The Lighthouse
Feature Article

Conducting Research on the Assyrians of Northern Iraq

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Objective

A Structural/Functional Analysis and Needs assessment to be conducted on the Assyrian community of northern Iraq, by which to gather demographic information, measure socio-economic conditions, and determine policy.

Historical Background on the Assyrians

The Assyrians are the indigenous people of Mesopotamia, (today's northern Iraq, Western Iran, North Eastern Syria, and South Eastern Turkey) with Nineveh in northern Iraq as the main capital. After the fall of the Assyrian empire, in 612 B.C., Assyria became a relatively small kingdom under the Parthian rule. By 113 A.D. the small kingdom of Assyria was headed by Augaros the Osrehoenian, (king Abgar) who ruled it from Assyria's provincial capital, Edessa, (Urhay). By 116 A.D. parts of Mesopotamia were colonized by the Roman Empire, as far as Nisibis and Sinjar, with the frontier running down the Khabur River, from Sinjar to its confluence with the Euphrates. In that same year, Roman coins were made in celebration of Armenia and Assyria being made a Roman province by Trajan, who marched down the Euphrates to Ctesiphon, (the Parthian capital). Casius Dio writes, "In 117 A.D. Hadrian succeeded Trajan and gave up the province of Mesopotamia and Assyria." During this time, Assyria became Christianized and Syriac literature was flourishing due to the relatively autonomous state of Assyria within the Roman Empire.

During the Islamic conquest the geography of the Assyrian heartland did not change in any substantive way, but the Assyrian demographic composition changed dramatically by the sword of Islam. During the Ottoman rule in Mesopotamia, the Assyrian heartland was once again concentrated in northern Iraq, in a relatively autonomous state, encompassing Sinjar, Dohouk, Arbil, and Mosul.

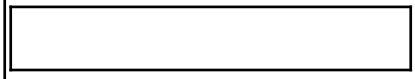
With the onset of WWI, the Christian Assyrians were caught between the British and the Turks, which resulted in the Assyrians becoming England's "Smallest Ally." During the course of this war, the Russian forces, who were protecting the Assyrians in Ottoman Turkey, withdrew from the frontlines to contend with the Bolshevik Revolution back in Russia. The Turks proceeded to massacre the Assyrians, the Armenians, and the Pontic Greeks to ethnically and religiously cleanse the "Turkish Fatherland." Three-quarters of the Assyrian population was slaughtered by the Ottoman Turks in the Assyrian genocide of 1914, using Kurdish mercenaries and nationalist Turks. The effects of this war on the Assyrian community were devastating, and resulted in the Ottoman-ruled Mesopotamia being divided between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, by the British colonialists, and the Assyrian community was formally split between these newly created political regions. In exchange for being the "smallest ally" of the British, the Assyrians were promised an independent state of their own in northern Iraq, but this never materialized.

By 1920, Iraq was declared a mandate of the League of Nations, under the United Kingdom administration. With only one quarter of the Assyrian population surviving WWI, the Turkish massacres and the redrawing of Asia Minor's political map, the Assyrian community of northern Iraq was reduced considerably. Splitting the Assyrians into various politically defined regions in the Middle East impacted the cohesiveness of the Assyrian community and devastated its socio-economic life-line. Moreover, the British promise to the Assyrians turned into the British betrayal in 1933, when Britain allowed the Iraqi army to massacre the Assyrians in Simele and other Assyrian villages in northern Iraq, using the Kurds once again. With thousands of Assyrians slaughtered, their political leaders all but assassinated and their religious leader exiled to Cypress, the Assyrian community of northern Iraq became an insignificant and politically powerless entity within the fairly modern state of Iraq. The demographic terrain of the Assyrian region began to change dramatically in the wake of the new Kurdish invasion of the Assyrian homeland. Adding to this geopolitical transformation of the Assyrian community, was the political, cultural and socio-linguistic oppression waged on the Assyrians during the 35-year reign of Saddam Hussein's Baath regime, where the Assyrian identity, culture, and language were suppressed, their political parties banned, their villages razed, and their leaders executed, in a systematic campaign to Arabize the Assyrians of Iraq.

