PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE RETURN

Iraqi and Afghan asylum seekers in Finland

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Marko Juntunen

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1   FOREWORD

This research report is part of an EU-funded project *Gender-sensitive return assistance for vulnerable groups of returnees*. The one and a half year long project kicked off in July 2009, and the research was carried out in Tampere Peace Research Institute (Tapri) at the University of Tampere. The project's main source of funding is the European Union's Return Fund (RF), which is part of the EU's General Program of Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows (SOLID), nationally coordinated by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior.

The aims of the research were two-fold. The first research report, *Gender, Vulnerability and the Obligation to Return: An Overview of Return Assistance to 'rejected' asylum seekers in the Nordic Countries*, published in January 2010 reviewed the policies in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark for the return of 'rejected' asylum seekers. The study conducted by Tiina Kanninen aimed at providing guidelines for the development and coordination of the Finnish return politics highlighting that other Nordic countries are more systematic and determined than Finland in both their thinking and practices of return assistance. The study also served as a necessary background for the second part of the project that focused on the experiences of gendered vulnerability, persecution, violence and trauma of Afghans and Iraqis in the countries of origin and on the way to the west. While the first part of the project opened perspectives to the administrative and official aspects of return this second part at hand is strongly empirical in nature. We thus urge the reader to approach the two reports as complementary perspectives on a single question.

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I consider myself fortunate having had a chance to carry out several years of ethnographic research among asylum seekers and refugees in Finland prior to starting the empirical work for this report in

October 2009. In many respects the problems encountered while conducting fieldwork among asylum claimants who are processing traumatic experiences of the past and facing an uncertain future were familiar to me. In one central respect I was, however, entering a completely new territory. While I consider myself well informed in the Iraqi refugees' experiences I must confess that I was only superficially aware of the complexity of the crisis in Afghanistan and the multifaceted experiences of millions of Afghan refugees worldwide. Moreover, being an anthropologist specialized on the Arab world I felt both socially and linguistically very much at home with the Iraqis, whereas my access to the Afghan interlocutors' personal narratives was completely dependent on interpreters. Surprisingly, during the course of the fieldwork my earlier contacts with the Iraqis in Finland extending back to early 2000s proved to be pivotal for carrying out both field works. One name stands out in this respect. I had cooperated closely for over three years with Riadh Muthana, an Iraqi journalist and human rights activist and former political prisoner of the Saddam Hussein era who settled in Finland in 1998. Riadh not only arranged dozens of meetings with recently arrived Iraqi asylum seekers but utilized his extensive networks in order to find suitable interpreters fluent in Kurdish, Dari and Farsi. All our interviews with Iraqi Arabs were carried out in Arabic, whereas the views of the Kurdish interviewees were translated by interpreters from Sorani Kurdish to Arabic. With respect to interviews with Afghans we turned to another Iraqi friend of Riadh, Hassan Ugla – refugee in Finland since 1995 and fluent in Farsi and Dari. In this sense the field work was a truly collective effort. Undoubtedly the entire research process benefitted greatly from the fact that both men have a refugee background and thus the entire research team was able to bypass many of the obstacles that frequently emerge in interviews with asylum claimants, conducted in challenging contexts such as asylum reception centers and housing compounds for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. With the generous help provided by the Employment and Economic Development Center (EEDC) in Turku the project was able to hire Riadh's wife Majda Ajlan to conduct interviews with Afghan women within EEDC's practical work training program. While being tremendously grateful for the invaluable help provided by the participants of the research

team, I wish to emphasize that I take full responsibility of the analysis of the data and the composition of the research report, with all its possible shortcomings.

The field work period conducted for this project was largely about listening to people who had personally experienced the consequences of the global war on terror initiated by the George W. Bush administration following the September 11, 2001 terrorist strikes in the U.S. In the case of Iraq the people involved in this study directly experienced the Western military invasion of Iraq in 2003, the dramatic collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime and the rapid descent of the Iraqi society into chaos. They witnessed the extremely bloody circle of sectarian and ethnically motivated violence that left behind more than 108,000 civilian casualties and produced the largest refugee crisis in the Middle East since the Palestinian exodus of 1948. The Afghans for their part had histories of exile and temporary refuge in the neighboring countries extending back to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. The western invasion of the year 2001 and the collapse of the brutal Taliban rule in the country allowed millions of Afghans to return home but the deterioration of the security situation in most of Afghanistan initiated a new phase in the global mobility of the Afghans.

Over the course of five months (October, November, December 2009, January and June 2010 we interviewed thirty five Iraqis who had arrived in Finland from 2005 onwards and resided in asylum centers and private homes. While the majority of our interlocutors were 'rejected' asylum claimants, we also heard a number of displaced Iraqis who had entered Finland as quota refugees from Syria. I myself interviewed two Iraqis and one Turkish Kurdish man in a detention center in Helsinki and organized series of discussions with social workers of asylum centers and lawyers working with asylum claimants.

In order to gain a deeper perspective in the current developments in Iraq, Riadh Muthana made three visits in different parts of Iraq in 2009 and 2010, interviewing not only public authorities and activists in non-governmental organizations but also ordinary Iraqis concerning their experiences in the political turmoil following the occupation. In the last stage of the research Riadh traced a number of Iraqis who were under threat of forced return to Iraq from Sweden

and interviewed two men in Gothenburg in September 2011 and one woman via Skype calls.

Between July and October 2010 we managed to find fifteen Afghan asylum claimants who were willing to share their experiences with us. The Interviews took place in multicultural centers, reception centers of asylum claimants and housing compounds for minor asylum claimants in south western Finland. Unfortunately, given the scarcity of time and lack of prior experience of fieldwork with Afghan asylum seekers we were not able to reach a similar richness of data as in the case of Iraqis. Thus, as the reader will notice, the description of the Afghan experience is heavily supplemented by extensive reading of research rapports, media items and newspaper articles.

Marko Juntunen
Helsinki
January 11. 2011.

2   INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of an increasingly abrupt public migration debate in EU Member States, even countries with a tradition of considerably liberal migration policies – such as Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the U.K., and the Netherlands – have adopted stricter policies towards asylum claimants. Largely as a result of these developments, the number of asylum claims peaked in Finland in 2008 and the following year the Government of Finland begun to react to the new situation. Return, deportation, and criteria for granting and rejecting asylum claims entered the public consciousness in Finland, like in many Western European contexts. Finland introduced several initiatives aiming at reducing the number of unfounded asylum applications by delimiting family reunification, rejecting the applicants' rights to work, and speeding up the processing times of asylum claims. In addition, policies of detention and removal of refused asylum claimants were to be revised.

  Iraq and Afghanistan remain in 2010 among the most dangerous places on the earth nevertheless many asylum claimants in Finland have recently received negative asylum decisions – often counter to the advice given by UNHCR – and thus their futures remain open.[1]

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[1] Suomi palauttaa irakilaisia turvapaikanhakijoita. [Finland will return Iraqi asylum claimants] Yle Uutiset, May 5, 2009. Available online at: http://yle.fi/uutiset/ kotimaa/2009/05/suomi_palauttaa_irakilaisia_turvapaikanhakijoita_728142.html

  Thors: Suomen tarkistettava linjaansa Irakin turvapaikanhakijoiden suhteen. [Finland needs to revise its policy concerning Iraqi asylum claimants] Yle Uutiset, April 27, 2009. Available online at: http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/2009/04/ thors_linjaus_irakilaispakolaisten_suhteen_tarkistettava_708459.htm

  Suomi voi ryhtyä palauttamaan pohjoisirakilaisia ja afganistanilaisia turvapaikanhakijoita. [Finland can begin returning asylum claimants from the north of Iraq and Afghanistan] Yle Uutiset, January 3, 2007. Available online at: →

Finnish authorities have displayed considerably more reluctance to return Iraqis and Afghans to the countries of origin than Sweden and Denmark. However, willingness to start large scale returns, particularly those of Iraqis, has been voiced by Finnish immigration authorities several times in 2009 and 2010.

While a more restrictive asylum policy is under construction in Finland, there is very little official debate on what the actual content of Finnish return policy should look like.[2] Neither the rationality of forced or assisted returns to Iraq and Afghanistan, nor the future options of returned migrants have entered official political debate in Finland. This means that while a large proportion of the asylum decision for Iraqis and Afghans are negative, the asylum seekers receive very little information concerning the different options they have until they are obliged to leave Finland. While Sweden has engaged in hundreds of highly problematic returns, the considerable advantage of the Swedish system is that the asylum applicants are from the outset provided information as to what follows from both positive and negative decisions on asylum claims.

The experiences of violence and persecution of Iraqis and Afghans interviewed for this study are extremely heterogeneous and highly complex. This poses new challenges for policy makers and immigration authorities. While international asylum migration has for decades been predominantly a masculine trait of adult men, over the last decade an increasing number of single mothers, unmarried women, and young people unaccompanied by elders are claiming for asylum in Finland, like in other EU Member States. The subjective experiences of Iraqis and Afghans become understandable only against the background of the social and political history of the regions in question and thus they will be discussed in length in the following pages.

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http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/2007/01/suomi_voi_ryhtya_palauttamaan_pohjoisirakilaisia_ja_afganistanilaisia_turvapaikanhakijoita_225047.html;jsessionid=B C8903B66889970315B25BEBA37611BC?name=useFontSize&path=per cent2F&v alue=normal&redirectUrl=per cent2Fuutisetper cent2Fkotimaaper cent2F2007percent2F01percent2Fsuomi_voi_ryhtya_palauttamaan_pohjoisirakilaisia_ja_afganistanilaisia_turvapaikanhakijoita_225047.html&refresh=null

[2] Kanninen T. (2010). Gender, Vulnerability and the Obligation to Return: An Overview of Return Assistance to 'Rejected' Asylum Seekers in the Nordic Countries. Occasional Paper No. 98. Tampere Peace Research Institute, Tampere.

Large-scale violence and the collapse of the state structures always produce complex forms of vulnerability with effects not only on kin and household but also on normative order, in particular notions concerning propriety and sexuality. Murder and harassment of homosexuals, forced marriages and abductions, and rape of women and children are integral parts of the 'logic' of violence in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Security vacuums leave room for criminal gangs and networks of organized crime to engage in kidnappings for ransom and trafficking of women and children for prostitution.

Migration debates in the West should not ignore the fact that many forms of gendered vulnerability are in fact results of the legal impasse encountered by the asylum seekers in search of shelter. For thousands of Iraqis and Afghans the dangers and trauma they experience on the way to the West, or while circulating from country to country as refused asylum seekers without legal residence, may be even more threatening than the violence at home. Thousands of people have lost their lives on the way to the West; in the mountains of eastern Turkey, on Evros river separating Turkey from Greece and on Greek – Turkish shoreline. Others encounter dangers while cramped in cargo containers, overcrowded fishing boats, and lorries. Those left in the legal limbo in the European transit countries such as Greece, Italy and France have no other option than to look for shelter in make-shift camps, where women and minors are easily subjected to sexual violence.

Based on an in-depth empirical research conducted between 2009 and 2010, this report seeks to convey critically important first-hand information which should be taken into serious consideration when formulating the future directions of Finnish asylum and return policies. It should be highlighted that the movement of asylum seekers should be observed through a gender lens. Refugee mobility follows particular pathways and travel trajectories which are cleared by earlier generations of mobile men, women and children. Mobility is informed by shared memories and narratives, as well as commonly upheld attitudes and assumptions. The nature of present day asylum migration can be assessed only by recognizing that the asylum seekers have significant information concerning political and gendered mechanisms that emerge hand in hand with violent conflicts and displacement.

Much of contemporary knowledge concerning the refugee experience is produced within state institutions that project forms of state power on asylum seekers, such as border guard, police, and immigration offices. This research, on the other hand, sought to provide its subjects an alternative and neutral ground to communicate their personal experiences without the fear that their narrations could endanger their futures. We believe that such a perspective is essential for understanding the preconditions for sustainable returns to Iraq and Afghanistan.

TABLE 1. *The table indicates a considerable increase in the numbers of asylum claims in Finland since the year 2007. It is worth noting that in February 18, 2008 Sweden signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" regarding the repatriation of Iraqi refugees from Sweden to Iraq. Similar agreements were also ratified by Denmark and Norway, which may at least partly explain Finland's growing attraction as a country of destination for Iraqis.*

Afghans	all decisions	positive	negative/returns within EU countries/abated applications
2010 1.1. – 31.7	285	118	150/68/17
2009	242	95	144/112/3
2008	93	72	19/14/2
2007	159	122	36/10/1

Iraqis	all decisions	positive	negative/returns within EU countries /abated applications
2010 1.1. – 31.7.	820	408	309/147/103
2009	1023	495	438/380/90
2008	496	268	186/184/42
2007	321	221	91/90/9

3 REFUGE AS A GENDERED EXPERIENCE

Violence is a form of contextual human behavior, and it is always influenced by collective actions, attitudes and shared cultural understandings.[3] The idea that war, political violence and post-conflict situations are particularly deeply structured by gendered understandings has been recognized by scholars within political and humanistic sciences.[4]

The Afghan and Iraqi societies with more than three decades of nearly continuous violence indicate that gender is both transformed by conflict but also that conflict itself reflects changing understandings on gender.

It is often the young men who partake in actual violent actions, as they are expected to fulfill their masculine responsibilities as defenders of women, children, and elders of their communities. Political violence thus enforces men to be rough and underlines a kind of masculinity where the roles of men and women are defined in terms of the protectors and the protected.[5] Decades before the present day conflicts, both the Iraqi and Afghan societies were already deeply militarized, and nearly all adult males knew how to use guns. Nearly forty per cent of Iraq's adult males took part in the war against Iran (1980–1988), and the image of the fighter as the prime example of masculinity and patriotic defender of the nation

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[3] cf. Connell, R.W. (1987). Gender and Power. Stanford University Press, Palo Alto.

[4] Kimhi, S. et. al. (2009). Getting a Life: Gender Differences in Postwar Recovery. Kimhi, S., Eshel, Y. Zysberg, L., Hantman, S., Sex Roles, 7/8 (61). Borer, T. (2009). Gendered War and Gendered Peace: Commissions and Post-conflict Gender Violence: Lessons From South Africa. Violence Against Women. 15 (10).

[5] cf. Moallem, M. (2005). Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

was widely rallied by the media, popular culture, and the regime's public discourses.[6]

Women, on the other hand, tend to take the responsibility for keeping their households together (as mothers and elder sisters of households), and they often partake in supportive activities offering their services as nurses and caretakers of the victims and the wounded.[7]

Conflicts thus tend to polarize gender roles and delimit the normative discourses surrounding gender and sexuality. This process very often leads to two central consequences. First, men cannot be 'soft' in both practical and symbolic ways. Therefore conflict situations very often entail a strong hetero-normative undercurrent and especially homosexual males become targets of aggression. Leading figures of armed militias, populist leaders, and conservative religious leaders may configure homosexuality as un-masculine and morally corrupt behavior that threatens the moral purity of the community.[8]

Second, women's role as markers of morality and community become enhanced. In the Muslim world, this process is often supported by ideas referring to sectarian and ethnic identities. Both sect and ethnicity can be seen as socially constructed markers of differences, for they are supported by publicly shared understandings of what makes people different from each other. Differentiation operates, although often in highly contradictory ways, especially through family and kin systems, and socialization. The female body becomes the signifier of family, kin and moral community, and its

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[6] Rohde, A. (2006). Opportunities for Masculinity and Love: Cultural Production in Ba'thist Iraq During the 1980s. In Ouzgane, L. (Ed.) Islamic Masculinities. Zed Books, London.

[7] See: Silber N. (2009). Gender and the Sectional Conflict: How Important Were Women to the War? University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
Freedman, J. (2008). Women Seeking Asylum: The Politics of Gender in the Asylum Determination Process in France. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 10 (2).

[8] They Want Us Exterminated: Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq. Human Rights Watch 2009. Available online at: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0809webwcover.pdf

importance as an object of both protection and aggression becomes underlined.[9]

Like sect and ethnicity, the role of patriarchy should also not be overlooked. Extended violent crises paralyzed the very state mechanisms that had begun to liberate both Afghan and Iraqi women from the constraints of a patriarchal society. The deterioration of the infrastructure and the collapse of public services, together with severe economic crisis, reinforced traditional forms of authority embedded in relations of family and kin.[10] These factors largely explain the emergence of a more conservative ethos concerning gender roles.

In his classic study written in 1972, the sociologist Stanley Cohen suggested that at times of uncertainty and rapid change societies may undergo periods of heightened moral alertness, even moral panic. A characteristic feature of such a phase is that particular social groupings or individuals become defined as threats to the society's key defining values, and are constructed as markers of the troubling question of who belongs to a community and who is excluded from it.[11] In the case of present day Iraq and Afghanistan, systematic gendered violence against women, children, and sexual minorities reflects the kind of situations defined by Cohen. Rape, sexualized torture, and sporadic killings of women of the 'wrong' side, together with several hundred killings of homosexual men, were integral parts of the experience of both countries at the end of the first decade of the new Millennium.

3.1. GENDER AND ASYLUM

Interest towards the role of gender in the asylum experience and asylum decision process has increased significantly in the past two decades. The gendered profile of asylum claimants in Finland

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[9] cf. Joseph, S. (2008). Sectarianism as Imagined Sociological Concept and as Imagined Social Formation. International Journal of Middle East Studies 40 (4).

[10] They Want Us Exterminated: Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq. Human Rights Watch 2009. Available online at: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0809webwcover.pdf

[11] Cohen, S. (1972, 70–71). Folk Devils and Moral Panics. Routledge, London.

resembles that of other Western European countries. Nearly two thirds of the new entrees are men, and very often they arrive in target countries without accompanying family members. Women are much more likely to escape violence within the national boundaries of conflict zones due to socioeconomic constraints.[12] In Iraq, for example, at present nearly eighty per cent of the internally displaced people are women with their offspring.[13] The women who manage to enter Western Europe and apply for asylum are much more likely than men to be accompanied by children and spouses. Nearly all of those Iraqi and Afghan children who arrive in Finland unaccompanied by their parents are boys.[14]

What can be said about the role of gender within the asylum process in the EU in general? Are men and women treated unequally? Recent studies suggest highly contradictory answers. At first hand it seems that both women and men are at the same time both victims and winners because of their gendered position. The studies that highlight women's vulnerability in the asylum process revolve around two central arguments. The first one is that women's gendered position as caretakers – mothers, grandmothers, and elder sisters – explains why they are less likely than men to become international refugees.[15] The second argument, in brief, is that women's cases are often denied when they enter Western Europe and claim for asylum because their experiences of persecution are not in line with the official definition of a refugee.[16]

The official definition of a refugee – stated in the most important international refugee conventions, namely the 1951 Convention

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[12] Mascini, P & van Bochove, M. (2009). Gender Stereotyping in the Dutch Asylum Procedure: Independent Men versus Dependent Women. International Migration Review, 43 (1).

[13] The Internally Displaced People in Iraq. Update 35, June 30, 2008. Available online at: http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP_35_update_EN.pdf

[14] Interview conducted in reception center of un-accompanied minors in Finland, August 2010.

[15] Freedman, J. (2008). Women Seeking Asylum: The Politics of Gender in the Asylum Determination Process in France. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 10 (2).

[16] Zeigler, S & Sterwart, K.(2009). Positioning Women's Rights within Asylum Policy A Feminist Analysis of Political Persecution. Frontiers 30 (2).

relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol – reflects the political atmosphere of the Cold War era. Asylum claimants were predominantly politically convicted male dissidents from Eastern Europe who escaped persecution or its threat practiced by Communist regimes. Women were and are still less often than men political activists in opposition movements, trade unions and other civil associations. Women's political roles tend to be more indirect than men's. For example during Saddam Hussein's rule many Iraqi women who opposed the Ba'ath party regime acted as secret couriers and took care of safe houses for male activists of banned underground movements. Thousands of Iraqi women experienced torture and extended imprisonment because of their male relatives' political activities. Systematic abuse and sexual violence against women were explicit tools of political oppression and often violence was practiced as means to make arrested male family members confess to their interrogators. It is still today common that decision makers do not recognize sexual violence perpetrated by state actors as an essential part the logic of warfare.[17]

Another general disadvantage for women is that there is some degree of blindness towards cases of domestic violence in the asylum process. This applies to all EU countries. As noted above, extended conflicts often underline women's role as markers of communal norms and social boundaries. Women's liberties become constrained by the 'protective' practices of males. In such settings disputes over women's domestic roles and behavior and dress in public spaces are strikingly common. In many regions of the Muslim world, these developments lead to an increase in 'honor' crimes, forced marriages, and assaults against women. In asylum process cases involving gendered forms of violence rarely lead to positive decisions for the applicants, as the proof of applicant's vulnerability is often extremely difficult to verify.[18] Women are advised to resort

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[17] Macklin, A. (1995, 226). Refugee Women and the Imperative of Categories, Human Rights Quarterly, 17 (2).

[18] Coleman, A. (2008b). It's Tortured to Call that Gender Politics: (Re)producing the Public/Private Divide in Immigration Court. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the The Law and Society Association, Hilton Bonaventure, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 27, 2008

to the protection of their respective governments and police even when the futility of such an attempt is widely known by Western decision makers.[19]

In general, women's public and private experiences of persecution and violence were to a large deal unnoticed in the international refugee conventions of the Cold War era. Additions and improvements were suggested in the latter half of the 20th century in order to dissect and handle female-specific problems in asylum policy. In 1991 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) introduced *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*, and pressed for the European Union and a number of European countries to implemented similar policies.[20] Regardless of these initiatives, the gendered aspects of asylum policies and the effects of policy to women claimants still lack serious scrutiny. One indication of gender blindness is that Western European countries do not provide accurate gender disaggregated statistics on asylum seekers. The complexity of women's experience of violence and persecution is often ignored by the discretionary power.[21] In France, seventy-five per cent of the positive cases result from the decisions made by the court of appeal (Commission des Recours des Réfugiés – from 2008 onwards – Cour nationale du droit d'asile).[22]

Like in other EU countries, in Finland there is no explicit legal guidance for legal actors working with asylum cases involving honor violence, rape, or domestic violence. This leaves wide spaces

[19] Interview with Finnish Refugee Council, February 2010.

[20] Mascini, P & van Bochove, M. (2009). Gender Stereotyping in the Dutch Asylum Procedure: Independent Men versus Dependent Women. International Migration Review, 43 (1).

[21] cf. Keenan, S. (2008). The Applicant Claims to be a Lesbian: Legal Discomfort and Disruption in Sexuality-Based Refugee Claims Made by Women. Conference Papers, Law & Society; 2008 Annual Meeting. Available online at: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/3/5/6/4/p235649_index.html

[22] Freedman, J. (2008). Women Seeking Asylum: The Politics of Gender in the Asylum Determination Process in France. International Feminist Journal of Politics, 10 (2).

for alternative and contradictory readings for judges and trial attorneys.[23]

It often seems advantageous for women to mute their individual agency and reduce their personal histories to easily comprehensible stereotyped gendered roles. Presenting oneself as a good mother, or a helpless victimized woman in need of protection has proved to be much more useful for asylum seekers than demonstrating individuality, self-reliance, and active rebellion against patriarchal power.[24]

Due to their more explicit political roles in many conflict zones, men thus may seem to fit better in the official definitions of refugee. However, contrary to what one may expect, statistical data from the U.S., Canada, and the Netherlands suggests that, in fact, male claimants have a considerably smaller success rate than women in the asylum process. The reasons are three-fold. First, unlike women, men often are not accompanied by a spouse or children. Second, men tend not to follow their spouse to the destination, and they are more likely than women to come from countries considered safe in the Western Europe. Finally, in the case of women the asylum procedure often perceives especially single mothers with children as victims of gendered systems of power, while the single claimant men fit within the category of bogus refugees.[25]

It is essential to bear in mind that political violence, as noted above, has always gendered repercussions that pertain to both men and women. Thus both male and female asylum seekers can

[23] cf. Coleman, A. (2008b). It's Tortured to Call that Gender Politics: (Re)producing the Public/Private Divide in Immigration Court. Conference Papers, Law & Society; 2008 Annual Meeting. Available online at: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/3/6/0/7/p236074_index.html

[24] Kneebone, S. (2005). Woman within the Refugee Construct: 'Exclusionary Inclusion' in Policy and Practice: The Australian Experience. International Journal of Refugee Law, 17(1)
Spijkeboer T. (1999). Stereotyping and Acceleration: Gender, Procedural Acceleration and Marginalized: Judicial Review in the Dutch Asylum System. In Noll, G. (Ed.) Proof, Evidentiary Assessment and Credibility in Asylum Procedures. Martinus Nijhoff, Leiden.

[25] Mascini, P & van Bochove, M. (2009). Gender Stereotyping in the Dutch Asylum Procedure: Independent Men versus Dependent Women. International Migration Review, 43 (1).

be vulnerable because of their gendered position. Deviation from patriarchal norms, conceptions of honor, sexual appropriateness, and heterosexual gender roles can cause serious threat of violence for both genders, yet this form of gendered vulnerability goes almost unnoticed in Finnish asylum process.[26]

It has been suggested elsewhere that blindness towards men's gendered vulnerability can be interpreted as an expression of deeply entrenched male dominance in the Western culture. Often policy makers are simply unable to comprehend that men can become victims because of their masculinity.[27]

3.2. ON THE WAY TO EUROPE

The Iraqis and Afghans interviewed for this study have highly versatile personal histories of international mobility. While the vast majority arrived in Finland by resorting to services provided by migrant smugglers directly from the country of origin – after journeys ranging from five days to three weeks – we also interviewed several people who had stayed repeatedly extended periods in neighboring countries before embarking on a journey to West. Some had spent years on the road in countries generally understood as transit locations – such as Iran, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, and France – while in search of shelter from the Northern Europe.

While in transit, the future is very much dependent on a person's ability to gather information and contacts facilitating further travel. It is increasingly common that both Iraqis and Afghans end up leaving their applications – and often under several different identities – for asylum in several EU countries. In the case of Finland one third of asylum claimants arriving in 2009 had also sought asylum in some other EU Member State.[28] When the options for

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[26] Interview at Finnish Refugee Council, February 16, 2010.

