CREID INTERSECTIONS SERIES
Religious Inequalities and Gender

Women of Religious Minority Background in Iraq: Redressing Injustices, Past and Present

Mariz Tadros, Sofya Shahab and Amy Quinn-Graham

December 2022

Part of the CREID Intersection Series Collection on Violence and Discrimination Against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Iraq

institute of development studies

CREID
Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development

About CREID

The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) provides research evidence and delivers practical programmes which aim to redress poverty, hardship, and exclusion resulting from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. CREID is an international consortium, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and funded by UK aid from the UK Government. Key partners include Al-Khoei Foundation, Minority Rights Group (MRG) and Refcemi.

Find out more: www.creid.ac

Suggested citation:
Tadros, M.; Shahab, S. and Quinn-Graham, A. (2022) *Women of Religious Minority Background in Iraq: Redressing Injustices, Past and Present*, CREID Intersections, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CREID.2022.016

© Institute of Development Studies 2022

ISBN: 978-1-80470-061-7
DOI: 10.19088/CREID.2022.016

This is an Open Access paper distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.

Available from:
Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
Tel: +44(0) 1273 606261
E-mail: creid@ids.ac.uk
Website: www.creid.ac

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England.
Charity Registration Number 306371
Charitable Company Number 877338

Women of Religious Minority Background in Iraq: Redressing Injustices, Past and Present

Mariz Tadros, Sofya Shahab and Amy Quinn-Graham

Keywords: Women's rights; Iraq; minorities; inequalities.

Mariz Tadros is Professor of Politics and Development at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex and Director of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID). She is also the Principal Investigator (PI) of Heritage Repertoires for Inclusive Development in Egypt and Beyond supported by the British Academy, and the PI of the Middle East Culture Conservation Collective, an initiative implemented in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, and supported by the British Council.

Sofya Shahab is a Fellow at IDS. Sofya is a social anthropologist specialising in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Her most recent research explores community-based responses to the physical and existential displacements resulting from heritage destruction among ethno-religious minority groups in Iraq and Syria. Sofya joined IDS in June 2020 as part of CREID. She obtained her doctorate from Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization in Melbourne.

Amy Quinn-Graham is an action researcher at the Salvation Army (part time) and a doctoral candidate at the University of Leeds, studying the intersections of gender, religion and domestic violence. She obtained her master's with Distinction in Gender and Development from IDS in 2019.

Contents

1 Introduction **4**

2 Conceptual conundrums **6**

3 Women of religious minority backgrounds: why an intersectional lens matters **9**

4 Women of religious minority backgrounds: why their narrative matters **13**

5 Methodological approach **15**

6 Selection of researchers **17**

7 Inroads and limitations of understanding intersecting inequalities through participatory approaches **22**

8 Key aggregate findings **25**

9 Intended audience of the study **29**

References **31**

Annexe 1 Error! Bookmark not defined.

Tables

Table 1: Research participants 15

Table 2: Aggregation of participatory ranking exercise priority list of grievances 26

Table A1: Christian populations before and after ISIS occupation **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1 Introduction

This volume is part of the Intersections series which explores how the intertwining of gender, religious marginality, socioeconomic exclusion and other factors shape the realities of women and men in contexts where religious inequalities are acute, and freedom of religion or belief is compromised. This volume looks at these intersections in the context of Iraq. Its aim is to amplify the voices of women (and men) whose experiences of religious otherisation have accentuated the impact of the intersections of gender, class, geography and ethnicity. At time of publication, in December 2022, the country is going through a particularly turbulent phase, prompting some to wonder why now? Isn't it bad timing to focus on the experiences of minorities, let alone inter- and intra-gender dynamics? Iraq is caught in the middle of geo-strategic struggles of tectonic proportions but this is all the more reason to understand the dynamics of micro-politics through a gender-sensitive lens. Doing so sheds light on the interface between global, regional and local power struggles in tangible and concrete ways.

For much of the past year, the country has been without a government, causing political uncertainty, sectarian division, protests and violence. At time of writing, in October 2022, a new president and prime minister were appointed, marking the end of Iraq's longest period without a government since 2003 and the US-led invasion. History is still alive and present in people's narratives. The US-led invasion 20 years ago and the occupation by ISIS fighters almost ten years ago are spoken of as if they happened yesterday. Sectarian fault lines are still very deeply drawn. Iraq is a mosaic of ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural components. According to reliable estimates, 99 per cent of Iraqis are Muslim, of whom 60 to 65 per cent are Shia and 32 to 37 per cent are Sunni (MRG 2022). The remaining 1 per cent of the population comprise the following religious minorities: an estimated 350,000 Christians in Iraq, 500,000 Yazidis, 200,000 Kakai, fewer than 5,000 Sabean-Mandaeans and a small number of Bahai (*ibid.*). The UK government also recognises the presence of Jews and Zoroastrians in Iraq, although it does not give current population numbers (Home Office 2021).

There is a great deal of diversity in how individuals and communities self-identify in Iraq. For some, such as the Yazidis and the Assyrians, their identity refers to both their ethnicity and their religious affiliation. For others, their identity can be a merging of two aspects, for example being Turkmen *and* Shia or Sunna; or being Shabak *and* Sunna or Shia or

Armenian Orthodox or Catholic. It is also important to remember that some groups such as the Zoroastrians (Salloum 2016) and the Kakai (Abdulkhaliq, 2023 forthcoming) have had to, over many decades, conceal their identity and publicly self-identify as Muslim in order to avoid persecution. In some cases, public self-identification is not a matter of choice: for example, the law in Baghdad-administered Iraq does not give religious minorities the right to pass on their religious faith to their child if the child's father is a Muslim. Children are automatically considered Muslim even against the wishes of the child. They are registered as Muslims on identity cards, even if the Muslim father is absent (as in the cases of children born to Yazidi and Christian mothers after sexual abuse by ISIS fighters).

In other cases, finer distinctions in denominational affiliation within a religious minority matter a great deal for the religious/political leaders of that minority. For example, in some instances it is politically anathema to the leaders of the Chaldean, Syriac Orthodox and Assyrian religious denominations to assume that they can all be represented by one patriarch as the representative of the 'Christian denomination' in Iraq.

Another reason for caution against assuming a reified category of 'religious minority identity' in Iraq is that there are groups whose numbers are minute but whose presence is of great civilisational importance – such as the Zoroastrians and Sabeans whose faiths date back thousands of years. This is significant given that sometimes it may be easy to focus on the Middle East as the cradle of Abrahamic religions, while overlooking the existence of other religious traditions that have existed over millennia. It is also important to recognise the plurality of administrative governance systems in contemporary Iraq. Religious minorities are governed by different laws, policies, and decrees under two different administrations: the Baghdad-administration and the Erbil-administration. In some ways, the ability of Iraqi women of minority backgrounds to access citizenship rights is significantly shaped by where they live and which administration they follow. For example, the inheritance laws for non-Muslim women living in Iraqi Kurdistan are different to those governing non-Muslim women in Baghdad-administered areas.

Moreover, public representation of identity is fluid and contingent on contextual and temporal dynamics. For example, the Tishreen uprising, which began in October 2019 and was sustained until 2021, represents the largest ever protest movement that the country has witnessed since 2003 and comprised citizens from all political persuasions, religious and ethnic backgrounds (International Crisis Group 2021). The protests, mainly led by youth, mobilised around demands for an end to corruption, better governance of

economic policy, including unemployment, and an end to foreign interference. Collective action was mobilised around Iraqi citizenship as a supra-identity, or as a form of collective representation that cuts across other political, religious or ethnic affiliations.

