The Civilian's Dilemma: How Religious and Ethnic Minorities Survived the Islamic State Occupation of Northern Iraq

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December 3, 2021

Abstract

How did Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities survive the Islamic State occupation of Ninewa governorate? Existing accounts of civilian behavior during wartime either essentialize social identity or ignore it altogether by reducing survival to cost-benefit calculations or political opportunism. Against the conventional wisdom, I argue that civilians adopt survival strategies based on the internal resources of their home communities. Specifically, civilians detect and respond to threats by drawing on a set of heuristics to discern combatants' motives and intentions. I evaluate the key tenets of my theory through a mixed-methods research design of observational data and field interviews. I begin by analyzing migration patterns recorded in the United Nation's *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. To understand how Iraqis who remained survived the conflict, I draw on original interviews with Iraqi peacebuilders from minority communities. I find that those who remained survived the conflict by mobilizing self-defense groups and collaborating with members of the anti-ISIS coalition. Opportunistic collaboration between minorities and ISIS insurgents was less common. My findings provide insights for scholars and practitioners interested in refugee return, resettlement, and reintegration in fragile states.

Keywords

Iraq, Islamic State, minorities, Ninewa, civilians

“We fear from the possible war between the Iraqi Army and the Peshmerga. We fear we might be caught in the middle.” – Shabak medical professional living in Al Hamdaniya¹

“We didn’t have any name, but we fought *Da`esh*.” – Khal Ali, leader of a Yazidi self-defense group on Mount Sinjar²

Introduction

In summer 2014, Islamic State insurgents from extended their military offensive from neighboring Syria into Northern Iraq. The advance began in early June, when approximately 1,500 ISIS insurgents attacked and occupied Mosul. In response, nearly 25,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) fled their posts, abandoning military equipment, ammunition, and bases through Ninewa governorate. In the following weeks, the Islamic State advanced beyond Ninewa to control territory as far south as Samarra, a 90-minute drive to the heart of Baghdad.

In the face of the ISIS threat, Iraq’s ethnic and religious minorities—including Assyrian Christians, Bahais, Kaka’is, (Sabian) Mandaean, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Yazidis—pursued different survival strategies in the face of existential threats. While many minority residents fled their homes, those who remained faced stark choices. Most actively collaborated with pro-regime forces, including formally integrating local self-defense groups into the anti-ISIS coalition. Some

¹ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.” Middle East Research Institute, August 2017, <http://www.meri-k.org/publication/the-shabaks-perceptions-of-reconciliation-and-conflict>.

² Hannah Lynch. “The Budding Kurdish-Iranian Alliance in Northern Iraq.” *New Lines Magazine*, 24 June 2021, <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/the-budding-kurdish-iranian-alliance-in-northern-iraq>.

Assyrian Christian and Yazidi communities aligned their self-defense groups with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), while others opted to support a network of Shi'a, pro-government militias called the Popular Mobilization Units (*al-Hashd ash-Sha'bi*). Other groups—such as a splinter faction of the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS)—sought autonomy from both Baghdad and Erbil. Still others, include Sunni Turkmen and Shabaks took advantage of the security vacuum to exploit their neighbors and extract private rents.

What explains the wide variation in how Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities survived the ISIS occupation? In the face of political violence, how do civilians decide whether to stay or leave their communities? For those who stay, what factors determine whether individuals collaborate, resist, or remain nonaligned from armed groups?

The goal of this study is to explain how civilians detect and respond to threats during wartime. I argue that civilians draw on a set of heuristics—or decision-making shortcuts—to decide how to engage combatant groups. First, individuals consider which combatant groups control the community and whether they benefit from governance under the status quo. Second, individuals consider whether they have any viable alternatives for security and how a revision to the status quo will affect access to their basic needs. The first question informs how civilians perceive combatants' motives and intentions, whereas the second question conditions civilians' sensitivity to combatant tactics. Judgements based on these questions shape whether civilians stay or leave, as well as how they engage combatants contesting for control over the community.

I evaluate my theory via a mixed-methodology research design consisting of existing observational datasets and original interviews from the field. First, I analyze migration and displacement trends in Ninewa governorate recorded in the United Nations' (DTM).³ Second, I

³ United Nations Mission in Iraq, International Organization for Migration (IOM). *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, Wave 123 (August/September 2021), available from: <https://dtm.iom.int/iraq>.

draw on original key informant interviews I enumerated among local Iraqi peacebuilders. Considered in concert, both data sources provide a more comprehensive picture of civilian beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors over the course of the ISIS occupation in Ninewa. A combination of observational datasets and field interviews provides a more complete picture of civilian survival strategies than any single method of causal inference.⁴

Civilian Survival Strategies During Wartime

Despite their relative vulnerability, civilians exercise a remarkable degree of agency during wartime. Whether individuals remain or flee their homes—as well as how they engage local combatants—affects not only how conflicts evolve but also which side(s) prevails after violence subsides. Nonetheless, substantial questions remain about which beliefs and attitudes motivate civilian behavior in the face of proximate threats from armed groups.

Figure 1: How do civilians survive civil war?

⁴ Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. Cambridge University Press, 2015; Driscoll, Jesse. *Doing Global Fieldwork: A Social Scientist's Guide to Mixed-methods Research Far from Home*. Columbia University Press, 2021; Krause, Peter, and Ora Szekely, eds. *Stories from the Field: A Guide to Navigating Fieldwork in Political Science*. Columbia University Press, 2020.

In this study, my primary outcome of interest is *civilian engagement strategies*, or how civilians identify with and relate to combatants during wartime.⁵ As outlined in Figure 1, when confronting violence in the community, civilians first must decide whether to flee the violence or remain in their homes. The decision to migrate can result from forced displacement or a voluntary exit based on a family’s motivations, constraints, and opportunities.⁶ While most refugees avoid engaging in the politics of their home communities, a select few engage in diaspora activism and political advocacy. Given the structure of preexisting incentives, diaspora activists often create moral hazard for their home communities, including advocating for more extreme positions (e.g., political autonomy or separatism) than are tenable in a post-conflict context.