The modern Assyrian community of northern Iraq is comprised of Mosul province, (known to the Assyrians as the Nineveh Plains) which encompasses some 16 Assyrian townships, the city of Nohadra, (re-named "Dohouk" by the Kurds) and Ankawa in Arbil province, (the ancient Assyrian Arbella). Smaller Assyrian communities exist in other provinces such as Kirkuk, Diyala, and Diyana. The Assyrians have traditionally lived in the Assyrian Triangle, (their traditional ancestral lands) for thousands of years, and have faced numerous religious conquests, political and cultural invasions, occupations, and geo-political changes. Starting with WWI, WWII, the Gulf War, and the recent war on Iraq, most Assyrians have fled their homeland and living in the Diaspora, due to the on-going political and military campaigns waged on their small nation.

In the aftermath of the Gulf War, in 1991, and the carving of the new Kurdish enclave on the Assyrian homeland, the United States further decimated the Assyrian community, by providing the Kurds with a safe-haven against "Saddam's tyranny," on the Assyrian homeland, enabling them to establish their own parliament, assisting them with the creation of the new political entity known as the federal region of "Kurdistan," the new American colonial post in the Middle East. The implementation of this newly created Kurdish federal region has split the Assyrian community once more, where half of the Assyrians now live in "Kurdistan" under the Kurdish Regional Government, (KRG) rule, and the other half in the Nineveh Plains, tied to the Central government in Baghdad. Moreover, with the insurgency and Muslim fundamentalism in Iraq on the rise, fuelled by America's war on Islam, the Christian Assyrians are suffering religious persecution in ways that are familiar and reminiscent of both Assyrian genocides of WWI and the Simele Massacre of 1933, being forced to abandon their homes, evacuating their communities, fleeing Iraq by the thousands, or escaping to the relative safety of the northern region under the protection of the multinational forces.

The Socio-Political Community of the Assyrians of Northern Iraq



Today's Assyrian community of northern Iraq is composed of two strata: 1) the indigenous Assyrians living in their historical Nineveh Plains, with Mosul as its capital, under the Central government rule in Baghdad, and 2) the indigenous Assyrians living in their ancestral and historical lands of northern Iraq, (Sinjar, Ankawa, Dohouk, Diyala, Arbil and Diyana) now part of the Kurdish-controlled region. In addition to the indigenous Assyrian population living in their ancestral lands, there is an influx of Assyrian refugees fleeing war-torn Baghdad and Basra. These refugees can be categorized as

follows: The first group is comprised of internally displaced Assyrians fleeing the war and the ethnic-religious cleansing in Baghdad and Basra to the relative safety of the Northern provinces, now under the control of the Kurdish Regional Government and the multinational forces. The second group is fleeing Iraq altogether with the rest of the Iraqi refugees, temporarily settling in the neighboring countries of Jordan and Syria, applying for asylum to the West, or awaiting funding and possible resettlement in their traditional lands in northern Iraq. While the Christian Assyrians make-up only 4% of the total Iraqi population, 40-50% of Iraqi refugees living in Jordan and Syria are Assyrians. The Diaspora Assyrians are ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and economically linked to the Assyrian community of northern Iraq in ways that are visibly and invisibly manifested in their on-going struggle to maintain their ties to the relatives back home and their ancestral lands, as well as by lobbying for political and financial support from the West.

The Assyrian community living under the Kurdish Regional Government rule in northern Iraq is the largest Assyrian community, and is known to the Assyrians as "Occupied Assyria." This region is headed by the Barzani and the Talabani Clan, who lead the majority-Kurdish parliament, (KRG) with a few seats reserved for minorities, such as the Assyrians, the Turkomen, the Yezidis, the Armenians, and the Mandeans. On the one hand, the KRG has entrusted several high positions to Assyrian political ministers who have proven to be loyal Kurdish affiliates, in an attempt to prove "Kurdish Democracy." On the other hand, the KRG has all but confiscated the majority of Assyrian lands in order to accommodate the overwhelming Kurdish population, resettling Kurds from Europe, Turkey, and Iran on the Assyrian lands. The majority of Assyrians around the world view the Kurdish occupiers as the old "enemy" who helped the Turkish and the Iraqi army to exterminate the Assyrians during WWI and the Simele Massacre of 1933. Moreover, the Assyrian ministers working for the KRG are viewed by the majority of Assyrians as "Kurdish puppets," collaborating with the Kurds to "Kurdify" Assyria and legitimize "Kurdistan."