In times of political upheaval, excuses are often given for why a gendered power analysis needs to be deprioritised or postponed. Government officials often suggest that gender dynamics can only be discussed after a certain level of stability has been achieved. These goalposts then become perpetually moved forwards, thereby delaying any action (Ray and Korteweg 1999; Razavi 2000; Waylen 1994; 2007). There is a need to ensure that in the period that follows the overthrow or resignation of a political leadership, gender equality features at every step of the negotiations around a new contract between state and people (Beckwith 2007; Rai 2000; Tadros 2016).

However, the intersection of gender with religious marginality becomes even more likely to be relegated to a matter for future consideration after the situation has stabilised. Political, ideological and pragmatic factors influence the extent to which the situation pertaining to women of religious minority backgrounds features in policy debates. In making our case in this volume, we address some of the reservations that Western (and some non-Western) policymakers, academics and feminists hold with respect to an evidence-based focus on women who belong to religious minority backgrounds in Iraq.

This volume is organised as follows: after unpacking key concepts, we situate this research within broader academic and policy debates regarding Western representations of gender justice struggles in Iraq, followed by a description of the methodological approach, its rationale, strengths and limitations, and finally a discussion of the main findings and intended audience of the volume.

2 Conceptual conundrums

The concept of a religious minority has always been contentious in the context of the Muslim-majority Middle East. Professor Seteney Shami traces the political use of the term in the Arab world to colonialism (2009: 153). Her study demonstrates that the first time the word ‘minority’ entered the lexicon of terms used to describe Christians in the Middle East was in the early 1920s in Egypt when political elites were debating whether the new Egyptian constitution should include specific language concerning the protection of religious minorities. In 1923, the term ‘non-Moslem minorities’ (i.e., Greeks, Armenians

and Jews) was introduced and enshrined in the Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and the Western powers. The labelling of non-Muslim communities as minorities was a political project, according to Seteney, intended to justify colonialist control over internal governance matters – i.e., in the name of protecting minorities, foreign powers would be given special interventionist privileges. In the twentieth century, when pan-nationalist and pan-Arab movements mobilised for independence, one of the ways in which the liberation movements sought to unify religiously and culturally diverse populations around the rallying cry of independence was to call upon the people to reject the divide-and-rule strategies of Western powers wanting to prevent the emergence of a unified front against them. Pan-Arab regimes that emerged post-independence in Iraq, Syria and Egypt sought to downplay the multiple identities of their citizens (religious, linguistic, ethnic) as a way of fostering a supra-allegiance to the nation-state. Yet state legitimacy remained contested throughout (Haddad 2017). There are contending historical accounts in the Middle East as to whether the political projects of the twentieth-century independence movements sought to unify the populations under one pan-Arab identity in a manner that was respectful of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, or whether they worked in denial of that diversity, in a bid to mobilise societies around one common enemy (the coloniser) (Abu-Seif Youssef 2016).

Interestingly, it is not only the colonialist project that articulated a division of society into majorities and minorities. Political movements and parties whose visions of governance are inspired by Shariah-based governance (see Tadros 2013 for a discussion of citizenship rights with qualifiers for non-Muslim citizens). While the qualifiers vary from one context to another, and one period to the next, there are limitations to full equality with Muslims in a Shariah-inspired governance model. For example, the exclusion of non-Muslims from positions that involve leadership over Muslims, which is loosely defined and interpreted in multiple ways depending on the political power in question.

The Iraqi constitution uses the term *mouqawenat* (components) as a form of recognition of the different religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups in society, thereby avoiding the word 'minority'.[1] How the different non-Muslim communities in Iraq self-describe is not static; it changes according to person, community and context. Self-labelling is a highly dynamic process that is constantly being reconsidered. Groups that have historically

---

[1] See preamble to the Iraqi constitution (Constitute n.d.).

experienced deep systemic inequalities because of their non-Muslim religious affiliation find themselves in a very difficult position. On the one hand, there is a strong rationale for rejecting the concept of being a religious minority, namely that it plays into the Western construct of needing special protection and into the Islamist movements' conception of them as 'the non-Muslim other'. Some academics and policymakers have attacked minority-based claims on the basis that these play into the agendas of those who wish to entrench sectarianism in Iraq (see for example contributions in Hashemi and Postel 2017).

On the other hand, as the situation has continued to worsen for non-Muslim minorities in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, there is a sense of urgency in having Iraqi power holders and the international community recognise the extent of the denial of the rights accorded by the majority. The term minority then comes to convey the collective disempowerment of whole groups on the basis of their different ethno-religious affiliations. In Iraq, there are several coalitions, networks and collective platforms that since the US-led invasion have emerged to respond to the threats to religious pluralism in the country, such as the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities Network (AIM 2022). Representatives of different religious groups have during the post-2003 period come to engage in claims-making as *members of religious minorities* in relation to their own governments and in the international arena.

In the narratives of the minorities under study here, the US-led invasion is held responsible for the creation of a post-Saddam political order based on sectarianism and the fragmentation of Iraqi society in deeply divisive ways, as is evident in the papers in this volume. In other words, in religious minorities' narratives, there is no alignment between a pro-minority West and the Muslim rest. On the contrary, many minorities consider Western policies as enabling and emboldening the national movements that sought to erase minority identity.

The situation is further complicated on account of the interventionist policies not only of the West, but also Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Russia. Those countries are among others that have played behind-the-scenes roles. Foreign fomentation of sectarianism is an indisputable reality in the context of Iraq – and a theme that features prominently in many of the papers in this volume. In such a context, can we use the term 'religious minority' and at the same time not feed into highly divisive political projects? Use of the term religious minorities does not in and of itself constitute a sectarian project. First, it is commensurate with how many members of various groups self-describe as minorities.

Moreover, there is a risk of denying the presence of groups who had to deny their identity such as the Kakai and the Zoroastrians. The context of extreme discrimination led the Kakai to conceal their identity in public. However, pressure for official recognition of minorities especially in Iraqi Kurdistan has emboldened both the Kakai and the Zoroastrians to begin to gradually manifest their identity in public (although not across the whole community). Some members within the Kakai community are now saying that they should no longer pretend to be Muslims and even change their identity cards to state 'Kakai' as their affiliation. In this context, the recognition of religious minorities is not so much about creating social fragmentation; rather it is part and parcel of the politics of recognition which is a prerequisite for redressing the inequalities that have been experienced for decades. Finally, in our use of the term religious minorities, we can always be nuanced by careful description of the intersections of gender, ethnicity, location, language, political affiliation and so forth.

3 Women of religious minority backgrounds: why an intersectional lens matters

Another reservation expressed by some scholars and activists is that if all women have suffered in Iraq, why specifically focus on women who belong to religious minorities? It is undoubtable that Iraqi women across all religious affiliations have suffered from a broad set of gender-specific rights violations, and also have experienced extreme hardship alongside men in Iraq on account of the highly turbulent political context.[2] The research undertaken here supports the view that many of the structural drivers of oppression and injustice cut across religious and ethnic lines, such as the prevailing lack of safety. A state of lawlessness and the rule of competing militias in many parts of Iraq are depriving citizens of a sense of safety when going about their everyday lives, with real gendered implications for Iraqi women's lives (Ali 2018).