Figure 2: How do civilians engage combatants?

⁵ Civilians are “unarmed actors living in a given territory who do not participate in hostilities or belong to any state or non-state armed group,” see Ana Arjona. “Civilian cooperation and non-cooperation with non-state armed groups: The centrality of obedience and resistance.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, no. 4-5 (2017): 755-778.

⁶ Prakash Adhikari. “Conflict-induced displacement, understanding the causes of flight.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013): 82-89; Justin Schon. “Motivation and opportunity for conflict-induced migration: An analysis of Syrian migration timing.” *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 1 (2019): 12-27; Akisato Suzuki, Stefanovic Djordje, and Loizides Neophytos. “Displacement and the expectation of political violence: Evidence from Bosnia.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 38, no. 5 (2020): 561-579.

Among those who remain, three engagement strategies are most common: collaboration, autonomy, and resistance. As Figure 2 illustrates, each strategy represents an ideal-type that varies along two dimensions: cooperation and risk. Cooperation refers to whether civilians engage combatants through collaboration, nonalignment, or resistance. Risk reflects the degree to which noncombatants are willing to take chances on the anticipated costs and benefits of their decisions. Collaboration reflects civilian behaviors that support or assist combatants in pursuit of their objectives in the community.⁷ Low-risk collaboration includes providing confidential tips to counterinsurgents, whereas high-risk collaboration might include mobilizing to fight for pro-regime forces.

Resistance represents the mirror image of collaboration, including strategies that frustrate or obfuscate the tactics, goals, or strategies of armed groups. Low-risk forms of resistance include refusing to comply with combatants' order, directives, or authority, or complying in a manner that undermines combatants' core interests and objectives. Like collaboration, the riskiest forms of resistance include public displays of support for the opposition, including mobilizing to fight against the incumbent regime.

Nonalignment exists between collaboration and resistance and is distinct from mere neutrality or political opportunism (e.g., "fence sitting," "hedging," "side-switching," or "double-dealing"). Instead, nonalignment seeks to secure relative autonomy from victimization or exploitation by either avoiding contact with combatants or engaging combatants on one's own terms.⁸ Low-risk forms of nonalignment including hiding, lying-low, or avoiding contact with

⁷ Matthew Adam Kocher, Adria K. Lawrence, and Nuno P. Monteiro. "Nationalism, collaboration, and resistance: France under Nazi occupation." *International Security* 43, no. 2 (2018): 117-150.

⁸ Stathis N. Kalyvas. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2006; Oliver Kaplan. *Resisting war: How Communities Protect Themselves*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

combatants by changing locations or remaining mobile. In contrast, the riskiest form of nonalignment is to mobilize a community self-defense group to guard against combatant threats.

Under what scope of conditions do particular engagement strategies emerge? Civilians detect and respond to threats in their community by drawing on a set of heuristics—or decision-making shortcuts—informed by answers to two fundamental questions. First, individuals consider which combatant groups control the community and whether they benefit from governance under the status quo. Second, individuals consider whether they have any viable alternatives for security and how a revision to the status quo will affect access to their basic needs.

Civilians threatened by governance under the status quo will either migrate or collaborate with an alternative security provider, such as a foreign counterinsurgent or rival non-state group. Individuals migrate when they confront a proximate threat to their survival yet lack viable alternatives for security provision.⁹ The lack of viable alternatives might result from the absence of counterinsurgents in the community, or because counterinsurgents pose an equally-pressing threat to an individual's survival or access to basic needs. When alternative security providers are available, however, collaboration is preferable to exit because it presents the best protection of victimization or exploitation from insurgent or rebel groups.

Civilians also remain in their communities when governance under the status quo serves their basic needs better than any viable alternative. An individual's preference for the status quo might emerge because she has secured a preferable bargain with local insurgents (e.g., receiving private or club goods), or because contestation between armed groups does not threaten access to

⁹ Kristin Fabbe, Chad Hazlett, and Tolga Sinmazdemir. "A persuasive peace: Syrian refugees' attitudes towards compromise and civil war termination." *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 1 (2019): 103-117; Mara Redlich Revkin. "Competitive governance and displacement decisions under rebel rule: evidence from the Islamic State in Iraq." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 1 (2021): 46-80; Justin Schon. *Surviving the War in Syria*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

her basic needs. In the former scenario, civilians will resist counterinsurgents, in the latter, they will opt for nonalignment. Nonalignment is most viable when civilians are largely insulated from proximate threats, or can credibly bargain with armed groups competing for power or influence. In either scenario, civilians will engage with combatants in order to reinforce the status quo distribution of power.

Research Design

To evaluate how ethnic and religious minorities survived the Islamic State occupation of Northern Iraq, I draw on a mixed methodology research design consisting of two components. First, I draw on observational data—including the United Nations’ *Displacement Tracking Matrix* (DTM) and the United Institute of Peace’s *Conflict Stabilization and Monitoring Framework* (CSMF)—to study displacement and migration trends.¹⁰

Second, I draw on a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) I enumerated with local Iraqi peacebuilders from minority communities across Ninewa governorate.¹¹ I was introduced to these peacebuilders through a collaboration with Tearfund, a London-based NGO which conducts peacebuilding, economic development, and humanitarian assistance work in fragile and conflict-affected states.¹² Tearfund provided a safe and confidential location in their regional office in Erbil to conduct interviews, including a local staff member who served as an interpreter for the Kurdish-speaking respondents. Due to their ongoing relationship with Tearfund—as well as their role as community leaders—most respondents had higher levels of education, income, and social status

¹⁰ UN IOM. *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. August 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int>. United States Institute of Peace. Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework (CSMF), Wave V (May 2021), available from: <https://www.usip.org/programs/conflict-and-stabilization-monitoring-framework>.

¹¹ Field research was covered under IRB Protocol #2016B0455 at The Ohio State University.