[27] Mascini, P & van Bochove, M. (2009). Gender Stereotyping in the Dutch Asylum Procedure: Independent Men versus Dependent Women. International Migration Review, 43 (1).

[28] Finland Uses Dublin Agreement to Speed Refugee Deportation. Yle News, February 10, 2009. Available online at: http://yle.fi/uutiset/news/2009/10/finland_uses_dublin_agreement_to_speed_refugee_deportation_1052376.html

protection seem bleak, many are left with no other alternative than to drift – by decision of authorities or voluntarily – from country to country, living in the streets and unofficial migrant encampments with occasional stays in asylum and detention centers.

We encountered several difficulties when interviewing the asylum seekers whose claims – or petitions at the appeals and supreme courts – were still being processed at the time of the interviews. It was obvious from the beginning that smuggled migrants do not necessarily provide accurate information concerning their experiences and motivations in a pre-organized research setting. The interviewees were particularly un willing to share information on the last stages of the journey prior to their arrival in Finland. The reason for this may result from a variety of factors, such as pressure practiced by the migrant smugglers, stress and exhaustion, not to mention the obstacles created by the interview situation itself – especially in institutional settings such as detention and reception centers. Furthermore, the narrations, especially those of children and teenagers, were obviously often influenced by smugglers, other migrants and parents. It is also not uncommon that the legal advisors in the country of arrival provide asylum seekers advice, which may shape the ways in which they describe their experiences. It was equally difficult to gain direct answers as to why Finland was chosen as the country of destination. The majority of those who had paid for all inclusive journeys to secure a place in Europe claimed that they had no particular destination in mind. However, in several interviews our interlocutors mentioned that they had family or friendship connections in Finland. Those whose journeys included several stops in transit locations were undoubtedly informed by fellow asylum seekers on the asylum policy and future options in Finland.

Because of these limitations we found it useful to construct an image of present day Iraqi and Afghan travel trajectories by interviewing, not only newly arrived asylum seekers, but also those who had entered Finland as quota refugees and through marriage and family reunion. In addition to the recent newcomers, we also interviewed members of earlier generations of Iraqi and Afghan migrants (most of whom entered Finland between 1998 and 2002) concerning their perspectives on the present day Iraqi and Afghan diasporas.

3.3. TRAVEL TRAJECTORIES

The rapidly increasing number of Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers entering the EU territory has become an issue of concern in many European countries. The global movement of both Afghans and Iraqis is, first and foremost, a response to an extended violent conflict and the subsequent social, political and economic difficulties, which have made life unbearable for millions of people. While the majority of both Iraqi and Afghan refugees reside in the neighboring countries, or travel back and forth between a neighboring country and the country of origin, their increasing arrival to Western Europe indicates that people display growing readiness to widen their scope of movement. There are three major reasons behind this. First, the introduction of restrictive immigration and asylum policies by the EU Member States coincides with growth of organized migration industry. Second, the growth of diasporic communities in the West create a clear pulling factor as their members provide essential information and often also financial and instrumental help directing the movement of those on the road. Third, modern communication technologies facilitate extremely rapid move of remittances around the world without recourse to formal banking system, thus enabling the funding of irregular movement.

The travel routes of asylum seekers can be viewed as cultural artifacts that are informed by collective memory and popular discourses.[29] By far the most common travel trajectory for the Afghans on their way to West runs from Afghanistan via Iran to Turkey. In the case of the Iraqis, Turkey plays an equally pivotal role in the first stages of the journey. Istanbul serves as a central transit point for both Afghans and Iraqis and a vast majority continue their journey towards the Netherlands, Germany, and Scandinavia in small groupings via Greece, Bulgaria, Italy and France – all considered transit countries due to their restrictive migration policies and social conditions generally understood as extremely difficult for asylum

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[29] Clifford, J. (1997). Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

seekers.[30] Our interviews indicated that a less frequently used route extends from eastern Turkey to Russia and the Baltic States, and further to Finland and other Nordic destinations.

Financial constraints force a vast majority of Iraqis and Afghans make several stops on the way in order to rest, receive money transfers from family members, and to gather information concerning migrant smugglers, entry restrictions, and asylum policies in different target countries. Thousands of asylum seekers have no other possibility to make their living than by engaging in networks transporting both people and goods, which blurs the boundary between the smuggler and the smuggled.[31] Some Iraqi interviewees explained that those unable to pay the migrant smugglers may as well finance their trip by entering in agreements with drug dealers and transporting drugs across key borders.

3.4. THE SMUGGLED

Asylum seekers' travel practices materialize within a larger socioeconomic context of illicit global trade and – more particularly – as a part of one of its fastest growing currents, migrant smuggling. Today, illicit trade connects Western Europe to the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. It includes a vast range of economic activities from the trade of counterfeit consumer goods to human organs, migrants, drugs, and weapons. Illicit trade is a constantly expanding and transforming, web-like sphere of economic activity that is largely organized around trust, and social networking. It often penetrates state institutions, and, at worst, undermines and destroys whole organized economic zones. All initiatives aiming at

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[30] cf. Yaghmaian, B. (2005). Embracing the Infidel: Stories of Muslim Migrants on the Journey West. Delacorte Press, New York.
Mougne, C. (2010). Trees Only Move in the Wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe. UNHCR – PDES. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/4c1229669.html

[31] Yaghmaian, B. (2005, 219–254).

delimiting the scope of illicit trade increases the economic turnover.[32] Although migrant smuggling differs in its nature, structure, and goals according to location, everywhere the smugglers are united by their common interest in maximizing profit and thus their dependence on customers. Therefore, changes in political spaces quickly affect business options and forge transformations in the strategies used by the smugglers.[33]

Making contact with the smugglers was generally described as easy by the interviewees. Some Afghans reported having paid well over 10,000 € for an all-inclusive trip to Finland, while the price was some ten to twenty per cent cheaper for the Iraqis. Those Afghans with more limited means initially sought less expensive transit destinations such as Turkey or Greece, the travel to which required some 4,500 to 5,000 €. The travel costs of Iraqis crossing to Turkey was reported being around 1,000 € and to Greece between 2,000 and 3,000 €. Travel was financed by selling property, land, and livestock, or resorting to savings of relatives. Many of the Iraqis we interviewed informed us having sold everything they owned in order to embark on a journey with their entire family. Narratives of Iraqi and Afghan interviewees on encounters with migrant smugglers reveal a central paradox. The risks involved in the business are vast but people have no other option but to cooperate with the smugglers, who are known to be untrustworthy. The migrants can never be sure of their fate when dealing with smugglers but do their best to minimize this risk. In practice it means that they turn to a local agent recommended by friends and members of family. For example, an Iraqi interviewee described the beginning of his journey as follows:

In Sulaymaniyah (in Iraqi Kurdistan) some of my Kurdish friends suggested that I turn to one local Kurdish man whom they knew. Because I am an Arab, a Kurdish smuggler could easily have deserted

[32] cf. Naím, M. (2005). Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy. Doubleday, New York.
Nordstrom, C. (2004, 209–238) Shadows of War: Violence, Power and International Profiteering in the Twenty-first Century. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

[33] cf. Juntunen, M. (2002). Between Morocco and Spain: Men, migrant smuggling and a dispersed Moroccan community. University of Helsinki, Helsinki.

me in the mountains. My friends served as a source of trust between myself and him (Hussein, born in Baghdad, 1976)

The clients rarely maintain direct contacts with the smugglers themselves. All the arrangements are made with their agents, transporters, and people who run the safe houses for accommodation. The clients are usually under tight control of the drivers and transported in private cars, minibuses, pick-up trucks, and lorries. The drivers make several stops on the way and at times order the clients to bypass the police, and security checkpoints on foot. In case of the Iraqi-Iranian-Turkish frontier, the border can be reached on foot after three to four days of rough and fast paced hike, with the help of a mountain guide. The clients are organized in small groupings usually of no more than a few dozens of people.[34] Before reaching the border, the drivers and guides pass their clients to other members of their networks. Some interviews indicated that, along the Iraqi-Iranian-Turkish frontier, a large part of the rural population is deeply engaged in the informal economy that revolves around smuggling of both people and drugs, and forging official documents. Moreover, several villagers along the main travel routes make their living by working as mountain guides, selling food, and providing safe houses for people on the way to the west. As an Iraqi interviewee told us:

We entered the last village before the Turkish border and were housed in a deserted dwelling. We were told that we would proceed early in the morning to a dry river bed nearby. It appeared to be a meeting point for everyone (using the eastern route). There must have been at least 500 people, Iranians, Afghans and Pakistanis – all on the way to the west. I saw whole families with crying children (Hussein, born in Baghdad, 1976)

Naturally, money makes the journey a great deal less arduous. Another Iraqi respondent paid 14,000 € for a smuggler in Sulaymaniyah. Within 48 hours a private car took him with his wife and three children to Istanbul, and then through an unspecified route via Western Europe and Sweden to Finland. Another elderly man from Baghdad reported having paid the smugglers 8,000 € for a trip

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[34] Smith, B. (2008). Kurdish Refugee Reception Centers in Greece Home Displaced. Visual Anthropology, 24 (1).

through Turkey, Georgia, and Russia to Finland. As he explained,

The smugglers operated in travel agencies in Sulaymaniyah. I wanted to find someone who could take me across the border to Zakho (in Turkey). I spent the night in a pension and then I was directed to a man willing to take me to Europe, because I had informed that I don't want to stay in Turkey. They (smugglers) said it would be expensive, and it wouldn't be the easiest of journeys. I said I was ready. Then we headed to Russia through Georgia. There was just myself the smuggler and a third person. We were on the road about three weeks. (Abu Mahmud, born in Qayim, Iraq, 1947)

Nusratullo, a teenager from the Helmand province in eastern Afghanistan told us he paid nearly 7,000 € for a journey to Finland via Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Western Europe:

If I told you all the details, we would stay here until tomorrow. We used all means of transportation – trucks and cars and sometimes we proceeded on foot. We were on the road for nearly fifty days. I cannot remember the places, but we were housed in rural areas, often in the middle of nowhere. Sometimes we were given just one meal a day, and the smugglers refused to answer our enquiries concerning the next destination. (Nusratullo, born in Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan 1994)

Afghan children constitute one of the largest groups of minors who enter Western Europe via migrant smugglers. Between January 1 and March 31, 2009 nearly half of the four hundred minors who claimed asylum in the United Kingdom were Afghans.[35] In the Greek island of Lesvos children represented forty per cent of the total Afghan arrivals in 2009. In Italy, the same year, the total number of unaccompanied Afghan children residing in the country was 758. Norway, which is a particularly attractive destination for unaccompanied minors due to its generous social welfare policy, has received several hundreds of Afghan child claimants – in 2009 the number reached 588.[36]

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[35] UK to deport child asylum seekers to Afghanistan. Guardian, June 7, 2010. Available online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/07/child-asylum-seekers-uk-Afghanistan

[36] Mougne, C. (2010). Trees Only Move in the Wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe. UNHCR – PDES. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/4c1229669.html

Thousands of children face tremendous risks when their fate is in the hands of smuggler networks, but also during periods of rest-over in transit countries. Afghan and Iraqi children, a vast majority of whom are boys in their early teens, are alone with their traumatic travel experiences and pain of separation from their parents and peers. During the journey, the smugglers strive to maintain their authority by breaking bonds of solidarity between the clients. In practice, this often means that the children are kept away from friends and trustworthy adult acquaintances, who could offer at least some security. In safe houses and migrant encampments children sleep with adult men and are largely unprotected from sexual violence.[37]

3.5. IN TRANSIT

As Turkey has no functioning asylum system, refugee status determination is carried out by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Turkish authorities generally discourage the refugees from staying within the Turkish territory and support the idea that all those recognized as refugees by the UNHCR will be resettled in third countries. However, while the recognition rates by the UNHCR have been high for Afghans in particular – some eighty per cent in recent years –resettlement appears to be increasingly difficult for most refugees. Therefore, only a small minority of the Iraqi and Afghan newcomers make an effort to gain an officially recognized refugee status by turning to UNHCR. The willingness to use this option seems to be continuously reducing; as indicated by the UNHCR records, the Turkey office registered only 4,276 Iraqis in the country in 2007.[38]

Officially, refugees and asylum seekers face no legal obstacles when looking for employment in Turkey. Nevertheless a large majority of the some 60,000 to 90,000 Iraqis in the country are

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[37] Ibid.

[38] The Silent Treatment: Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan. Human Rights Watch, November 27, 2006. Available online at: http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11107/section/1

working illegally due to cumbersome bureaucratic procedures which prevent them from legal employment.[39]

Nearly all of our interviewees informed that after arrival in Turkey the first objective was to reach Istanbul. As an Afghan respondent explained,

We were within a large group of approximately eighty to ninety people in one lorry. There were people from different nationalities – Afghans, Iraqis, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. We stayed almost two weeks on the Turkish border and during this period we were given (false) passports. Then some forty people were told to get in another lorry. They gave us bottles which we used for urination. They also gave us sacks of bread and some canned food. Our journey took about three days and we proceeded mostly at night. Everyone was squatting very uncomfortably. The children were a problem for all, as the smuggler warned us that we have to keep them quiet. It was a closed space, but it had small openings for ventilation. For three days we never got out. When we got to Istanbul the truck entered a building. All I know is, that as I got out of the truck, I saw a large space that resembled an underground car park. We were then accommodated in the building above (for seventeen days). (Hamid, born in Ghazni, Afghanistan, 1979)

In case the arrangements for further travel were not made prior to arrival in Istanbul, all interviewees began to search for contacts that would open possibilities for moving forward.

An Iraqi man who reached Finland in September 2009 with his wife and three children related having spent only one night in Istanbul, as the journey across the sea – to a location unknown to him – was arranged in Sulaymaniyah in Iraq by 14,000 €.

Those obliged to settle temporarily in Istanbul begin to look for shelter in the poor districts of the town where shared flats are widely

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[39] cf. Yaghmaian, B. (2005, 13–107). Embracing the Infidel: Stories of Muslim Migrants on the Journey West. Delacorte Press. New York.

Number of Iraqi, Afghan refugees in Turkey halved last year. Today's Zaman, March 30, 2010. Available online at: http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=205790

The Silent Treatment: Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan. Human Rights Watch, November 27, 2006. Available online at: http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11107/section/1

available for destitute and exhausted new arrivals. As everyone wants to move on as soon as possible, migrant dwellings are commonly plagued with conflict and tension.

In the early 1990s, certain areas in Istanbul turned into temporary stopovers for migrants and witnessed a rapid emergence of an informal service and information sector for the new arrivals. Istanbul's migrant quarters, such as Aksaray, are notorious for their drug dealers, petty criminals, prostitutes, suitcase traders, and migrant smugglers. At present Aksaray hosts Iraqis, Iranians, Afghans, Bangladeshis, and Sub-Saharan Africans. Women, men and entire families, as well as minors without parents, are among its new inhabitants. The area is also known of its many hotels and hostels, restaurants, discotheques, cabarets and brothels, some of which are used as deal-making places for migrant smugglers. Migrants find their income in street commerce, small factories, and sweat shops. The most destitute have to resort to pick-pocketing, survival-sex, and petty drug dealing. Asylum seekers on their journey to the west are frequently arrested by Turkish police, but usually released after giving bribes. Although people are not in most cases taken in custody, many are subjected to sporadic violence and beatings perpetrated by the Turkish police.[40]

Greece has been under severe international criticism since the turn of the Millennium for its policies and practical treatment concerning asylum seekers, refugees, and irregular migrants. The Greek authorities have been accused of practicing refoulement of asylum seekers on both sea and land, issuing illegal deportation orders, carrying out arbitrary age tests for unaccompanied child asylum seekers, and providing highly insufficient and overcrowded facilities of reception and detention.[41] While a small numbers of Iraqis and Afghans have sought a more permanent stay in Greece,

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[40] Stuck in a Revolving Door: Iraqis and Other Asylum Seekers and Migrants at the Greece/Turkey Entrance to the European Union. Human Rights Watch. November 2008. Available online at: www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/11/26/stuck-revolving-door-0-Similar

[41] Mougne, C. (2010). Trees Only Move in the Wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe. UNHCR – PDES. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/4c1229669.html

the majority aspire to travel further when no other options are available. Several Afghan young men, whom we interviewed between August and October 2010, told us that the Greek authorities had evaluated their ages based on visual criteria. Many claimed being up to three years younger than officially stated in Greek records. Many Iraqis and Afghans encounter the most severe difficulties during their entire journey in Greece. It is not uncommon that asylum claimants may prefer to be returned back to Iraq or Afghanistan rather than Greece or Italy, should their case fall under the Dublin accord, obliging the first EU member state of destination to process the asylum application.[42]

According to some estimates nearly fifty per cent of Iraqi diasporans in Western Europe have made a stopover in Greece while on the way to other locations.[43] Most of them arrive in Greece from Turkey by land route and carry no documentation. In practice this means crossing the Evros river by rafts or by swimming. Another option is to cross the Aegean Sea to Greek Island destinations located near Turkish coastline. As an Afghan youth said in the interview,

In Istanbul, the smugglers told us that if we wanted to go to Greece we should pay 2,300 € each. They provide migrants with rubber boats and each boat carries twenty people.

They told us to select among us a driver who would navigate the boat to Greece. We left Istanbul and drove about two hours. Then we walked for three hours until we reached a swampy area. The boats were fully equipped and the smuggler asked me to drive one of the boats and told me that I would be exempted from paying the 2,300 €. He told that the driver of the boat bears the penalty according to both Greek and Turkish law. The punishment can lead up to ten years in prison. I accepted the task in order to save the money for my trip to Europe. They also gave us knives, and said that if we see the coast guard we ought to tear apart the boats immediately. In that case the coast guard would rescue us and take

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[42] Interview conducted with Finnish Refugee Aid, February 22, 2010.
Interview conducted with a social worker at asylum center in Finland, February 28, 2010.

[43] Wance, S. (2004). An Assessment of the Iraqi Community in Greece. UNHCR Representation in Greece. Available online at: www.aina.org/reports/aoticig.pdf

us to Greece. Otherwise they would return us with the same boat to Turkey. It took almost four hours to reach Greece. We began the journey at three am. at night and arrived at seven am. (Hussein, born in Ghazni, Afghanistan, 1992)

People have no other choice but to keep trying; they must pay the same amount of money for the smugglers for each attempt and there are no guarantees of success. Several hundreds of people have lost their lives on the Greek-Turkish border in recent years.[44] If the financial situation permits, sea journeys can be arranged to Italian, and even French locations. Consider for example the following explanation by an Iraqi respondent:

We continued from Izmir (Turkey) by a small sailing boat with approximately thirty-five people for four days. We did not land in Greece, because the journey doesn't take that long there. It must have been Italy or France. I took some pictures secretly on the way by my camera phone. I remember that we landed about three o'clock in the morning. (Khalid, born in Shangal, Iraq, 1967)

Several of our interviewees had been pressured by the smugglers to remain silent about the details of their travel arrangements. They reported that, on occasions, the smugglers had simply refused to give them detailed information about the travel routes. Journeys took place in night time and many claimed having been tightly controlled by the smugglers. As an Iraqi youth recounts,

I don't know where we disembarked. We had crossed the sea, leaving from Istanbul on a normal passenger boat with other travelers. I do not know where we were heading. The smuggler refused to answer our enquiries and did not let us to talk to others. We were not even allowed to see our (false) passports (that the smuggler had arranged for them) (Ali, born in Baghdad, 1988).

The new arrivals always enter the EU territory exhausted both physically and economically. In Greece asylum seekers face very similar obstacles concerning the asylum process and labor market position as in Turkey. Many leave as the financial situation allows them to be smuggled further. The asylum process in Greece takes

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[44] Migrant deaths on Turkish – Greek border spark UNHCR concern. Sofia Echo, July 2, 2010. Available online at http://sofiaecho.com/2010/07/02/926788_migrant-deaths-on-turkish-greek-border-spark-unhcr-concern

approximately three months, but the possibilities for third country settlement are extremely low. During the first half of the year 2003 Greece rejected 2,171 asylum applicants from Iraq and Afghanistan and only twenty-two were recognized during the same period. The year 2008 Greece did not grant a single refuge for an Iraqi applicant.[45]

The asylum seekers are allowed to stay in the extremely poorly equipped refugee centers for no longer than six months. Those with negative decision are generally expected to leave the country within one to three months, although in practice actual deportations are rarely executed by the authorities. Young man from Ghazni, Afghanistan related us:

We were handed over to the refugee reception center in the island of Samos. This camp was under the supervision of the Government of Greece. It was very bad there, like in a prison. After ten days they gave us a document stating that we had a month to leave Greece and they brought us by boat to Athens.

In Athens, a large number of Afghans have turned to church charities for food. This happened to me also. During this period, I together with my friends, started to look for a smuggler who would to take us out of Greece. I stayed twenty-two days in Athens in a very difficult situation. There were special places for smugglers, mostly Afghans and Iranians. We gave them money and photographs for passports. (Hussein, born in Ghazni, Afghanistan, 1992)

In early 2000s, the government of Greece did not provide any benefits for most registered asylum seekers. Thousands found shelter in parks and abandoned buildings and survived usually by hawking and street commerce. Several unofficial refugee camps are still located at the outskirts of Athens providing shelter for Afghans, Iraqis, and Iranians.[46]

Some are fortunate enough to find occasional part time jobs from construction sites and agriculture. They are not offered a work permit, thus the jobs remain undocumented. When the people are

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[45] Europe urged not to turn away Iraqi refugees. The Independent, June 17, 2008. Available online at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/europe-urged-not-to-turn-away-iraqi-refugees-848507.html

[46] cf. Yaghmaian, B. (2005, 260). Embracing the Infidel: Stories of Muslim Migrants on the Journey West. Delacorte Press. New York. Smith, B. (2008) Kurdish Refugee Reception Centers in Greece Home Displaced. Visual Anthropology 24 (1).

finally ready to leave the makeshift camps, the departure only marks a new beginning in their struggle.

Many interviewees with sufficient financial resources informed us having crossed Greece very rapidly. Finland was usually reached after five to fifteen days on the road. A Man from Iraqi Kurdistan, travelling with his wife and three children reported:

After reaching the shore we first entered a small town and the Afghans, Iraqi Yazidis, and Christians among us were divided by the smugglers according to their desired destinations. We entered a lorry and remained there for three days. The smuggler said that we were in Europe, but what was the name of the town I am not aware of. After a day's rest we continued our journey on a normal passenger bus. I don't know which route we took but the last destination before Finland was Sweden. When reaching Turku we contacted immediately the police. (Khalid, born in Shangal, Iraq, 1967)

Fear and uncertainty are constantly present in the narratives of Iraqis and Afghans. A seventeen-year-old Iraqi boy who had lived most of his life in Qandil, on the Iranian side of the Iraqi-Iranian border, informed us having lost his entire family after embarking a lorry somewhere in Southern Europe:

We saw a lorry approaching us and the smuggler told us to enter. We were altogether ten passengers – our family and another Iraqi family. The smuggler told the others to go to the back of the lorry and ordered me to sit next to him in the front. After a long while on the road he received a phone call. He told me to go back and hide inside a container box the size of which was approximately one cubic meter. Then he drove on, but after a while he stopped. I heard voices and then we continued. Later he came to me and told that we should eat. I told that we need to give food also to my family. He said that my family members were still in the place where he told me to get in the container box. He said that he was ordered to bring me to the destination and that he was sure that my family would be there waiting for me. This happened seven months ago. I still have not been able to contact my family. I managed to get the news to my paternal uncle who lives in Qut in Iraq. Neither has he heard of them. (Rezgar, born in Qandil, Iran, 1993)

4   THE IRAQI DRAMA

Experience of refuge is surrounded by systems of gendered and sexualized power, embedded in different domains of social relations. Thus ethnic and race relations, sectarian and religious relations, and kin and household relations deserve detailed attention in this study.

Iraq under the Ba'ath party regime is often referred to as the 'republic of fear'.[47] The party governed Iraq from July 1968 until the invasion of the country by international coalition forces in April 2003. It transformed gradually into political machinery, one of the main tasks of which was the literal and symbolic silencing of Iraqi citizens. Silence, distrust, and violence penetrated every sector of the society from kindergartens to schools, universities, and administrative institutions. The regime under Saddam Hussein's reign (1979–2003) included 500,000 informers and used all conceivable forms of violence from assassinations, abductions, and deportations to torture and murder. The primary role of interrogations carried out by some half a dozen internal security institutions was not to collect information but to evidence and establish the suspect's guilt. Torture and fear aimed at breaking the individuals for later recruitment into the machinery of fear. The Iraqi regime's message was that party membership was the only guarantee of individual social progress. In similar vein ascending in the party hierarchy required the individual's integration into the practical dynamics of violence.[48] One interviewee, Abdelkarim, who spent most of his young adulthood as political prisoner explained us:

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[47] Makkiya, K. (1998) [1989]. Republic of Fear: Politics of Modern Iraq. University of California Press. Berkeley and Los Angeles.

[48] Tripp, C. (2002, 235–237). History of Iraq. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Fattah, H. & Caso, F. (2009, 219–245). A Brief History of Iraq. Chekmark Books, New York.

Finally a very high proportion of Iraqis were members of the party. But in the end the vast majority joined the party because of fear. The system aspired to recruit everyone. The regime even had a slogan: "The whole folk is of Ba'ath". (Abdelkarim, born in Baghdad, 1961)

The Ba'athist political culture had a devastating effect on the everyday life. Fear of actual or potential violence framed the entire society and managed to blur boundaries between action and inaction, participation and spectatorship.[49] Particularly traumatizing for ordinary Iraqis was that many were forced to become spectators of public executions, or to partake in the acts of violence against fellow citizens – sometimes even the members of one's own family. It was not exceptional that in situations of interrogation suspects were obliged to torture other suspects.[50]

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis became first suspects and then guilty merely because of their social backgrounds. Many individuals paid a heavy price for having a family name that was associated with banned religious, left-leaning, or ethnic political activism. Often entire families were arrested and tortured in order to put pressure on the politically most active family members. An Iraqi woman whose parents and three brothers left the country between 1991 and 2007 recalled:

I never felt completely at ease during Saddam's reign. From the day I opened my eyes my world has been in the state of war. Especially people like us, who had always defended human rights, were constantly threatened by them (the regime). They never stopped putting pressure on our family. (Sajida, born in Baghdad, 1969)

Saddam's years with two deadly wars (The Iraqi-Iranian War 1980–1988 and the Second Gulf War 1990–1991) left the Iraqis choking on the historical memory of pain, loss, and death. Every Iraqi household we visited for this study is full of traumatic memories.