Earlier studies by leading Iraq experts suggest that political fronts for countering the oppression of women tend to focus on issues that cut across religious/ethnic divides. For

---

[2] See Vilardo and Bittar (2018) for an Oxfam gender profile of Iraq; Alkhudary (2020) and Medica Mondiale (2021) for an overview of the barriers Iraqi women face in achieving their rights; Younis (2021) on Iraqi women's mental health struggles; and Jaber (2022) on Iraqi women's access to leadership and decision-making roles.

example, Al-Ali (2012: 103) tells us that the women's movement post-2003 is made up of women from 'various ethnic and religious backgrounds' and that 'most women I talked to stressed that their political activism cut across ethnic and religious lines' (Al-Ali 2008: 410). Additionally, when interviewing a large number of Iraqi women activists (from both inside and outside Iraq), Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) concluded that differences in opinion on a range of topics related to the women's movement were found to be more commonly because of political affiliations rather than ethnic (or religious) affiliations. One argument would be that if this is how Iraqi women mobilise, should we not accordingly frame issues along the same cross-cutting lines?

The specific focus on women who belong to religious minorities is informed by a number of important considerations. First, Al-Ali (2008) herself acknowledges that in feminist activism the presence of women who come from religious minorities does not mean that the specific grievances associated with the intersections of gender and religious marginality are reflected in these women's agenda-setting. Second, in some cases, the fact that women's rights activists and their allies strategically choose framings that do not pinpoint the religious affiliation of survivors of politically motivated gender-based violence does not negate the presence of any religious affiliation. For example, in Nigeria, in response to the capture of the girls in Chiboke in 2019 by Boko Haram, women leaders who formed into a collective to press the government for action to return the missing girls framed their campaign as 'bring back our girls'. The reasons for the choice of this framing have been meticulously studied (Aina *et al.* 2019). This, however, does not negate the fact that the majority of girls captured by Boko Haram were Christian and that this was not by chance, but was also partly ideologically motivated. By the same token, the fact that women from all backgrounds in Iraq choose to frame some campaigns without specific mention to religious marginality, does not mean that certain forms of oppression that women experience in Iraq are not shaped by religious affiliation. It is significant that Iraqi women's collectives themselves recognise that religious minority women are acutely disadvantaged. For example, while the Iraqi Women Network's (2014: 34) shadow report calls on the government to ensure the rights of 'migrants, ethnic and religious minorities', it also acknowledges that specifically 'women from…religious minorities are the most vulnerable' (*ibid.*: 8). Additionally, the Iraqi Women Network's 2019 shadow report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is specific in its naming of Yazidi women as those who have suffered some of the worst systematic

sexual violence at the hands of ISIS and who are still facing discrimination now, even from within their own community (Iraqi Women Network 2019).

A recurring concern raised by scholars around the focus on targeting women of a religious minority background in Iraq is that it may feed into orientalist, sensationalist, and hypocritical engagements with issues of sexuality in Muslim-majority contexts. For example, following the onslaught by ISIS in 2014, there was a great deal of Western media coverage of the sexual violence experienced by Yazidi women in particular. Several scholars, while acknowledging the plight of Yazidi women and the targeting of women who belong to religious minorities, expressed concern that when these stories are circulated in the West, 'sexualized violence is politically instrumentalized, often sensationalised and overblown in terms of scope and the threat it presents. It is used as a dehumanizing device deployed as part of wider racist and sectarian culturalist discourses counterposing their "barbaric" culture as essentially different from "our" civilised culture, a difference is that is articulated most dramatically through the bodies of women' (Al-Ali 2014; Ali 2018).

Al-Ali points to a number of further critiques in the representation of ISIS violence against Yazidi women following the ISIS occupation in 2014. She notes for example, that the very actors who call ISIS out, such as Western governments, have done nothing to prevent the violence and their policy has been consistently hypocritical in their engagement with gender-based violence in foreign policy. This is very much in line with the widely cited work of Lila Abu-Lughod in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving.* She has critiqued US foreign policy leads and liberal American feminists who justified the invasion of Afghanistan in the name of 'saving women' (Abu-Lughod 2015). Al-Ali rightly highlights issues pertaining to positionality – whether the person has the legitimacy to launch attacks from an assumed moral pedestal especially when both their intentions and policies are dubious to say the least.

However, there is a way forward that allows issues of gender-based violence to be raised internationally while challenging the kind of problematic Western representations and instrumentalisations raised above. We believe that this volume contributes practically towards addressing this conundrum. All the reports are written by women and men whose positionality confers the legitimacy to share and analyse experiences of gender-based violence that their communities have encountered and continue to encounter. In other words, they are speaking not from the vantage point of outsiders with politicised

agendas, but as insiders keen to amplify in a multivocal manner the situation of the communities to which they belong.

Undoubtedly, as the volume is being published in the West, are there not issues still of instrumentalising data? The approach that we have taken in this volume (see methodology section) is one premised on the view that members of the community would undertake the research with participants from within, and that they would co-construct the research framing as well as ensure that the community participates in the validation of the data being generated. It is not only their positionality but their standpoint that gives weight to the issues being raised in this volume. There is of course a danger still that the content of this volume when published is still instrumentalised by Western actors for their own ulterior motives. However, inconsistent Western foreign policy should be challenged by using the evidence we have from the communities to call out hypocrisy and press for greater accountability. Avoiding speaking about the subject of specific forms of gender-based violence and the day-to-day encroachments that women experience in order to avoid Islamophobia or orientalist depictions is not the solution. It is true that gender-based violence exists along a spectrum, but when atrocities that amount to a genocide occur against a specific group of people because of their religious affiliations, then they deserve to be amplified. Almost ten years after the genocide perpetrated by ISIS, justice has not been granted to Yazidi women and the voices of transnational feminist activists pressing for recognition of their rights has in some respects waned.

This volume's emphasis is on the voices of women (and men) whose experiences of religious otherisation have amplified the impact of the intersections of gender, class, geography and ethnicity. While in these women's stories there are a number of overlapping and complex factors that drive how they have been targeted, ideology is certainly one of them. However, concern has been expressed that by focusing on the ideology of actors such as ISIS, this 'feeds into their media strategy, obscures women's resistance to their violence and promotes the Islamophobia that fuels the very war with "the West" that ISIS craves' (Susskind 2014). The challenge with this argument is that it represents the perpetration of violence by ISIS as reactive – that ISIS's violence is exclusively in response to the acts of aggression perpetrated by the West. While grievances against the West do fuel ISIS's war, it is a gross misreading of ISIS to understand it as operating exclusively in reactive mode; ISIS is informed by tactical

political and economic drivers but also by its vision. ISIS's gender-based targeting exists along an ideologically informed taxonomy of the level of violence exercised, depending on victims' religious and political affiliations. Hence, to speak of coverage of the assault on women who belong to religious minorities as a matter that needs to be contested on the basis of the provocation of further aggression would be to overlook the ideological drivers behind ISIS's targeting of these women in the first place.