In the last two years, the KRG's Assyrian Finance Minister, Sargis Aghajan, has rebuilt 60-70 northern Assyrian villages destroyed by Kurds and Saddam's army, and has resettled hundreds of displaced Assyrians within the KRG region, accommodating the Assyrian refugees fleeing Baghdad and Basra's sectarian violence, building them homes, churches, schools, cultural centers, and a satellite TV station, called Ishtar, all sponsored by "Kurdistan." But the majority of Assyrians see this gesture as building a Kurdistan, not Assyria.

More recently, Sargis Aghajan has been instrumental in forming the Assyrian Council of Ankawa, an Assyrian Legislative body consisting of representatives from all Assyrian constituencies in northern Iraq, and several Assyrian global political parties who share his political goals for the Assyrians of northern Iraq. But even this council is seen by most Assyrians as an illegitimate entity installed by the Kurdish regime to Kurdify the Assyrian homeland.

To the extent that the Assyrian community of northern Iraq has suffered numerous and on-going political and social conflicts, as well as fairly recent geopolitical changes, the modern Assyrian community is in a fragile and vulnerable state. It is in this historical complexity and ever-changing context that the fate of the Assyrian community of northern Iraq hangs in balance between the sectarian violence afflicting Iraq, the KRG political ambitions of expansion and control of indigenous Assyrian lands, and the military occupation of Iraq by the United States. Hence, any attempt to conduct social research on the Assyrian community of northern Iraq is a difficult task, one that requires a sensitive and careful approach, not to mention somewhat dangerous, especially in light of the political instability in Iraq, the upward advance of the insurgency towards the Mosul district, and the on-going religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, and refugee flow afflicting the tattered Assyrian nation.

Important Research Factors Relating to the Assyrian Community of northern Iraq

Some of the factors that should be given important consideration when conducting research on the Assyrian community in northern Iraq are: 1-the insurgency movement throughout the country, 2-the Kurdish Peshmerga and the PKK armed groups operating in northern Iraq, and connected to the KRG, 3-the Assyrian households living in northern Iraq, (including the newly arrived Assyrian refugees, who have traditionally maintained ties to their ancestral homeland), and 4) the Multinational corporations operating in northern Iraq, in conjunction with the multinational forces, the "new occupiers of Iraq."

Some of the challenges faced by social scientists attempting to conduct research on the Assyrian community of northern Iraq are apparent:

- How do you design a sampling methodology in a region where there are no accurate or even available census data?
- How do you run field work in war-damaged neighborhoods where ongoing violence disrupts transportation and communication, endangers interviewers and shuts down cities under curfews and roadblocks, and still achieve exacting scientific standards?
- How do you craft questionnaires that probe attitudes on sensitive subjects without alienating skittish respondents and posing further risks to your field staff?
- How do you establish agency for the households in this region, who are vulnerable and powerless, devastated by war, destruction, and religious and political persecution, and completely dependant on their KRG overlords?

Literature Review

In reviewing the available literature on how to conduct research in volatile regions, it becomes clear that every completed field research in conflict zones has been conducted by well-funded international organizations, specializing in social research, employing professionally trained staff, and supported by national or international governments. In most cases, the field work is conducted by aid workers employed by such humanitarian agencies as the Red Cross/Red Crescent, and in exceptional cases, by local citizens, hired and trained by professional agencies to conduct surveys. In nearly every case, the methodologies used are designed by professional research companies in conjunction with local partners, who develop focus groups, provide professional moderators, translators, and data interpreters. The majority of available data analysis is interpreted by professional social scientists and anthropologists, hired by governmental and non-governmental organizations, (NGOs) or research institutes, and the publications are available on the websites of many of these large organizations.

The largest and most well-known organizations who have conducted most of the field research in war-zone regions are: The International Committee of the Red Cross, (ICRC), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Fafo Institute for Social Research, funded by the Norwegian government. Large surveys, such as the nation-wide Iraq Living conditions survey (UNDP 2005), conducted in 2004 by Fafo and the Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology, Iraq (COSIT) provide comprehensive data on the living conditions of Iraqi households, but these large-scale surveys are time-consuming and significantly more difficult, and potentially dangerous to complete. Moreover, they lack ethnographic data by which one can obtain information on the Assyrian community of northern Iraq.