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[49] In comparison with the case of political terror in Northern Ireland, see: Feldman, A. (2003). Political Terror and the Technologies of Memory: Excuse, sacrifice, commodification and actual moralities. Radical History Review, 85.

[50] Juntunen M. & Muthana, R. (2008) Abu Ghraib – Varissuo: Irakilaismiehen matka Saddamin selleistä Suomeen. [Abu Ghraib – Varissuo: Iraqi Man's Journey from Saddam's Cells to Finland]. Ajatus Kirjat, Helsinki.

Many of our interlocutors described their personal past being nightmarish and beyond comprehension. At the same time, the ones suffering from the most severe past traumas expressed deep agony resulting from a pressing need to organize personal and collective memories but being unable to do so.

The collapse of the Ba'ath party regime in April 2003 was followed by several symbolic acts of role reversals. The former victims took over the streets in order to regain their stolen dignity.[51] During the first days after the U.S. invasion, acts of revenge and humiliation were targeted at Ba'athist functionaries and members of the feared security institutions. Often the perpetrators were supporters of Shi'ite popular movements banned by the former regime.[52] A man experiencing the deteriorating security situation in Baghdad following the collapse of the regime recounted:

Particularly the Iranians supported the emerging Shi'ite militias, which were then sent to the streets. They had whole lists of names of people who were functionaries in Saddam's regime. Even teachers and academics became targets of horrible acts of revenge. At the same time they (militias) were using people's financial crisis and general poverty for their own good. First nobody said that the violence had anything to do with sectarianism. You were only targeted because of being Saddam's supporter. Then later it became clear that it was also a question of sectarian politics. (Abu Mahmud, – Sunni Muslim man -born in Qayim, 1947)

4.1. The Shi'ite resurgence

Iraq is of specific symbolic and ritual importance for Shi'ites. Not only are eight of the twelve holy Imams of Shi'ites buried in Iraq but also some of the eldest religious centers of learning *madrasas* and the most renowned mosques and burial grounds are located within

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[51] Cockburn, B. (2009, 145–148). Muqtada al-Sadr and the Shia Insurgency in Iraq. Faber and Faber, London.

[52] Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation. International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing, September 9, 2003. Available online at: kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/.../ b008_iraq_shiites.pdf

its borders. The town of Najaf has since the 11th century been regarded as the focal point for Shi'ite learning worldwide. Najaf hosts the *hawza,* a loosely organized network of men of religious learning with their followers and students. However, it would be erroneous to perceive the Shi'ites of Iraq as a social grouping with a sense of common identity defined entirely in religious terms and untouched by other social markers, such as local identity, tribal affiliation, worldview, and political ideology. In the late 1950s and early 1960s many educated Shi'ites were left-leaning in their political attitudes, but the period also witnessed the establishment of the first popular Shi'ite political movements. During the early years of Ba'athist rule in the 1970s, the Iraqi regime made great efforts to co-opt increasing numbers of Shi'ites and by 1982 nearly thirty per cent of the members of the most influential Ba'athist institution, the Revolutionary Command Council, were Shi'ite.

The war years between Iraq and Iran considerably changed the political future of Iraqi Shi'ites. Iran had experienced a revolution that was largely rallied by Shi'ite religious clergy. For obvious reasons the secular-nationalist, yet Sunni dominated Ba'ath party regime feared a similar fate.

Unlike in Iran, Iraq's collective of Shí´ite senior clerics, the *hawza,* had stayed outside of politics for the most part of the modern history of Iraq in order to preserve its spiritual independence. However, towards the end of the Ba'athist reign, the *hawza* was rapidly drawn to the political process.

The first modern Shi'ite Islamist movement in Iraq, *Da'wa, was* formed in 1957. It was soon forced to move its leadership to Iran, and a number of its influential members sought refuge in Paris and London. In 1982, a group of leading figures of the movement, together with a new generation of exiled Shi'ite Islamists founded (with considerable Iranian backing) the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Like Da'wa, SCIRI soon penetrated deeply in the Iraqi diaspora in Western Europe. The Shi'ite Islamists paid a heavy price for their open opposition to the Ba'athist Iraqi regime, as dozens of forefront leaders of both Da'wa and SCIRI were assassinated, executed, and tortured to death. Three decades later, the Government of Iraq was largely in the hands of the relatives and descendants of the persecuted founding fathers Iraq's

Shi'ite Islamism, a development that seemed extremely unlikely in the 1980s. A large majority of the Iraqi victims of the Iran–Iraq War pertained to Shi'ite families, a factor which further enhanced sectarian divides within Iraq. The damage caused by the devastating war on country's infrastructure was furthered by the Second Gulf War (1990–1991). The Ba'athist government displayed great indifference to the deteriorating living conditions of the disenfranchised Shi'ite. Numerous charity organizations connected to Shi'ite Islamist parties began to engage in large scale charity work, often with considerable Iranian support. This strengthened sectarian solidarity, particularly in the southern parts of the country and among impoverished members of urban population.[53]

In the aftermath of the Second Gulf War in 1991, the Shi'ites acted out decades of frustration, persecution, and political marginalization in a popular uprising that spread from the southern city of Basra to Shi'ite concentrations elsewhere in Iraq. The regime responded by taking up arms against both rebels and civilians in a manner that resembled ethnic cleansing in many locations. All men over fifteen years of age were arrested in the Shi'ite stronghold of Kerbala in central Iraq. Millions were terrorized and up to 150,000 citizens were killed merely because they were Shi'ites. Among ordinary Iraqis, the uprising was largely fuelled by the erroneous assumption that popular initiatives to topple Saddam Hussein's regime would be backed by U.S. military force. The bitter end of the uprising largely explains the mistrust felt by the Shi'ite population towards the U.S. presence in Iraq following the invasion of 2003.[54] As man pertaining to Iraq's Mandaean religious minority recalled,

I remember very clearly standing on a rooftop seeing that horrible sight (in Baghdad in 1991). Dozens of trucks were packed with men women and children but also older people. They were on the way to

[53] Cockburn, B. (2009, 145–148). Muqtada al-Sadr and the Shia Insurgency in Iraq. Faber and Faber, London.

Fattah, H. & Caso, F. (2009, 199–201) A Brief History of Iraq. Chekmark, New York.

Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation. International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing, September 9, 2003. Available online at: kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/.../b008_iraq_shiites.pdf

[54] Cockburn, B. (2009, 68–86).

be executed, and buried in mass graves that were found much later. They had closed the borders with Jordan but people were still trying to escape Baghdad towards west. From the north thousands escaped to Turkey and in the south the Shi'ite population went to Iran and many were also hosted in refugee camps in the Saudi Arabian desert. Some of them are still there. (Abu Basim, born in Baghdad, 1962).

In the aftermath of the Second Gulf War, no-fly security zones were established by United Nations in the southern Iraqi regions with marked Shi'ite majority and in the northern Kurdish regions. Especially in the north, this resulted in an increasing sense of independence from Baghdad government, which finally lead to the establishment of Kurdistan Regional Government in 1992.[55]

In the new geopolitical climate following the military occupation of Iraq in 2003, numerous leading figures of the *hawza* developed new political visions for the Iraqi Shi'ites, constructing them as a social and political community demanding political representation that would reflect the country's demographic profile. Being a majority in Iraq, many Shi'ites felt they had the right to define the future course of their country. At the same time, prayer rooms, mosques, and religious symbols became increasingly present in the public spaces. Several Iraqis we interviewed for this report perceived – as Abu Nawris in the following excerpt – that the change of atmosphere was, however, a gradual process.

Due to a more than a decade of constant recession, people curled up in their own areas, they did not intermingle with others (those of other ethnic and sectarian backgrounds) and their awareness of the world came increasingly from one source. For many this meant mosques or prayer rooms. This resulted in growing unawareness of the world in every respect. Many had to leave school and the society turned upside down. Without this 1980s and 1990s recession we would not have encountered the problems that emerged after the invasion (of 2003). (Abu Nawris, born in Baghdad, 1971)

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[55] Tripp, C. (2002, 271–275). History of Iraq. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Iraq Backgrounder: What Lies Beneath. International Crisis Group. Middle east Report 6. October 1, 2002. Available online at: repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:3369

The Ba'athist regime had to counter the emerging, religious, social, and political activism by presenting itself as the guardian of people's religious sentiments. Saddam transformed into a believing president who saves the citizens from the corruptive effects of Western imperialism. Simultaneously the regime, being largely composed of Sunni tribes, allowed more assertive Sunni religious and social activism. Social control exercised in the name of religion became more visible, and numerous religious practices and symbols that were previously unheard of emerged in Iraq. Consider the following insight by an interviewee who is a former political prisoner because of his leftist sympathies:

The political and religious atmosphere changed after the Iraq – Iran war. The regime feared revolution and therefore suppressed all forms of oppositional activism. But it resorted also to conservative Wahhabi (Sunni) Islam to play out other religious forces. The regime nominated Wahhabi imams in mosques, supported youngsters to go and fight among the Muslim volunteers in Afghanistan and they allowed Muslim charities' activities in Iraq. All these developments guaranteed that the atmosphere changed gradually. Take alcohol for instance – in early 1990s all bars were closed in Baghdad. (Abdelkarim, born in Baghdad, 1961)

Public schools became largely gender-segregated, the veiling of women increased, selling of alcohol was restricted, and night-life facilities in major cities were closed. These developments also resulted in more explicitly drawn ethnic and sectarian boundaries. However, nearly all our interviewees' shared a highly unanimous perception concerning the role of ethnicity and sect in Iraq during the Ba'athist reign. The wars and economic hardships were making life increasingly unbearable, yet religion and ethnicity were not explicitly structuring the everyday interaction of people. This idea was especially clear in the testimonies of educated urban middle classes:

Nobody talked about backgrounds (ethnic and sectarian). We were all in the same situation. (Abu Mahmud, born in Qayim, 1947)

In our city district there were Sunnis, Shi'ites, Kurds, Christians and Mandaeans. We never encountered any problems. Nobody would say that this or that family is Sunni or Shi'ite. (Raghad, born in Baghdad, 1994)

My neighbors had been there for twenty years, I didn't know whether they were Sunni or Shi'ite. But then after the Second Gulf war the situation begun to change, and we cannot dismiss the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia, they played a central role in promoting sectarianism(…) and automatically also the Kurds begun to forge their ideas about own state. (Abdelkarim, born in Baghdad, 1961)

It should be underlined, however, that ethnic and sectarian tensions were already mounting in many areas with heterogeneous population, such as the town of Kirkuk. One interviewee from the region related us:

The Turkmens, the Arabs and the Kurds were in their own sections of the town and this situation soon reflected itself on the political life and the political culture. People had no trust in public authorities but preferred to solve their own problems amongst themselves. From 1970s onwards politics was a kind of ethnicity chess. The present day politics is an extension of this. (Nawzad, born in Kirkuk, 1957).

As it will be indicated below, the traditional fabric of ethnically and religiously heterogeneous Iraqi society, and its handshake culture between different societal groupings was rapidly transformed in the aftermath of the U.S. military invasion of April 2003.

4.2. Gender and household

From late 1950s onwards, Iraqi governments invested great efforts in modernizing the country's education system and in revising its health and employment policies. This had a vast impact on the gender order in Iraqi society.[56] A rapid change in the public role of women was backed by the 1958 civil law reform, which guaranteed women social and political rights that were relatively broad in comparison with many other parts of the Muslim world. Women's illiteracy declined rapidly and the presence of women at all stages of education increased. Indeed, the issue of women's role was a central ideological tool for the ruling Ba'ath party. Paradoxically, under the

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[56] Fattah H. & Caso F. (2009, 213–214) A Brief History of Iraq. Chekmark, New York. Tripp, C. (2002, 148–166). History of Iraq. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Ba'ath regime women's social visibility in the public sector increased considerably while repressive dictatorship was under construction. These initiatives became particularly clear during the first years of Saddam Hussein's reign.[57]

The war years of the 1980s and 1990s and the embargo that followed the Second Gulf War had a tremendous effect on the Iraqi households, and family and kinship systems. The traditionally tight cohesion of families deteriorated as thousands of homes lost their breadwinners in battle fronts. Saddam's crackdown on all real and potential opposition activism launched vast migratory movements from Iraq to its neighboring countries and to the West. Given the mass unemployment and huge inflation rate, the economic difficulties in the domestic sector deepened during the embargo years with disastrous effects.[58] An interviewee pertaining to Baghdad's educated middle class recounted:

The situation before the invasion was already quite bad. We suffered from constant lack of water and the sewage system would flood in the winter time. We had only a few hours of electricity a day, but we knew the timetables. We did not let the children drink the tap water, and tried our best not to resort to bottled mineral water because lot of it was just cheating (i.e. bottled tap water). (Abu Faris, born in Baghdad, 1957)

Nearly two million civilians died during the embargo because of malnutrition and disease, including 700,000 children.[59] The collapse of public services forced people to resort to their immediate kin-based networks, which partly explains why the Iraqis often speak of the embargo years as a period of revival of tribalism.[60] Another explanation is the regime's political strategy to ensure its grip on power by offering benefits to strategically important, predominantly

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[57] Al-Ali, N & Pratt, N. (2009, 21–55). What Kind of Liberation? Women and Occupation of Iraq. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ali, A. (2003). Lifting the Embargo After Almost 2 Million Deaths. Available online at: http://www.ilaam.net/War/IraqEmbargo.html

[60] Iraq: Decades of Suffering, Now Women Deserve Better. Amnesty International, February 2005. Available online at: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE14/001/2005

Sunni Muslim tribes. Moreover, the regime allocated judiciary powers (that had previously belonged to civil courts) to tribal elders. The years of embargo also generated serious street crime problem in major cities narrowing women's participation in the public sphere.[61] On several occasions our interlocutors pertaining to educated middle class underlined the fact that the Iraqi society was in deep social crisis even before the occupation of 2003. As two of our interviewees explained,

The present situation can only be understood in the light of the wars of 1980s and 1990s, and the recession brought by the embargo. Everyone was mentally exhausted and what marks the experience of the generation of the embargo years is growing ignorance mixed with religious resurgence. (Abu Nawris, born in Baghdad, 1971)

What explains the growing illiteracy rate is the fact that the children had to work because of economic crisis. Also cars were increasingly stolen and houses were burgled. Then there was a slight improvement in 2002 and 2003, everyone had food cards, and hunger was no longer a great problem. (Ali, born in Baghdad, 1974)

4.3. Post invasion years

Shortly after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC on September 11, 2001, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz labeled Iraq a terrorist state because of its alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction and support for international terrorism. The more aggressive U.S. policy towards Iraq materialized in the spring months of 2003 as the U.S. led international military invasion brought an end to Saddam Hussein's regime. The Ba'athist machinery of terror had left hundreds of thousands of victims, over three million political refugees, and a deepening internal chaos. Simultaneously with international military invasion, there was also an important undercurrent developing in Iraq which was largely unnoticed by western media. Namely, Shi'ite symbols quickly entered the public space in Iraq. For example, many streets and

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[61] Al-Jawaheri, Y. (2008, 121). Women In Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder.

urban areas were re-named with references to Shi'ite history and in many places images of the martyrs of Shi'ite political movements replaced those of Saddam Hussein. All of a sudden, religious graffiti were dotted here and there in urban areas. The expression of new Shi'ite political and spiritual revival found its strongest expression as three million Shi'ites marched in April 2003 to the city of Karbala in commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein in the year 680.[62]

Approximately two months after the military invasion, the Ba'ath party was declared illegal. Its military and security apparatus was dissolved and hundreds of thousands of Baath members lost their jobs in public institutions. As nearly sixty per cent of the Iraqis had been employed by the state, millions of Iraqis were now without means of income.[63] Things were made worse by the deteriorating security situation (which was hardly under control of the foreign occupiers) and the poor basic infrastructure. The Iraqi infrastructure was already in ruins after decades of war and embargo, and it was given the final destructive blow with the invasion.

People, paralyzed because of air raids, areal bombings, looting, roadside bombs, and general chaos had to cope for months in temperatures reaching fifty degrees without running water, sanitation, or electricity. Abu Faris described the conditions in Baghdad:

There were ponds of sewage water on the streets. Only the households with generators could pump water from the tap, and there were people in the streets selling electricity from their portable generators. People would buy one to two hours of electricity. On top of everything, the water was contaminated but people had to use it for washing. (Abu Faris, born in 1957, Baghdad)

The battle over political representation, security vacuum, and widely spread street crime only furthered the deeply shared popular

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[62] Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation. International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing, September 9, 2003. Available online at: kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/.../b008_iraq_shiites.pdf

Cockburn, B. (2009). Muqtada al-Sadr and the Shia Insurgency in Iraq. Faber and Faber, London.

[63] Iraq's Shiites Under Occupation. International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing, September 9, 2003. Available online at: kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/.../b008_iraq_shiites.pdf

frustration. The supporters of the former regime and the Sunni tribes, aiming to secure their grip of the future administration of Iraq, began to translate their resentment as the Shi'ite had done – in terms of sectarian political rhetoric. Simultaneously, both factions were investing heavily on recruiting members both nationally and internationally in order to build up their military strength.

Prior to the first full parliamentary elections in the new Iraq, in December 2005, the social atmosphere reflected deepening internal divisions in the country. The security situation was extremely tense and the elections drove ordinary Iraqis into a situation in which voters were forced to select a representative, and thus also their own "camp" on the basis of religion or ethnic grouping. As two informants residing in Baghdad at the time recalled in interviews,

The armed militias were investing on areas where the Americans were not present. They only concentrated on empty (disputed) areas in order to gain control on them. It was a process of reordering. Soon the Shi'ite families were covered by their group. The Kurds also had their military entity the Peshmerga, but God forbid if there was a family who belonged to the former supporters of the regime. (Abu Mahmud, born in Qayim, 1947).

Particularly difficult it was for people like us whose quarters housed all kinds of people. We received families from both Shi'ite and Sunni dominated areas. Our area was a contested ground, the atmosphere was not tense, but we all knew that it was not considered an area protected by a particular militia. We were between Shi'ite dominated Sadr-district and Sunni dominated Fadl and Adhamiya. This meant that the both camps would attack our area when they saw it necessary. This happened especially when they were too afraid of perpetrating acts of violence in the heart of the enemy's territory. (Abu Faris, born Baghdad, 1957)

Shi'ite Islamist parties Da'wa and SIIC were both effectively organized in the diaspora and thus favorably positioned to take over the Iraqi power vacuum. The same holds true for the major Kurdish political parties – the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the People's Union of Kurdistan (PUK). These two parties comprise the organizing forces of Kurdistan's autonomous regional government, established in 1992. Unlike dozens of emergent political parties

inside Iraq, these Shi'ite and Kurdish parties had their ready-made agendas and infrastructures.

All of our interlocutors who witnessed the sectarian violence explained that the security climate deteriorated very rapidly in the spring months of 2006. This was due to a massive bomb attack which destroyed the Golden Mosque in the city of Samarra – one of the holiest places of Shi'ite Islam – and which was allegedly carried out by a group of Sunni extremists.

From the beginning, the violence following the occupation found highly diverse local manifestations. Blood was shed in confrontations between occupying forces and Sunni insurgent groups. The latter could be roughly divided in three categories – the extremists, Ba'athists, and Sunni nationalists. Extremists were largely responsible of detonating car bombs, carrying out suicide attacks in the streets and marketplaces, and abducting businessmen and members of educated elites and western contractors and journalists, but also members of the newly established Iraqi security institutions. Iraq had become part of a global warfront for Islamic militants fighting against western geopolitical and cultural dominance. Many fighters from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, and Morocco arrived and sided with the Iraqi insurgents.[64]

Ba'athists, especially former members of Iraq's security structures, took up arms and staged attacks against both the multinational coalition and Iraqi Government forces. Some groups of Sunni Arabs were not driven by militant Islamism or Ba'athist loyalties but rather strove for the establishment of a new Iraq guided by loosely defined "moderate" Islamic principles.

The involvement of Shi'ite resistance increased considerably from the year 2004 onwards. Influential figures in the *Hawza* took different positions with regard the occupation. The leading clergy, including the supreme Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, opposed the foreign military invasion. The fiercest critique was voiced by Moqtada al-Sadr, member of the influential Shi'ite family that had suffered tremendously under the Ba'athist regime. The Sadrist movement with its military wing, the Mahdi Army, soon controlled an entire

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[64] A Face and a Name: Civilian Victims of Insurgent Groups in Iraq: Human Right Watch, October 2, 2005. Available online at: http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11604/

section of Bagdad, which was soon renamed as *Madinat al-Sadr* (Sadr City). The Mahdi Army, with up to 60,000 armed soldiers, was present in the Shi'ite majority cities of Iraq. By 2005 it seemed as if all political parties and interest groups had established armed militias to protect their interests. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI (later; Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, SIIC), controlled thousands of men of the so-called Badr Brigade, a militia comprised largely of former officers and soldiers who had defected from the Iraqi army. It also included hundreds of refugees, many of whom had joined SCIRI when its leadership was exiled in Iran.[65]

Ethnically and religiously heterogeneous urban areas were soon divided along sectarian and ethnic boundary lines. By 2010 over fifty areas within the city were divided by concrete walls.[66] Without a protector, people belonging to regional minorities such as a young man from Baghdad whom we interviewed for this study had no other option than to leave.

We lived in a Sunni dominated area and soon the expulsion of the Shi'ites begun. Everyone knew of the death lists. We received a message stating that my father's and brother's names were listed in al-Qaeda's death list and that we had to move to another area. We took all our possessions with us. By that time my brother had already moved (to Qatar). Later they forced many other people out of the area, then the first wave of explosions and murder started and the Iraqi al-Qaeda settled in the area. (Samir, born in Baghdad, 1986)

The sectarian violence took its toll from the families of several of our interlocutors. As a man from Kirkuk related,

My cousin died in a terrorist act in Kirkuk. He was standing in front of a butchers shop in Kirkuk when a truck full of explosives

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[65] Fattah, H. & Caso, F. (2009, 254–256). A Brief History of Iraq. Chekmark, New York.

Badr Corps. Global Security. Available online at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/badr.htm

[66] 1,400 checkpoints inside Iraqi capital Baghdad. Azzaman, March 27, 2010. Available online at: http://www.azzaman.com/english/index.asp?fname=news\2010-03-27\kurd.htm

was detonated. Dozens of people lost their lives in the incident. It was increasingly common to see young (recruited) men from Saudi Arabia and North Africa in the streets of the city. There are still today (February 2010) several people in Kirkuk's prisons charged of terrorism – from abroad but there are also Iraqis among them. People are being brainwashed to carry out suicide attacks by religious leaders. They may say: 'today you will have lunch with Prophet Muhammad.' (Nawzad, born in Kirkuk, 1957).

Boundaries were guarded by militias controlling the movement in and out of strategically important zones. Thousands of civilians lost their lives on the some 1,400 check points within the capital city.[67] As indicated by one interviewee sectarian and ethnic boundaries soon marked the entire public space:

At present (October 2009) you have to show you identity card upon request. The card states religion, I mean, whether you are Christian, Mandaean, or Muslim, but it doesn't state whether you are Shi'ite or Sunni Muslim. The card also states your ethnicity – whether you are Arab, Kurd or Turkmen. Recently Assyrian Christians have claimed that they should be officially recognized as an ethnic group in their identity cards. It's extremely difficult to move in Bagdad's Thawra and Adhamiya districts, to give an example, without two identity cards. People resort to forged cards and use most commonly recognized 'sectarian' names to prove themselves as either Sunni or Shi'ite. The militias guarding the checkpoints have begun to use different kinds of tests to check whether a person is who he claims to be. They for example ask how do you perform your prayer or your wudu' [the Islamic ablution ritual] as there are sectarian differences in these. (Abdelkarim, born in Baghdad, 1961)

4.4. EXPERIENCES OF PERSECUTION

While international attention was focused on the battlefront between international coalition forces and different insurgency groups, other forms of violence remained largely unnoticed by the western media. Between the years 2005 and 2008, on average 14,2

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[67] Ibid.

people were killed every day by suicide attacks and car bombs, and 137 by gunfire and executions. The years 2006 and 2007 alone witnessed more than 53,000 civilian deaths.[68] Many thousands lost their lives in air raids and house searches of the coalition forces, not to mention kidnappings and other forms of violence perpetrated by criminal gangs. Increasing numbers of Iraqis were subjected to fear and violence under 'preventive' security measures carried out by coalition soldiers and western security contractors and sub-contractors.[69] More than 180,000 Iraqis were detained or imprisoned and thousands were subjected to torture and humiliation by the U.S. trained Iraqi military and security institutions. In more than 1,300 cases, the Americans were aware of torture practiced by Iraqi security but effectively ignored the information.[70] By the year 2008 forty per cent of families based in Baghdad had lost at least one family member due to violence. There were between four and five million orphans and 1.5 million widows, over two million new international refugees and 2.8 million internal refugees.[71]

Militias loyal to leading Shi'ite and Sunni parties and military factions were the major perpetrator of violence, murdering more than 32,500 Iraqis.[72] Especially the Shi'ite militias were notorious

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[68] Iraq Body Count. Database. Available online at: http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/

[69] According to international network opposing Iraq's occupation 'Brussels Tribunal' the total number of functionaries in these contractors may have exceeded 160,000 individuals in 2006. see: http://www.brusselstribunal.org/SecurityCompanies.htm#ISG

[70] British BBC Channel 4 gained access to nearly 400,000 secret military significant activities reports (SIGACTS) logged by the U.S. military in Iraq between 2004 and 2009. The channel released a documentary "Secret War Files" in 2010 which indicated that Americans were aware of the levels of violence against civilians and casualty figures. President Bush continuously claimed that Americans did not record casualties and were doing their utmost to avoid civilian deaths. BBC Channel 4, Dispatches: Secret war files: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-74/episode-1

[71] Al-Mashad al-Iraqi (2008) Political discussion program, al Jazeera (Arabic) TV channel 16.11. 2008.