4 Women of religious minority backgrounds: why their narrative matters

Susskind proposes a solution: 'Why not support the millions of progressive Muslims who reject violence, including violence against women?' (2014, unpaginated). This is well placed in terms of showing the many faces and expressions of solidarity among the many Muslims who are against ISIS and have fought their ideology. We need to acknowledge and celebrate them. However, this argument (perhaps inadvertently) removes the emphasis from the experiences and voices of the women from a religious minority background who have been the targets of ideologically motivated gender-based violence. The recognition of the multitudes of Muslims who condemn ISIS can only partially address the need to redress the injustices that minority women have faced. What is needed is not a de-accentuation of attention from minority women's voices and experiences, but the assurance that they have a platform to speak for themselves, that their demands are amplified and that transnational academia and feminism endorse them. In the name of avoiding provoking ISIS or Islamophobic representations, we risk muting the voices of women who are survivors of ideologically motivated violence and who want to tell their stories to the world. In other words, it is critically important that in countering misrepresentations in the West, we do not contribute to the same blind spot that thousands of women who belong to religious minorities have experienced across centuries in the Middle East: obscuring the specificity of their experience as women whose religious/gender intertwining creates particular kinds of injustices. We hope this volume challenges the racism that has obscured the specificity of the claims-making women of a religious minority background in Iraq. Several women who participated in the group inquiries undertaken have articulated their experiences not only in terms of

religious discrimination but racism in Iraq. They speak of a racial profiling in how they are treated, associated with their ethno-religious identity.

It is important also to note that even if some common systemic sources of injustice are experienced by women whose religious marginality intersects with other identifiers (class, location, ethnicity, age etc.), this does not signify that their experiences are one and the same. Hence our approach was to recognise that while women who come from a religious minority background can experience some common challenges of being seen as the non-Muslim religious other, they themselves do not represent one bloc with a common reified identity. Women of a religious minority background are also differently positioned, not only in the literal geographic sense but also in terms of access to and use of power. The reports in this volume also show that the expressions of women's (and men's) agency in terms of accommodation or adaptation to the shifting status quo of Iraq is both subjective but also hugely impacted by the collective strength and position of the community to which they are affiliated.

Finally, the case has been made that a focus on violence perpetrated by violent groups deflects attention from the patriarchal hierarchies within religious minority groups, which are in and of themselves sources of gender inequality and gender-based violence. The conversations with women and men that took place in the group inquiries shared by several contributors in this volume cover forms of encroachment and violence that are both in the public and private spheres. Women (and some men) acknowledge problems of domestic violence and psychological abuse as acute in many of these communities. This is further nuanced when status hierarchies are taken into account (such as in the contribution on the Kakai). In the same vein, the fact that religious leaders in some communities have been complacent in not holding to account men who abuse their wives and children has had far-reaching consequences. For example, among the Turkmen Shia, the fact that the religious leaders chose not to speak out against the rape, kidnappings and sexual assault that some Turkmen Shia women experienced at the hands of ISIS and other Islamist militia has had severe psychological repercussions for survivors, and obfuscated their opportunities of seeking restorative justice (Tadros 2020a).

5 Methodological approach

This section describes the subjects of the study and the selection of the researchers followed by an elucidation of the methods, their rationale, strengths and limitations.

The subjects of the study came from the religious minority groups outlined in Table 1, which also details how many women and men from each minority group participated in the research and in which geographic areas they resided.

Table 1: Research participants

Religious minority	No. of women	No. of men	Geographic areas
Yazidis	26	24	Bashiqa and Bahzani (Nineveh)
Displaced Yazidis	37	13	Essian camp (Ninewa governorate) and Shariya camp (Dohuk)
Assyrian Christians	26	21	Duhok
Christians	24	24	Al-Hamdaniya and Bartella (Nineveh) and Ankawa (Erbil)
Kakai	36	24	Safiya, Gwer subdistrict (Erbil)
Shabak	26	22	Nineveh Plain
Sabean-Mandaeans	22	23	Erbil and Baghdad

Source: Authors' own.

A number of points are noteworthy. Firstly, it is clear that the number of participants is low and is negligible in terms of generating generalisable data for the whole communities. While this is true, the intention here was not to take a sample size to wield universal statements, rather it was to provide deep insights into the experiences of marginalisation that would be very difficult to gauge through more conventional data collection methods such as a community-wide survey. This is on account of the sensitivity of the topics and the poor levels of trust currently in Iraq, which are not likely to lead to participants sharing their experiences frankly through surveys. Ideally, the methodology would be repeated among more groups in different sites and across time to corroborate the evidence presented here.

Secondly, the decision to include two sets of inquiries for the Yazidis and Christians is in order to explore two kinds of intersections that are significant. In the case of the Yazidis, the location of the research has far-reaching consequences in terms of influencing the participants' reading of their reality. The two reports describe the situation of Yazidi women in Bashiqa and Behzane – two neighbouring towns which were occupied by ISIS but to which families have begun to return following rehabilitation – and another report focusing on the situation of Yazidi women within internally displaced person (IDP) camps in the Iraqi Kurdistan. This research also included a group consisting of survivors – Yazidi women who had been kidnapped and enslaved by ISIS – in recognition of their specific needs and circumstances, and was led by a peer-researcher who is herself a survivor. In terms of the rationale for undertaking two research processes among the Christians, this was done in recognition of the plurality of denominational affiliation, and of how when intertwined with location, this produces slightly differentiated readings of the drivers and outcomes of power configurations on the ground.

Thirdly, we acknowledge that there are limitations pertaining to the sites in which the research was undertaken, given its heavy concentration around the centre of Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad, the capital. While acknowledging the demographic spread of religious communities across the country, the focus sites of the research reflect to a very large extent the greatest current concentration of religious minorities, especially after the wave of displacement following the ISIS occupation, which has left many populations still displaced.

Fourthly, we acknowledge that not all religious minorities are included such as the Bahai and Zoroastrians, nor the rich intertwining of various ethnic-religious identities such as the Armenian Orthodox or Armenian Catholic, Turkmen Shia or Turkman Sunna.

It is important to emphasise that the experience of being a minority is very much informed by where a person is situated – they may be a religious minority in Iraqi Kurdistan (such as the Shabak Shia) but be a majority in another part of the country (for example, in Najaf).

6 Selection of researchers

Our choice of a participatory methodology approach was informed by our decision to privilege who generates the data as much as what kind of data is collected. With positionality and standpoint central to our inquiry into the realities of women and men from a marginalised religious background, the legitimacy of the researcher in the eyes of the community members was crucial. This was especially relevant given the sensitive contexts: namely, situations of ongoing displacement, insecurity and trauma related to religious marginalisation as well as a serious trust deficit towards those who are not from the same community. Utilising peer research enabled us to remain sensitive to the needs, interests and priorities of those we were working alongside. This is because the participatory approach we employed centred on community members as colleagues and researchers of their own and their communities' experiences. As a result, the focus was on 'conducting research "with and for" the subjects of the research' while being conscious of the power balances that traditionally arise within the research process (Institute for Community Studies n.d.). This was important due to the personal and sensitive nature of the topics under study – gender and religious marginalisation – which meant that they would most appropriately be explored and addressed by those from within the communities themselves. The peer-researchers were predominantly identified through existing networks and our knowledge of the different contexts. They were brought together for an initial training workshop in Erbil from 8 to 12 September 2021. The research was undertaken during the period October 2021 to March 2022. A further online group meeting to share findings and learning among peer-researchers from the first focus group discussions was held on 30 November 2021. For a majority of the studies, first drafts were received and translated at the end of December 2021, with online feedback and discussion meetings held on 12 January 2022. Another in-person meeting in Erbil on 26 January 2022 supplemented these, as did regular one-to-one meetings both in person (in Duhok and Erbil) and online throughout the research and writing period.