¹² For more information, see <http://www.tearfund.org>.

when compared to their neighbors and family members. As such, these interviews represent the perspective of community elites as opposed to the more vulnerable of residents of their respective communities. Table 2 of the appendix provides descriptive statistics for each key informant, including a brief description of their role in the community.

Figure 3: Network of Combatant Groups Competing in Ninewa Governorate (2014-2017)¹³

My geographic unit of analysis includes three districts in Ninewa governorate: Al Hamdaniya (Ninewa Plains), Sinjar, and Tal Afar. Three selection criteria inform my comparison of civilian engagement strategies. First, each district has a plurality of Sunni Arabs and Kurds living alongside a diverse array of “second-order” or “micro-minorities,” including Assyrian

¹³ Data for the combatant network comes from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), available at: <https://acleddata.com>.

Christians, Bahais, Kaka'is, (Sabian) Mandaean, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Yazidis.¹⁴ Second, each district contains territories which are disputed between the Government of Iraq (GOI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Approximately half of the 14 disputed subdistricts listed in Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution (*al-manatiq al-mutanazae alayha fil iraq*) are located in Al Hamdaniya (e.g., Bartalla and Bashiqa), Tal Afar (e.g., Zummar), and Sinjar (e.g., Sinjar town).¹⁵ Third, due to their geographic location and ethnosectarian composition, each community has been contested by a litany of armed groups, organized into two broad coalitions: the anti-ISIS coalition and the Islamic State and its local affiliates and collaborators. As Figure 3 demonstrates, the combatants competing over Ninewa governorate include both and foreign combatants, as well as those aligned with and against the incumbent regime in Baghdad.

Main Findings: Minority Survival Strategies in Ninewa Governorate

Despite confronting the same existential threat, ethnic and religious minorities across Ninewa responded differently to the ISIS occupation. In the subsections below, I explore how civilians in Al Hamdaniya, Tal Afar, and Sinjar engaged the anti-ISIS coalition as well as ISIS insurgents. I begin with an exploration of forced displacement and migration and then analyze the various engagement strategies of civilians who stayed in their communities during the conflict.

Forced Displacement and Voluntary Migration

¹⁴ Shane Joshua Barter. "'Second-order' ethnic minorities in Asian secessionist conflicts: problems and prospects." *Asian Ethnicity* 16, no. 2 (2015): 123-135, Bethany Lacina. *Rival claims: Ethnic violence and territorial autonomy under Indian federalism*. University of Michigan Press, 2017; Gregory J. Kruczek. "Christian (Second-Order) Minorities and the Struggle for the Homeland: The Assyrian Democratic Movement in Iraq and the Nineveh Plains Protection Units." *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 12, no. 1 (2021): 93-121.

¹⁵ Mako Shamiran. "Negotiating peace in Iraq's disputed territories: Modifying the Sinjar agreement." *Lawfare*, 17 January 2021, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/negotiating-peace-iraqs-disputed-territories-modifying-sinjar-agreement>.

Forced displacement has been an ever-present reality for Ninewa's ethnic and religious minorities ever since Saddam's campaign of "Arabization" (*al-ta'rib*) in the late 1970s. In the post-Ba'athist period, Ninewa hosted increasing numbers of displaced minorities from conflict-affected communities in Baghdad, Al Anbar, Salah al-Din, and Diyala governorates. Many Assyrian Christians, in particular, departed their homes in Baghdad in order to resettle in Christian-majority communities on the Ninewa Plains.¹⁶ An estimated 750,000 Iraqis were registered as IDPs in the intervening period between the US departure in December 2011 and the ISIS offensive of summer 2014.¹⁷

The arrival of ISIS insurgents in mid-2014 only exacerbated the conflict-induced migration that plagued civilians during Iraq's civil war (2003–2011). Throughout the country, an estimate 3.5 to 5 million Iraqis fled their homes over the course of the three-year conflict.¹⁸ According to the United Nations' International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Between June 2014 and March 2015, over one million individuals displaced from Ninewa Governorate, the majority of which were ethno-religious minorities: 500,000 Yazidis, predominantly from Sinjar, 190,000 Turkmen Shia from Tal Afar, 60,000 Shabak Shias from Ninewa Plains, and 60,000 Christians from Ninewa Plains." These figures include the ethnic cleansing of Yazidis from Mount Sinjar between 3–8 August 2014. An estimated 200,000 individuals were displaced, approximately half of the broader community's Yazidi population. An additional 4,200 Yazidis were killed and

¹⁶ United States Institute of Peace. "Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature." April 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/04/ninewa-plains-and-western-ninewa-barriers-return-and-community-resilience>.

¹⁷ Lahib Higel. *Iraq's Displacement Crisis: Security and Protection*. Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, 2016, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CEASEFIRE-report_ENGLISH_march-2016_210x297mm_WEB.pdf.

¹⁸ World Bank Group. "Iraq: Reconstruction and Investment." January 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29438/123631.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

upwards of 10,800 were abducted.¹⁹ As of September 2021, Sinjar has the lowest rate of return of all Iraq's districts, with approximately 16 to 18 percent of residents returning to their homes.²⁰

The majority of IDPs from Ninewa resettled in the Kurdistan Region (KRI). By 2016, approximately 1.3 million Ninewa residents had relocated to Kurdish districts, concentrating in IDP camps in Dohuk and Erbil.²¹ As was the case during the civil war, a small subset of ethnic and religious minorities—upwards of 500,000 since 2014—resettled in the diaspora in Australia, North America, and Western Europe.²²

¹⁹ Valeria Cetorelli, Isaac Sasson, Nazar Shabila, and Gilbert Burnham. "Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey." *PLoS medicine* 14, no. 5 (2017): e1002297.

²⁰ UN IOM. *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. August 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int>.

²¹ United States Institute of Peace. "Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature."

²² Approximately 25-30 percent of the Iraqi diaspora community in the United States (totaling around 400,000) belong to ethnic and religious minorities. Minority diaspora communities are concentrated in California, Illinois, and Michigan with smaller communities in Arizona, Nebraska, and Tennessee. United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM). "Iraqi minorities in Diaspora Mapping of Community Structures, Perceptions on Return, and Connections to the Homeland."