[72] Dispatches: Secret war files. BBC Channel 4. Available online at: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-74/episode-1

for running their secret prisons and interrogation centers.[73] It was by no means exceptional that fierce rivalries took place between competing groupings from the same sect.   Among the targeted were also entire families accused of loyalty to former regime; those who held public positions in the Ba'athist Iraq; individuals who were perceived too liberal or 'corrupt' in their public demeanor; women working outside of private homes; sexual minorities; artists; musicians; alcohol, music and perfume retail dealers; prostitutes, and ordinary Iraqis working for occupiers, or to foreign relief and development organizations.

In the chaotic situation, people were often unaware who was targeting them and why. Terms such as sectarian violence and civil war hardly captured the nature of the situation as perceived by our interviewees. What they experienced as particularly painful was that violence against civilians was often perpetrated by ordinary people against other ordinary people. Every person we interviewed could name at least one close relative who had died in the post-invasion turmoil.

4.4.1. Religious minorities

The mass flight of Iraq's religious minorities increased rapidly in the years following the invasion. In 2005, the UN estimated that thirty per cent of those who left Iraq were non-Muslims, and particularly Assyrian Christians. According to the Assyrian organization AINA nearly half of Iraq's 1.2 million Assyrians (estimate of 2003) had fled by mid-2009.[74]

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[73] Manfred Novak United Nation's Special Rapporteur on Torture, published a report in September 2006 where he alleged that torture was a grave problem in several prisons run by ministries of interior and defense. Many prisoners had burns and tissue damages caused by use of acids. It had become increasingly common that the bodies left in public places were found with missing or damaged body parts, which indicated that many had been tortured before execution. cf. Iraq torture worse after Saddam. BBC News, September 21, 2009. Available online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5368360.stm

[74] Available online at : http://www.aina.org/releases/20090618154221.htm

Four of our interviewees belong to Iraq's Mandaean religious minority.[75] According to them, the public space went through a rapid transformation due to strengthening religious conservatism:

We shopkeepers, for example, were no longer allowed to play taped music in our premises, and those who had TVs in their shops had to monitor carefully which channel was on. My (jewelry) shop was in the district of Thawra (in Baghdad) and I was well aware of the atmosphere on the streets. At times I had to keep my shop closed for weeks because of the violence and general unrest. Soon the nature of dealing with female clients changed. Every woman was dressed in black abaya cloack and one had to keep the intercommunication to the minimum. Some jewelry shops were blown up in that section of the town. (Abu Nawris, born in Baghdad, 1971)

In the market place in Sadr City the shopkeepers were no longer allowed to place tomatoes and cucumbers next to each other (because of sexual connotations). (Sajida, born in Baghdad, 1969)

Prior to deserting their home quarters, our interviewees reported having often spent several weeks practically locked inside their homes. Umm Thamina who left Baghdad in 2007 recalled:

The atmosphere was tense and oppressive. I stayed at home all the time making only short visits to food markets, aware of the threat of road side bombs. Those committing the terrorist acts were both from inside the Thawra district but also outsiders. They were both contract killers but also criminals hired by militias. (Umm Thamina, born in Baghdad, 1978)

The Mandaean women that we interviewed told us that harassment, threats, and direct physical violence towards women of religious minorities became frequent after 2006. All informed that Mandaean and Christian women had no other option than to adapt to 'Islamic' dress codes when moving in public spaces. Umm Thamina narrated us:

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[75] A large majority of the 60,000–70,000 members of global community of Mandaeans resided in Iraq until 2003. At present there are large refugee communities in Iran, Sweden and other western European countries, Australia and the U.S.A. See: Iraqi minority group needs U.S. attention, Yale Daily News, March 9, 2007. Available online at: http://www.yaledailynews.com/staff/kai-thaler/

You simply had no other choice than to cover your head with a scarf and dress in black abaya. We were all afraid of what might happen to us. They (the members of Shi'ite militia) said to my husband's brother's wife and their two daughters, aged twelve and fourteen that they would be killed if they did not cover up. By 2007 all my female relatives had adopted head scarf, including my aunt who was in Syria, studying to become a secretary. Makeup was not so much an issue for the militias but later they begun to force women to wear only black or white scarves. Colorful scarves were no longer considered appropriate. (Umm Thamina, born in Baghdad, 1978)

4.4.2. Members of secular and educated middle classes

A large proportion of our interviewees, fourteen individuals, could be categorized as belonging to Baghdad's educated and largely secular middle classes. All had resided in areas that until 2005 housed an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous population. Harassment and acts of violence were directed, not only against people from 'wrong' sectarian or religious groups, but also against women (and on occasions also men) who were seen as too 'liberal' or 'westernized' in their behavior or public demeanor. Several women reported us having seen or heard of women who had been stabbed by knife in thighs for wearing trousers. Kidnappings, murder, and rape of women and girls were endemic in many areas of Baghdad as indicated by two interviewees.

A short while ago a half a kilometer from our house in Yarmuk, in Baghdad, a woman and her two children were murdered right there on the street. (Ali, born in Baghdad, 1974)

I have one cousin who is exceptionally blonde. Her parents keep saying to her not to go to the university because foreign looking people are in particular danger. They are constantly kidnapped, either by al-Qaeda or by radical Shi'ites. (Abu Nabil, born in Baghdad, 1962)

Three male and one female interviewee ended up as targets of violence perpetrated by both Shi'ite and Sunni militias because of their professional profile. Journalists, sports teachers, and perfume, music and western fashion retail sellers were subjected to violence

and threats. Sunni insurgents also targeted state employees and other functionaries of the 'illegitimate' government. A civil servant whom we interviewed in Baghdad informed us:

We are all afraid, at streets, workplaces and buses. You can hear people saying in buses: "God save us from elections". People have lost their hopes. I am sure that our ministry is in danger. There have been many acts of terrorism against public institutions, even in those situated near U.S. troops. (Kamil, civil servant in the Ministry of Migration Karrada, Baghdad[76])

The interviewees reported that the militias maintained regional death lists and many, as Abu Faris had personal experience of direct encounters with armed combatants:

We were returning from the marketplace with my brother and we saw them standing some ten meters from our front door. We were forced to shop on that day because in the Sadr- district there had been several terrorist strikes. It meant that soon there would be unrest in our quarter. We had bought some eggs, oil, milk and bread to manage for a week or ten days. These men had obviously come to revenge the strike in Sadr. […] There were perhaps fifty people among them; everyone was armed with Kalashnikovs and PKC (machine guns) and majority seemed very young only fifteen to seventeen years of age. They were all dressed in black. Some, obviously outsiders, had left their faces uncovered but others had covered everything except eyes in order not to be recognized. One of them shot with his Kalashnikov over my head so close that I didn't hear anything for two days. I was sure they would kill me. That boy left me alone, but then another one with PKC approached me. I saw also my neighbor saying that we had nothing to do with violence and that we hardly got out of our houses. I was not so much worried of myself but I feared what they might do to my wife and children […] In about thirty minutes a man, approximately twenty-five years of age, came and said: "We are not after these ones". It appeared that they had come in search of another family, but did not want to return empty handed. That's why they had come to our house. (Abu Faris, born in Baghdad, 1957)

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[76] Interview conducted in Baghdad, July 17, 2010.

One interviewee of Kurdish origin had received death threats because of working as a driver for a foreign charity organization:

Numerous international relief organizations had entered Kurdish region after the invasion. Among them was a Greek organization specializing on health care with offices in Erbil and Dohok. They for example took care of those who couldn't receive treatment for their illnesses in Kurdistan. I started working for them as a driver, and the car had Greek license plates so everyone knew that I work for a foreigner. The terrorists saw no difference whether you worked for humanitarian organization or the occupying military forces. They interpreted you being opponent of Islam and that kind of people were killed. First I received phone calls reminding me that I am an Iraqi and that he Americans are occupying our country. They said that I have to leave my job because the Greeks spy for the Americans. Finally the organization left Kurdistan because of the deteriorating security, and I received a death threat in phone. (Abu Asad, born in Shangal, Mosul, Iraqi Kurdistan 1967)

4.4.3. Violence against women

As noted earlier, the deterioration of women's position in the Iraqi society was largely a by-product of the decade of international sanctions which preceded the toppling of Saddam's regime. The 2003 foreign military invasion and subsequent sectarian violence only intensified the problems encountered by Iraqi women-- something that was completely contrary to the intentions of the international coalition occupying Iraq. In the years immediately after the invasion, there were concrete attempts to improve women's official social, legal, and political position. This objective was clearly expressed by President George W. Bush in the run up to the invasion. Women were expected to give a new face for the post-Saddam Iraq. Numerous international programs were established to educate women for their new roles as moderating participants in the political process. The U.S. invested great efforts in promoting women's empowerment, according to the visions of neo-conservative political forces in the George W. Bush administration. Many U.S. experts entered Iraq specifically for this purpose. Strikingly often, they were in their first

international mission and with hardly any experience of post-conflict settings. Appointments were often done according to political rather than professional criteria.[77]

The new Iraq was to open all positions within the government and public state institutions for women. The new system was based on a specific quota for women. The initial plan was to guarantee twenty-five per cent representation for women across all levels of government, yet in practice it was implemented only in the parliament. Elevated ideas were countered by bleak realities. In January 2005, following the first parliamentary elections, critical voices were raised both domestically and internationally claiming that many female voters were largely unaware of what they were voting for. Political programs were hardly accessible to ordinary citizens in the tense security atmosphere. Many of our interviewees expressed the view that the first elections did not launch a democratic process, but instead represented the rapid institutionalization of sectarian politics. Women were elected as members of the new parliament but they were by and large family members of male conservative politicians with hardly any political background. In the following years it was increasingly difficult to find women running for elections because of the security risks involved in public campaigning.[78]

In the dominant official political discourses, women were increasingly constructed as symbols of post-Ba'athist Iraq and its Islamic nature. Yet the question of women's role also became a part of the political rhetoric of both Sunni and Shi'ite resistance movements, which often vocalized their hatred towards western imperialism and cultural influence by referring to the role of women in future Iraq. Despite having remained in the center of political discourses, there has been no improvement in women's overall social and political situation since the invasion.[79]

It soon became apparent that the most influential political parties in the new Iraq relied heavily on conservative religious norms.

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[77] Kids Who Run Iraq. BBC World Series. March 2008. Available online at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1658_assignment_2008/page51.shtml

[78] Al Ali, N. (2009). What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq, Lecture at UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies. Available online at: http://www.international.ucla.edu/cnes/podcasts/article.asp?parentid=104926

[79] Ibid.

The country's new constitution reflected the efforts to harness civil law more tightly to the Islamic legal doctrine.[80] Conservative interpretation of Sharia civil law is currently applied practice in Shi'ite-dominated areas in southern Iraq and in some Sunni dominated areas of central Iraq.

More often than ever in the history of modern Iraq, violence in the post-occupation Iraq was a vehicle to reorder public spaces, not only along sectarian and ethnic boundaries, but in terms of gender as well. Particularly in areas falling under the control of sectarian militias, women were forced to fit into strictly defined gendered norms of propriety. Thousands of women were harassed, kidnapped, raped, and killed merely because of appearing to be too liberal.[81]

Nur, a 24 year old university student who was kidnapped and gang raped by Shi'ite militia was interviewed for this study in Baghdad in July 2010. She described us the atmosphere at the university:

The militias, both Sunni and Shi'ite, begun to control everything. They even interfered in the relations between the students. They entered the lecture halls and did not respect even our lecturers. Most pivotal thing for them was that women covered their heads. They were ready to punish everyone who did not obey. It was impossible to talk freely. We tried to tell them that they had to respect lecturers. Soon we were backed by others. Then the militias threatened to kill us. Then I was kidnapped. (Nur, born in Baghdad, 1986)

Public assassinations of women created a vicious circle; every murder pushed women to think twice about their public activities. Ultimately, women disappeared almost entirely from many urban areas and sectors of labor, making the remaining women even more vulnerable than before.

Our interviewees included a thirty-six-year-old woman who worked as a gymnastics coach. She was accused of corrupting

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[80] Women Lose Ground in the New Iraq. Once They Were Encouraged to Study and Work; Now Life Is 'Just Like Being in Jail. The Washington Post, December 16, 2006. Available online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/15/AR2006 121501744.html

[81] Trapped by Violence: Women in Iraq. Amnesty International 2009, Available online at: http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE14/005/2009/en/e6cda898-fa16-4944-af74-f3efc0cf6a4d/mde140052009en.pdf

children, particularly girls, and experienced increasing pressure to leave her profession. After returning from an international sports event in Syria, the woman had been interviewed by an Iraqi TV station without wearing a headscarf. This led to more severe threats. She received two letters; one at home and another in her training premises, telling her to leave her profession. She explained us her reason for leaving Iraq:

One of our neighbors, leader of another sports team Talaba-club was kidnapped and later killed. They said that the same would happen to me. (Sajida, born in Baghdad, 1969)

4.4.4. Sexual minorities

In early 2007 the UN reported rapid increase in severe cases of persecution and torture of sexual minorities in Iraq.[82] Already in late 2005 Iraq's supreme Shi'ite authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, had published a religious decree, *fatwa,* which legitimized the killing of homosexual men and women in order to protect the Iraqi society from corrupting influences. The *fatwa* was lifted by al-Sistani twelve months later but from the point of view of Iraq's sexual minorities the message was clear.[83] In early 2009 several sources reported of series of killings with hundreds of victims in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Najaf and Basra, as militias begun to monitor people, especially men, whom they suspected of homosexual conduct.[84]

The main responsibility for these arbitrary killings lay in the hands of the Mahdi Army of the Sadr-movement. The leader of the

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[82] Gays Living in Shadows of New Iraq. The New York Times, December 18, 2007 Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/18/world/middleeast/18baghdad.html

[83] They Want Us Exterminated: Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq. Human Rights Watch 2009. Available online at: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iraq0809webwcover.pdf

[84] Iraq's Newly Open Gays Face Scorn and Murder. The New York Times, April, 7 2009. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/middleeast/08gay.html
Gays killed in Baghdad as clerics urge clampdown. Reuters April 4, 2009. Available online at: http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE53312Q20090404

movement, Muqtada al-Sadr, himself proclaimed homosexuality as a disaster and threat to the morals of the nation.[85]

The Ja'fari school of Shi'ite jurisprudence, but also the four legal schools of Sunni law, criminalize homosexuality between men. However, punishment – which may according to circumstances range from warning to execution – must meet strictly defined criteria before any sentence can be imposed. In the Iraqi Criminal code, which was drafted in 1969 and which is still in force, homosexual conduct is only mentioned under title 'Rape, Homosexual Acts, and Assault on Women's Honor'. Although in principle this reference to homosexuality seeks to define a gender-neutral rape law, it has been criticized for leaving police and prosecutors wide scope to persecute people whose conduct they dislike. [86]

Several members of sexual minorities had little option but to leave the country. In most cases people sought shelter in the neighboring countries, and registered with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with the hope of being resettled in third countries. We were not able to trace any homosexual interviewees who had claimed for asylum in the EU countries because of fear of being persecuted. However, in Baghdad we interviewed two homosexual men who had lost dozens of homosexual friends since the invasion. According to them, the fears increased in Baghdad in the spring of 2009, with rumors of the killing campaigns. The rumors were confirmed as six gay men were executed within a period of two weeks in Baghdad's Shi'ite stronghold Sadr - city. A large majority of the killings were perpetrated by sectarian militias but on occasion also by members of the victims' own tribes. Muhannad, a 25-year-old economics student, told us that he had turned to the Iraqi Police after receiving a death threat from the Mahdi Army. He ended up being raped by the police – an incident which he said is not uncommon. In Bagdad's vernacular Arabic the

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[85] Iraq's Sadr Wants 'Depraved' Homosexuality Eradicated," AFP, May 29, 2009. Available online at: www.google.com/.../afp/.../ALeqM5gyEDJh2jz2X-0cesB76vl6eIJL6Q

[86] Gays Living in Shadows of New Iraq. The New York Times, December 18, 2007 Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/18/world/middleeast/18baghdad.html

strongly derogatory term *Jrawi* (little bitch-dog) is often used in reference to gays, Muhannad told us.

4.4.5. *Persecuted academics, professionals, and former members of the*

Ba'ath

Several acts of violence against civilians indicated a deep embitterment and hatred towards former Ba'ath party loyalists and public functionaries of the 'system', including teachers, academics and physicians.

At the beginning of the crisis, one of the first groups to leave Iraq was the educated upper strata of population. Threats against professional elites working in public institutions (government offices, hospitals, and universities) became increasingly common as the crisis deepened. The Iraqi Medical Association reported that nearly half of Iraq's medical doctors had fled by 2008. Numbers indicated by Oxfam/NCCI (NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq) were even more alarming with regard to country's rebuilding prospects; roughly forty per cent of Iraq's entire professional staff had left the country since 2003. Over 230 university professors had been assassinated between 2003 and 2008, and in 2007 deans of three major universities in Baghdad announced a nearly eighty per cent fall in the number of their teacher staff.[87] Universities in major cities had turned into headquarters for militias and death squads. In one single incident, armed men wearing Iraqi Police uniforms had abducted up to 150 professionals from the Ministry of higher education in Baghdad.[88]

Abu Mahmud, whom we interviewed in a reception center in Turku, had worked as a secretary of the party's regional office in Dora, Baghdad. One of his sons who had belonged to Saddam's elite army, the Republican Guards, disappeared in the fall of 2009.

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[87] cf. Lischer, S. (2008). Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis. International Security, 33 (2).

[88] Iraq's Education Under Siege. Asia Times Online. November 21, 2006. Available online at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HK21Ak05.html

According to Abu Mahmud, he was most likely kidnapped and executed by the Mahdi Army. Three days after his disappearance Abu Mahmud's house was destroyed by a bomb blast where his wife also lost her life.

Another man whom we interviewed perceived that in the current political climate, anyone with connections to former public institutions – especially those of security – had no room to participate in the reconstruction of Iraq. He related about the developments leading to his departure from Iraq:

In the nineties I worked at the Ministry of Social Affairs and then I was transferred to the administration of the Abu Ghraib prison. In 1994 I started my academic studies in order to avoid military service. I married and worked with my father at his clothing business until 2003. Then in 2005 the authorities ordered everyone who had previously worked for the state to take their professional documents and report at the Ministry of Labor. I went there and turned to some people with whom I had worked earlier. They told me to get out fast and run because (as a former worked in prison administration) I would be arrested. (Ali, born in Baghdad, 1974)

4.4.6. Kidnappings

Since the spring moths of 2003, thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children have been kidnapped by both militias and criminal gangs in search of ransom money. Indeed, kidnapping became the major form of criminal activity in Iraq, overtaking burglaries, robberies, car theft, and other crimes. According to Iraqi Police Forces, some incidents were perpetrated by criminal gangs, but the main culprits were insurgent groups who financed their activities by kidnappings. Many cases remain unreported as people are concerned about antagonizing the kidnappers.

In October 2009 the kidnappings in Baghdad began to target especially children. The children of wealthier city districts, such as Shari´Filastin and Zayouna in eastern Baghdad and Mansoor in the western part of the city, are particularly vulnerable. In these areas,

posters of missing children have become common.[89] Umm Basma, who visited Baghdad in July 2009, told us the following in an interview conducted in Finland in November 2009:

We did not let our children out because while we were in Baghdad one child got kidnapped in the neighborhood. My sister works in the day care center in Shari´ Filastin and she said that one day she got frightened because of hearing a woman scream in front of the center. She enquired what had happened. The woman said that she is from the same street, and feared that her child had been kidnapped. The girl was five years old, of locals. After a few hours the family was informed that they had to pay 15,000 € ransom. The woman said that she was sure her daughter would be killed even if they paid the ransom. It was a poor family. After this incident we didn't let our children play outside. (Umm Basma, born in Baghdad, 1964)

4.4.7. Children

The social and political turmoil that has prevailed in Iraq for more than three decades has left deep mental and physical wounds on the generations born since 1970s. With the 2003 invasion the overall situation of children deteriorated rapidly. By 2007 violence had orphaned tens of thousands of children.[90]

Currently there are no precise statistics about the mental state of the Iraqi children. However, the Association of Iraqi Psychologists announced in 2007 that violence raises serious concerns for the future generations[91] and, according to figures presented by Iraqi ministry of health, thirty per cent of children show symptoms of

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[89] Kidnappers target youth of Baghdad. Guardian, February 29, 2004. Available online at. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/feb/29/iraq
Kids at risk in Iraq kidnap business. The Australian. October 8, 2009. Available online at: http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/kids-at-risk-in-iraq-kidnap-business/story-e6frg6so-1225784065612

[90] Iraqi Youth Face Lasting Scars of War. Washington Post. June 26, 2007Available online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/25/AR2007062501952.html

[91] Children of war: the generation traumatized by violence in Iraq. The Guardian. February 6, 2007. Available online at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/feb/06/iraq.topstories3

trauma, such as sleep disorders and inability to concentrate. In 2008 merely seventy psychiatrists remained in Iraq, none of whom had specialized on treatment of traumatized children and adolescents. In Baghdad only, it was estimated that a half a million children were in need of psychological help.[92] Children who have witnessed murder, gunfire, assassinations, kidnappings, and violent house searches tend to build mistrustful perceptions of the adult world, which may lead to social withdrawal and hopelessness – symptoms that are often extremely difficult to treat.[93] Ali, whom we interviewed in Baghdad in October 2009 related:

When we left our home (in Dora, Baghdad) I was fifteen and in the secondary school. The schools had remained closed for months because no one allowed their children to attend the classes. People had been killed right in the streets. The worst part lasted about eighteen months (…) teachers and headmasters were murdered, all according to death lists (distributed by the militias). (Ali, born in Baghdad, 1991)

Thousands of children experienced situations where they witnessed their parents being humiliated and made incapable to protect their offspring.

Violence has also affected the lives of children economically, for the economic status of families that have lost their fathers has dropped dramatically. An increasing number of children have begun to work in street commerce, and many were forced to become directly involved in the violence. For example, some children were hired as bomb makers, which is a major reason for why in 2008 some 1,500 children and adolescents were held in Iraqi prisons.[94]

The indirect effects of occupation on the Iraqi children should not be overlooked, either. In 2006 one quarter of the victims of unexploded military devices were children. It is estimated that the western powers have dropped nearly seventeen million cluster

[92] Fakhri, K. (2008). Trauma, Affect, and Changing Family Structures in Iraq. Presentation in international symposium Cultural Voices of a Fragmented Nation: War, Trauma, and Remembrance in Contemporary Iraq" December 11–13, 2008, Marburg University.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Poverty Drives Children to Work. Global Policy Forum. May 10, 2007. Available online at: http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/167/35653.html

bombs in Iraq since the Second Gulf War. South central Iraq in particular is badly contaminated by cluster ammunition remnants and unexploded air and ground ordnance. This will undoubtedly have devastating effects on future generations of Iraqis.[95]

4.5. Iraq since 2009

The U.S. administration's critically flawed military strategy in Iraq largely explains the onslaught of violence in 2006 and 2007. A central part of the strategy was to keep the number American troops as small as possible while simultaneously pushing the Iraqi Security Forces into the lead. The U.S. anticipated that gradual political progress would result in increased security. The failure of this strategy could be explained by two factors; first, the Iraqi Security proved to be highly insufficient and unprepared to take the lead, and second, political progress could not be reached after the vicious circle of sectarian violence had begun.

In early 2007, as president George W. Bush appointed general David Petraeus and the new ambassador in Baghdad, Ryan Crocker, to take charge on the change of strategy. The number of U.S. forces in Iraq was increased by nearly forty per cent with the aim of stabilizing key areas of the country. Increasing security, it was believed, could nurture political progress and provide possibilities to strengthen the Iraqi Security Forces. A large part of the troops was allocated in Baghdad in order to disrupt al-Qaeda and other insurgent networks extending to Sunni majority areas that served as bases to carry out terrorist operations within the city.[96]

While fighting armed organizations, the U.S. increased its support for coalitions of tribal Sunni Sheikhs, the so called 'awakening

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[95] Iraq. 2008 Key Data. Land Mine Monitor. Available online at: http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2009&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=iraq

How many civilians were killed by cluster bombs. Iraq Body Count. Available online at: http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/killed-by-cluster-bombs/

[96] Understanding General Petraeus's Strategy. The Weekly Standard. June 27, 2007. Available online at: http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/803vtvls.asp?page=2

councils'. The cooperation managed to improve security particularly in Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces.[97] Moreover, in August 2008, the radical Shi'ite leader Muqtada al-Sadr suspended the activities of his Mahdi Army. This was a result of major U.S. and Iraqi military campaign carried out on the movement's strongholds in the Iraqi Capital and southern parts of the country in spring 2008.[98]

The number of civilian deaths dropped rapidly in Baghdad after the circle of violence between Sunnis and Shi'ites had been broken. However, this was not merely because of the new American strategy. In fact the ceasefire imposed by militias indicated that they had managed to carry out thorough population transfers and established fiefdoms for members of the same sect. A recent report by Refugees International maintains that Iraq resembles a large military base within which each neighbourhood is separated by walls, which prevent ordinary Iraqis from moving freely.[99]

Spectacular attacks involving large numbers of victims remain frequent in Iraq. Although in some provinces (Anbar and Baghdad) violence has been dramatically cut down, other areas with highly heterogeneous population and deeply grounded presence of insurgent groups remain extremely dangerous (Kirkuk, Mosul).[100]

At the time of writing this report, Iraq's future – even in short term perspective – allows multiple interpretations. Very positive indications can be read from rapid decrease in the number of civilian deaths – from 9,222 in the year 2008 to 4,673 the year 2009. However, large-scale acts of terrorism still occur and their magnitude seems to be increasing. In 2008 a total of 534 people died in the nine most devastating attacks, and in 2009 750 people lost

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[97] In a Force for Iraqi Calm, Seeds of Conflict. The New York Times. December 23, 2007. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/23/world/middleeast/23awakening.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all

[98] Al-Sadr Back in Iraq Stronghold. Al Jazeera News, January 5, 2011. Available online at: http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/01/2011151418794320.html

[99] The Return and Resettlement of Displaced Iraqis. Refugees International. March 31, 2009. Available online at: http://www.refintl.org/policy/testimony/return-and-resettlement-displaced-iraqis

[100] Civilian Deaths from Violence in 2009. Iraq Body Count. Available online at: http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2009/

their lives in the eight largest attacks.[101]

Perhaps the most concerning news come from the political arena. In August 2010 President Barak Obama announced that the U.S. was to consistently follow the agreement it had made with Iraqi Government that all American forces will be out of Iraq by the end of the year 2011. In the same month the Iraqi Chief of Staff had warned that the withdrawal of the U.S. military would create a severe security vacuum in the country and foreign military presence would be needed until the year 2020.[102]

Not only Iraq's security climate but also the developments in the political sphere seemed to raise international concern. The parliamentary elections held in March 2010 resulted in a grave political impasse as none of the main four electoral blocks won majority. For nearly nine months, Iraq was without a functioning government.