The most comprehensive and elaborate social research in conflict zones has been conducted by the Fafo Research Foundation. Their website boasts several research projects launched in conflict regions such as the Middle East, East and West Africa, and Eastern Europe. One of their most notable staff, Dr. Kathleen Jennings, has recently published her review of some of these research

projects conducted in conflict zones, and she provides a detailed and thorough analysis in her abstract, "The War Zone as Social Space: Social Research in Conflict Zones."

Dr. Jennings defines conflict zones as social spaces. In the introductory paragraph of her analysis she writes, "As seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the late 1990's, and in Iraq and Afghanistan today, it may be difficult to say with any certainty whether a conflict is in fact over, even once a political compromise or process is agreed. Conflict zones are sites of both change and continuity. At the same time, the chronic nature of many post-Cold War conflicts highlights how depressingly normal a situation of conflict may become for the affected population." (Jennings 2007:1).

Jennings admits that much of what we know about conflict is second-hand and descriptive, as the stories of participants and survivors of conflict are told to journalists, aid-workers, and officials concerned with the political and economic aspects of war. This suggests that social research in conflict zones has been a fairly recent trend and more studies are needed to establish working models for social researchers, and to provide data by which we can assess conflict-affected populations.

Jennings maintains that violent conflict is often represented and understood as an exceptional phenomenon. "This is merited, given what comes with war: large-scale death, destruction, refugee flows, political instability, humanitarian crisis, and long-lasting socio-economic impacts. Yet the "exceptionalism" associated with violent conflict obscures two important points: the first is that, in chronic conflict zones, conflict is not exceptional. It might instead be called the "new normal," often in quite resilient and remarkable ways." (Jennings 2007:7). This means conflict is not only prolonged to sustain the interests of those perpetrating war, but the affected population adapts to this "new normal" by adopting or inventing new coping mechanisms by which to survive.

Jennings divides the actors in conflict regions into three distinct groups: The Armed Groups, the Elite Networks, and the Households. She defines the term "armed groups" as a non-state, armed movement, fighting the government, and comprising anything from disciplined, military-style organizations, to armed wings of political or religious movements. She posits that the way armed groups have been defined and understood by analysts and policy-makers, has always been affected by geopolitics. "Presently the geopolitical current most relevant to the study and understanding of armed groups is the "global war on terror". Even at the time of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, many armed groups were also considered to be terrorist organizations." (Jennings 2007:10). Among the armed groups she lists, who operate in various countries and who are labeled "Terrorist Groups," is the Kurdistan Worker's Party, (PKK) who are nowadays the subject of most news articles, fighting the Turkish government along Iraq's northern border with Turkey. The KRG denies any affiliation with this "rogue" group, yet their name bares the word "Kurdistan" as opposed to the Kurdish Worker's Party, which would encompass all the Kurds of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Taking into consideration the definitions of armed groups and their motives as described by Jennings, the military power behind Kurdistan's power in northern Iraq is the PKK. In that sense, the PKK's role is to expand and sustain the conflict for the KRG in northern Iraq while the officially recognized Kurdish Peshmerga armed group secures the expansion and annexation of the Kurdish region. Consequently, any attempt to conduct research on the Assyrian community in this region, is dangerous and politically complex, considering how many armed groups operate in this conflict zone.

Jennings's analyses of the motive of armed groups in conflict zones is based on the "greed and grievance" debate, formulated by her Fafo colleagues Berdal and Malone where "the precise role of economically motivated actions and processes in generating and sustaining contemporary civil conflicts has been understudied, despite the fact that as the editors argue, economic considerations often shape the calculations and behavior of the parties to a conflict, giving rise to a particular *war economy* and a distinct dynamic of conflict."(Jennings 2007:12). This would explain the immense economic boom in the Kurdistan region during the course of the War on Iraq, where the Iraqi

economy is globalized through the Kurdish regional structure. Jennings adds, "Profit motive can be an important, if not primary factor determining the advent, continuation, and institutionalization of violent conflict; and that where conflict facilitates profit, the pursuit of economic interests supplements-and may even supplant-the traditional aim of war, namely defeating the enemy." (Jennings 2007:12). She argues that attacks against military targets and infrastructure are thus accompanied (or replace) by attacks intended to appropriate and exert control over resource-rich areas, trade routes, and aid distribution, which in the case of northern Iraq is comprised of several different actors, not only consisting of Kurdish armed groups, but the US forces, as well, all of whom are involved in the process of gaining political dominance of northern Iraq, and economic control over resource-rich areas. Hence in this particular scenario, America sustains the conflict, by creating "the war on terror," and to that extent, the beneficiaries of the war on the oil-rich and strategically important Iraq are the American occupiers and their Kurdish emissaries.