For those whose reports appear in this volume, applying participatory approaches and undertaking peer research was a new experience. The majority of researchers had backgrounds either within the NGO/development sectors or as women's rights activists while a minority were academics with strong activist backgrounds in their communities. This was an intentional aspect of the selection process, whereby a greater emphasis was placed on community engagement as opposed to research experience, so that the

researchers in collaboration with their communities could begin to mobilise their research findings in analysing instances of injustice. Selecting members of their own communities to be facilitators of the group inquiries or focus groups created a more enabling environment to openly discuss and share experiences relating to religious and gender marginalisation. This was because the issues discussed within the focus groups were also issues experienced by the researchers and this reduced the likelihood of misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Through an empathetic approach and the sharing of their own personal examples, the researchers were therefore able to cultivate a space for honest discussions around what they found to be meaningful. In some instances, these group inquiries around traumatic issues proved to be personally and collectively therapeutic. This was because the research approach enabled an open discussion of challenges that usually remained hidden. However, through collective sharing participants realised that they were not alone in their experiences, creating a sense of solidarity and cohesion. The positionality of being from within the communities was also crucial in making it possible to tackle more challenging topics, as the researchers were aware of the issues within their communities – including instances of honour killings and forced marriages – and how to manage them in a manner which would not risk exposing women to backlash or negative repercussions, were they to share sensitive issues arising in their families and/or communities. Working with peer-researchers in discussing such issues also helped to remove any sense of judgement or voyeurism which might be felt from an external researcher and to move away from more extractive models of research. In this way, it was not so much the researcher's experience of matters relating to freedom of religion and belief (FORB) and women's rights, but their ability to connect with people and to make them feel confident in sharing personal details about their lives and experiences. In turn this allowed a greater insight into the everyday lived experiences of those from religious minorities and how these experiences impact on their rights to identify freely with and practise their beliefs.

We began the research process with a five-day workshop in Erbil to explore what it means to undertake a participatory approach, the research questions and objectives in understanding the particular challenges faced by women from religious minorities. This focused on their experiences as these relate to being women (and therefore how this differs from the experiences of men in their community) and to belonging to a minority (and how this differs from the experiences of women more generally in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan). It also described the specific methods that would be employed by the

researchers within their communities. Although some aspects of the research design were set – for example, the focus on the intersections of religious and gender marginalisation, the methods to be used and a broad sense of the thematic areas – the researchers were able to tailor these to ensure that these were relevant. A further delineation of the priority areas for discussion was negotiated with the communities.

The research itself took the form of two predominant methods: focus group discussions and participatory ranking. The composition of the research groups varied slightly by community and according to how each peer-researcher felt would best ensure participants were as comfortable as possible in sharing their experiences. In most cases focus groups consisted of approximately 12 to 14 people and were organised by gender and age, although there were some variations. Although the primary focus of the study was on the experiences of women resulting from their gender and religion, it was important for men to be included within the research as a point of comparison. Additionally, by disaggregating the focus groups by age it was possible to attend to some of the intersectionalities within gendered identities and also to mitigate some power dynamics that might arise within the groups where deference to elders could prevent younger women from opening up about their experiences. The researchers' knowledge helped to contribute to a sense of security for participants within the focus groups: for example, separate discussions were held with Yazidis inside and outside the camp setting and also with Yazidi survivors who had been imprisoned and enslaved by ISIS. Participants were identified by the peer-researchers through their knowledge of their communities and in conjunction with local organisations and leaders. Researchers made a purposeful attempt to invite marginalised people whose voices are most commonly excluded. The focus group discussions were held in accessible locations – often local NGO offices – to minimise travel for participants, and at convenient hours. However, the short time frame for undertaking the research and multiple commitments of the researchers proved the most significant challenge, especially as it coincided with the Iraqi elections.

The benefits of these two particular methods were that in using the participatory ranking exercise, the participants were able to identify and assess the selection of issues that had the most relevance to their daily experiences according to their relative weight of frequency and intensity. Through the discussions it would also be possible to gain further understandings and insights into intersecting inequalities, most especially among those

who are at the margins of their societies, without the lengthy time frame required by extended anthropological investigations. Furthermore, such approaches gave space for and directly centred the experiences and voices of the women and men from within these communities (Tadros 2020b). This was important as a means of enabling a certain level of narrative control, by relaying participants' experiences in their own words so that they had greater control over how they were represented. Operating within a group also helped people to share and respond to details that might not otherwise be raised during individual interviews (*ibid.*).

Within the groups, the peer-researchers were given the freedom to decide whether they preferred to begin with the participatory ranking exercise or the discussion component. Most of the peer-researchers opted to begin with the participatory ranking exercise as it would provide a framework for the discussion section; it enabled identification of key topics of import among participants and captured initial thoughts and perceptions, before topics were discussed in more depth or participants had too much time to consider their responses. As part of the participatory ranking, participants were invited to put forward the key areas in which they faced challenges, for example health care, dress/religious symbols, and transport. In some cases, researchers who were facilitating the group inquiries asked participants to name the issues and then rank them. In other cases, after discussions, the facilitators presented a number of standardised categories for participants to rank. Some forms of standardisation across groups, contexts and ultimately countries were crucial to allow for comparisons across the different group inquiries. Each standardised topic was discussed in depth with the peer-researchers, to ensure it was relevant and applicable to raise within the participatory ranking exercise and discussion. Each researcher was also invited to include their own challenges which they had identified during the workshop according to the specific contexts of their communities. For example, some researchers raised the issue of displacement and camps, as well as online harassment and blackmail, which they saw as crucial for understanding people's realities in their contexts.

Having collated the key challenges, participants were then invited to rank these from the greatest to the least according to their personal experiences. This could be undertaken in any number of ways. In some instances, the peer-researchers collated a list on a board or flip chart and participants were asked to vote on each issue, through a show of hands or by each participant numbering each challenge on the board according to their ranking. In

other groups, participants were asked to write individual lists ordering each of the topics collectively identified according to the priority they would assign to it. Each participant was also invited to briefly expand on their reasons for the order they chose. The results and analysis of the participatory ranking exercise undertaken by each group within each community are detailed within the reports, with particular attention paid to points of differentiation between groups from the same communities and the potential reasons behind these differing experiences and challenges.

