time they were not in favor of women (Fischer-Tahir:2010). In the 1990s, the regime started to increase its reliance on tribal and religious groups that were more conservative in nature, a policy change that resulted in the promotion of traditional roles for women (Al-Ali:2005). This, in combination with the international sanctions imposed on Iraq and the impact the war had on the country, the situation for women started to deteriorate once again (Kaya:2017). It was with the formation of the semi-independent Kurdistan after 1991, with support of the U.S. and other Western allies, that the emergence of feminist movements in the Kurdish-majority provinces advanced (Fischer-Tahir:2010).

After the fall of the Ba'athist regime in 2003, sectarian violence started to increase, and together with political instability, it led to the deterioration of the situation for women in both their private and public domains (Kaya:2017). Despite the marginalization that Iraqi women have found themselves in over the past decades, some forms of participation and resistance were observed on a local level. One example of this are the Anfal women.

Between February and September 1988, the Ba'ath regime conducted the Anfal operations against the Kurdish populations living in the rural, hard-to-govern areas. During these months, thousands of Kurdish villages were bombed and later raised to the ground by the Iraqi army (Mlodoch:2012). Large numbers of families were deported or buried in mass graves. In other cases, men and boys were killed whilst women and children were forced to live in newly built 'collective villages', which were more like camps. Thus, many women found themselves without their breadwinners (husbands and sons) and forced to explore ways to make a living which included hard labor that went far beyond the traditional female jobs (Mlodoch:2012). Informal networks of like-minded women were set up with time, which helped share experiences and solidarity. Interestingly, while women in rural Kurdish societies were traditionally seen as the safeguarding family honor, many of the restrictive boundaries were lifted for the Anfal women (Mlodoch:2012). They backed each other for having a job and breaching community traditions, thereby showing their agency and ability to provide for themselves (Mlodoch:2012).

Women's Current Legal Status

Women's legal status in the KRI was elevated in 1990 and more significantly after 2003 as the KRG introduced reforms that expanded the participation and recognition of women. Unfortunately, despite the criminalization of honor killing in all parts of Iraqi Kurdistan in 2000 and 2002 by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and KDP administrations, respectively, the practice continued as did other honor related practices including self-immolation and female genital mutilation, especially in rural Kurdistan areas (Kaya:2017). Due to the stigma associated with reporting, the literature and statistics under-represent this issue.

Today, local women's organizations often use international treaties and resolutions that are endorsed by Iraq for women's rights advocacy within the GoI and KRG. They are supported by international actors who likewise push for women's rights and relevant reforms within both governments (Kaya:2017). In the period from 2008 until the end of 2013, there was a positive trend for women's rights in Iraq and the KRI. The women's agenda was given a priority within the KRG and the KRI Parliament. A good example is the Alliance 1325 and Network 1325 committees that were tasked with the coordination of the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) (Kaya:2017).

Iraqi National Action Plan

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was adopted in October 2000 and outlined the UN, state and partner obligations to ensure that the needs and priorities of women and girls impacted by conflict are addressed and that peace is brokered in an inclusive and sustainable manner (Aref & Alzameli:2018). An Iraqi National Action Plan (INAP) was developed between the years 2012 and 2014 - more than ten years after UNSCR 1325 came into existence - as a result of cooperation between civil society and political decision makers (Aref & Alzameli:2018). Iraqi women's organizations and networks from both Iraq and the KRI started to form initiatives focused on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2012. In 2013, this process led to the establishment of a Cross-Sector Task Force (CSTF) composed of representatives from Ministries, members of the two parliaments, legal experts and INAP Initiative (Aref & Alzameli:2018). Whereas the INAP is a very ambitious and progressive document, there have been some difficulties with its implementation. The budget of the INAP was the last part requiring signatures when IS arrived in Iraq in 2014. The priority of the women's agenda decreased greatly from 2014 onwards, and therefore, the budget was never signed. The five-year implementation period for the first INAP has now passed, and currently, the Women Empowerment Organization, an NGO, is working on a second INAP which includes improvements learned from the first plan.

Women in Reconciliation

Women still play a marginal role in reconciliation efforts. However, it is important to note that the challenges women face in participation and resistance might differ per district, sub-district and town. This largely depends on the level of conservatism in the community and thus how open to the idea of changing roles for women. For example, Tal Afar and Ayadhiya are conservative regions within Ninewa where women's participation is challenged. Although the issue is found to be very important by NGOs and other organizations, the reality on the ground is that there is still not enough attention paid to women's participation. Furthermore, it is argued that little efforts have so far been made by both the GoI and KRG, as well as community, tribal or religious leaders to change this situation (INGO KIIs:2019).