The deadlock was resolved in December 21, 2010 as the parliament approved a new government headed by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who had been in power since 2006. The twenty-nine ministers of the new government include members of all major sectarian factions. However, the process of forming the new government reflects Prime Minister al-Maliki's attempts to consolidate his power and dominance over the entire security file, as he is acting minister of defence, interior and national security "until appropriate candidates are found". The power sharing within the government further solidifies sectarianism in political life and gives supremacy to sect and ethnic identity over national unity.[103] It should be noted that the new government includes six ministers from Muqtda al-Sadr's radical Shi'ite block and the movement has no less than thirty nine seats in the Iraqi parliament. Sadr himself made a visible comeback to Iraq in early 2011. He had spent several

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[101] Ibid.

[102] US troops withdraw from Iraq despite fears over violence. The Telegraph, August 19, 2010. Available online at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/7954677/US-troops-withdraw-from-Iraq-despite-fears-over-violence.html

[103] Iraq gets a new government. Al Jazeera Net December 12, 2010. Available online at: http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/12/201012211373655244.html

years in exile in Iran following an arrest warrant imposed on him.[104]

The political process reflects a fierce regional and international power play on influence and control over Iraq's natural resources. The style of politics in Iraq very much resembles the situation in Lebanon, where an ethno-sectarian division of power generates repeated periods of civil violence and even war. The Iraqi constitution grants the post of Presidency to the Kurds, while the Prime Minister is of the Shi'ites, and the Sunnis hold the position of the speaker of parliament. At worst, Iraq might become hostage to its sectarian system, where each political party fights over its share and is largely driven by the fear of marginalization.[105]

The sectarian political system is a direct result of post-invasion developments. In this situation, the largest gains have fallen into the hands of Iran who has for long backed al-Maliki. In November 30, 2010, a leading Arabic International TV channel, al Jazeera, carried out a spectator poll asking: "Who is the winner in the recent parliamentary elections in Iraq? Iran or democracy?" An overwhelming majority, eighty-eight per cent of the answerers, perceived that the winner was Iran.[106]

Nevertheless, the role of Iraq's Sunni Arab neighbours should not be overlooked in the consolidation of the country's sectarian boundaries. Arab countries have for several years rallied for greater political influence on the Iraqi Sunnis in order to outplay Iran. Should the ethno-sectarian political culture prevail, Iraq will experience increased external interference, whether by the U.S., Iran, or other regional powers. In Arabic news rooms and Internet pages, there are rumours of hundreds of millions of dollars being allocated to sectarian politicians. Numerous online discussion sites also suggest

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[104] Al Sadr calls Iraqis to resist. Al Jazeera News, January 8, 2011. Available online at: http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/01/20111872647305497.html

[105] The 'Lebanonisation' of Iraq . Al Jazeera Net. November 29, 2010. Available online at: http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/2010/11/20101126143626991797.html

[106] see: Man al muntasir fi tashkil al-hukuma al-Iraqiaya al-jadida. [Who is the winner in the formation of new government in Iraq]. Al Ittijah al Mu´akis [The Opposing Direction] –program. Aljazeera (Arabic), November 30, 2011 Available online at: http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/04A83FB4-0724-49DF-8718-DD88F80660F9.htm

that there is close intelligence coordination between sectarian blocks and neighbouring countries with regard to the situation in Iraq.[107]

In this climate the battle against terrorism and organised crime has proved to be increasingly difficult. Both international al-Qaeda and remnants of Ba'athist militias aim to destabilize the situation, and re-ignite sectarian conflict. Another critical question is the fate of the millions of Iraqi refugees in the neighbouring countries. Should they face forced return to their home areas, the risks for mounting sectarian tensions are likely to increase. Taking all these factors into account, Iraq's social and political future will remain extremely difficult to predict. The indications that conservative political ethos will keep its grip on the Iraqi administrative culture are too numerous to list here. The recent onslaught on basic democratic and cultural rights by a number of provincial councils illustrates the direction of the change. For example, in November 2010 the Baghdad provincial council ordered all Baghdad's nightclubs to be closed, based on the justification that the city had to be cleared from bars without proper licenses. Acting on orders from the provincial council, three days later the Iraqi security forces also closed the Iraqi Writers' Union social club in central Baghdad. In Babil, the provincial council decided to ban songs and plays in the Babil Cultural Festival. Similar developments have occurred in various areas of the country in the fall of 2010.[108]

4.6. Population transfers

Despite its chaotic nature, there was a clear underlying logic in the sectarian violence of 2006–2007. Militant groups attempted to homogenize their territories in order to secure their positions, first by expelling unwanted individuals. The cleansings were followed by the

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[107] See: Iraqi CP, Interview about the Political Impasse 6 months after the Elections. SolidNet.org. Available online at: http://www.solidnet.org/index.php/iraq-iraqi-communist-party/558-iraqi-cp-interview-about-the-political-impasse-6-months-after-the-elections

[108] Iraqi Writers Union outraged by social club closure. AK News, November 29, 2010. Available online at: http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/1/198624/

introduction of new members of the "desirable" group in the area. Third, the militants aspired to in promote their personal political position by presenting the displaced population as vulnerable and in need of protection. In effect, leaders from all militant groups tended to exaggerate the nature of the violence.

By 2008 Iraq had witnessed the largest mass population movement in the Arab world since the 1948 Palestinian exodus, as nearly eighteen per cent of the Iraqi people were forced to leave their homes. Cleansing of entire neighborhoods from people of the "wrong" groups became a part of the social and political reality of occupied Iraq.[109] One of our interviewees witnessed the changes upon a visit in Iraq in the summer of 2009:

Very many left and were replaced by others, for example as I visited my paternal aunt's house, (In Shari' Filastin, Baghdad) I was told that several of the neighbors had gone. It used to be a heterogeneous area, but now majority of the newcomers were of Shi'ite families (Umm Basma, born in Baghdad, 1966).

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) estimated in 2007 that fifteen million Iraqis were extremely vulnerable due to impoverishment and alienation, and that a vast majority had been exposed to terrifying and traumatizing experiences of violence.[110]

Up to 2.4 million Iraqis left the country, predominantly to Jordan and Syria, and some 2.7 million – eighty per cent of them women and children under the age of twelve – sought refuge within Iraqi borders.[111] Only a small minority – estimated around 100,000 – had the strength and resources to make their way to Europe.[112]

This vast humanitarian cost of the occupation remained largely unnoticed in the Western media because the problem was largely

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[109] Lischer, S. (2008). Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis. International Security, 33 (2).

[110] Harper, A (2007). Iraq: Growing needs amid continuing displacement. Forced Migration Review 29. Available online at: http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR29/51–53.pdf

[111] The Internally Displaced People in Iraq Update 35, 30 June 2008. Available online at: http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP_35_update_EN.pdf

[112] Five Years on Europe is Still Ignoring Its Responsibilities Towards Iraqi Refugees, UNHCR, March 3, 2008, Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47e1315c2.html

invisible. Nearly ninety-nine per cent of the refugees did not reside in camps and simply utilized their social networks, or used their savings to find housing in more secure areas in Iraq or in the neighboring countries.[113] Another reason for the lack of media coverage is that Iraq was a danger zone for those international relief workers, news houses, and journalists who were not 'embedded' in the international coalition military forces. Without news stories with faces and names, the new Iraqi refugee crisis thus failed to enter the western media consumers' consciousness.

4.6.1. Routes within Iraq

The movement of displaced Iraqis took various routes and found several destinations. A large part of the population transfers took place within the capital Baghdad, as people left highly insecure areas to districts with less dangerous neighborhoods and better services. Samir from central Baghdad recounted:

In our area (Dora, Baghdad) the Sunnis formed the majority and the transfer of Shi'ites started. People talked about death lists and killings. We also received a note saying that my father's and brother's names were included in al-Qaeda's death list and that we should move away. We took everything with us and left the house empty. By that time my brother had already moved outside of Iraq. Many others were forced to leave and then the wave of explosions and murder started as al-Qaeda took control of the entire area […] Many of them were from abroad and they settled in deserted houses. Increasingly often the newcomers were people of whom we knew nothing about. Little by little Dora became a Sunni area. We moved to Talibiya in Baghdad because we had relatives there who helped us to rent a house. So many people left Dora; for Yamin, Sha´ab and other Shi'ite dominated areas. (Samir, born in Baghdad, 1986)

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[113] Lischer, S. (2008). Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis. International Security, 33 (2).

By 2007 more than 350,000 people in Baghdad had resorted to networks of kin and tribal links inside the city in search of shelter. At the same time, several hundreds of thousands moved outside of the capital.[114] Between 2005 and 2008, the city underwent a massive transfer of Sunni families from the west of the city to the Sunni dominated areas in the north and northwest of Baghdad. They were replaced by Shi'ites from eastern Baghdad.[115] A major trend within the Shi'ite population was to leave the Sunni strongholds in major cities and rural areas of central and north-central Iraq, and to head towards the southern regions of the country with a Shi'ite majority. In reality, the patterns of population transfers were much more complex, as many Iraqi marriages were formed across sectarian and ethnic boundaries. A considerable number of people, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds, sought shelter from the more settled regions under the Kurdistan Regional Government in the north-western Iraq. The situation worsened as most of Iraq's eighteen governorates began to impose both formal and informal restrictions on the entry and residence of internally displaced persons. [116] This made life unbearable especially for those who did not have social connections to the more secure areas. For many the only option was to leave the country altogether.

4.6.2. Internally displaced people (IDP)

The Iraqi Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Displacement and Migration should in theory take the responsibility for displacement issues in Iraq. The harsh reality for a vast majority of the displaced Iraqis is that they do not receive any form of government assistance. For ordinary Iraqis, not to mention the IDPs, the government has continuously proved incapable of providing even basic services such

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[114] The Real Challenge of Internal Displacement in Iraq: The Future. Available online at: http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2007/1206_iraq_ferris.aspx?more=rc

[115] Harper, A. (2007). Iraq: Growing needs amid continuing displacement Forced Migration Review 29. Available online at: http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR29/51–53.pdf

[116] Ibid.

as electricity and clean water.[117] Many IDPs see Iraqi government as useless representative of impenetrable bureaucratic morass.

Some eighty per cent of the IDPs in the country were from Baghdad according to 2007 estimates.[118] Those who sought refuge from more secure areas seldom managed to receive IDP stipends or transfer their Public Distribution System (PDS) card to claim food allotments. Thousands of Iraqis still face equal difficulties when trying to obtain documents to reclaim stolen, confiscated or destructed property. Similar situation is encountered by those thousands who had to sell their properties, often with extremely unfavorable terms. As Abu Basim expressed,

We for example sold our house in Baghdad and the same happened to my wife's family home. It was a normal market price deal, but it is obvious that many buyers were of the new government elite, who benefitted from the situation. Mandaeans like us had always lived surrounded by other groups. Our house was just one surrounded by families from other groups. (Abu Basim, born in Baghdad, 1962).

From 2009 onwards, as the security situation begun to improve nearly 250,000 persons – mainly – IDPs have returned to their homes. The large majority of returnees are from Baghdad, however sustainable returns proved to be difficult.[119] Many found resettlement impossible due to lack of government protection, chronic unemployment, economic constraints and tensions encountered in the demographically reordered areas. Many returnees have been displaced again.[120]

Resettlement has been particularly difficult for those returning from neighboring countries. UNHCR survey found in 2008 that

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[117] Al-Mashad al-Iraq. Al Jazeera (Arabic) 27.6. 2010, Available online at: http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/D0C76383-DB93-46ED-BCEC-8C83CF813EC6.htm see also http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2008/05/08/36432/charity-work-shows-another-side.html

[118] Ferris E. (2007) The Real Challenge of Internal Displacement in Iraq, Brookings Institute, Available online at: http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2007/1206_iraq_ferris.aspx?more=rc

[119] The Return and Resettlement of Displaced Iraqis. Refugees International. March 31, 2009. Available online at: http://www.refintl.org/policy/testimony/return-and-resettlement-displaced-iraqis

[120] Lischer S. (2008, 62–64), Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis. International Security, 33 (2).

seventy per cent of the refugees returning from Syria had been displaced within Iraq shortly after their return.[121] A large majority of the displaced do not consider return simply because their homes were destroyed or confiscated and they think that security in their home areas is not duly enforced.[122]

According to another UNHCR survey released in 2010 nearly two thirds of Iraqi returnees from neighboring countries regretted taking the decision of returning back to Iraq. General insecurity and fear of persecution made return to original homes impossible for seventy-seven per cent of residents in Baghdad's Karkh and Resafa quarters. The survey also indicated that more than third of the returnees were uncertain whether they will stay permanently in Iraq if the conditions do not improve.[123]

The IDP situation has remained a vast challenge regardless of the fact that the Iraqi Government announced its initiatives to close the IDP file by the end of 2009. Many fear that even the inadequate food and economic assistance can be dramatically reduced.[124]

Iraqi government has furthermore proved to be incapable of developing an effective plan to receive the influx of returnees and minimize the risks of new round of sectarian violence that could be initiated by a massive return. Moreover, the government lacks a clear mechanism to solve disputes surrounding property rights of returnees who find their homes destroyed or occupied. [125]

Internal displacement both reflects and forges sectarian divisions within the Iraqi society. In Iraq, as elsewhere extended political violence and paralysis of public sector, together with

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[121] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Iraq Situation Update, March 2008. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/491956a02.html

[122] The Internally Displaced People in Iraq: Update 35. Iraq Red Crescent, June 30, 2008 Available online at: http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP_35_update_EN.pdf

[123] UNHCR Poll: Iraqi Refugees Regret Returning to Iraq, amid Insecurity. UNHCR, October 19, 2010. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/4cbd6c9c9.html

[124] Iraqi Refugees: Women's Rights and Security Critical to Returns. Refugees International, July 15, 2009. Available online at: www.refugeesinternational.org/.../iraqi-refugees-womens-rights-and-security-critical-returns

[125] Iraq Lacks Plan on the Return of Refugees, Military Says. The New York Times, November 30, 2007. Available online at: www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/world/.../30refugees.html

mass unemployment and economic crisis of households, leaves plenty of room for political manipulation of the displaced people. One of the major hindrances for the development of civil society movement lies in this very fact. The government perceives emerging nongovernmental organizations as a threat rather than a partner.[126] By far the most visible charitable organizations that channel aid to citizens are under direct leadership of sectarian political groupings. The most visible of such actors are Shahid al-Mihrab – foundation[127] and charities under control of the Sadr movement with particularly strong following among the two to three million residents of the Sadr City district in Baghdad.

The Shahid al-Mihrab – foundation is headed by Ammar al-Hakim the leader of the most influential Shi'ite political party SIIC. With its personnel of 7,500 workers, it oversaw the building of hundreds of mosques, gender separated schools (that impose veiling for girls over ten years of age) day care centers and health clinics. It has provided various forms of material and social support for displaced Shi'ites in different locations. In addition Sadrist charities provide economic assistance for burial services, money gifts for families of dead and injured and food assistance. Furthermore they help resettling displaced families free of charge.[128] Numerous young

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[126] The Return and Resettlement of Displaced Iraqis.
Testimony Submitted by Kenneth H. Bacon President, Refugees International and Kristele Younes,
Senior Advocate, Refugees International To the hearing before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations One hundred eleventh Congress - First Session Tuesday, March 31, 2009 Presiding: Senator Robert P. Casey. Available online at: http://www.refintl.org/policy/testimony/return-and-resettlement-displaced-iraqis

[127] Shahid al-Mihrab (Martyr of the Pulpit) Foundation refers to the central founding father of Iraqi Islamism, the Shi'te cleric Muhammad Baqer al-Hakim. He was killed in a bomb attack in August 2003 upon leaving Friday prayers at Najaf's Imam Ali mosque. See: Rising player with a vision for Shiite Iraq. The Christian Science Monitor, November 20, 2007. Available online at: http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/1120/p01s05-wome.html

[128] Charity Work Shows Another Side of Sadr's Movement in Iraq. McClatchy. May 8, 2008. Available online at: http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2008/05/08/36432/charity-work-shows-another-side.html

men have joined armed Shi'ite militias but also Sunni insurgency groups simply because they need money.[129]

4.6.3. Internationally displaced people

We fled for Syria in the middle of December in 2006 with my wife and three children. The journey from Baghdad to Syrian border was very difficult. We were extremely lucky since there were five buses ahead of us which were all stopped and the passengers were robbed. Many lost money and jewels. An American military convoy happened to appear just at the right moment and because of this nobody stopped our buss. When we reached the border we heard from other Iraqis that we were in the only bus that was not robbed that day. Among us there were many widowers and entire families who had lost their father. In some cases, I remember, the father had disappeared with no trace. Women were only thinking about their children's best, especially if there were teen-aged daughters in the family. They were the ones in the gravest danger, because of frequent kidnappings and rapes. Everyone knew that the situation was only deteriorating. People just had to get their daughters to a safe place. (Abu Basim, born in Bagdad, 1957)

A vast majority of Iraqis seeking shelter outside of Iraq turned to neighboring Syria and Jordan as Iraq's southern neighbors Saudi-Arabia and Kuwait had categorically rejected the entry of displaced Iraqis. The years 2003-2005 Jordan proved to be largely tolerant of the large influx of Iraqis. The official attitude changed rapidly in the end of the year 2005 as three Iraqis carried out a terrorist attack killing sixty in the capital Amman. Authorities begun to prevent entry of single men between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five and Jordanian border guards inspected Iraqis concerning their sectarian identity and refused entry of those considered Shi'ite.[130] In order to

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[129] The Real Challenge of Internal Displacement in Iraq: The Future. Brookings, December 6, 2007. Available online at: http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2007/1206_iraq_ferris.aspx

[130] Frelick, B. (2007). Iraqis denied right to asylum. Iraq Special Issue. Forced Migration Review, June 2007. Available online at: http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/contents.pdf

avoid deportation, most Iraqis attempted to register as refugees at the UNHCR office in Amman. By 2007 some 50,000 had managed to claim refugee status, but only a tiny minority was selected for third country settlement programs. The overall number of Iraqis in Jordan was estimated to be around 750,000.[131] Since the first years of Iraqi influx the average size of cases handled by UNHCR had sharply risen, as more often entire families left Iraq. As Jordan grew more determined to close its borders, Syria remained the only welcoming country for Iraqis. There are no accurate estimates of the number of the Iraqis in Syria, yet it was believed to exceed 1.5 million by 2008-2009.[132] By the year 2009 UNHCR in Damascus had registered over 200,000 Iraqis and the government of Syria stated that the refugees were not be forcibly returned to Iraq. However Syria has introduced entrance visa regime for Iraqis, practically closing the last remaining route of escape for Iraqis.[133] Iraqi refugees remain in legal limbo in the both countries as they are denied from access to legal work and thus pushed into illegal and underpaid jobs. Especially in Damascus, Syria, thousands of desperate women without other means of survival are forced to work in prostitution. The refugees' physical and mental health has rapidly deteriorated due to lack of sufficient medical care.[134]

Neither Jordan nor Syria have signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which creates a constant fear of deportation regardless of the official promises not to deport Iraqis by force. In both countries refugees largely rely on their savings, and in many cases their resources are running out. The prices of foodstuffs and basic increased by thirty per cent property prices by forty per cent, and rentals by 150 per cent since the arrival of first

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[131] Land, T. (2009). Europe accepts 10,000 more Iraqi refugees. The Middle East, February 2009. Available online at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2742/is_397/ai_n31396362/

[132] Ibid.

[133] Harper, A. (2008) Iraq: Growing needs amid continuing displacement. Forced Migration Review 29, September 2008. Available online at: www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR29/51–53.pdf

[134] Land, T (2009).

Iraqis fleeing the violence.[135] Due to price increases in suburban areas of Amman and Damascus, Iraqis encounter great difficulties to rent or buy apartments. As Sajida and her husband Abu Faris recounted,

S: So we headed to Damascus…

A (interrupting: …and rented an apartment. The middlemen were already there – at the bus station waiting for Iraqi newcomers. "Are you looking for an apartment? What kind?" they said.

S: (interrupting) "…how many bedrooms?" They were there with their pick-ups. We settled the price, but when we reached the flat the price had doubled. For them, the most important thing was to catch a potential client. They knew that the new arrivals were exhausted and had left all their possessions behind. (S: Sajida, born in Baghdad 1969) (A: Abu Faris born in Bagdad, 1957)

As many families are increasingly destitute the choices narrow and the risks increase. Nur, whom we interviewed in Baghdad in the mid July in 2010, told us having been forced to leave Iraq after being kidnapped and raped by a group of men of the Mahdi Army. She was particularly worried of the shame the rape brought to her family. Nur was requested to turn to a family residing in Damascus by a woman she acquainted with in Bagdad. As she recounted,

This woman gave me her relatives' address in Bab Touma in Damascus. I managed to get across the border and finally I felt that I was safe. I settled in this family and I really liked these people, especially the mother. I constantly demanded that I could work for my housing and food because the family was destitute and with two daughters and two sons. I found it strange that they left the house in the evenings and did not return until one in the night. They did not respond to my enquiries when I asked where they worked. Then one night while I was asleep one of the sons tried to sleep with me. I fought back and the mother woke up. She said that I will have to work with the other daughters. I didn't know what kind of work she was talking about. Then she said she knows everything about my history, and that should I refuse to work she would inform my family about what had happened to me and where to find me. So, I had to go to the club, and strip and go with men. (Nur, born in Baghdad, 1986)

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[135] Lischer, S. (2008, 39) Security and Displacement in Iraq Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis International Security, 33 (2).

Nur later managed to register her case in the UNHCR office in Damascus, a lucky strike compared to thousands queuing in front of the offices that were overwhelmed by the work load. Nur thought that as a kidnapped victim of sexual violence, fleeing from both militias and her own family, she had a chance to be selected for third country settlement program. Iraqis in Syria are largely aware of the fact that UNHCR prioritizes particularly vulnerable groups including female headed households, persecuted religious and political groups but as well those who had worked for the foreign employers, popularly associated with the occupiers. After registration Nur was entitled to receive a monthly cash payment and food allotment but after waiting period of several months she heard that she was not among the fortunate one per cent granted the right for third country settlement.[136] The officials in the UNHCR office demanded a large bribe. Exhausted and desperate she left the family but soon acquainted with an Iraqi woman from Sayida Zaynab in Damascus, who offered to house her among her relatives if she chose to return back to Baghdad. Nur is at the time of writing this report living in Baghdad but in great fear that her family will find her.

4.6.4. International refugees

Despite U.S. government's pivotal role in the dramatic developments in post invasion Iraq the Bush administration proved to be extremely unwelcoming for the displaced Iraqis.[137]

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[136] cf. Harper, A. (2008) Iraq: Growing needs amid continuing displacement. Forced Migration Review 29, September 2008. Available online at: www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR29/51–53.pdf

[137] For example families who had paid ransom for the return of their kidnapped relatives had been rejected under a provision of the Patriot Act, U.S. counter terrorism law. Paying ransom to kidnappers was interpreted by U.S. immigration officials as material support for terrorist groups. See: Iraq's Invisible Refugees. The Nation, march 9, 2009. Available online at: http://www.thenation.com/article/iraqs-invisible-refugees.
The U.K. rejected numerous Iraqi asylum claimants, who are under threat for having worked for British forces in Iraq. See: Frelick, B. (2007). Iraqis denied right to asylum. Iraq Special Issue. Forced Migration Review. June 2007. Available online at: http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/contents.pdf

Between 2003 and 2006 merely 770 Iraqis were admitted by the U.S. . The number was to reach 7,000 the year 2007, yet in reality the numbers were dramatically lower – 1,608 individuals. Resettlement gained momentum gradually but did not meet its stated goal 12,000 resettlements for the year 2008, largely due to insufficient funding and bureaucratic hindrances.[138]

The U.S. government's attitude was clearly shared by EU Member States. The UNHCR called for a resettlement of 80,000 refugees in Europe between 2009 and 2012 but the EU ministers of interior and justice decided grant asylum for 10,000 members of most vulnerable groups.[139]

During the first years of the crisis Sweden was the only exception among the EU countries. In 2006 it admitted more Iraqis than all other EU countries combined and during the first four years of the crisis some 18,000 Iraqis gained residence permits in Sweden. With the formation of right wing government (October 2006) winds begun to change and by 2008 Sweden introduced considerably more restrictive asylum and resettlement policies.

Some 100,000 asylum applications from Iraqis were received in the EU between 2003 and 2007. Sweden alone hosts a permanent community of some 100,000 Iraqis, yet it should be noted that the number includes Iraqis who settled in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s. Other large communities of newcomers are in   Germany (13,414), Greece (11,627) UK, (11,145), and the Netherlands (10,906).[140]

The treatment of newly arrived Iraqis reflects the huge differences of refugee policies in different EU countries. The decision rates for first instance asylum applications of the Iraqis in 2007 varied from zero per cent (Slovenia, Greece) to over eighty per cent (Hungary,

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[138] Lischer, S. (2008, 76). Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis. International Security, 33 (2).