The participatory ranking exercise was followed in most cases by a more open discussion, often using the topics identified to guide and anchor the second part of the focus group discussions in order to draw out more detailed information and examples related to these challenges. When facilitating the focus groups, the peer-researchers were therefore requested to focus on three things: specific examples of marginalisation experienced by participants, the reasons behind this marginalisation, and the impact it had on them. As a result, it was necessary to ensure a safe space was cultivated within the discussions. A great deal of attention was paid to ethics to ensure anonymity and to designing the inquiry in such a way as to avoid negative repercussions as a result of the research process. As such, emphasis was put on the need to respect and listen to the experiences of each participant and on the requirement that experiences shared should not be repeated outside the discussion group. As part of the ethics procedure, it was necessary for the researchers to begin each focus group discussion with a full explanation of the project and how the information would be used and shared – with no names or identifying features included within the reports – as well as establishing some guiding principles for the discussion in which participants would not be pressured to share more than they felt comfortable with, in order to ensure free and informed consent. The peer-researchers were also encouraged to draw on and share examples from their own experiences as a form of modelling for focus group participants, to make them feel comfortable and to open up the conversation. However, this often also entailed asking follow-up questions to ensure that specific details were captured, alongside more general observations. There was also a recognition that some topics might be particularly hard to discuss in a group setting especially where the participants may be known to one another. This was most particularly the case in instances of domestic violence, suicide and honour killings. With regards to these areas the peer-researchers used their discretion: enabling the women to speak in more general terms, rather than giving specific examples from their own lives or those of women who might be recognisable to

others in the community. In some cases, participants also chose to speak one-to-one with the researchers. The trust cultivated through the peer-researchers was therefore essential in allowing participants to speak about areas of sensitivity within their communities.

7 Inroads and limitations of understanding intersecting inequalities through participatory approaches

In recognition of the expertise and knowledge that the peer-researchers bring to the research process, their analysis and interpretation is foregrounded within the reports they have produced (Macaulay *et al.* 1999). Having researchers from within the community lead the analysis and writing of the research reports subsequently provided greater depth of nuance and understanding of the research, and also allows for connections between experiences and events to be made in new ways. It also deepened the researchers' knowledge with regards to the challenges facing members of their communities, feeding into their work as activists and NGO actors – as was the case for the Yazidi researcher in Bashiqa who through a greater awareness of the needs of marginalised women in her community gained a renewed drive to incorporate that understanding within existing and new projects. Undertaking the research process within multiple communities and bringing the researchers together in their exploration of FORB also allowed for shared learning between peer-researchers by creating prompts with regards to points of similarity and divergence from other religious minorities included in the study. One of the strengths of using participatory approaches and peer-researchers was therefore that it enabled an iterative process of learning from one another; this entailed learning about the challenges encountered with regards to undertaking these forms of research, about the experiences highlighted within them and the ways in which they may be overcome. This emerged through informal peer-support networks between researchers that arose during the workshop and group meetings. It was particularly thanks to relationships built between the young Yazidi and Sabean researchers, whereby an almost mentor relationship developed through shared encounters of working on sexual violence within their communities and in advocating for women's rights. The focus was on conducting the research with small groups in each community and on foregrounding individual personal stories through an investigation into the intersections of gender and religious marginalisation. As well as having local applicability, the learning and recommendations

from these communities may also have broader policy and programmatic relevance that takes account of 'local priorities, processes and perspectives' (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995).

As mentioned, the aim of the study was not to explore at scale the differing dimensions of religious and gender marginalisation. Instead, the focus was on creating a snapshot of particular individual and collective lived experiences of discrimination in varying forms and in relation to specific issues, identifying patterns and commonalities that emerge within and across groups. Consequently, sample sizes are limited to approximately 50 participants for each study, often from within the same localities (although these often incorporate both urban and semi-rural participants), or occasionally across two regions. This means that the accounts provided within the ensuing reports are set within specific community contexts, and differences in terms of rankings and challenges may be faced by those of the same religion and gender in other locations. As such, further research might seek to undertake similar processes across different regions and contexts within Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan – specifically Baghdad and Southern Iraq where there are also a proportion of religious minority communities. However, one particular challenge that emerged within this study, and which further studies would also need to account for, are the different languages, dialects and vernacular expressions of Arabic spoken throughout the country. These may be particular to specific religious groups and geographic locations, and they were a challenge when translating the research and reports.

While recognising the knowledge and experience of the peer-researchers and incorporating that into the research process, at times it was necessary for the peer-researchers to set aside their preconceptions and expectations with regards to their communities' experiences in relation to FORB. This was so that the participatory approach would be successful in enhancing knowledge and understandings of FORB within the everyday lived realities of participants. Peer-researchers may rely too heavily within the analysis on their own encounters rather than being led by participants' understandings. There may also be a tendency to exaggerate the scale and intensity of a problem, for example, the extent to which religious identity impinges on employment opportunities since at times it can be challenging to differentiate the reasons why a candidate might be unsuccessful in obtaining a job, given the high unemployment throughout Iraq. As such, peer-researchers were encouraged to approach the research as a learning process, in which each individual participant is positioned to appreciate the value of knowledge of every day women and men and not dismiss it as less valuable than

the knowledge that is shared by recognised experts in the community, such as religious leaders or academics.

Each report went through multiple stages of review with the editors and data was corroborated through multiple sources including within and between the groups of the study, as well as other relevant literature and the editors' own research and observations. Although research was undertaken with Turkmen Shia participants, it was not possible to include this within the final volume. This was due to the lack of transparency in selecting a co-researcher and participants for the focus group discussions, as well as a lack of rigour in research processes and an absence of robustness in research findings. The report did not meet the quality control measures that had been put in place.

We also faced ethical dilemmas pertaining to the process of engaging with the reporting on the group inquiries. Even when names were anonymised, some statements that were made as people spoke freely could be considered as offensive towards another group's religious doctrine or could be seen as inflammatory. In such cases an editorial decision was taken to remove such statements from this volume altogether. This may be considered a missed opportunity in understanding perceptions of the 'other', or about the extent of hostility or mistrust prevailing in the communities. However, in such highly sensitive research in which participants trusted that we would always put their safety first and foremost, we decided to remove statements that may be considered inflammatory or even a form of hate speech. This emanated not from an intention to meddle with people's narratives or to censor them but out of a commitment to uphold the values of duty of care towards partners and vulnerable groups.

One of the challenges was to disentangle perceptions and interpretations of reality and what constitutes evidence. For example, where groups shared perceptions of insecurity, vulnerability to discrimination and so on, we sought to relay their narratives in their own words as much as possible. However, where examples from their lived realities were presented as concrete evidence of injustice, we probed further, and sought to corroborate the evidence from other sources to address any credibility issue with the data. An example would be a mother complaining that her child did not get a high grade in a subject because the teacher is discriminating against him/her on religious grounds. Her child may not have attained a high grade for all kinds of reasons, so we sought to deal sensitively but selectively with the examples given by the communities that are shared here.

8 Key aggregate findings

The participatory rankings aggregated below do not indicate or reflect the scale and severity of the challenges encountered by all women identifying with the religious communities included within the research. This is because communities are not homogenous and there are a number of intersecting factors that may impact on daily interactions and power dynamics, such as geographic location, socioeconomic background and level of education. Rather, the findings present through the lens of those who participated in the group inquiries what they consider is most affecting them in terms of everyday acts of discrimination. The analysis of the data from across different groups allows for an identification of recurring patterns of areas where women experience powerlessness and power. The combination of the quantitative data deriving from the participatory rankings with the qualitative data from the group inquiries allowed for a triangulation of methods to ensure the overall robustness.

Table 2 outlines the results of the participatory ranking exercise aggregated across all focus group discussions (FGDs) from all of the studies. Columns two and three show the priorities as ranked by the women; columns four and five outline the same threats and challenges ranked by the men. Columns six and seven show the overall ranking when both women's and men's votes are aggregated. Not all issues were raised by all participants – for example, while some men across the studies recognised the negative impact that customs, norms and traditions can have on the lives of the women in their communities, none of the men in any of the studies raised 'gender discrimination' as a threat or challenge. This may be because the men in the majority of the studies, namely the Bashiqa and Bahzani Yazidi, Christian, Assyrian, Sabean-Mandaean and Kakai studies, chose to identify threats and challenges they face, rather than those they believe the women in their communities face. Nevertheless, the findings are still revealing, and it is significant that no men felt discriminated against because of their gender, in comparison to the women.