Despite the fact that many NGOs are working on the issue of women's rights and participation, there are still many challenges ahead. Kaya (2018) comments sharply on the current WPS agenda, which is part of UNSCR 1325, being carried out by national and international actors. She argues that

it is problematic to focus on the idea that "societies should be transformed for interventions to be successful" (Kaya:2018). In the most current approaches, it is societies that are seen as the barrier to achieve the goals of interventions instead of state structures and its regulations (Kaya:2018). This is not to say that there are no cultural barriers hindering reforms to succeed, but if rules and regulations were changed and pursued from a national level, the situation might have a different outlook. This point of criticism was also raised by a key informant who stated that only if there is political will and a fundamental belief in women's participation will the situation improve (NGO KII:2019).

Lessons Learned for Iraq's New National Action Plan

In order to come forward with a realistic WPS approach, the following points should be considered:

1. It is essential to redefine resilience and vulnerability according to context without essentializing gender, gendered vulnerabilities and gender norms (Kaya:2018). Women are not vulnerable only because cultural norms in society hinder them from participating in public economic and political life. It is crucial to understand female IDPs' own conceptions of vulnerability and resilience in order to generate effective resilience policies.

2. The current approaches focused on the participation of women in peacebuilding and other initiatives is strongly centralized on their potential, e.g., the potential of women to be an essential part in countering violent extremism or their economic potential that often stays unexplored. However, women should not be empowered only because of the potential they have in certain areas, but they should be given the same opportunities as men because they constitute half of the population. There should be a structure in place that unconditionally provides these women with rights on protection, security, work, movement and participation. For women's empowerment, it is needed to make the structure accountable for providing for women unconditionally on par with their male counterparts. In this way, political intention and motivation for equality, along with a recognition for KRI and Iraqi women's struggle and resistance throughout the decades, must build the foundation for this change.

3. A caution should be made on potential over-engagement - i.e. exceeding their actual leverage and legitimacy as perceived by their community - of tribal leaders in reconciliation and other stabilization initiatives. Their participation could outweigh their actual remit and re-energize conservative gender roles, limiting female participation in similar ways that colonial forces arguably re-subordinated women in Iraq. Engagement in ways that minimize the exclusionary aspects of tribal customary law, detrimental to the status of women, should be explored.

3.3 RECONCILIATION

"Without justice, there is no reconciliation with Sunni tribes."

Yazidi community leader, KII, 2019

Most areas in Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa are not homogeneous, making social cohesion difficult. Yet, it remains fundamental to the region's stability. This tension suggests that it is critical to address Ninewa's complex social issues to ensure that stabilization and reconstruction efforts in the most heavily IS-affected areas of Iraq do not simply rebuild over unstable foundations. Obstacles surrounding social cohesion are one of the major factors for continued displacement in Ninewa (IOM, RWG & Social Inquiry:2018). In addition to a long history of violence, as mentioned in the previous section, a wide range of studies show that people across districts of Ninewa and across different ethno-religious groups have concerns related to discrimination, marginalization, demographic or population change, and revenge or retaliatory acts occurring within their places of origin (IOM, RWG & Social Inquiry:2018; USIP & Social Inquiry:2018).

The recent defeat of IS presents an important opportunity to help Iraq undertake a nuanced, systematic approach to bottom-up, civic-led reconciliation. The ground for reconciliation and transitional justice can be better prepared while supporting urgently needed community-based conflict resolution. As a major contributing factor of stability, this should expedite IDP return (UNDP:2019). However, both district and sect-and-religion-based barriers to return, as described in Part II, have demonstrated that the lack of serious investment in reconciliation and healing of community trauma have constrained stabilization and return processes in all six districts of concern and across all ethno-religious communities. Some of these problems predate the IS occupation of Ninewa and the liberation process. Previous studies on the perception of reconciliation held by minority communities in Ninewa, including Christians, Yazidis, Sabean-Mandaeans, Shabaks, and Turkmen, show that even before the IS occupation, these communities were shut out of government decision-making at both the local and federal levels (Van Zoonen & Wirya:2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d). Studies also show that it was their marginalization which contributed significantly to the failure to protect predominantly minority areas and ultimately facilitated the IS invasion in Ninewa that uprooted their communities. Today, these communities continue to experience physical insecurity, political exclusion, a lack of proper public services, and a feeling of uncertainty towards the future (USIP:2019; Costantini & Palani:2018). Meanwhile, the threat posed by intercommunal tensions among minority groups has discouraged many IDPs from returning to their homes and contributed to emigration from their ancestral towns and villages. These conditions hamper the early recovery efforts that are essential for stabilization and the development of long-term resilience.