[139] Land, T. (2009). Europe accepts 10,000 more Iraqi refugees. The Middle East, February 2009. Available online at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2742/is_397/ai_n31396362/

[140] Five years on Europe is still ignoring its responsibilities towards Iraqi refugees. ECRE January 3, 2008. Available online at: www.ecre.org/files/ECRE_Survey_Iraq_2008.pdf

Cyprus and Sweden). Only eight EU Member States, including Finland were engaged in resettlement efforts the year 2008.[141]

The determination within the member states to prevent Iraqi and other refugees' entry to their territory has materialized in stricter border controls. The new European Border Management Agency (FRONTEX) is designed at preventing irregular entries and thus it doesn't distinguish asylum seekers from other border crossers.[142]

There are no signs that indicate improvement of the situation of displaced Iraqis. Two developments are likely to follow. First, the EU states receiving largest number of Iraqis will display more force and determination to send refugees back into Iraq. As it will be indicated in the following chapter this development is well on the way in the UK, Sweden, Denmark and Germany.

Second, with current political impasse in Iraq massive returns are likely to have negative impact on the security situation within Iraq. As tens of thousands of Iraqis run out of savings in Jordan and Syria many are left with practically no other option than to return to Iraq. The returnees will be subjected political maneuvering, as both U.S. and Iraqi administration have vested interest to claim that return of refugees is a clear indication of improved security situation and the success of their political strategy. Information concerning returns from neighboring countries is likely to reverberate across EU countries and make their social and political atmosphere increasingly hostile to Iraqi asylum seekers.

Prime Minister al-Maliki's first government (2006–2010) displayed little sympathy for the displaced Sunni Iraqis and the sectarian bias remains strong not only within the governing institutions of the country but to a large degree in the society in general. Prime Minister al-Maliki is surrounded by a network of Shi'ite advisors and thus many refugees feel that the government it much more sympathetic towards displaced Shi'ites than Sunnis. Furthermore, several non-governmental organizations working in

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[141] Ibid.

[142] See: http://www.frontex.europa.eu/

Sunni areas have informed of problems when attempting to register formally with the Government of Iraq.[143]

4.7. RETURN: A FEASIBLE SOLUTION?

The reluctance of displaced Iraqis to return to their homes is a concrete indication of vast challenges which the country is still facing and which need to be addressed before sustainable returns can take place.

While return is the most desirable solution for both the international community and the majority of the displaced Iraqis, the countries of asylum should not overlook the fact that premature or forced return of large numbers of Iraqis is bound to make Iraq's recovery process extremely difficult.   Rampant corruption and the inability of the leading political parties to form a legitimate government have paralyzed the rebuilding of basic infrastructure, and led to increasing popular resentment towards political leaders. The U.S. is determined to end its military occupation by the end of 2011, and many fear that the Iraqi Army is unprepared to take the lead. A security vacuum may easily ignite another circle of violence. Forced return of displaced persons to reordered urban spaces can further destabilize the situation and launch new refugee flows.

The returnees have often no other option than to search for housing among their 'own' social groupings, which reinforces the social and political divisions in the country. In Iraq as elsewhere in protracted crisis zones, forced population movements are followed by property disputes, as returnees find their houses occupied by newcomers. In many areas of Iraq, thousands of squatters are themselves displaced people who cannot return to their homes. The

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[143] The Return and Resettlement of Displaced Iraqis.
Testimony Submitted by Kenneth H. Bacon President, Refugees international and Kristele Younes,
Senior Advocate, Refugees International To the hearing before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations One hundred eleventh Congress – First Session Tuesday, March 31, 2009 Presiding: Senator Robert P. Casey. Available online at: http://www.refintl.org/policy/testimony/return-and-resettlement-displaced-iraqis

situation is equally complicated for the displaced property owners who are willing to return, but fear for their own safety. There are no signs that property disputes can be solved effectively in the near future.[144] It should be underlined that in many urban areas of Iraq security is highly relative to individual's subjective position within the social space. Umm Sa´ad, who arrived in Finland with her husband and three children in August 2009 related:

If Finland engages in forced returns we have no place to go to. The boy (her son) injured his arm in a terrorist strike, and my husband was threatened several times. Our home region is very unsettled and hundreds of people have died in car bomb strikes. Where could we go to? (Umm Sa´ad, born in Sinjal, 1972)

Certain areas – that may at first sight appear secure and settled – can be extremely dangerous for people of the "undesirable" social groupings. Murder and intimidation still occur daily in many areas of the country as indicated by our interviewee Abu Faris:

If we were forced to go back my wife would certainly have had to leave her profession as sports coach, and we would have had to move to another area. I used to work at the Sabah newspaper and likewise, it would have been impossible for me to return to work. We were all threatened by militias (at work). More than a dozen of people working in our paper lost their lives. (Abu Faris, born in Bagdad, 1957)

Sustainable returns are extremely hard to accomplish without coordinated programs of aid for returnees, as many have sold their property in order to travel to countries of asylum. Only in Baghdad much needs to be done before the basic conditions for return are fulfilled, as the whole city resembles a series of interconnected fortresses, with each grouping guarding its frontiers.

4.7.1. Forced returns from The EU – countries

In Western Europe, the 2000s was marked by unprecedented divisions among political parties regarding their attitudes towards the new refugees and migrants. Migration, Islam, and criticism of policies

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[144] Ibid.

that were popularly labeled as 'multiculturalist' became heated topics of both official and popular debates, and were successfully exploited by populist politicians. Negative and stereotypic images of Muslim migrants in Europe were rallied by the yellow press, numerous internet communities, and hate groups. Concerns focusing on gender relations, integration, social cohesion, demographic change, and security influenced immigration debates from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean Europe.

This created growing public pressure to reverse a range of policies, such as instruction and advisory services for foreigners in schools, health care, and other public institutions - as part of the official integration strategy.[145] A more interventionist integration policy, including compulsory language education, initiation programs for refugees, and growing control on family reunification, became common practices in different EU Member States. The adoption of these practices was accompanied with revaluation of citizenship and a shift towards increasingly restrictive immigration policy.[146]

These developments were viewed with growing concern among the Iraqi human right organizations operating in Western Europe. Sa´ad, an Iraqi human rights activist in Sweden, told us the following in an interview conducted in September 2010:

After the developments that occurred in Iraq, specifically in April 2003, the countries of asylum begun to reconsider how to deal with asylum seekers from Iraq. They saw that the main justification (i.e. Saddams's brutal regime) for Iraqis' need of international protection was no longer there. (Sa´ad, Iraqi human rights activist in Sweden)

Many Iraqi newcomers in the EU had been granted temporary refugee status, based on the perception that Iraq was too dangerous for the refugees to return to. However, the winds were changing rapidly.

In Denmark, the National Police increased its monitoring of the movement of Iraqi refugees and claimed that since 2003 several hundreds of Iraqis had travelled back and forth between Denmark

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[145] Akkerman, T. & Hagelund, A. (2007, 197). Women and children first! Anti-immigration parties and gender in Norway and the Netherlands. Patterns of Prejudice, 41(2)

[146] Ibid. p. 207.

and Iraq. This was seen to prove that they no longer needed international protection.[147]

Our interviews indicated that the fall of Saddam's regime opened a possibility for several refugees from earlier generations of Iraqi diasporans to visit their home region and family members after years of exile. Although this was still a dangerous possibility, many took the chance and visited Iraq, highly conscious of the risks that such a visit might involve. During their visits, the refugees could provide help and mental support for friends and family members suffering from the long years of embargo and post-invasion violence.

Already in 2006-2007, as Iraq was undergoing the most severe period of violence, some European countries began deporting failed asylum seekers and those without residence permits. Germany, Britain, Sweden, and Denmark were particularly determined to deport hundreds of Iraqis whose asylum requests had been rejected by authorities. From the point of view of the German government, Saddam Hussein's fall had ended relevant claims to asylum. The revocation procedures were started already in 2006 by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), aiming to deprive 4,400 Iraqis of their refugee status. The practice was unique in Europe as it included hundreds of people that were already well- integrated into the German society. Some 14,000 Iraqis were listed as subject to deportation from the country, yet lack of air connections and bilateral agreement with the Government of Iraq prevented Germany from engaging in large scale deportations.[148]

In Britain, Home Office figures from 2009 showed that 632 people were deported against their will to the Kurdish region in the north of Iraq between 2005 and 2008. It was estimated that the number would exceed 900 by 2009. According to the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees, Britain has organized monthly charter

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[147] Ministry to investigate refugee trips to Iraq. The Copenhagen Post. June 11, 2009. Available online at: http://www.cphpost.dk/news/politics/90-politics/45919-ministry-to-investigate-refugee-trips-to-iraq.html

[148] Iraqi Refugee Disaster: Europe continues to shirk its responsibility. Pro Asyl. July 21, 2007. Available online at: http://www.proasyl.de/en/news/newsenglish/news/iraqi_refugee_disaster_dt_vorlage/back/764/

flights each carrying approximately fifty Iraqis since the beginning of 2009.[149]

In Sweden, 1,400 Iraqi refugees received letters from the country's Immigration Service where they were informed that measures would be taken to deport them forcibly unless they consented to return voluntarily. As a response, the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees organized demonstrations in several European capitals including Stockholm (April 19, 2007) and Helsinki (April 20, 2007).[150]

Numerous EU countries displayed growing willingness to solve the Iraqi refugee crisis by engaging in forced returns of failed asylum seekers. In Denmark, Iraqis represented nearly fifty per cent of the total number of rejected asylum seekers under expulsion order in March 2009. [151]

By 2009, Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, had ratified bilateral agreements with the Iraqi government to repatriate Iraqi citizens.

According to the Finnish Immigration Service estimate from May 2010, the time was ripe for the rejection and removal of asylum seekers from autonomous Kurdish regions in the north, southern Iraq, and the capital city of Baghdad. The reason, it was claimed, was that they no longer needed international protection due to improved security. In May 2009, approximately 1,500 Iraqis were waiting for their asylum decision and the new guidelines were to be applied only to new decisions. The Immigration Service estimated that the first returns were expected to be take place in the spring months of 2010.[152]

The inter-governmental repatriation agreements received a plenty of critique from humanitarian organizations, including the

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[149] Iraqi army confronted U.K. deportation officials on Baghdad plane. Guardian, October 16, 2009. Available online at: www.guardian.co.uk/uk/.../unhcr-uk-baghdad-deportations

[150] Campaign Against the Deportation of Iraqi Kurdish Asylum Seekers. Echoes Newsletter 5, 2007. Available online at: http://www.wpiraq.net/english/2007/Echoes5.pdf

[151] Iraq reach deal to repatriate Iraqi refugees. Agence France-Presse (AFP), May 13, 2009. Available online at: http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jeHTbmQ9pta2nmIds9_upk3-3hYA

[152] Suomi palauttaa irakilaisia turvapaikanhakijoita. [Finland will return Iraqi asylum claimants] Yle Uutiset, May 5, 2009. Available online at: http://yle.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/2009/05/suomi_palauttaa_irakilaisia_turvapaikanhakijoita_728142.html

UNHCR and Refugees International.[153] However, for several EU Member States the agreements were interpreted as guarantees that the returns could be implemented without violating the human rights of the displaced Iraqis. As for the Iraqi Government, it received the returnees with open arms since they conveyed an important message to international audiences: the Government of Iraq was on the right path to stabilize the country.

We conducted a series of interviews with human rights activists and failed asylum seekers facing forced repatriation in Sweden in September-October 2010. All the interviewees we spoke to told us that sentiments across the political field had become more favorable to forced returns in Sweden. Sa´ad, an Iraqi activist residing in Sweden informed us:

This is the first time (in Sweden) in which the positions of the extreme right, the center and even left are getting closer to each other. Maybe some political actors took advantage of feelings of anger of Swedes who reject foreigners. This in fact happened when the extreme right won seats (in September 2010) in the Swedish Parliament. (Sa´ad, Iraqi human rights activist in Sweden)

The decision-making of the Swedish authorities proved to be highly contradictory, which only increased fears among the failed asylum seekers. As Sa'ad recounted,

We have studied cases where someone arriving in Sweden week later than another one was granted temporary residence and the first one received a negative decision. I mean, only in mid-2007 a considerable number of Iraqis fleeing the violence arrived and they are facing deportation now. Some others arriving a week later obtained the residence and in fact both cases had similar backgrounds. These things we cannot correct – because we don't make the decisions. (Sa´ad, Iraqi human rights activist in Sweden)

Typically, the Iraqis arriving in Sweden in 2006 and 2007 had received negative decisions from the Swedish Immigration office, the Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court. Consequently, they were

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[153] UNHCR dismayed at forced repatriation of Iraqis; reports increase in flight of Iraqi Christians. UNHCR News stories, December 17, 2010. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/4d0b45476.html

contacted by the Swedish Police and were asked to report themselves at the local police office every fourteen days.

Salma, whom we interviewed by telephone two times in September 2010 had arrived in Sweden together with her sister in September 2007. Her entire family had been denounced from Iraqi citizenship and was deported from Iraq to Iran in 1982, among several tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens who were seen by their government as loyalists to Iran. The family's property was confiscated and two brothers were executed by the Iraqi regime. In 1985, the UNHCR office in Iran accepted the family to a third country settlement program but the waiting period was prolonged due to an overloaded waiting list for resettlement. Finally, Salma's father turned to migrant smugglers and traveled to Sweden. He gained permanent resident status in Sweden in mid-1990s. Salma, together with her sister and brother decided to return to Iraq in 2004, but they did not manage to reclaim Iraqi citizenship. They settled in an area in Baghdad which witnessed severe sectarian violence. Salma's sister injured her right leg in a car bomb explosion and the sisters decided to return to Sweden with the financial help provided by the father and other relatives living in Sweden. The sisters received negative decisions from both Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. Two years after their father's death, in the beginning of September 2010, they were detained and repatriated to Baghdad on September 22. Two days prior to her deportation Salma told us:

Problem that will confront us in Baghdad, is that the Iraqi authorities will not recognize us as Iraqis... as we were living in Iran since 1982. I mean I really do not know what to do ... All of these things were spelled out to the Swedish authorities, but they always say this is not our problem. I think the responsible for all this is the Iraqi government which signed an agreement with Swedish authorities encouraging them (Swedes) to take such harsh decisions . (Salma, born in Baghdad, 1967)

On October 10, 2010, we interviewed two Iraqi men, each of whom had received negative decisions in similar manner to Salma. They were hiding from the authorities in Gothenburg in fear of forced return. They told us:

I think that everybody now is talking about an agreement signed between the Iraqi government and the Swedish government and the problem is there. Silence leaves us the impression that everyone is satisfied with this resolution! (Ahmad, born in Baghdad, 1972)

We lost everything in our country, we paid very large sums of money to get here and psychologically we cannot return to Iraq because it reminds us of the crimes that took place in front of us .Today we are in such a bad state that we do not desire to talk to even our relatives in Baghdad. Please deliver our voice, through all means available. (Majid, born in Baghdad, 1974)

What further complicates forced returns is that neither the Iraqi Government nor international aid organizations sufficiently monitor the situation faced by the forcefully returned failed asylum seekers. The unfortunate situation of the returnees was fully acknowledged by Sa´ad, a representative of the Iraqi Human Rights Organization in Sweden.

Interviewer: Have you followed the situation of Iraqis who have been returned in Iraq?

Sa´ad: This is not one of our tasks, but as I know our main branch in Baghdad takes care of it.

Interviewer: As I understand their following is also a very bad.
Sa´ad: Regrettably, this is what we have heard too. (Sa´ad, Iraqi human rights activist in Sweden).

In August 2009 Astrid Thors, the Finnish Minister of Migration and European Affairs announced that Finland was aiming to reach a repatriation agreement with the Government of Iraq, which would largely follow the content of the Swedish – Iraqi agreement. [154] The political deadlock in Iraq following the parliamentary elections in March 2010 largely explains why such an agreement had not been reached by the time of writing this research.

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[154] Thors: Puheet löysästä maahanmuuttopolitiikasta ovat puppua. [Thors: Talk on loose migration policy is unfounded]. Kaleva August 19, 2009. Available online at: http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/thors-puheet-loysasta-maahanmuutto-politiikasta-puppua/809817

5   AFGHANISTAN: THREE DECADES OF VIOLENCE

In August 2010 as we begun searching for the first Afghan interviewees for this study, we contacted an Afghan journalist who had lived in Finland for nineteen years. We expressed our interest in his opinions concerning developments in the country with a history of over three decades of nearly continuous violence. He arranged a meeting for us in a multicultural center in a migrant suburb in South Western Finland. At the time Afghanistan was facing a critical period. The U.S. Government had recently announced its determination to end the decade-long military operation carried out by NATO and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by July 2011. All the key arguments that had been used to justify the western military engagement in Afghanistan were under severe international criticism.

In the post 9/11 shock, Afghanistan was interpreted by the George W. Bush administration as the prime incubator of international terrorism. The toppling of the brutal Taliban regime in the Afghan capital Kabul, in 2001, was followed by heavy air strikes against al-Qaeda bases. These actions, however, were far from marking the end of violence in the country. By the time of our meeting the western coalition's military engagement in Afghanistan was approaching the length of the Vietnam War, and there were very few positive signs in the horizon. The Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership were largely intact. In fact, their political influence and strategic strength had increased, not only in Afghanistan, but also in the neighboring Pakistan. This fact greatly undermined Afghan Government's and President Hamid Karzai's legitimacy. The number of casualties – both international and Afghan – had reached alarming levels and many regions that had remained relatively stable since 2001 witnessed increasing violence.

Our Afghan host explained:

The problem of Afghanistan is that the neighboring countries – specifically Pakistan and Iran– have a great role in supporting the Taliban and al-Qaeda with money and weapons, for the purpose of making Afghanistan unstable. Before 2001 Pakistan was heavily present in Afghanistan but after 2001 its presence became more secretive. It took the form of mafias and this certainly was dangerous to Afghans. Neither Pakistan nor Iran has interest in promoting stability and security in Afghanistan. Particularly Pakistan can take the advantage of the considerable support provided by the West to fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda. To stabilize the situation in the Afghanistan we need to deprive Pakistan from support. In addition, the erroneous policy of the government of Hamid Karzai and his poorly trained army must be mentioned. They have not helped stabilizing the situation. (Muntadar, born in Kabul, 1954)

In the course of this research, it became clear that Afghanistan's fate resulted not only from the troubled relation with its neighbors. In 2010, ethnically and religiously heterogeneous Afghanistan was perhaps more than ever in its modern history lacking the founding principles and a shared narrative which would be needed to build a state. A leading scholar on Afghan society, Alejandro Monsutti, argued that the present crisis was further exacerbated by a new type of political and economic force – namely that of transnational networks. These networks were comprised, first of all, of illicit trading of heroin, as over ninety per cent of world heroin is produced in Afghanistan. Second, the Taliban and al-Qaeda, together with less influential insurgent groups, received weapons, money, fighters, and logistical support from an increasingly globalized body of advocates. Third, there were the migrant networks that circulated the wealth of millions of Afghans living abroad, and were largely responsible of financing the international movement of Afghans. Fourth and perhaps most important, Afghanistan had become a target of thousands of international relief aid and development programs. Monsutti was one of the rare voices pointing out that in weak states the control over resources and circulation of commodities is likely to fall into the hands of person centered networks. In such a situation, redistribution – whether the question

is about drugs, fighters, weapons, or international aid – increases political influence of particular elites.[155] Monsutti seemed to capture the core of the problem, as by 2010 Afghanistan had transformed into a conflict zone hosting a plethora of groupings fighting for their share. These included the Western-supported political elite revolving around President Karzai, transnationally financed and recruited Muslim radicals, localized armed groupings largely financed by narco-trafficking, new development elites seeking to take advantage of western aid programs, and finally, thousands of western administrative and military personnel whose main task was to restore order in the country.

5.1. COUNTRY OUT OF A HISTORICAL CO-INCIDENT

Although the historical roots of Afghanistan as a political entity reach back to mid-18th century, its present day borders were drawn out of co-incidence. In 1813–1907, during the period known as the Great Game, the entire Central Asia witnessed strategic rivalry and conflict between British Empire and Tsarist Russia. In 1878, the British army occupied most of the area of present day Afghanistan in order to form a buffer zone, and to block the Russians from gaining access to the ports of the Indian Ocean. The arrangement hardly paid respect to the territorial boundaries of Afghan tribal groupings. The largest ethnic groups – the Pashtun and the Tajik –resided in areas which extend far beyond modern Afghanistan's international borders. The case was no different with minor ethnic groups, such as Uzbeks, Aimaks, Balochs, and Turkmen. The only exception in this respect was the Hazaras of north central Afghanistan, for their traditional areas were bounded by the new international border.

Creating sustainable political and economic stability in Afghanistan proved to be difficult, as both the British and Russian empires allocated resources to their favoured social groupings to

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[155] Monsutti, A. (2009). Local Power and Transnational Resources: An Anthropological Perspective on Rural Rehabilitation in Afghanistan. UCLA Asia Institute Central Asia Initiative Working Paper No. 2

promote their interests. The central state was established 1919 under the Pashtun leadership of King Amanullah Khan. The central government was challenged by occasional tribal upheavals, and in 1929 the capital Kabul fell to rebel forces. The unrest came to an end as Amanullah's cousin prince Nadir Shah defeated the rebels and was declared king. After Nadir Shah's assassination in 1933, Afghanistan was governed until 1973 by his son Mohammed Zahir Shah.[156]

Under Mohammad Zahir Shah's reign, the modernization process reached even the most remote areas of the country, leading to the establishment of administrative, educational, and security structures. This period of modern history of Afghanistan (until the 1970s) was characterized by relative political stability,

However, throughout the latter half of the 19th century, the legitimacy of the central government was increasingly challenged by two very different political forces. On the one hand, there were those rallying for the establishment of a distant and benevolent state, and on the other hand, those who wanted a centralized and ideological state. The former were typically traditional men of religious learning, while the second group was comprised of Communists and modern Islamists. Ethnicity was by no means a central organizing principle of political opposition, yet radical political visions tended to be expressed particularly among the Pashtun groupings.[157]

The declaration of independence of Pakistan as a sovereign Muslim state in 1948 brought to the fore the resentment of the Pashtun tribes. Nearly two thirds of the Pashtun population became Pakistani citizens, while less than a third remained Afghans.[158] As a response to the mounting social tensions, the Afghan government made a considerable shift in its foreign policy and resorted to Soviet

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[156] Roy, O. (2002) Afghanistan: Internal Politics and Socio-Economic Dynamics and Groupings. Writenet Paper No. 14. Available online at: www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/3e9ae5535.pdf
Afghanistan: Country profile. Library of Congress – Federal Research Division Country Profile, August 2008. Available online at: lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf

[157] See: Roy, O. (2002).

[158] Rashid, A. (2010). A Deal With the Taliban. New York Review of Books, February 25, 2010. Available online at: www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/.../a-deal-with-the-taliban/

Union for support. The constitution of 1964 sought a compromise with the secular and religious opposition forces by liberalizing the political culture of the monarchy. However, the democratization process initiated by the new constitution was largely halted because of worsening economic conditions, which soon led to increasing popular unrest.[159]

Ultimately, Afghanistan's experiment with democratic governance came to an end in 1973, as Daoud Khan, a member the royal family, orchestrated a coup that led to his nomination for the first president of Afghanistan. Daoud Khan's attempts to reform the economic sector proved unsuccessful, and his rule was short lived.

In April 1978 Afghanistan witnessed a violent uprising, this time organized by a Marxist movement called 'Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan'. The party leader Nur Mohammad Taraki was declared President. The party immediately began to persecute its rivals, which ranged from traditional elites and educated professionals to the major figures of religious institutions. In harmony with the spirit of Marxist revolutions elsewhere, the party pushed for a rapid reform in the position of women in the fields of labor and political life. In December 1978, it signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. The revolution and the radical implementation of socialism stirred up reactions in the U.S. administration that were typical of the Cold War era. The White House, already alarmed by the Islamic revolution of Iran and the takeover of U.S. embassy in Tehran, sought to counter the loss of its influence in the world's richest oil producing region. Americans believed that Afghanistan offered a possibility for the Soviet Union to fill the political void in the entire Central Asia. In effect, the Carter administration begun to offer both financial and material support for the *Mujahidin,* that is, loosely aligned groups of Islamist militants opposing the pro-Soviet government of Afghanistan.[160]

The U.S. strategy prompted a firm response from the Soviets. The power struggle in the Afghan Communist circles intensified and the government began to execute its opponents. President Taraki was killed

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[159] Afghanistan: Country profile. Library of Congress – Federal Research Division Country Profile: August 2008. Available online at: lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf

[160] Kepel, G. (2002, 136–141). Jihad the Trail of Political Islam. Belknap, London.

in September 1979 by his rivals within the party. Fearing for chaos in Afghanistan, 100,000 Soviet troops invaded the country in December 1979. Suddenly, the majority of the Afghans were thrust into resistance. Bombings had destructed the crops and herds of rural populations and pushed all capable men to participate in the *Mujahidin* factions.[161]

With the Reagan administration and the CIA's support, the *Mujahidin* engaged in full scale guerilla war against the Soviet troops. It has been estimated that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia provided up to forty billion U.S. $ worth of arms and cash for the Islamists.[162] The first and the increasingly international training camps of the *Mujahidin* were established along the Pakistani North West Frontier in an area hosting more than three million Afghan refugees. A massive amount of light weaponry, delivered by the CIA, flowed to the insurgents through the Pakistani port of Karachi. A large proportion of this weaponry was sold to local markets before reaching its official recipients. In Afghanistan, the trucks conveying arms were loaded with heroin for the return trip, thus providing an additional source of steady income for the insurgents.[163]

In this context, the call for holy war against the occupier came from transnational religious networks, and subsequently Afghanistan became a focal point of militant Islamists worldwide. In the mid-1980s, a heterogeneous group of young Muslim militants with different ideological and doctrinal backgrounds, united merely by common goal, had arrived by thousands from all over the Muslim world. The material and financial support provided by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia reached its destination predominantly via the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of the General Zia ul-Haq's Islamist regime in Pakistan.[164] Other main source of support for the main factions

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[161] Ibid., p. 138

[162] See: How the CIA created Osama bin Laden. The Green Left, September 19, 2001. Available online at: http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/24198
Putting Empires at Rest. Al-Ahram Democracy, 2010. Available online at: http://democracy.ahram.org.eg/eng/Index.asp?CurFN=selt2.htm&DID=9995

[163] Kepel, G. (2002, 137–144).