It is worth noting that each researcher approached the analysis of the participatory ranking slightly differently. Some asked participants only to vote on the threats and challenges they felt were of the highest priority to them, often allowing participants to vote on more than one issue as their top priority if they felt there were threats and challenges of equal prevalence and severity. The studies on displaced Yazidi women,

Sabean-Mandaean women, and Assyrian women are examples of this. In contrast, other researchers asked participants to rank the threats and challenges from highest to lowest priority and then calculated a final ranking by weighting the votes accordingly. The study on Kakai women is an example of this. Consequently, an issue that only received one vote as the top priority but ten votes as the second priority, may feature high in that individual study's aggregate ranking in a way that is not reflected in Table 2, which only accounts for the top priority votes.[3] It is also worth noting that the report on Christian Catholic and Orthodox communities does not include the participatory ranking figures, with Christian women's priorities excluded from the table.

The 20 most cited threats and challenges overall, identified in the participatory ranking exercises for both the women's and men's focus groups, are shown in Table 2. The top five most cited threats and challenges have been colour-coordinated (see key) for ease of comparison between the priority issues identified by the women and the men.

Table 2: Aggregation of participatory ranking exercise priority list of grievances

	Women		**Men**		**Overall ranking**	
Priority order	**Threats and challenges identified by women**	**% of women's votes as top priority threat or challenge**	**Threats and challenges identified by men**	**% of men's votes as top priority threat or challenge**	**Threats and challenges identified**	**% of votes as top priority threat or challenge**
1	Education (access to and quality of)	39.3	Religious discrimination (including discrimination linked specifically to clothing and food)	28.3	Education (access to and quality of)	30.9
2	Employment and job opportunities	13.3	Education (access to and quality of)	19.7	Religious discrimination (including discrimination linked specifically to clothing and food)	16.6

[3] The reports on Yazidi women and Shabak women used both approaches to analyse their participatory ranking data.

3	Health (including access to health and social care)	13.3	Safety and security	14.2	Employment and job opportunities	12.3
4	Safety and security	9.2	Employment and job opportunities	11.0	Safety and security	11.3
5	Intra-community customs, community norms and traditions	8.7	Early marriage (& honour killings)	10.2	Health (including access to health and social care)	11.3
6	Inheritance customs	8.7	Health (including access to health and social care)	8.7	Intra-community customs, community norms and traditions	8.3
7	Religious discrimination (including discrimination linked specifically to clothing and food)	8.1	Intra-community customs, community norms and traditions	7.9	Early marriage (& honour killings)	7.0
8	Harassment	8.1	Economy	7.9	Displacement and migration	6.3
9	Displacement and migration	6.9	Role of government and political participation	6.3	Inheritance customs	6.3
10	Early marriage (& honour killings)	4.6	Displacement and migration	5.5	Economy	5.6
11	Lack of freedom (to move around, be out in public, and make personal decisions)	4.6	Lack of freedom (to move around, be out in public, and make personal decisions)	4.7	Harassment	5.0
12	Economy	4.0	Domestic and family violence	3.9	Lack of freedom (to move around, be out in public, and make personal decisions)	4.7

13	Gender discrimination and marginalisation	4.0	Inheritance customs	3.1	Role of government and political participation	3.7
14	Invasion of privacy	2.9	Transportation and travel	2.4	Gender discrimination and marginalisation	2.3
15	Ability to celebrate religious festivals and carry out religious rituals	2.9	Tribalism	2.4	Domestic and family violence	2.3
16	Access to services	2.3	Access to services	1.6	Invasion of privacy	2.0
17	Role of government and political participation	1.7	Divorce	1.6	Access to services	2.0
18	Poverty	1.7	Military service	1.6	Transportation and travel	1.7
19	Domestic and family violence	1.2	Harassment	0.8	Tribalism	1.7
20	Transportation and travel	1.2	Invasion of privacy	0.8	Ability to celebrate religious festivals and carry out religious rituals	1.7

Source: Authors' own.

Key

	First threat/challenge in overall ranking
	Second threat/challenge in overall ranking
	Third threat/challenge in overall ranking
	Fourth threat/challenge in overall ranking
	Fifth threat/challenge in overall ranking

As Table 2 shows, education was the area where women and men of different religious minority backgrounds felt that they experienced the most acute distress. This is significant because without inclusive and good quality education, families are likely to continue to migrate in search of education opportunities for their children, and young people are also going to leave in search of opportunities to continue their education. Another leading concern was unemployment, which is endemic across the country, but as will be seen from the reports is an area where participants feel that their opportunities are significantly undermined on account of religious discrimination. Religious discrimination is a theme in and of itself and re-appears down the table under different themes such as public displays of identity in festivals and celebrations. The top ranked causes of grievances are interconnected and point to a vicious circle: the lack of personal and communal safety, education and job opportunities, all amplified by religious discrimination, making it more likely for families to try to leave the country. The more families emigrate, the more vulnerable those left behind feel, thereby increasing their desire to leave the country as well. The qualitative research demonstrated clearly the gendered dimension of the intersections of these vulnerabilities in complex ways. Sometimes the gender intertwining with religious marginality manifests itself in a clear pattern for women of non-Muslim religious minorities from different backgrounds such as Christian, Sabean, Yazidi and Kakai. It was most evident in terms of new restrictions on mobility and freedom of movement, greater exposure to sexual harassment, greater vulnerability to gendered expressions of hate speech. On the other hand, some forms of vulnerability are accentuated for particular groups, such as displaced Yazidi women living in camps taking away their lives, or Kakai women witnessing their husbands being ridiculed in public spaces because of their facial hair.

9 Intended audience of the study

This study is intended for multiple audiences, all of equal importance. We hope this study is useful for academics researching Iraq and with an interest in matters pertaining to religious diversity. Academics more familiar with conventional methods of data collection (in particular surveys and interviews) may question the impartiality of locally led research using participatory methods. However, it is important to note that participatory methods are considered robust, and measures such as triangulation and corroboration of evidence allow for identifying and addressing any concerns over rigour. It is also worth noting that

when engaging with highly sensitive subjects as freedom of religion or belief in very fragile settings, conventional research methods can generate distorted findings. This is because in contexts where there is a trust deficit, people may not share their thoughts or experiences honestly or openly in a survey or an interview with an outsider (an outsider here defined as someone from outside the country or someone whose background makes them a stranger in the eyes of the interviewee). The use of participatory ranking for example, allows for quantitative data to be generated in ways that may be more authentic than data-gathering through anonymous phone calls or questionnaires filled out online.

Moreover, the use of a participatory methodology directly contributes to pluralising the narratives featuring in academic research. In view of the rising calls within academia to recognise the unequal power relations that inform research design, implementation, analysis and dissemination, participatory methods allow for a redress of whose knowledge counts, whose interpretation and analysis are considered valid and most importantly, the extent to which the process itself is multivocal and inclusive.