Figure 4: Geographic Location of IDP Inflows (2014–2020)

Figure 4 shows the aggregate inflow of IDPs from various communities throughout Ninewa, Erbil Dohuk, and Salah al-Din governorates between 2014 and 2020. A spatial distribution of IDP flows reveals that refugee resettlement occurred in both-conflict affected communities like Al Hamdaniya, as well as large urban centers in Kurdistan which were relatively insulated from insurgent violence (e.g., Erbil, Dahuk, Zakho, and Sumel). The map also reveals that many Iraqi civilians who were affected by the ISIS advance on Mosul were initially displaced to surrounding communities on the Ninewa Plains. The experience of subsequent waves forced displacement is common for the most vulnerable members of conflict-affected communities, who must often migrate several times before finding a safe location for resettlement.²³

²³ World Bank. 2017. *Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally*

In the historically-Christian town of Qaraqosh (Bakhdida), for example, nearly 170,000 individuals from 28,000 households were displaced between June 2014 and October 2016, including over 95 percent of the population of 50,000 Assyrian Christians.²⁴ These figures represent over half the pre-ISIS population of the Ninewa Plains (estimate at approximately 226,500 residents in 2013).²⁵ Of those displaced, 20 percent resettled in IDP camps within Northern Iraq (especially in Dahuk and Erbil), whereas 80 percent resettled in private settings outside of camps. A total of one in three IDPS from the Ninewa Plains resettled in or near Erbil.²⁶ As Johansen et. al (2021) note, “In practical terms, displacement from the [Ninewa Plains] 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.”²⁷ As of August 2021, approximately 170,000 individuals returned to their homes, nearly 88 percent of the pre-ISIS population of the Ninewa Plains.²⁸

Given the speed of the ISIS offensive—as well as the retreat of Iraqi and Kurdish security forces—many displaced families confronted obstacles navigating the evacuation from their communities, including traffic congesting, navigating checkpoints, and getting reliable access to food, water, and shelter. As an Assyrian Christian from Qaraqosh conveyed to me,

“On June 8, 2014, in the evening, we left Bakhdida [Qaraqosh], where we left everything we had and we went out with only our clothes. We took the road linking Mosul to Erbil

Displaced, and Their Hosts. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/25016>.

²⁴ UN IOM. *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. August 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int>.

²⁵ Erica Gaston. “Iraq after ISIL: Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya District.” Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), August 2017, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/20200429-ninewa-plains-and-western-ninewa-_barriers-to-return-and-community-resilience-report.pdf.

²⁶ Assyrian Christian communities from the Ninewa Plains largely relocated to Erbil because of the pre-existing social capital of the Christian community (including local elites, such as the Chaldean Archbishop Bashar Warda.

²⁷ United States Institute of Peace. “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature.”

²⁸ UN IOM. *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. August 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int>.

and crossed the [Khazar] Bridge with difficulty as a result of tens of thousands of crowds [waiting] to cross...when we arrived, Erbil's border control was blocked...We remained out in the open all night without food, water, or a [place to sleep]...It was a very difficult day. We wished we would die and not see such a sight.”²⁹

A similar trend occurred within the Turkmen community of Tal Afar. The Islamic State captured Tal Afar city on 16 June 2014, a week after the successful advance on Mosul. Prior to the arrival of the Islamic State, Tal Afar district had a population of approximately 300,000 residents (two-thirds of which resided in Tal Afar city). The district was 90 percent ethnic Turkmen, including 75 percent Sunni and 25 Shia. The remaining ten percent included a mix of Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Yazidis, and Shabak. The majority of Shia Turkmen in Tal Afar city fled to neighboring Sinjar by mid-June 2014, which fell to ISIS insurgents less than two months later. In the words of one Shia Turkmen tribal leader, “When IS came, people immediately fled to Sinjar and that's where they stayed for a couple of months. In the unfinished buildings, houses, and other places...The people there, especially the Eyzidis, they were very supportive and responded honourably to the influx of displaced people by welcoming and sheltering them.”³⁰

Over the course of the occupation—16 June 2014 to 2 September 2017—over 420,000 residents were displaced, including the majority of Shia Turkmen, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds. One in three homes was destroyed, and as of August 2021 the district still lacks sewage networks, pumping stations, or wastewater treatment plants.³¹ A second, smaller wave of displacement occurred during the liberation campaign in August 2017. During this period, an additional 20,000

²⁹ Author interview with Respondent A10.

³⁰ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. "Turkmen in Tal Afar: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict." Middle East Research Institute, July 2017, http://www.meri-k.org/meri_posts/turkmen-in-tal-afar-perceptions-of-reconciliation-and-conflict/

³¹ World Bank Group. "Iraq: Reconstruction and Investment." January 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29438/123631.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

residents fled Tal Afar city in anticipation of clashes between ISIS and coalition forces. As of September 2021, approximately 82 percent of IDPs have returned to Tal Afar district, encompassing nearly 358,000 displaced residents.³²

While the Islamic State was defeated in December 2017, it took an additional two years for refugees and IDPs to return to their home communities. By August 2019, nearly two thirds of displaced Ninewa residents—approximately 1.6 million individuals—returned to their homes throughout the governorate.³³

Collaboration

For minorities who remained in their communities during conflict, collaboration with the anti-ISIS coalition served as the best strategy for surviving the Islamic State. However, collaboration was only a viable strategy for communities where coalition security forces were present, willing, and able to provide protection. During the initial ISIS offensive in the summer of 2014, Iraqi and Kurdish combatants fled the battlefield in Al Hamdaniya, Tal Afar, and Sinjar. Given the absence of viable local security providers, migration and self-mobilization provided the only options for survival. As the campaign progressed, however, opportunities arose for community self-defense groups to support the anti-ISIS coalition, including the Iraqi army, KDP-aligned Peshmerga units, as well as the PMU.