[164] See: Kepel, G. (2002, 137–139) Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005) The Salafi Movement: Violence and the Fragmentation of Community. in Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop. eds Cooke, M. Lawrence, B.
University of North Carolina. Chapel Hill and London

Mujahidin was the Pakistani Islamist group, the pro-government Jamaat-e-Islami organization.[165]

The ten years of continuous violence that followed the Soviet invasion took a devastating toll on the Afghan people. Between 600,000 and two million Afghans, most of them civilians, lost their lives. Up to six million sought refuge in the neighboring states, particularly in Pakistan and Iran, and some tens of thousands made their way to the U.S. and Western Europe.[166]

By the end of the 1980s it became clear that, despite their overwhelming war craft, the Soviets were unable to repress the *Mujahidin* military resistance. The first concessions were made in 1988, as the Soviet Union agreed to create a neutral Afghan state. The high number of Soviet casualties (up to 50,000) and mounting international pressure led to the Soviets' complete withdrawal in 1989 – an event seen as an ideological cold war victory in the U.S. [167]

5.2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE TALIBAN

In Afghanistan as elsewhere in the Muslim world, Islamic political movements emerged in reaction to modernity. From Morocco to Indonesia, the Muslim world witnessed highly uniform and often concurrent developments, as the administrative elites aspired to modernize the society. At the same time the overwhelming majority of the people were excluded from the process of discussing the practical consequences of modernity on their lives.[168]

In Afghanistan, the first movements that promoted Islam as an all-encompassing social, moral, and political program appeared in the political arena in the 1920s. By and large, modern Islamism

[165] Kepel, G. (2002, 137–142).

[166] See: Death Tolls for the Major Wars and Atrocities of the Twentieth Century. Available online at: http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat2.htm#Afghanistan , Refugee Admissions Program for Near East and South Asia. U.S. Department of State. Available online at: http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/117283.htm

[167] Dick, C. (2002). Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet Afghan War. Conflict Studies Research Center. Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Available online at: http://edocs.nps.edu/AR/org/CSRC/csrc_jan_02.pdf

[168] cf. Roy, O. (1998). The Failure of Islamism. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.

sought to maximize its political potential at a time that witnessed increasing polarization between proponents of modern liberalist ideologies and traditional systems of values. The pioneers of Afghan Islamism represented the educated new generation that had largely distanced its roots from traditional world views. Like elsewhere, they can thus be viewed as results of modernization. Similarly to Islamist movements in the Arab world, the Afghan Islamists were largely aware of the modern social ills and utilized them for the purpose of ideological recruitment.[169]

By the 1960s Afghan universities had become contested sites for ideological rivalries between Soviet model socialists and Islamists. The latter were largely inspired by their ideological forefathers of the Muslim Brothers movement in Egypt. Shortly after the 1973 coup, the confrontation between Islamists and the government led by Muhammad Daoud escalated. While the regime displayed considerable tolerance towards socialists, many Islamist leaders were driven to exile, mainly in Pakistan. The Soviet invasion of 1979 was soon turned into direct call for resistance among the exiled Islamists. In the aftermath of the Soviet occupation and the collapse of the Soviet-backed government in April 1992, the various Afghan and international *Mujahidin* factions failed to reach unity. The ideological, political, and security vacuum provided a fertile ground for radical responses – most notably by a conservative and austere movement known as the Taliban. The Taliban (the Students) was comprised of students from Pakistan's boarding schools for Islamic religious learning, the *madrassas*. After managing to gain generous support from Pakistan, the Taliban began a military campaign, attempting to seize control of the *Mujahidin* factions and to unite Afghanistan. A large proportion of Taliban's constituents had a refugee background. Uprooted from their social backgrounds and without a state of their own, the Afghan children and young men of various ethnic origins were particularly receptive to the idea of universal Islamic identity and religious rigor, communicated by the curriculum of madrassas.[170]

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[169] Marsden, P. (2002). Whither The Taliban? Asian Affairs, vol. XXXIX, no. III.

[170] Kepel, G. (2002, 142–143). Jihad the Trail of Political Islam. Belknap, London.

5.3. GLOBALIZED RADICALISM

A network of modern *madrassas*, were established in Afghanistan in late 19th century the by the conservative Deobandi movement, founded in 1867 in Deoband India. The Deobandi movement represents a typical neo-fundamentalist movement disseminating the idea of "purified" Islam in the tradition of the founder generation of the religion (*as-salaf*).[171] Like neo-fundamentalist Islamists elsewhere, Deobandis sharply reject all practices and ideologies that are understood as "foreign" to Islam. All matters – whether practical or spiritual – that cannot be traced back to the examples of the pious forefathers are perceived as forbidden innovations. Despite these basic tenets that are commonly shared, neo-fundamentalists have highly differing political agendas, ranging from ultra-political to non-political. The same applies to their preferred strategies for forwarding the message, which range from peaceful charity work to warfare and terrorist strikes against civilians. The overarching objective for all neo-fundamentalists is the unification of the global community of Muslims, the *Umma,* by a collective return to the ideal set of beliefs and practices of the first community of Muslims.[172]

To fully understand the process by which the Taliban movement aligned with the idea of globalized radicalism, it is essential to shift attention to the role played by Saudi Arabia in the development of Islamism in Afghanistan.

The status of the Saudi Monarchy as the spiritual center of the Muslim world had been directly challenged on November 20, 1979, as the Grand Mosque in Mecca was seized by a group of radical insurgents. Following the crackdown of the attack and execution of the surviving aggressors, the Saudi state imposed stricter enforcement of Islamic code within the Kingdom. In order to communicate its position as a defender of Islam worldwide, the Monarchy expressed its complete moral support for the Afghan *Mujahidin.* From the point of view of the Saudi Arabian government it was beneficial

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[171] Gugler, T. (2009) Jihad Da´wa and Hijra: Islamic Missionary Movements in Europe. Zentrum Modern Orient. Available online at: http://www.zmo.de/mitarbeiter/gugler/jihad,%20dawa%20and%20hijra.pdf

[172] Ibid.

that numerous young men, whom it perceived as potential security threats, left the country to join the Afghan battlefronts.

The flow of material and financial aid from the Persian Gulf States to Pakistan and Afghanistan naturally required intermediaries. In the 1980s the key persons facilitating the reception of aid and manpower from the Arab world were Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian academic and a former professor of Islamic Shari'a at the University of Jordan, and a wealthy Saudi, Osama bin Laden, who had joined the *Mujahidin* already in 1979. Both men settled in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, commissioned by Saudi Arabia and the Kuwaiti Red Crescent to co-ordinate assistance in support of the Afghan resistance. In 1984 Azzam founded a bureau for receiving and supervising jihadists on the way to the battle fronts in Afghanistan. Among the thousands of arrivals was also Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, who settled in Afghanistan in 1986 and after a decade became known as the second man of the international al-Qaeda organization.[173]

Although the role of Arabs in the actual military operations remained marginal throughout the Soviet occupation, their importance as modifiers of the radical Islamist ideology cannot be refuted. The war in Afghanistan put thousands of new arrivals in contact with radicals much more extreme than their sponsors from the oil rich Gulf States, and with much higher and utopian goals than the Taliban, who conceived *jihad* merely as war against foreign occupier. In the latter part of 1980s, Peshawar turned into a meeting point for radicals from Morocco to Indonesia, persecuted by the regimes of their home countries.

In the mid-1980s, Azzam began to outline in his many writings what would become the founding principles of al-Qaeda organization, namely that *jihad* it is a religious obligation for all Muslims and it should be waged worldwide to defend the global community of Muslims. The radical neo-fundamentalist thought was largely welcomed, not only by the eight to twenty five thousand Arab fighters, but also among the Pashtun population in Afghanistan. As the Soviet withdrawal seemed inevitable, the relations between the mentor Azzam and the disciple bin Laden deteriorated due

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[173] Kepel, G. (2002, 149). Jihad the Trail of Political Islam. Belknap, London.

to disagreements over the tactics of *jihad*. Azzam was finally assassinated in late 1989, which left bin Laden as one of the few surviving senior *Mujahidin*.[174] Simultaneously with increasing internal fractures among the *Mujahidin,* the U.S. aid flowing to jihadists was sharply reduced, yet the future of Afghanistan did not seem any brighter. The Soviet army had begun to withdraw its forces already in early 1989, with the result that the U.S. lost a great deal of its strategic and rebuilding interest towards Afghanistan. Numerous Arab states expressed their concern over general instability in the country. Gradually, the possibility that Kabul could be taken over by extremist Islamists received more international concern.

In 1994, the Taliban movement caught international attention due to its rapid military advancement. At the time, Afghanistan was fractured into literally hundreds of warzones with several dozens of warring factions. Three names in particular were present in the international media: warlords Ahmad Shah Massoud, an ethnic Tajik, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun, and Abdul Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek.

It was particularly the Taliban that proved to be capable of bringing security to areas where the civilian population had suffered tremendously under the Soviet occupation and the subsequent inter-factional battles of different *Mujahidin* groups. Pakistan had a great interest in supporting the formation of a conservative Islamist regime in Afghanistan. Since the 1980s, Pakistan had supported jihadists for its own purposes in and outside of Afghanistan. The rationale was to further its goals regarding Kashmir, a region that Pakistan perceived as illegitimately occupied by India.[175]

For Pakistan the Taliban seemed to be the most likely force to gain control of the entire Afghanistan. With abolishment of bribery on roadblocks, the Taliban managed to win both the moral and financial support of professional groups such as traders and

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[174] Gunaratna, R. (2002, 26–31). Inside al-Qaeda. Columbia University Press, New York.

Kepel, G. (2002, 147) .

[175] Descent into Chaos. Ahmad Rashid – Conversations With History. Institute of International Studies, university of California, Berkeley 2008. Available online at: http://conversations.berkeley.edu/content/ahmed-rashid-0

truckers. Particularly receptive for Taliban were the areas dominated by the Pashtun population of Southern Afghanistan. The movement found support especially in the city of Kandahar, a native home of the Taliban's spiritual leader and self-proclaimed Commander of the Faithful of the movement, Mullah Muhammad Omar. In 1996 the Taliban finally gained control of most of the country, and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Only three countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates recognized the entity. By the request of Omar, bin Laden arrived in Kandahar in 1997.[176] He had left Afghanistan in 1989 for his native Saudi- Arabia. However, his radical criticism of the monarchy's decision to allow the U.S. soldiers use Saudi Arabia as a base in the 1990-1991 Second Gulf War forced bin Laden to flee to Pakistan and later to Sudan, where he relocated al-Qaeda's infrastructure.[177]

As a result of more than fifteen years of war, Afghanistan's economy remained in ruins, and most government services had ceased to function. For several of our interviewees the Taliban meant a new form of oppression. Muntadar who experienced the Taliban occupation of Kabul told us:

They (the Taliban) brought along mercenaries from all nationalities, Arabs, Pakistanis, and Chechnyans especially. They were ready to make us pay for slightest failure to conduct according to their rules. This does not mean we were better off before the Taliban. Our city had been governed by the Mujahidin and they were harsh as well. The situation did not change for better in city when the Taliban forces entered – no, the situation became even worse. The organization spread its influence by exploiting the emotions of religious people. They raised the Koran and talked about Islam. Bin Laden's economic wealth allowed distribution of goods to people to win them over to the organization. They had doctors and plenty of medications. They were able to take over large (rural) regions and after gaining control of these areas they moved to cities where they faced increasing resistance. (Muntadar, born in Kabul, 1954)

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[176] Gunaratna, R. (2002, 56). Inside al-Qaeda. Columbia University Press, New York.

[177] Ibid. pp. 38–39.

5.4. THE FORMATION OF THE TALIBAN – AL-QAEDA ALLIANCE

The increasingly globalized notion of *jihad* – rallied by Azzam and later by bin Laden and his trustee Ayman al-Zawahiri – was to a great deal shared by the international *Mujahidin*, and gradually absorbed by the Taliban. Already in the mid-1990s there were mounting concerns among western intelligence that the international Muslim fighters had become more organized. Al-Qaeda was known to run several training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, largely backed by the Taliban. The first considerable international targets of al-Qaeda were the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The two terrorist strikes carried out in Nairobi and Dar as Salam in 1998 turned the attention of the Clinton administration towards Afghanistan. The U.S. initiated air strikes on al-Qaeda's training camps in August 1998 pushed the Taliban-al-Qaeda alliance towards an increasingly pan-Islamic strategy. Conscious of Taliban's close relations with al-Qaeda, U.S. leaders began to demand the handing over of Osama bin Laden to U.S. forces. As a result, the Taliban increased its support for al-Qaeda and increasing numbers of Muslim volunteers from all continents arrived in order to wage *jihad* – this time against the U.S. military.[178]

In the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist strikes in New York and Washington DC, President George W. Bush announced a Crusade against the international al-Qaeda. Like Bosnia, Chechnya and Palestine before, the conflict in Afghanistan was increasingly Islamized; it became a global drama of particular symbolic value for Muslims worldwide. The military invasion was translated as aggression against the world of Islam. At the same time, the alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda begun to construct its public image in terms of defending Muslims from the aggression of the Christian West.[179]

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[178] Marsden, P. (2002). Whither The Taliban? Asian Affairs, vol. XXXIX, no. III.

[179] Rashid A. (2009). Descent into Chaos: The World's Most Unstable Region and the Threat to Global Security.

5.5. THE (TEMPORARY) DOWNFALL

The U.S.-led international alliance – consisting of U.S. army, British special forces, CIA Special Activities Division, and the so called Northern Alliance, that is, Afghan combatants and military commanders opposing the Taliban regime – made extremely rapid progress in fighting the Taliban. The capital Kabul fell in November 2001, pushing the Taliban fighters, including al-Qaeda leadership, to the mountainous borderland between the Afghanistan and Pakistan.[180]

The reordering of Afghanistan's governing institutions was likewise made with breathtaking speed. After the Taliban government had ceased to exist, a new government under President Hamid Karzai was formed in December 2001. In order to support the government in its efforts to rebuild the country, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established by the UN Security Council. The number of ISAF troops increased from less than 10,000 to roughly 43,000 by 2008, and further to 64,500 by July 2009. The largest contributors of military personnel of the forty-two participant countries in ISAF were U.S., Britain, Germany, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, and France. The first presidential elections were carried out on December 7, 2004. Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected President of Afghanistan and a new constitution, written by an assembly of regional leaders, was ratified in early 2004.[181]

As in Iraq, the overwhelming military victory of the international coalition marked the beginning of a new kind of violence in Afghanistan. The western military operation seemed to prove the historical truth that winning battles does not necessarily equate with winning wars – especially when it comes to fighting terrorists. Afghanistan's fate resembled that of Chechnya under Russian invasion, and Lebanon and Occupied Palestinian territories under

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[180] Richardson, L. (2006, 221–223). What the Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat. Random House, New York.

[181] Afghanistan: Country profile. Library of Congress – Federal Research Division Country Profile: August 2008. Available online at: lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf

the Israeli aggression.[182] It seemed that resolving the conflict with the Taliban required addressing the increasing radicalization, and the abolishment of the Taliban's support structures in Pakistan. Since 2005 the war on the Taliban has clearly been a battle on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border. Between 2001 and 2008, the U.S. offered ten billion dollars of aid to Pakistan, however, rather than initiating development programs in the Taliban's recruitment basis in North-Western parts of the country, the Government of Pakistan directed nearly 90% of the aid to its military.[183]

Popular resentment against the occupation was largely caused by two factors. First, the international military force relied heavily on airpower and unmanned aerial drone bombings, which produced large numbers of civilian casualties.[184] Second, the radical Islamists penetrated the state institutions, including army, police force, schools, hospitals, and ministries, and launched attacks against the state from within its institutional structures.

Several Shi'ites whom we interviewed were of the opinion that the threat of the Taliban had forced the government to make several concessions towards conservative Sunni views. This resulted in further deterioration in the position of religious minorities. Mohannad from the city of Herat in Western Afghanistan told us:

There is grave injustice towards the Shi'ite minority. The laws always make us second class people. Things have remained as they are from the time of the rule of the Taliban, and the Taliban still control this very moment the region. It is true that the government is engaged in war with the Taliban, but in most cases it turns a blind eye to what is happening to the Shi'ite community. Some nine years ago our city Herat was attacked by the Taliban and parties that were hostile to the Shi'ite community. It happened in the Shi'ite holy month of Muharram. (Mohammad, born in Heart, 1965)

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[182] Richardson, L. (2006, 221). What the Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat. Random House. New York.

[183] Rashid A. (2009) Descent into Chaos: The World's Most Unstable Region and the Threat to Global Security. Penguin, New York.

[184] The Predator War. The New Yorker, October 26, 2009. Available online at: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/26/091026fa_fact_mayer

Nearly all of our interviewees had faced situations of direct aggression – killings of family members, gunfire, kidnappings, and forced recruitment by the Taliban and factions aligned to it. Consider the experiences of Ahmad and Muhsin, young men whom we interviewed for this study:

My elder brother was taken from our house (village near city of Ghazni) by force because he refused to join the Taliban's ranks. It was like the kidnapping. We did not receive any information from him in three months. Then we were informed that Taliban killed him. For this reason we had to leave Afghanistan. (Ahmad, born in Ghazni, 1992).

In my hometown Lashkar Gah the atmosphere was very tense, nobody trusted strangers, because people did not know whether they were from the Taliban or not. Many were indeed members, but secretively. On occasions you just found out that people were actually active in factions. There are plenty of jihadists in my area and we have witnessed several suicide attacks against the Americans. We had plenty of problems in the family. The Taliban took my father and then (in 2002) they begun to threaten my family. (Muhsin, born in Lashkar Gah, 1994).

Nearly two thirds of our interviewees had been forced to move – often several times – to Pakistan or Iran because of the security situation. Everyone's immediate family members were dispersed to several countries. Some family members remained in Afghanistan, and others had sought refuge in Europe, Pakistan, and Iran. Muhsin related us:

The Taliban killed my father and I had to take care of our large family. My brothers had to leave to Pakistan for fear of the Taliban. For these circumstances I wasn't able to study full-time or even participate in normal life. (Muhsin, born in Lashkar Gah, 1994).

5.6. Recent developments

Towards the end of the first decade of the new millennium the future prospects for Afghanistan seemed increasingly unsettling. Despite the steady increase in foreign military strength – in October 2010 there were 152,000 NATO troops of which little less than 100,000 of U.S. personnel – many areas that had remained relatively calm since

2001 had become much more unstable. This applied particularly to the north of the country. The Taliban had become a significant regional player with safe havens, sources of supply, medical treatment, and centers of leadership on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border. The insurgency remained particularly strong in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, areas long regarded as 'hotbeds' of the Taliban. Kandahar's strategic importance for the future of the whole country is aptly illustrated by the recent deployment of 30,000 additional US troops, mostly to Kandahar province in order to clear the area from the Taliban.[185]

In many areas the situation begun to resemble an open warfare between the Taliban, regional warlords, and the international forces, with a rising number of insurgent attacks and casualties on all sides. In 2009 there were in average 1,200 monthly attacks by the Taliban or other insurgent groups, indicating a sixty-five per cent increase from the year before. The number of Afghan civilian deaths, reaching 2412 in 2009, indicated a fourteen per cent increase from 2008.[186] Similarly, the number of NATO and ISAF casualties reached an all-time high in 2010, with 599 deaths in the period between January and October 2010.[187] The unstable security situation increases popular resentment towards the Karzai government, which enjoys only limited legitimacy, particularly among the twelve million Afghan Pashtuns. In thirty-three of Afghanistan's thirty-four governorates, the Taliban runs its own shadow governors, and engages in the killing and intimidation of the government functionaries, aid agencies, women's groups, and the UN. By 2009 practically seventy per cent of the country was under Taliban's control.[188] The Taliban has managed to place night guards even in remote rural areas, making it very

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[185] Suicide bomber kills Afghan deputy governor. AFP, September 27, 2010. Available online at: http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iixpkgULAPbH 0d7y2Uep2NkkObA?docId=CNG.65d5de24b23a7e6931907c79435f70bd.81

[186] Ahmad Rashid (2010). A Deal with the Taliban. The New York Review of Books, February 25, 2010. Available online at: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/ archives/2010/feb/25/a-deal-with-the-taliban/

[187] cf. www.paktribune.com/news/index.shtml?232826

[188] Dalrymple, W. (2009). Pakistan in Peril. New York Review of Books. February 12, 2009. Available online at: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2009/ feb/12/pakistan-in-peril/

difficult for the coalition to reach their enemy. A senior officer from ISAF claimed in July 2010 that, in twenty-five to fifty per cent of raids, the coalition soldiers found that the insurgents had escaped as they reached the targeted area.[189]

It is increasingly unrealistic to assume that the Western military coalition will reach significant breakthroughs regarding the security situation in a matter of months, or even the few upcoming years. In the current political standoff, it seems likely that the U.S. administration will eventually open negotiations with the Taliban, but it wants to weaken the enemy before taking serious initiatives in this direction. On the other hand, the Taliban leadership perceives that in order to distance itself from al-Qaeda and engage in serious peace negotiations, foreign troops must leave Afghanistan. At the same time, the neighboring Pakistan's military fears that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan will thrust Afghanistan in civil war. In December 2009 the U.S. President Barack Obama announced that a drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan would begin in July 2011. In response to heavy criticism both nationally and internationally, the Obama administration rephrased its objectives in November 2010 by stating that July 2011 will mark a phased reduction of troops with the aim of ending the combat mission by 2014.[190] The NATO partners view the situation in a variety of ways. In principle there exists a fragile agreement on the timeline of 2014, yet Canada has named a date (in 2008) for complete withdrawal in 2011. The Dutch completed their withdrawal in August 2010, and Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron mentioned 2015 as the "lights out date". [191]

Many Taliban commanders are expected to change sides depending on the reconciliation strategy of President Karzai. In order to reach a sustainable solution, Karzai's policy needs to satisfy the

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[189] Coll, S. (2010). Stop Blaming the Afghans. The New republic. July 26, 2010. Available online at: http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/magazine/76448/afghanistan-unity-karzai-najibullah-taliban-cohesion

[190] A New U.S. 'Transition' Strategy For Afghanistan. NPR news, November 15, 2010. Available online at: http://www.npr.org/2010/11/15/131330600/for-afghanistan-a-new-u-s-transition-strategy

[191] Afghanistan: Exit vs. Engagement. International Crisis Group, Update Briefing 115, November 28, 2010. Available online at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B115%20Afghanistan%20--%20Exit%20vs%20Engagement.ashx

non-Pashtun populations of the north, such as the Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, who together make up more than half of the country's population. The current situation can be interpreted in various ways – undoubtedly thousands of the Taliban leaders think that it is better to wait for the Americans' withdrawal before engaging in full military efforts to seize Kabul.[192]

5.6.1. Security institutions

Within the Government of Afghanistan and its western supporters, security is to a large degree understood in terms of armed dominance, the number of soldiers, and the geographic coverage of areas under control. Success, on the other hand, is predominantly measured in the numbers of killed or captured insurgents – not in terms of increased sustainable stability.[193]

The Afghan security institutions face tremendous challenges as they are expected to take the lead at the handover of power by U.S. forces. Both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) are not only politicized institutions but also fragmented, "ethnicized"[194], and completely dependent of the financial goodwill of the U.S. government. The ANP is entirely financed and supervised by the U.S. and its NATO allies. In a 2010 report by the International Crisis Group, it was criticized of being "corrupt, brutal, and predatory", and resorting to "bribery, illegal tax collection, drug dealing, and even murder."[195] The police officers

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[192] Coll, S. (2010). Stop Blaming the Afghans. The New republic. July 26, 2010. Available online at: http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/magazine/76448/afghanistan-unity-karzai-najibullah-taliban-cohesion

[193] Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch, Reports, July 2006. Available only at: http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/afghanistan0706/index.htm

[194] Afghan Army Struggles With Ethnic Divisions. CBS News July 27, 2010. Available online at: http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/07/27/world/main6717786.shtml

[195] Afghanistan: Exit vs. Engagement. International Crisis Group, Update Briefing 115, November 28, 2010. Available online at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B115%20Afghanistan%20--%20Exit%20vs%20Engagement.ashx

have for several years been targeted by the Taliban. The year 2009 alone witnessed 646 killings of police officers.[196]

There is a striking inconsistency between the information provided by leading global newspapers and the International Crisis Group, and the Finnish Migration Service, regarding the present state of Afghan security institutions. The latter informs in its 2009 report 'Fact Finding Mission to Afghanistan' that "the training of civilians as police was started by the Germans in 2006 and it has progressed well", and that there are "no nationality-based problems among the police". Furthermore, the report claims that there are "no reports of anyone having been persecuted because of their service with the police".[197] Such selective analysis of the situation in Afghanistan clearly indicates the deep politicization of the Afghanistan crisis in the West, undoubtedly resulting in violations of the human rights of Afghan asylum seekers.