We hope that this volume also speaks to practitioners engaged in activism, development or humanitarian action who are committed to supporting community-led action to address everyday forms of encroachment. Given that the research involves community members in the central role of identifying and defining challenges and opportunities, we hope that this may generate opportunities for further conversations to follow regarding actions needed to redress issues identified. At the very least, we hope the space afforded in the group inquiries has allowed for an interrogation of complex power relations as experienced on the ground in a different light.

We also hope that this volume is relevant to policymakers in Iraq and overseas who would like to understand the priorities as expressed by marginalised members of various communities. Often policymakers have access to the views of religious representatives and elite (often male) self-appointed leaders from within communities. We hope the insights and voices of women and men of different religious backgrounds will help to develop a tailored and nuanced approach to policies to support inclusive societies and orders in both Kurdistan-administered and Baghdad-administered Iraq.

Finally, we specifically hope that this volume will galvanise transnational feminist networks to take into consideration how the findings of the research presented in this volume can be addressed through the women, peace and conflict agenda.

References

Abdulkhaliq, Z.S. (2023, forthcoming) *Kakai Religion and the Place of Music and the Tanbur*, CREID Working Paper, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies DOI: 10.19088/CREID.2022.024

Abu-Lughod, L. (2015) *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

AIM (2022) *About us*, Alliance of Iraqi Minorities Network (accessed 2 December 2022)

Aina, T.; Atela, M.; Ojebode, A.; Dayil, P. and Aremu, F. (2019) *Beyond Tweets and Screams: Action for Empowerment and Accountability in Nigeria – The Case of the #BBOG Movement*, IDS Working Paper 529, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (accessed 15 November 2022)

Alkhudary, T. (2020) *Iraqi Women are Engaged in a Struggle for their Rights*, LSE Blogs, 15 June (accessed 31 October 2022)

Ali, Z. (2019) 'Feminisms in Iraq: Beyond the Religious and Secular Divide', *Gender a výzkum / Gender and Research* 20.2: 47–67 DOI: 10.13060/257065 78.2019.20.2.483

Ali, Z. (2018) *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Al-Ali, N. (2014) Sexualized Violence in Iraq: How to Understand and Fight It, *openDemocracy*, 3 December (accessed 15 November 2022)

Al-Ali, N. and Pratt, N. (2008) 'Women's organizing and the conflict in Iraq since 2003', *Feminist Review* 88.1: 74-85, doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400384 (accessed 9 April 2019)

Al-Ali, N. (2008) 'Iraqi Women and Gender Relations: Redefining Difference.' *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 405-419

Al-Ali, N. (2012) 'The Iraqi Women's Movement: Past and Contemporary Perspectives', in P. Arenfeldt and N.A.H. Golley (eds). *Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A Century of Transformations Within*, Cairo: AUC Press

Anderson, C. (2017) 'A Year Ago We Declared ISIS Genocidal. Why Are its Victims Still Waiting for Aid?', *The Washington Post*, 21 March (accessed 15 November 2022)

Beckwith, K. (2007) 'Mapping Strategic Engagements: Women's Movements and the State', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9.3: 312–38

Constitute (n.d.) *Iraq 2005*, Constitute (accessed 2 December 2022)

Cornwall, A. and Jewkes, R. (1995) 'What is Participatory Research?', *Social Science and Medicine* 41.12: 1667–76, DOI: 10.1016/0277-9536(95)00127-S

Haddad, F. (2017) 'Sectarian Relations before "Sectarianization" in pre-2003 Iraq', in N. Hashemi and D. Postel (eds), *Sectarianization Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Glasgow: Bell and Bain

Hashemi, N. and Postel, D. (eds) (2017) *Sectarianization Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Glasgow: Bell and Bain

Home Office (2021) *Country Policy and Information Note. Iraq: Religious minorities*, London: UK Government Home Office (accessed 15 November 2022)

Institute for Community Studies (n.d.) *What is Peer Research?*, London: Institute for Community Studies (accessed 15 November 2022)

International Crisis Group (2021) *Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box*, Brussels: International Crisis Group (accessed 15 November 2022)

Iraqi Women Network (2019) *Iraqi Women challenges of Security, Peace and Justice By Iraqi Women Network; Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee*, New York: CEDAW – UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (accessed 15 November 2022)

Iraqi Women Network (2014) *Iraqi Women in Armed Conflict and Post Conflict Situation: Shadow Report submitted to the CEDAW committee at the 57th Session*, Baghdad: Iraqi Women Network

Jaber, R.S. (2022) 'The Perception of Gender Equity: A Case of Iraq', *Journal of Gender, Culture and Society*, 2.1: 17–45 DOI: 10.32996/jgcs.2022.2.1.3

Kandiyoti, K. (2007) 'Old dilemmas or new challenges? The Politics of Gender and Reconstruction in Afghanistan', *Development and Change* 38.2: 169–99

Macaulay, A.C. *et al.* (1999) 'Participatory Research Maximises Community and Lay Involvement', *BMJ* 1999;319:774, DOI: 10.1136/bmj.319.7212.774

Medica Mondiale (2021) *Northern Iraq – Autonomous Region of Kurdistan*, Medica Mondiale (accessed 31 October 2022)

MRG (2022) *Iraq*, London: Minority Rights Group (accessed 2 December 2022)

Rai, S. (ed.) (2000) *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratisation*, London: Palgrave Macmillan London, DOI: 10.1007/978-1-349-62879-7

Ray, R. and Korteweg, A. (1999) 'Women's Movements in the Third World: Identity, Mobilization, and Autonomy', *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 47–71

Razavi, S. (2000) Women in Contemporary Democratization, UNRISD Occasional Policy Papers no. 4, Geneva: UNRISD

Salloum, S. (2016) 'Zoroastrianism in Iraq Seeks Official Recognition', *Al-Monitor*, 17 February (accessed 15 November 2022)

Shami, S. (2009) 'Aqalliyya/Minority in Modern Egyptian Discourse' in C. Gluck and A. Tsing (eds), *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*, Durham NC: Duke University Press

Susskind, Y. (2014) *The Stories We Tell About ISIS and Women*, *openDemocracy*, 3 December (accessed 15 November 2022)

Tadros, M. (2020a) *Invisible Targets of Hatred: Socioeconomically Excluded Women From Religious Minority Backgrounds*, CREID Working Paper 2, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

Tadros, M. (2020b) *Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Pakistan*, CREID Intersections Series, Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/CREID.2020.003

Tadros, M. (2016) *Resistance, Revolt and Gender Justice in Egypt*, New York NY: Syracuse University Press

Tadros, M. (2013) *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt*, UK: Routledge

Vilardo, V. and Bittar, S. (2018) *Gender Profile - Iraq*, Oxford: Oxfam International

Waylen, G. (2007) *Engendering Transitions: Women's Mobilization, Institutions and Gender Outcomes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Waylen, G. (1994) 'Women and Democratization, Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics', *World Politics* 46.3: 327–54

Younis, M.S. (2021) 'The Plight of Women in Iraq: Gender Disparity, Violence, and Mental Health', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 67.8: 977–83, DOI: 10.1177/00207640211003602

Youssef, A. (2016) *Aqbat Misr..Al-Tareekh wa Al-Qadiyya,* Cairo: Al-Ain Publishing

CREID is an international consortium led and convened by the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

T +44 (0) 1273 606261
F +44 (0) 1273 621202
E creid@ids.ac.uk
W www.ids.ac.uk/creid

CREID partners

Funded by