As with armed groups, much of the policy and analytical work on elite networks, according to Jennings, "has focused on the important role of resource exploitation. An elite network is not a single actor per se, but a group encompassing actors, relationships, transactions, and resource flows." (Jennings 2007:21). She maintains that the elite networks, working in conjunction with regime actors, state military forces, non-state armed groups, and corporations, often play key roles in transporting goods and services, and brokering the commodity chain of natural resources coming from conflict zones or otherwise poor and insecure states. "They provide a link between local production and global markets in arms, drugs, diamonds, timber, finance, and people." (Jennings 2007:21). Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999) characterize this overlap as *la politique du venture*, or "the politics of the belly" in which the relationship between economic accumulation and tenure of political power does not preclude the conduct of illicit activities by the networked actors outside formal power structures. The creation of the so-called "federal region of Kurdistan" in 1991 then, was by design, and that such an accommodation was a preamble for the war on Iraq in 2003. To the extent in which the Kurdish elite networks have facilitated the multi-national corporate greed, and are serving as a vehicle for both cultural representations and goods of foreign origin, they play a key role in the process of globalization. This neo-patrimonialism, according to Jennings consists of the privatization of the public which has two consequences: "the first is that political power, instead of having the impersonal and abstract character of legal-rational domination, specific to the modern state, is on the contrary personal power. While the second is that politics becomes a kind of business, as it is political resources which give access to economic resources: politics is reduced to economies and recovers the depersonalized character inherent in the market." (Jennings 2007:28).

The last group discussed by Jennings, are the Households, which she admits is the group least studied. She posits that work on households in conflict mostly comes from anthropologists, epidemiologists, demographers, and to a much lesser extent, political scientists and economists. Much of the survey work being done on households in conflict areas is conducted for the purpose of assessing humanitarian needs and/or impact. "This work is crucial to effectively tailor policy and aid responses in crisis situations, and its relative neglect by both researchers and donors is highly problematic. Much of the debate in this area still circulates on developing methodologies and indicators, and implies how much work remains to be done." (Jennings 2007:29). This answers the question of why every completed research on households in conflict areas is conducted by humanitarian agencies and their aid workers, and to that extent, acceptable standards of social research and methodologies are not yet fully developed.

Jennings proposes that if we conceive of conflict zones as social space, then research into conflict should be conducted in an empirical manner, which would require researchers to observe connections, commonalities, and dissimilarities among the various elements active in a conflict zone, such as the relationships within and between armed groups, elite networks, and households and individuals. This would enhance the effectiveness of research and policy. In other words,

conducting any kind of research on the Assyrian community in northern Iraq must entail observing the entire area in which the Assyrian households live and studying connections formed or are forming between the Assyrians and their Kurdish political overlords, the Kurdish elite networks, as well as the occupying American forces operating in conjunction with the multi-national corporations. She uses as an example "the elite networks profitably" linking global arms, financial, and commodity markets to local production and consumption, which means that these households are largely impacted by the goods and services the American occupiers and the Kurdish elite networks produce, trade, and contract in northern Iraq. She advises that it is a mistake to assume that the economic boom in conflict regions consists of or is controlled exclusively by foreign opportunists. Rather, these elite networks are often embedded in their community and built on existing formal and informal authority structures within their regions.

A great deal of information has come out of the Kurdish region lately in the form of articles written by independent journalists reporting the immense corruption within the KRG, and how the Kurdish elites are siphoning both material and capital wealth to those who support them, while the rest of the Kurds struggle to survive. A great example of this is illustrated in an article titled, "Corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan" by Kate Clark, in which she writes, "Kurdistan's budget is large - more than $6bn last year - the region's share of Iraq's oil revenues. But there is a growing gap between ordinary Kurds and the political elite." (Kurdish Media: 1/10/2008). There is no question that the Assyrians who are affiliated with the KRG are also profiting economically, and this is manifested in their life-styles, their newly acquired wealth and positions in the KRG, as well as the loyalty to the Kurdish plans for northern Iraq. To that extent, the Assyrian households who live in this region, must either cooperate and become dependent upon them or fail to survive politically and economically. While ordinary Kurds suffer economically, the Assyrians, who are completely dependant upon their Kurdish overlords, are living below the poverty level, and their communities are plagued with joblessness and hopelessness, similar to America's ghettos.