Though addressing the social fragmentations that led to the rise of extremists in Ninewa is crucial for rebuilding trust between communities, it is also critical to address the legacy of the IS war and the brutal group's lingering impact on the wives and families of militants currently incarcerated in camps, who are subject to rape, beatings and murder (Abouaoun:2019). Prior to 2014, social cohesion and reconciliation were mostly driven by tensions between communities in the province. One of the unforeseen consequences of the IS war is that, in some areas, intra-communal tensions are even more urgent than inter-communal tensions. This is the case with the Turkmen community in Tal Afar as well as with the politically-divided Yazidis of Sinjar.

The literature mainly defines reconciliation from the lens of transitional justice and trust within and between communities. Similar to the crisis of displacement, the prospect of reconciliation and social cohesion must be contextualized within periodic waves of violence in the recent history of Iraq; it is critical to understand how that history is informing current actions, as explained in Section 3.1.

Importantly, amongst the communities in Ninewa, there is no common definition as to what reconciliation means or how it should be achieved. What "reconciliation" means to Yazidis is quite different than what it means to Sunni Arabs, for example. The lack of a clear policy from the Iraqi government, as well as from formal institutions like the now-defunct National Reconciliation Committee who are tasked with advancing reconciliation efforts, has created additional complexity in addressing conflicting views of reconciliation (see forthcoming Stakeholders Position Analysis report). For this reason, an INGO representative suggested, "the word reconciliation does not work on the ground, people have different reactions to it. Therefore, it is better to be avoided" (INGO KII:2019). Furthermore, Abouaoun (2019) states, "Now more than ever, the country is in dire need of a unified, coherent national reconciliation strategy, one that reintegrates innocent people back into communities which should be prepared to accept them and acknowledge that they too have suffered at the hands of ISIS. Otherwise, Iraq risks losing another generation of youth to extremist ideology and action."

Therefore, the key to understanding the viability of reconciliation initiatives and their impact on the safe return of IDPs, especially Christians and Yazidis, is addressing the structural and historical roots of conflict between various ethno-religious groups in Ninewa and in Iraq as a whole and, more importantly, through a comprehensive national reconciliation policy. Without the active engagement of national institutions, such tasks will not be possible. This is best illustrated in a quote from a local NGO activist: "For programs to work, we need to know that a 60-year-old conflict cannot be addressed by a 6-month peace-building program" (NGO KII:2019). In addition to this history, the IS occupation, displacement crisis and shifting power dynamics in Ninewa following liberation have deepened divisions within some communities and exacerbated problems in others (see Van Zoonen & Wirya 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d). As explained above, the process of addressing historical and structural problems needs to be combined with policies that address new intra-communal tensions in the post-IS setting.

The literature highlights several national reconciliation programs undertaken in Iraq since 2003, most of which focused more on the engagement of political elites with limited civic participation. These have yet to realize the goal of national unity or to fully match the existing demand for accountability and transitional justice (UNDP:2019, Rossi et al. 2019: 60). The problem is not only a lack of civic participation at the individual and grass-roots levels, but also the politicization of community reconciliation as a concept. Different political actors and entities in Iraq have different interpretations as to what reconciliation means and how it should be achieved. These differences have, in turn, impacted IDPs' and minorities' perceptions towards reconciliation and conflict. A former district mayor stated:

"The problem is that the Iraqi government has no unified decision towards the issue of reconciliation and displacement. There is much interference in Iraq and belonging and loyalty are divided. Iraq lacks a common identity and sense of belonging. In Iraq everyone, every community works for their own interests (KII, 2019)".

The lack of an integrated civic society and government approach that connects top-down and bottom-up efforts, in line with the factors mentioned above, has constrained reconciliation efforts. On the ground, local leaders in Ninewa express their dissatisfaction with the work of Iraq's National Reconciliation Committee and its successor institution, the Coexistence and Communal Peace Committee, because they feel excluded from the process and are therefore convinced that these entities do not represent the local people nor understand local complexities. With the absence of a streamlined and coherent government policy, reconciliation efforts are mostly NGO-led projects

(see Initiatives Mapping report). NGOs have created new opportunities for political participation, and, in particular, for underrepresented demographics that include women, youth and minorities. However, key informants reveal that current reconciliation programs have limited impact on the return process because they have not been able to adequately translate the complexities of local dynamics into project implementation.

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ABOUT MERI

The Middle East Research Institute (MERI) engages in policy issues contributing to the process of state building and democratization in the Middle East. Through independent analysis and policy debates, our research aims to promote and develop good governance, human rights, rule of law and social and economic prosperity in the region. It was established in 2014 as an independent, not-for-profit organization based in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.