Civilian collaboration most typically emerged in communities who has strong local parties and political elites who had ties to power brokers in Baghdad or Erbil. Given prewar social

³² United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM). Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). August 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int>.

³³ Ibid.

cleavages in many minority communities, two distinct logics dictated patterns of collaboration with coalition forces.

First, minorities would integrate self-defense groups into pre-existing coalition units based on a shared ethnic or sectarian identity. Patterns of co-sectarian collaboration were particularly common during the coalition's counter-ISIS campaign beginning in Ninewa in October 2016. For example, Shia militias within the Shabak and Turkmen communities—including volunteer units aligned with Hunain al-Qaddo's Shabak Democratic Gathering (e.g., the "Ninewa Plains Forces") and Yilmaz an-Najjar's Turkmen militias—aligned with the PMU, including units with close ties to the Badr Organization.³⁴ As the campaign progressed, Turkmen and Shabak militias were formally integrated into the PMU as distinct, coethnic brigades.³⁵ Similarly, Yazidi units who identified as ethnically Kurdish—including volunteer combatants loyal to the Qasim and Haydar Shesho's Êzîdxan Protection Force (HPE)—integrated into KDP-affiliated Peshmerga units.³⁶ In both cases, ingroup attachments based on preexisting social bonds between local parties and political elites made collaboration with the anti-ISIS coalition more likely. Table 1 provides an overview of alignment between minority self-defense groups and individual units of the anti-ISIS coalition.

³⁴ András Derzsi-Horváth, Erica Gaston, and Bahra Saleh. "Who's Who: Quick Facts about Local and Sub-State Forces." *Global Public Policy Institute*, August 2017, <https://www.gppi.net/2017/08/16/quick-facts-about-local-and-sub-state-forces>.

³⁵ Brigades 16, 52, and 92 were composed of Turkmen combatants, whereas Brigade 30 (under the command of Waad Qaddo) was the sole Shabak detachment of the PMU.

³⁶ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. "The Yazidis: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict." Middle East Research Institute, October 2017, <http://www.meri-k.org/publication/the-yazidis-perceptions-of-reconciliation-and-conflict/>.

Table 1: Collaboration Between Community Self-Defense Groups and the Anti-ISIS Coalition

Unit	Identity	District	Alignment	Party & Elites
<i>Dwek Nawsha</i>	Christian	Al Hamdaniya	KRG (KDP)	Lt. Col. Odisho (Assyrian Patriotic Party)
Ninewa Plains Protection Units (NPU)	Christian	Al Hamdaniya	GOI/PMU	General Behnam Aboosh (Assyrian Democratic Movement)
Ninewa Plains Forces	Christian	Al Hamdaniya	KRG (KDP)	Romeo Hakari (Beth Nahrain Party)
Ninewa Plains Guard Forces	Christian	Al Hamdaniya	KRG (KDP)	Sarkis Aghajan Mamendo (Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council)
Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS)	Yazidi	Sinjar	PMU (80 th brigade)	Ezidi Freedom and Democracy Party (PADE)
Sinjar Resistance Units (splinter faction)	Yazidi	Sinjar	PKK/HPG?	Khairy Khedr (d. 22 October 2014)
Babylon Brigades	Christian	Al Hamdaniya	PMU	Rayan al-Kildani
Lalish Battalion	Yazidi	Sinjar	PMU (36 th brigade)	Ali Khali
Turkmen Brigades	Turkmen	Telafar	PMU (16 th and 52 th brigades)	Said Yilmaz an-Najjar
Ninewa Plains Forces	Shabak	Al Hamdaniya	PMU (30 th brigade)	Hanin and Waad Qado
Êzîdihan Protection Units (HPE)	Yazidi	Sinjar	KRG (KDP)	Qasim and Haydar Shesho

¹ *Dwek Nawsha* was disbanded prior to the liberation campaign of the Ninewa Plains.

More commonly, minority groups would collaborate with the anti-ISIS coalition based on political opportunism. Aligned short-term interests—primarily the expulsion of ISIS insurgents from Ninewa communities—were crucial. Prominent examples within the Assyrian Christian community on the Ninewa Plains include collaboration between Rayan al-Kildani’s Babylon Brigade and Badr Organization units of the PMU. The Ninewa Plains Protection Units (NPU)—

affiliated with General Behnam Aboosh and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM)—also aligned with the PMU. Smaller and less-capable Assyrian Christian militias collaborated with the KRG. Lesser capable Christian militias collaborated with KDP-affiliated Peshmerga units, and on rare occasion, formally integrated into Peshmerga, Zeravani, or Asayish units. In some cases, minorities joined KRG security institutions, and in other cases they simply acquiesced to the presence of Kurdish combatants in their community. Prominent examples include Romeo Hakari (Beth Nahrain Party)’s Ninewa Plains Force (NPF) in Tal as Soq, Lt. Col. Odisho’s (Assyrian Patriotic Party) *Dwekh Nawsha*, and Sarkis Aghajan Mamendo’s (Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council) Ninewa Plains Guard Force (NPGF) or “Church Guards” operating out of Erbil.³⁷

After the successful liberation of Ninewa communities from ISIS insurgents, many minority communities shifted toward strategies of autonomy and nonalignment. Exploitation and predation by coalition forces who remained in the community post-liberation, including PMU and Peshmerga units, predicated a shift in engagement strategies.³⁸ On the Ninewa Plains, Assyrian Christian communities were particularly worried about the impending “Kurdification” of their communities by KDP-aligned Peshmerga.³⁹ Concerns about predation by the PMU on the Ninewa Plains are also present. For example, Shabak detachment of the PMU—30th brigade under the command of Waad Qado—were accused of extortion, illegal arrests, and kidnapping of

³⁷ Reine Hanna and Gregory J. Kruczek. “Contested Control: The Future of Security in Iraq’s Nineveh Plain.” Assyrian Policy Institute, June 2020, https://50f3ad00-5b28-4016-898f-6130d301c97a.filesusr.com/ugd/6ae567_98f8f8912baa40949a18a3a0b717caea.pdf.