Jennings also draws a link between the elite networks and the armed groups that serve them, by stating that "Armed groups also tend to establish relationships with, or constitute their own networks to market the exploitable resources and their control and ensure access to arms and other material." (Jennings 2007:17). In many articles published in independent Kurdish papers, we read statements from former Kurdish Peshmergas and former KRG political prisoners who describe how the Kurdish elite networks provide armed groups with material wealth such as lands and capital in exchange for their support to sustain Kurdish power in northern Iraq. Hence, it would be difficult to conduct accurate research using a sample survey by which to assess the socio-economic conditions of the Assyrians in northern Iraq without first gaining insight into the regional economic structure upon which the Assyrian households depend for their existence.

Jennings asserts that understanding conflict zones as social space may help to restore agency to those involved in or affected by conflict. To the extent in which the different actors in conflict have varying interests, including simple survival, the advancement of political and social agendas, status and profit, it is crucial to examine the interests, motives, and strategies of those acting within conflict zones in order to understand if the Assyrian households could be put in a position of power to be able to assume agency if a research project is launched in their community. In the case of the Assyrian households, they can only be empowered to assume agency if they are provided total independence within an Assyrian safe-haven, outside the Kurdish rule and influence. Otherwise, agency for the Assyrian households would be difficult to achieve, given the fact that the KRG is totally imbedded in every aspect of Assyrian life in the Kurdish controlled region, and Kurdish officials operate in every Assyrian village, and dictate the course of political and social decisions, conferences, caucuses, ethno-religious events, and even local elections. This is apparent in many of the events held in northern Iraq, where Kurdish officials are present in every Assyrian gathering, from eulogies, to memorials, to social or political meetings as well as the formation of the recent Assyrian Council in Ankawa.

Moreover, many Kurdish ministers treat the Assyrians as third-class citizens, and have made blatant and hostile remarks about the Assyrian rights within the Kurdish-controlled region, such as the recent statement by Mulla Bakhtiyar, who recently said, “It is known that nations have the legal right to establish their own states or regions if they had historic and geographical lands; however, the Turkomen and Assyrians are residing in Kurdistan and they have full citizenship rights in it, but they do not own/have any lands in Kurdistan and/or in Iraq." Mulla Bakhtiyar, head of the Foreign Relations Bureau of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK) under Jalal Talabani, (Iraqi president) as quoted in the Al-Malaf Press, October 22, 2007. No other nation or people have more valid historical and geographical reality in northern Iraq than the Assyrians, yet Mulla Bakhtiyar is emboldened by the Kurdish power that is propped-up in Iraq by the American colonialists.

Methodology

Given the political complexities and the dangerous and unstable circumstances in which the Assyrians of northern Iraq find themselves currently, it would be difficult if not impossible for an individual or group of Assyrians to launch an independent research project in the Assyrian community of northern Iraq, to empower the Assyrian households to assume agency, and to obtain accurate data on their living conditions, without risking intimidation and interruption from the Kurdish authorities, who are likely to be suspicious and want to intervene, disrupt, or even influence the research project. It is vital that an independent, well-funded, professional and authoritative research organization be assigned to conduct such important research and be able to carry it through, without fear of reprisal from various formal and informal Kurdish authorities operating in northern Iraq. This type of large-scale and sensitive project can only be launched by such groups as the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), working in conjunction with the Fafo Institute for Social Research. Only such organizations can truly be independent and empowered to perform such exacting and potentially dangerous work, in an uninterrupted and undeterred environment, where researchers, aid workers, data, and facilities can be protected and secured through a formal and legitimate structure which would enable the Assyrian households to assume agency.

A conflict zone, being a complex and multi-dimensional social space, requires research that is well-mapped and staged, incorporating several methods and techniques. Hence, the following methodology is proposed:

Stage I

In the initial stage, the research project must entail a structural/functional analysis in the target region. This would consist of a period of empirical observation and data analysis to determine the Assyrian social structure within the conflict region. It is crucial to identify all the players, such as the regional government, military forces, corporations, private security forces, armed groups, as well as international and humanitarian agencies operating in the region, and to analyze the relationships between all these groups, and map the playing field.