Several journalists have pointed out that many police officers who serve the government in the daytime join the insurgency when the night falls.[198] A recent survey, which was carried out by the International Council on Security and Development with the help of Afghan interviewers, indicated that fifty-six per cent of the Afghans, interviewed in the Taliban strongholds of Helmand and Kandahar provinces, believed that the Afghan police are helping the Taliban.[199]

Despite the salary increases attrition rates within the ANP are alarming, reaching twenty-one per cent in 2008 and twenty-five

[196] Taliban attacks on Afghan police intensify. New York Times, August 22, 2010. Available online at: http://articles.sfgate.com/2010-08-22/news/22230032_1_afghan-police-police-officers-afghan-national-army-soldiers

[197] Fact Finding Mission to Afghanistan by the Finnish Immigration Service. February 11, 2010. Available online at: www.migri.fi/download.asp?...Afghanistan+Fact-Finding+Mission+2009

[198] Afghan Police Unit Defects to Taliban, Leaving Burning Station Behind. The New York Times, November 1, 2010. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/asia/02afghan.html

[199] Afghanistan Transition: Missing Variables. International Council on Security and Development October 2010. Available online at: http://www.icosgroup.net/modules/reports/afghanistan_transition_missing_variables

per cent in 2010.[200] The police forces are poorly trained and largely illiterate. Many police officers also have serious drug problems.[201] One of our interviewees claimed that in his home region the drug problem was endemic.

The use of drugs is something as natural as drinking water. Everyone uses drugs even peasants. In the cities anyone can buy drugs – it's a trade among trade for Afghans. Neither the Police nor the Americans interfere in the consumption of drugs. (Muhsin, born in Lashkar Gah, 1994).

While the Afghan National Army (ANA) has been portrayed by the U.S. as a success story, financially it is entirely dependent on U.S. aid, and far from prepared to face the mounting security threats within the country. The U.S. is investing heavily on enlarging the ANA's manpower, while ethnic frictions, political factionalism, and eighteen percent drop-out rate and corruption make the building of institutional loyalty extremely difficult.[202] In the south of the country, near all Afghan soldiers are 'foreigners', do not master the local languages, and are dependent on interpreters hired for the Americans.[203] Especially in the Pashtun stronghold Helmand province, it has proved difficult to recruit Pashtuns for both the army

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[200] Reforming Afghanistan's. Police. Crisis Group Asia Report No138, August 30, 2007. Available online at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south asia/afghanistan/b85_policing_in_afghanistan___still_searching_for_a_strategy.ashx
Reluctant Pashtuns hamper Afghan recruitment drive. Reuters, March 3, 2010. Available online at: http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62247W20100303

[201] Drug abuse hampers Afghan police. BBC News, February 18, 2009. Available online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7895612.stm

[202] Afghanistan: Exit vs. Engagement. International Crisis Group.
Asia Briefing N°115 28 Nov 2010 . Available online at:
http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/B115-afghanistan-exit-vs-engagement.aspx Reluctant Pashtuns hamper Afghan recruitment drive. Reuters, March 3, 2010. Available online at: http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62247W20100303

[203] Afghan Army Struggles with Ethnic Divisions. The Associated Press, 28 July 2010. Available online at: http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/2010/07/afghan-army-struggles-with-ethnic-divisions.html

and police. The Pashtun represent only two to three per cent of the total number of ANA recruits.[204]

The U.S. aims to recruit 141,000 men for ANA before the transition date in July 2011. The number is more than the current size of the Afghan army. The Taliban will undoubtedly take the opportunity to enlist insurgents into the ranks of the ANA.[205] The situation is further complicated by the fact that the American public opinion is increasingly critical towards military engagement in Afghanistan, as the building of Afghanistan's security institutions has cost billions of dollars for American taxpayers. .

5.6.2. Rebuilding

The institutional structures responsible for Afghanistan's reconstruction and security currently lay in the hands of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). They are joint civilian-military organizations and typically consist of sixty to two- hundred and fifty persons. A large majority of PRT functionaries are without development and diplomatic backgrounds.[206] This arrangement has not managed to win the trust of local populations and it has received plenty of critique, from the point of view of both military and development specialists. For example, the PRTs have been criticized for lacking a clear overall strategy of auto-evaluation.[207]

Aid workers, particular those linked to Western organizations, are often targeted by the Taliban and other insurgent groups, and kidnappings and intimidations are frequently reported.

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[204] Reluctant Pashtuns hamper Afghan recruitment drive. Reuters, March 3, 2010. Available online at: http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62247W20100303

[205] Ex-UN Official Says Taliban Infiltrating Afghan Forces, BBC News, 4 October 2010. Available online at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11464175

[206] Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment. USAID, June 2006. Available online at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADG252.pdf

[207] See: Open Eyes to Humanitarian Needs. Refugees International, July 20, 2009. Available Online at: http://www.refintl.org/policy/field-report/afghanistan-open-eyes-humanitarian-needs
Afghanistan Invest in People. Refugees International, July 10, 2008. Available online at: http://www.refugeesinternational.org/policy/in-depth-report/afghanistan-invest-people

Some insurgent groups are also known to target particularly aid organizations that are working to improve the lives of women.[208]

The perceptions of local populations should be taken into account when considering the larger picture of security in Afghanistan: the most pivotal question in this regard should be whether the basic rights of citizens can be enjoyed or not.

With a growing number of western casualties and increasing costs of war, popular attitudes have become considerably more critical towards the rationality of the Western engagement in Afghanistan. In addition to the U.S., this applies particularly to the UK, Germany, Canada, and Italy. In the 2010 fiscal year, which began October 1, 2009, the U.S. budgeted more than $900 billion for military and diplomatic operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas where the country is engaged in the war on terrorism. For the first time since occupation of Iraq, the budget for Afghanistan – $65 billion – was larger than for Iraq – $61 billion.[209]

While the criticism increases, the Obama administration claims that, without the presence foreign troops, the Taliban will take control of several cities, thus increasing the risk that al-Qaeda would re-establish its organizational structures in Afghanistan.[210]

5.6.3. Security climate

In addition to the Taliban, the main sources of the present insecurity in Afghanistan are the armed factions that maintain close contacts with the Taliban, and the thousands of regional warlords and regional militia commanders who are largely financed by narco-trafficking. Indeed, narco-trafficking is equivalent to more than

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[208] Afghan Police Unit Defects to Taliban, Leaving Burning Station Behind. New York Times, November 1, 2010. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/asia/02afghan.html?_r=1

[209] Cost of Afghan war explodes with new strategy. USA Today, February 12, 2009. Available online at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2009-12-02-war-costs_N.htm

[210] We must crush the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in a 'long war' in Afghanistan. Los Angeles Times, July 1, 2010. Available online at: http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jul/01/opinion/la-oe-bolton-afghanistan-20100701

thirty per cent of Afghanistan's licit economy.[211] Both the Taliban and regional insurgent groupings largely share a common objective to weaken the grip of the central government on the society at large. A key part of the strategy is to prevent reconstruction projects, and usurp the billions of dollars that flow into the country in the form of development aid. As in the case of Iraq, ordinary civilians are often poorly informed who is behind the acts of violence. The situation is particularly disconcerting in the rural areas in the south and south east of the country, which are largely unreachable for the U.S. and ISAF forces. [212]

In our research we interviewed fifteen Afghans who were denied asylum in Finland. All interviewees told us that the Finnish Migration Service had stated – in its asylum decisions – that their home areas are secure and safe for return. Most of them had received their first negative decisions in 2008 and 2009. At the time of interview, they were waiting for the decision of the appeals court, and one case was being processed at the Supreme Court. The fifteen interviewees with negative decisions come from Herat, Lashkar Gah, Ghazni, and Kabul. While the city of Herat, in the Western Afghanistan has for several years remained relatively secure, recent developments point to the fragility of security in all regions of the country. Violence sharply increased in 2010, as the Taliban-led insurgency extended its attacks from its traditional strongholds in the south and east to the previously stable north and west. [213]

In many parts of the province of Helmand—where the province capital Lashkar Gah is situated—the situation resembles open warfare between the U.S. troops and the Taliban. The Taliban is heavily present in the Lashkar Gah and carries out frequent terrorist

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[211] Afghanistan: Drug Industry and Counter-Narcotics Policy. Structure, functioning, Dynamics, and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy. Wolrd Bank, UN Office on Drugs and Crime. November 28, 2006. Available online at: http://siteresources. worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1164651372704/ UNDC.pdf

[212] Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch, July 2006. Available online at: www.hrw.org/reports/2006/afghanistan0706/

[213] Roadside bomb kills four police in west Afghanistan. Reuters, October 26, 2010. Available online at: http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE69P1AI20101026

strikes, targeting both civilians and government buildings.[214] In December 2010, the U.S. completed a ten-month offensive in the neighboring city of Marjah, which is a major poppy production area of the province, and located thirty kilometers south west of Lashkar Gah. At the time of writing this report, the battle over control of the city of Sangin, seventy kilometers north of Lashkar Gah, was still under way.

As for the situation in Ghazni, the province has for a long time been extremely unstable due to its strategic location on the major road to Kandahar, the heart of Taliban country. Qayim Sajadi, a member of Afghan Parliament from the province, recently stated that "The security situation is very bad in Ghazni; in many parts of the province, the government has no control." In fact most of Ghazni was deemed too dangerous to conduct voting in September 2010 parliamentary elections.[215]

Many of our interviewees had lived more than five years in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. A number of people we heard for this study stated that over the recent years the situation of thousands of Afghans had become unbearable particularly in Iran. President Ahmadinejad's administration in Iran has expelled over 720,000 Afghans in the past two years, according to the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Returnees Affairs (MoRRA).[216]

[214] UPDATE Taliban deputy commander for Lashkar Gah district captured. All Voices, Local to Global News. August 14, 2010. Available online at: http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/6518124-update-taliban-deputy-commander-for-lashkar-gah-district-captured
Stranded between Lashkar Gah and Kandahar – July 8, 2009. Al Jazeera English. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBhjgc2HaJA

[215] Taliban fighters briefly overrun Afghan district, abduct 16 police officers. Roadside bomb kills four police in west Afghanistan Angeles Times. November 2, 2010. Available online at: http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/02/world/la-fg-afghan-taliban-20101102

[216] Afghanistan: Plight of child deportees from Iran. IRIN. Humanitarian News and analysis. March 22, 2009. Available online at: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83577

5.6.4. Women and gender

The NATO/ISAF invasion of Afghanistan was not only a military operation against international terrorism. Like before the occupation of Iraq, the question of women's rights was placed high on the political agenda. Despite plenty of good will and openly expressed commitment to promoting women's cause, Afghanistan still faces tremendous challenges in women's health, education, employment, as well as legal and political rights. Again, as in the case of Iraq, the position of women deteriorated after a rapid period of modernization. As Taliban seized control in 1996, nearly half of the country's civil servants and some seventy per cent of schoolteachers were women.[217] According to 2006 figures twenty two per cent of government employees were women. [218]

At present, more than 15,000 women die annually from pregnancy-related causes and nearly ninety-eight per cent are without formal documents proving their citizenship and identities. More than half of the girls under eighteen years of age are married. Particularly among the poorest segment, the family's survival depends on bride prices, forcing thousands to marry against their will.[219]

The post-invasion Afghanistan also resembles Iraq in another important respect: like the Government of Baghdad, the Afghan Government relies to a great extent on conservative Islamists to maintain political control, which in turn reflects negatively on the public role of women. To take one example, in March 2009 the parliament passed a conservative personal status law pertaining to Afghanistan's Shi'ite population, which in many respects restricts women's basic civil liberties. Wives are obliged not to leave their homes without husband's consent unless having "reasonable legal reasons". Furthermore, the law restricts child custody rights only to fathers and grandfathers, and frees the husband from obligation

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[217] Afghanistan: Afghan women fact sheet . Afghan Communicator. Available online at: http://www.womenforafghanwomen.org/images/IntWomensDay04/AfghanWomenFact%20Sheet.pdf

[218] See http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/prog/MOWA/civilservice.html

[219] Ibid.

to provide maintenance for a wife unless she performs her marital, including sexual, duties.[220]

One impact of the decades of militarization on the Afghan society is that the number of abductions of girls, as well as forced marriages to men of armed factions, has increased. This fact was reflected in numerous interviews that we carried out in 2010. Hamid related us:

Ghazni is currently very dangerous and a large proportion of young adolescents has left the area. Yes, young people in this region left the city with the entry of the Taliban forces. People, especially women feared for their lives as a result of laws imposed by the Taliban. (Hamid, born in Ghazni, 1979)

Kidnappings also involve young men who are sometimes recruited by force. Ahmad, young man from Ghazni fled Afghanistan shortly after the kidnapping of his elder brother. He recounted:

My elder brother was taken from the house by force, because he refused to join. It was like the kidnapping. We did not receive any information from him, in three months, and then we were told that Taliban killed him. For this reason we had to leave Afghanistan. (Ahmad, born in Ghazni, 1992).

Stories about abduction and fear of violence among families who refuse to marry off their daughters to combatants emerged in numerous interview situations. Armand expressed his reasons to flee from his native city Herat:

My uncle was detained by the Taliban – because of being Shi'ite. He has five daughters and was forced to sign a pledge to marry off his daughters to the Taliban. To save his home and his daughters he had to act quickly. He decided to marry his daughter Ahu to me, so that there was no excuse to the Taliban forces to take his daughter. I married her in order to save her. (Armand, born in Herat, 1986).

Several interviewees with children told us that the threats and attacks on the education system formed a central part of the violence against civilian population perpetrated by the Taliban and other armed factions. As the Taliban perceives schools and particularly

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[220] Hamid Karzai signs law 'legalising rape in marriage'. The Telegraph March 31, 2009. Available online at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/5080797/Hamid-Karzai-signs-law-legalising-rape-in-marriage.html

the education of girls and women as corrupt foreign import, these incidents were often targeted at female students. This type of violence, which had been carried out by the *Mujahidin* factions already in early 1990s, was increasingly used to send symbolic messages to central authorities and their foreign allies. Furthermore, between 2005 and 2006 seventeen teachers and officials of education were assassinated and more than two hundred attacks on teachers, students, or educational institutions were carried out. The situation improved immediately after the U.S. invasion in 2001, as students begun to return to schools. By 2005 5.2 million children, both girls and boys, attended public schools, yet the situation differs tremendously between different parts of country.[221]

5.6.5. *Trafficking in persons*

The decades of conflict, impoverishment, lack of security, and violence make Afghan people particularly vulnerable to international human trafficking. In addition, the geographical environment is favorable to trafficking, as the terrain around Afghanistan's international borders is difficult to control. In many areas, local networks engaged in narcotics trade offer a ready-made "infrastructure" and strategic know-how contributing to emergence of transnational networks. Efforts to counter trafficking must always occur on several levels from legislation to policy making and information dissemination. Currently, few organizations in Afghanistan work directly with trafficking. The field is still empirically under-researched. It is often difficult to recognize victims of trafficking as people often fall prey to false promises made by people they already know. Another difficulty arises from the fact that, while Afghans generally recognize that forced trafficking occurs, they tend to confuse it with smuggling and kidnapping.[222]

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[221] Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch, July 11, 2006. Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,HRW,,AFG,45c23e2d2,0.html

[222] Trafficking in Persons in Afghanistan. International Organization for Migration, Field Survey Report 2008. Available online at: www.iom.int/.../afghanistan/iom_report_trafficking_afghanistan.pdf

5.7. Return

There was a massive return of Afghan refugees after the collapse of the Taliban regime in Kabul. It involved nearly five million Afghans, particularly from Iran and Pakistan and was considered by the UNCHR as the largest of its return programs in nearly thirty years. A large number of the returnees were well aware that political conditions for return were unstable, and many were obliged to return against their own interests.[223] At the time, numerous western states displayed willingness to engage in massive repatriation programs, including both voluntary and forced returns. The British Home Secretary said that the Afghans in the U.K. should return in order to participate in the country's reconstruction. In the Netherlands, the authorities announced their willingness to return nearly 30,000 Afghans to their home country.[224] However, with the deteriorating security situation, the return has slowed down considerably. In 2009, it reached the lowest number – 251,500 – since 1990.[225]

The Afghan returnees face very similar problems as discussed in the case of Iraq. Wide-spread corruption, instability, and violence, together with insufficient housing conditions and land and tenure disputes, make life for thousands extremely difficult. At the same time, the future for the ones still remaining in the neighboring countries is an open question. In Pakistan and Iran, refugees have been accused of many social ills and increasing social tensions.

Countries hosting large numbers of Afghan refugees need to acknowledge that forced returns will make people vulnerable to various risks in Afghanistan, and many will embark on a new journey as soon as possible. As apparent in their migratory strategies since the Soviet occupation, of the Afghans have learned to survive through movement, and that movement is based on rational cost-

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[223] Repatriation to Afghanistan: durable solution or responsibility shifting? Forced Migration Review. April 9, 2009. Available online at: www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR33/20–22.pdf

[224] Afghan refugees in Europe. Forced Migration Review 13, June 2002. Available online at: http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR13/fmr13full.pdf

[225] UN: Wars Slow Refugee Returns to Record Low, The Associated Press, 15 June 2010. Available online at: http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=10914821

benefit considerations. This means that forceful repatriations are very unlikely to offer durable solutions unless the security, economic, and housing conditions in the home regions are guaranteed.

The international community must acknowledge the need for the returnees to be given a role in the rebuilding and development programs in Afghanistan. This applies particularly to Eastern and Central Afghanistan, where most of the returns take place. It has been repeatedly noted that the development programs in the country have focused on large-scale infrastructural projects at the cost of humanitarian objectives. Due to repeated and extended displacement, integration back to home communities will be a difficult process. This is the case particularly among rural population, many of whom have adapted to urban life styles in exile. [226]

Nearly eighty-eight per cent of Afghanistan's land resources are un-arable while agricultural land is largely state-owned. The increase of population among the refugee groups has created further challenges for returns as land disputes and landlessness remain grave problems in rural areas. In 2005 president Karzai issued a controversial decree on land allocation for the returning Afghans. A large proportion of the plots offered for the landless were of little value and many had to move to bigger cities for survival. [227]

The failures to address the humanitarian needs of returnees result mainly from the structural limitations of the UN and other development bodies engaged in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Large areas of Afghanistan are practically inaccessible for humanitarian work[228], and even government employees, unless armed, cannot travel in nearly one third of country's administrative districts. In all but one of Afghanistan's provinces there are districts

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[226] Repatriation to Afghanistan: durable solution or responsibility shifting? Forced Migration Review. April 9, 2009. Available online at: www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR33/20-22.pdf

[227] Afghanistan: Invest in People. Refugees International, July 10 2008. Available online at: http://www.refugeesinternational.org/policy/in-depth-report/afghanistan-invest-people

[228] See: Indicators of Worsening Security in Afghanistan. The New York Times, September 12, 2010. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/09/12/world/asia/20100912-afghan-indicators.html?ref=asia

too dangerous for outside visitors.[229] Simultaneously, humanitarian projects have suffered from budget cuts. As for international coalition forces, they tend to direct their aid merely to their own area without paying due respect to the humanitarian needs elsewhere.

In April 2010, the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) issued a press release on up-dated guidelines for Afghanistan. This was a response to the increasingly complicated security situation in the country, and the difficulties encountered in the evaluation of that situation in those area which were inaccessible. The new guidelines adopt the need for subsidiary protection as the key criterion in the assessment of the international protection of Afghani asylum seekers. However, Migri's view of the overall security situation in Afghanistan stands in contrast with the UN Assessment of Travel Safety within Afghanistan. [230] According to Migri, only four provinces, namely those of Kandahar, Helmand, Khost and Kunar, are understood as zones of armed conflict, while the UN considers nearly eighty percent of Aghanistan's land area too dangerous for travel.

According to Migri's interpretation, the worsening security situation in the central and northern provinces of Afghnaistan does not fulfill the definition of armed conflict. Migri does not regard the areas under the Taliban control as unsafe for the civilians, even though it notes that "foreigners have no access to such areas". The basis of Migri's security assessment remains unclear, as the UNHCR and other international aid organizations are no longer able to provide security updates.

The Migri report mentions that in order to update its security assessments a number contacts were established during its fact finding mission. These contacts included Finnish nationals, as well as international and local organizations working in Afghanistan. The report mentions that, due to security reasons, no road trips were made to areas where the majority of asylum seekers in Finland come

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[229] Security in Afghanistan Is Deteriorating, Aid Groups Say. The New York Times, September 11, 2010. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/12/world/asia/12afghan.html?_r=1

[230] See: Indicators of Worsening Security in Afghanistan. The New York Times, September 12, 2010. Available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/09/12/world/asia/20100912-afghan-indicators.html?ref=asia

from. The information on which the report is based was gained through interviews made in Kabul's Serena Hotel, in embassies, and in offices of different international organizations. The only Afghans interviewed were a wealthy returnee couple who owned of a construction company with a history of cooperation with western assistance projects. According to the report, the mission had established an effective network of local level contacts for further data collection. According to Migri, Finland was (in April 2010) preparing a tripartite agreement with the Government of Afghanistan for the repatriation of Afghans.

6   CONCLUDING REMARKS

Given the enthusiasm with which EU Member States presently promote large-scale returns to Iraq and Afghanistan, it is surprising that so little research has been conducted on the reintegration of returnees. In the Nordic context, we were able to trace only one study that touched upon the theme, carried out by Maria Bak Riiskjør in 2008. Her study focused on the perceptions of thirty-five Iraqis who had participated in a voluntary repatriation program but chose not to remain in Iraq and returned back to Denmark.[231]

The main reasons for failed reintegration dissected by Riiskjør could be classified with reference to three underlying factors. First, the Iraqi interviewees in Denmark perceived that the Iraqi society had undergone significant and often entirely unanticipated changes, such as ethnic and sectarian cleansings with corresponding reorganization of the political and social arena. Increasing religious conservatism that came as the   by-product of political power struggle had affected gender roles and shared norms of propriety in ways that made many feel like strangers – even unwanted ones– in their own country. As seen in the course of this study, reintegration process was particularly difficult – if not entirely impossible –for highly educated women, who had held public sector positions— as journalists, academics, teachers, nurses, doctors, and administrative

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[231] Bak Riiskjør, M. (2008) Circular repatriation: the unsuccessful return and reintegration of Iraqis with refugee status in Denmark. New Issues in Refugee research. UNHCR Research Paper No. 165. Available online at: www.unhcr.org/48eb34c72.html

Danish Act on Repatriation, ratified in January 2000 provides the legal and practical facilities for voluntary repatriation. It furthermore offers an opportunity for the voluntary returnees to change their minds and return to Denmark within 12 months of their repatriation. By the year 2008 306 Iraqis had participated in the voluntary return program of whom 73 chose not to remain in Iraq and to returned to Denmark. Ibid.

officials— prior to their refuge. Riiskjør's study indicates that the unstable security situation and lack of services threatened the returnees' physical safety. Number of our Iraqi informants also highlighted that foreign returnees are stereotypically considered to be relatively wealthy, and they may be targeted by criminal groups engaged in trafficking and kidnappings for ransom.

Recent reports on both Afghanistan and Iraq indicate that returnees are particularly affected by poor economic and humanitarian conditions and unsettled property disputes. Massive returns from Europe and elsewhere will undoubtedly burden the societies in a manner that can lead to renewed large-scale violence and exile. I It should be underlined that the security situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan is extremely fragile, not least because the international military engagement will come to a gradual end in the near future. The rebuilding of the Iraqi and Afghan military and security institutions has received plenty of international critique and the governments of both countries lack popular legitimacy.[232]

According to Riiskjør, a second factor hindering reintegration is that, while adapting to new circumstances in exile, refugees undergo changes in behavior, habits, and perceptions. Often the refugee households are divided regarding their opinions on repatriation. The return is particularly painful for children who have undergone a large part of their socialization process in exile, and acquired social and linguistic skills in the foreign setting. The Afghan interviewees in particular, considered themselves uprooted from their country of origin due to extended exile – in Iran or Pakistan – prior to their asylum travel to the west. They felt that they were lacking the necessary social capital to construct their lives anew in Afghanistan.

As Iraq and Afghanistan – the primary battle fronts of the U.S. led War on Terror – will witness gradual withdrawal of Western military forces, the EU member states display increasing determination to promote both voluntary and involuntary repatriation of asylum seekers. While durable return is the most desirable solution for the majority of Iraqis and Afghans abroad, the EU Members States also

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[232] cf. Five Years on Europe is Still Ignoring Its Responsibilities Towards Iraqi Refugees, UNHCR, March 3, 2008, Available online at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47e1315c2.html

need to take into account the social and political consequences of large scale population movements. Returning people to crisis zones within programs of 'voluntary' return – will not serve the long term interests of either the countries of origin or the countries of exile. The people who do not 'fit in' will engage in revised strategies of movement to ensure survival and find shelter.

Participation in voluntary return programs must not be offered as the last option before resorting to hard-line measures. As Tiina Kanninen aptly points out in the first part of our project reports, voluntary return "should not mean the intensification of measures of surveillance, punishment, or other kinds of threats of dehumanizing deportation[233]". Voluntariness turns into a mere semantic game when a person is placed in a position of choosing between return and sanctions, such as forced return and re–entry prohibition. As Kanninen argues, "Only positive incentives – not detention, withdrawal of financial support, or other pressure – can contribute to the aim of sustainable returns[234]." Furthermore, such arrangements will not treat in any relevant ways the underlying reasons behind international movement of Iraqi and Afghan asylum seekers.

In the worst case, large-scale returns, whether forced or 'voluntary', will generate new forms of mobility from the conflict zones towards Western Europe. Thus they might only serve to reshape the migration and trafficking markets. There is plenty of empirical evidence that increasing numbers of people embrace forms mobility that can no longer be understood in terms of conventional categories such as "migrant" transmigrant, clandestine migrant, asylum seeker, and refugee. These marginal mobile people display a deeply ambivalent relation with national contexts. They perceive themselves as unwanted global nomads, for whom mobility is a method of survival. Their self-image is often defined by cultural up-rootedness and alienation. Many individuals whom we heard for this study had lived for years in a constant state of 'in-betweennes' and legal limbo, drifting between their country of origin, neighboring

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[233] Kanninen T. (2010, 114). Gender, Vulnerability and the Obligation to Return: An Overview of Return Assistance to 'Rejected' Asylum Seekers in the Nordic Countries. Occasional Paper No. 98. Tampere Peace Research Institute, Tampere.
[234] Ibid.

countries, and Western European asylum countries. Many end up leaving their asylum claims in several EU countries and under different identities. It is highly probable that the increasing readiness of EU member states to promote both forced and 'voluntary' returns will increase the number of people engaged in marginal mobility.

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