³⁸ European Asylum Support Office. “Country Guidance Iraq: 2021.” January 2021. <https://easo.europa.eu/country-guidance-iraq-2021/12-popular-mobilisation-units-and-tribal-mobilisation-militias>.

³⁹ Matthew Barber. “They that remain: Syrian and Iraqi Christian communities amid the Syria conflict and the rise of the Islamic State.” *Christianity and Freedom* vol. 2 (2016): 453-488; Kent. R. Hill “On the Brink of Extinction: Christians in Iraq and Syria.” *Under Caesar’s Sword: How Christians Respond to Persecution*, eds. Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Assyrian Christians in Bartalla.⁴⁰ Residents of Sinjar, including several of the peacebuilders I interviewed, also expressed concern about the effects of indiscriminate violence between competing units within the coalition. One Yazidi peacebuilder from Sinjar noted that hate speech and intimidation between PMU and PKK units was a major obstacle preventing the return and resettlement of community members (Respondent A01).

Nonalignment

Unlike Shia Arabs and Sunni Kurds, Ninewa's ethnic and religious minorities lacked powerful political patrons in Baghdad or Erbil. Moreover, while Shia-majority governorates in southern Iraq were relatively insulated from the ISIS confrontation, Ninewa and Kurdistan confronted existential threats to their territorial integrity and survival of their minority communities. Given the severity of the ISIS threat and the absence of Iraqi and Kurdish security forces committed to standing their ground, most minorities pursued nonalignment and autonomy out of necessity rather than choice. As one Iraqi peacebuilder in Al Hamdaniya explained, the ISIS occupation necessitated that "local teachers, social workers, and community organizers and others work as peacebuilders even though they lacked formal training and experience."⁴¹

Two regions of Ninewa, in particular, saw a proliferation of autonomous self-defense groups: Sinjar and the Ninewa Plains. During the August 2014 ISIS offensive on Yazidi communities in Sinjar, Wana, and Zumar, for example, local communities mobilized self-defense groups loosely aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). As one member of a Yazidi volunteer militia on Mount Sinjar explained, "We didn't have any name, but we fought *Da'esh*".⁴²

⁴⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Republic of Iraq." May 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5cc9b20c4.pdf>.

⁴¹ Author interview with Respondent A03.

⁴² Hannah Lynch. "The Budding Kurdish-Iranian Alliance in Northern Iraq."

The two most capable community militias include the Êzîdxan Protection Force (HPE)—mobilized by Qasim and Haydar Shesho—and the Sinjar Resistance Unit (YBS). During the counter-ISIS offensive in Sinjar in November 2017, however, the ETE integrated into the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, and the majority of YBS fighters joined the “Lalish Battalion” of the Popular Mobilization Units (36th Brigade). Only a splinter group of the YBS would remain entirely autonomous from either Baghdad or Erbil. In the latter case, autonomy was only viable through closer collaboration with anti-ISIS rebel groups, such as PKK-affiliates in Turkey and Syria.⁴³

Beyond the battlefield, ethnic and religious minorities pursued nonalignment through appeals for political and financial support from the diaspora. Transnational advocacy networks (“TANs”)—composed of political activists, foreign lobbyists, media figures, anon-governmental organizations (NGOs), and political allies in foreign governments like in North America and Western Europe—provided an alternative source of support for many minorities.⁴⁴ Between 2014 and 2016, in particular, TANs mobilized support for ethnic and religious minorities through public awareness campaigns, political petitions to government institutions, media coverage, and financial donations for post-conflict reconstruction and, on more rare occasions, direct financial assistance to self-defense groups.⁴⁵ While most communities did not achieve complete autonomy from Baghdad or Erbil, diaspora support did provide limited bargaining power for negotiations with the anti-ISIS coalition. Given their wide presence in the diaspora, Assyrian Christians and Yazidis

⁴³ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “The Yazidis: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict;” Mehmet Alaca. “Iraqi Yazidis: Trapped Between the KDP and the PKK.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., December 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iraqi-yazidis-trapped-between-kdp-and-pkk>.

⁴⁴ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists beyond borders*. Cornell University Press, 2014.

⁴⁵ For example, the Nineveh Plain Defense Fund, a US-registered non-profit supported by the Assyrian diaspora in suburban Chicago, provides supporters with the ability to make tax-deductible donations to support the Nineveh Plains Protection Units (NPU).

were particularly effective at leveraging their diaspora networks to draw attention to ISIS violence on the Ninewa Plains and in Sinjar.

For example, in late June 2017 I was a participant observer at a conference in Brussels organized by conservative members of the European Parliament. Titled “A Future for Christians in Iraq,” the conference organizers aimed to draw awareness to the plight of Iraqi Christians on the Ninewa Plains. In concrete terms, they advocated for the victimization of Assyrian Christians to be recognized as an act of genocide, as well as proposing political autonomy for the Ninewa Plains. While the conference was attended by seven minority political parties, it was boycotted by the two most influential political actors in Ninewa: the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Chaldean Catholic Church.⁴⁶

Worse yet, on the final day of conference proceedings, political representatives from the KDP stormed out of the room and refused to sign the position paper. What emerged was political consensus among seven of the weakest minority parties around a position paper with little binding authority in Brussels, Baghdad, or Erbil. As such, the 2017 Brussels Statement on “A Future for Christians in Iraq” represents how diaspora activists and organizations can create undue risk for the local partners by advocating for political demands—such as political separatism—that have little chance of succeeding.

Resistance

⁴⁶ The seven parties that participated in the proceedings included: Beth Nahrain Democratic Party, Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union Party, Chaldean National Congress, Chaldean Democracy Movement, Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian Popular Council, Chaldo-Ashour, and the Syriac Assembly Movement. Those groups that boycotted included: the Assyrian Democratic Movement, Sons of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Patriotic Party, Chaldean Catholic Church and Assyrian Church of the East.

Resistance to the anti-ISIS coalition—in the form of passive opposition to the coalition or active support for ISIS—was the least common survival strategy employed by minority communities in Ninewa governorate.

Given the ideological rigidity of the Islamic State, most minority groups had no opportunity to appeal to ISIS insurgents based on common bonds of ethnicity, sect, or ideology. In fact, the only minorities who could credibly commit to support the Islamic State were those who were perceived by insurgents to be sufficiently Muslim. By definition, these criteria (i.e., Arab Sunnism) excluded the vast majority of the region's minorities, including Assyrian Christians, Yazidis, and Kurds, as well as Shia subgroups of Shabak and Turkmen. Accordingly, only Sunni members of the Shabak and Turkmen group collaboration available as a potential survival strategy.

When resistance to the anti-ISIS coalition did emerge, it occurred within communities where prewar social cleavages produced growing internal fragmentation. Inter-communal competition for access to basic needs further degraded social trust, community resilience, and social cohesion. The lack of a supervening identity strong enough to mend second-order cleavages further exacerbated competition over basic needs. As a result, subgroups with a shared ethnic identity—especially Turkmen and Shabak—pursued divergent engagement strategies.

In practice, differentiating voluntarily collaboration from forced compliance becomes difficult. As van Zoonen and Wirya (2017: 9) note, “Distinctions should be made between those who were forced to join IS, those who merely assisted IS and committed material crimes such as looting, and those who embraced IS’ extremist ideology and committed violent crimes or mobilised others to do so.”⁴⁷ As one local civil servant noted, “The issue is about differentiating between who is IS and who is not. The Sunnis themselves know who are the collaborators but

⁴⁷ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

there are people who might have become part of IS under duress. Those people should be freed and given amnesty.”⁴⁸ Sunni Arab and Turkmen women—both those who fled and those who remained—report confronting suspicion by the community of collaborating with ISIS. As one woman from the district observed, “Any way you can think they [single women] can be exploited, they are.”⁴⁹

Existing accounts suggest two cases of minority collaboration with the Islamic State. In both instances, collaboration emerged based on political opportunism (e.g., band wagoning) rather than a commitment to the Islamic States’ ideology. The first account consists of Sunni Shabak militias exploiting Assyrian Christian neighborhoods in Al Hamdaniya. Prior to the arrival of ISIS, intercommunal tension drove a wedge between Shabak and Christian communities. Many Assyrian Christian inhabitants of the Ninewa Plains worried that the influx of Shabak in the post-Saddam period would undermine the culture and social identity of historically Christian neighborhoods in towns like Qaraqosh, Qarambles, and Bartalla.⁵⁰

Social cleavages within Shabak communities over ethnic identity and political alignment also contributed to internal fragmentation. Shabak nationalists—such as Hunain al-Qaddo and the Shabak Democratic Gathering—contend that Shabaks belong to a distinct ethnic identity from Arabs or Kurds.⁵¹ They tended to align with the central government in Baghdad, including Nouri al-Maliki’s State of Law coalition, and advocated for the political autonomy of the Ninewa Plains. Other Shabaks align with the Kurdistan Region, especially the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The pro-KDP contingent of the Shabak community saw alignment with the KRG as the best path

⁴⁸ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “Turkmen in Tal Afar: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

⁴⁹ United States Institute of Peace. “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature.”

⁵⁰ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

⁵¹ The SDG also had an armed wing of approximately 1,000 combatants aligned with the Babylon Brigades and the PMF.

for improving local governance, especially security provision. Beyond elite-level politics, however, many Shabaks perceived themselves to be caught in the middle of a political tug-of-war between Baghdad and Erbil. As two Shabak women noted, “We notice that our representatives in Baghdad and the KRG don’t have the rights to express our needs and ideas. They have to express the ideology that their parties have... They don’t represent us, they represent their parties.”⁵²

Eyewitness accounts of the ISIS offensive on the Ninewa Plains suggest that Sunni Shabak militias used the chaos to settle past scores, redress grievances, and extract private rents from Assyrian Christian communities. As Mousa (2020) notes, “Stronger than their Christian counterparts, it is alleged that Shabak militia looted and damaged Qaraqosh in the immediate wake of ISIS’ ouster, possibly to deter Christian return.”⁵³ In the words of one local resident of Qaraqosh, “They [the Shabak] lived with us for the past 100 years. And yet they went with IS and sold us cheaply; stealing our houses, animals and other properties.”⁵⁴ In my interviews with peacebuilders from Qaraqosh, accusations of exploitation by Shabak residents were common, including complaints about property theft, looting, and squatting in neighbors’ homes.⁵⁵

The second account of opportunistic collaboration with ISIS occurred in Tal Afar. Much like Shabaks in Al Hamdaniya, Tal Afar’s Turkmen communities suffered from intercommunal strife marked by differences in perceptions of ethnicity and sect. Many Sunni Turkmen (roughly 70-75 percent of the Turkmen community) mistrust their Shia neighbors based on suspicions of undue influence and patronage by Iran. Likewise, Shia Turkmen mistrust their Sunni neighbors based on suspicions of foreign influence by Turkey. Shia Turkmen also accuse Sunni coethnics of

⁵² Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

⁵³ Salma Mousa. “Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq.” *Science* 369, no. 6505 (2020): 866-870.

⁵⁴ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

⁵⁵ Author interview with Respondent A07.

active collaboration with the Islamic State after the arrival of ISIS insurgents in mid-June 2014. According to one Shia Turkmen civil servant, “The majority [of Sunnis] was supportive of the terrorist groups ideologically and in practice. In addition, around 90 percent of the Sunnis joined IS...Only 10 percent of them left Tal Afar and when IS invaded the city.”⁵⁶ Similarly, in the post-ISIS period, Sunni Turkmen who returned to Tal Afar are equally worried about the prolonged presence of PMU detachments, including fears of economic exploitation, revenge killings, and other forms of violent reprisal.⁵⁷

Despite extensive foreign direct investment in local peacebuilding and development during the “interwar period” (2010–2013), the arrival of ISIS insurgents on 16 June 2014 further escalated sectarian tensions within Turkmen communities across Ninewa governorate. During the ISIS offensive on Tal Afar, approximately 500,000 Turkmen residents—nearly 90 percent of Turkmen community—fled the district.⁵⁸ During the occupation, Tal Afar became a central node in ISIS’ network of control within Ninewa. Specifically, the city of Tal Afar served as a temporary transit point for the exploitation and trafficking of Yazidi women.⁵⁹ While systematic data is lacking, current evidence suggests splinter groups within the 50,000 Sunni Turkmen residents who remained, collaborated with ISIS insurgents.⁶⁰ As van Zoonen and Wiyra (2017: 5) explain,

⁵⁶ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “Turkmen in Tal Afar: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

⁵⁷ Amnesty International. “Turning a Blind Eye: The Arming of the Popular Mobilization Units.” 2016. https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/pays/moyen-orient-afrique-du-nord/irak/docs/2017/des-transferts-darmes-qui-alimentent-les-crimes-de-guerre/170105_rapport_irak_anglais.pdf

⁵⁸ Upwards of 20 percent, or 100,000 IDPs, belonged to Shia Turkmen communities. United States Institute of Peace. “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature.”

⁵⁹ United States Institute of Peace. “Amid Iraq’s Turmoil, Tal Afar Builds Peace.” November 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/11/amid-iraqs-turmoil-tal-afar-builds-peace>.

⁶⁰ Experts estimate that a total of 75,000 residents total remained in Tal Afar city during the ISIS occupation. United States Institute of Peace. “Ninewa Plains and Western Ninewa: Barriers to Return and Community Resilience: A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature.”

“Although much is still unclear, it is widely believed that a number of Sunni Turkmen from Tal Afar joined IS and stand accused of having committed war crimes in their name.”⁶¹

Conclusion

Since the liberation of Ninewa governorate in mid-December 2017, significant barriers to the return, resettlement, and reintegration remain for the Iraq’s ethnic and religious minorities. Nonetheless, the key informants I interviewed emphasized the necessity of reinvestments in peacebuilding alongside economic developments. An activist in Qaraqosh (Bakhdida) noted, “The [return home] was very hard, but the insistence on returning was the main motive for making us work in the most difficult circumstances; we had to clean the streets of unexploded shells, booby-traps, and the remains of those who were killed by *Da’esh*.”⁶² Ninewa residents also expressed hope that their communities could transform in the aftermath of nearly two decades of war. As one peacebuilder from Bashiqa conveyed: “Peacebuilding is a daily need, just like water or food.”⁶³ Another peacebuilder from Qaraqosh recounted, “People in the community want to make things better but they don’t know how.”⁶⁴

My findings suggest two key lessons for post-conflict reconstruction in Northern Iraq. First, successful resettlement and reintegrating relies on local actors and institutions committed to an extended process of transitional justice and political reconciliation.⁶⁵ Key informants frequently stated that the primary barriers to resettlement included deficits of social trust, solidarity, and social

⁶¹ Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya. “Turkmen in Tal Afar: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict.”

⁶² Author interview with Respondent A10.

⁶³ Author interview with Respondent A02.

⁶⁴ Author interview with Respondent A07.

⁶⁵ Khitam Alkhayanee, “Justice and Security Needs in Iraq after ISIL”, United States Institute of Peace. Special Report 389. August 2016. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR389-Justice-and-Security-Needs-in-Iraq-after-ISIL.pdf>.

cohesion. Relatedly, return and resettlement is only sustainable with investment in a “triple nexus” of humanitarian assistance, economic development, and local peacebuilding.⁶⁶ Each leg of the triad represents a necessary yet insufficient means of restoring peace, social trust, and community cohesion.

Given current efforts to restore governance in Ninewa governorate, opportunities for future research abound. Moving forward, scholars should identify the mechanisms that separate forced displacement from voluntary migration. Relatedly, scholars and practitioners identify criteria for distinguishing between forced compliance and voluntary support for insurgent groups. Identifying the scope of conditions surrounding civilian engagement strategies will be crucial for understanding community relations in Iraq’s post-conflict period.

Acknowledgements

Portions of this article are derived from the author’s book manuscript on civilian survival strategies during the Islamic State occupation of Iraq, titled *The Civilian’s Dilemma: How Iraqis Survived the Islamic State Occupation (2011–2018)*; see chapter 3, “Ninewa Governorate: Civilian Engagement in the ‘Land of Two Rivers.’” The author thanks Yousef Kallian, Greg Kruczek, Teri Murphy, and Mariam Tadros for their valuable feedback.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

⁶⁶ Paul Howe. “The triple nexus: A potential approach to supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals?” *World Development* 124 (2019): 104629.

Research for this study was funded, in part, by a 2021 research grant from the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA).

Notes on Contributor

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Appendix

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Key Informants

ID	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/Sect	Home Community	Community Involvement
A01	Male	40–50	Sunni Arab	Qaraqosh (Bakhdida)	Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) at primary and secondary schools
A02	Male	40–50	Yazedi	Bashiqa	Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) at primary and secondary schools
A03	Male	30–40	Sunni Kurd	Erbil	university student group; inter-religious education and dialogue
A04	Female	40–50	Sunni Arab	Bashiqa	women’s community group
A05	Female	20–30	Assyrian Christian	Qaraqosh (Bakhdida)	Parent-Teacher Association (PTA); guidance counselor
A06	Female	20–30	Sunni Arab	Qaraqosh (Bakhdida)	women’s association, community garden initiative
A07	Female	20–30	Sunni Kurd	Erbil	university student group
A08	Female	20–30	Sunni Kurd	Erbil	peacebuilder for foreign NGO
A09	Male	20–30	Sunni Kurd	Erbil	journalist for Rudaw
A10	Male	30–40	Assyrian Christian	Qaraqosh (Bakhdida)	local business owner and city council member