Stage II

To the extent researchers may not have a choice who they might engage in the research, (be it officials, local, regional, and international bureaucrats) it is important to understand the social environment before conducting research. At this stage it will be necessary to meet with key players to establish the agency, the security system that will guarantee the safety of the research project, the agency, the staff and the data, and to secure the research project through the American military operations in northern Iraq.

Stage III

At this stage, the choice of which humanitarian and professional research agencies from among

the many large and well-established organizations must be established. The ICRC working in conjunction with the Fafo Institute is the most likely choice for the Assyrian community in northern Iraq. The ICRC is the only trusted humanitarian agency in Iraq to launch large-scale projects. The Fafo institute has the most experience in conducting social research on ethnic groups, and is not only independent but funded by the Norwegian government to conduct research throughout conflict zones. The choice of these two organizations would be the most expedient, efficient, and cost-effective.

Stage IV

At this stage, all the precautionary measures must be established by the research committee to allow for a sample design to be specifically tailored to the Assyrian community, taking into consideration the Assyrian religious and cultural mores, the linguistic specifications, and regional laws operating in northern Iraq.

Stage V: Opinion Survey

The Questionnaire-The opinion survey would be designed to question Assyrian households on their war experiences and would incorporate questions on their living conditions within each strata. The questionnaire would be developed by a professional research company, in consultation with the ICRC, and would include questions needed to assess the following topics:

- Characteristics of the community (infrastructure, access to services)
- Demographic characteristics (sex, age, marital status, migration, fertility, infant and child mortality, maternal mortality)
- Housing and amenities
- Household possessions
- Household income
- Labor force and sources of income, including agriculture
- Education (enrollment, attendance, literacy, achieved level of education)
- Health (state of health, reproductive health, access to services)
- Security
- Autonomy

The survey being a multi-topic survey, would allow cross-cutting analysis of the distribution of living conditions along a range of dimensions, and can therefore provide identification of vulnerable groups, geographic disparities and analysis of particular parts of the population, such as IDPs, (internally displaced individuals).

Sample Design-selected by a stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling method. The sample must be stratified to ensure representation from each of the principal Assyrian regions within the three governorates, (the KRG-controlled governorates of Arbil and Nohadra/Dohouk, and the non-KRG controlled governorate of Mosul). A local partner hired to randomly select small geographic units within these two strata can achieve a better outcome.

Within households, respondents would be selected using a kish grid (a respondent key that employs a combination of random numbers, alphabet codes and the number of available members in a household to identify the appropriate respondent) or the birthday criterion (a respondent selection process that employs dates of birth to determine appropriate respondent). The demographic distribution of the surveyed respondents would be compared with the best available census data on education, age, household type and occupation that can be obtained from the Assyrian church

records.

- Survey Administration

The survey would be administered by the ICRC, with the assistance of a professional research group and local research partner. Interviews would be conducted by the Red Cross or Red Crescent staff. The professional research company would provide the training.

- Focus Groups

The focus groups would provide a relatively unstructured environment for people to discuss their war experiences freely, express their views on the geo-political changes within each community structure, the security situation, as well as the freedom to establish Assyrian cultural and academic institutions important in maintaining religious rites, linguistic and social traditions of the Assyrians. In each governorate, 3-5 focus groups should be organized The participants should be recruited by Red Cross or Red Crescent staff, based on guidelines provided by a professional research organization.

The local research company should provide a professional moderator, who facilitates the discussions using the same guidelines. The discussions should be held in focus-group facilities, school classrooms, hotel rooms, and even in the open air, if, for example, they involved guerrilla fighters. ICRC, the Red Cross/Red Crescent and a professional Research staff would observe and listen from an adjoining location, with simultaneous translation in English.

- The Sample

The sample of the survey should be a comparatively standard two-stage cluster design. In the Ninveh Plains, the survey should be based on the 1997 census of Iraq. For the other two governorates of Arbil and Dohouk, where the 1997 census was not conducted, sampling frames should be based on lists of localities compiled by the local statistical offices. The first stage of the sample should be selected with probability proportionate to the number of households in each unit (PPS). Each selected Primary Sampling Unit (PSU) should be mapped, all households listed, and 10 households randomly selected in each PSU. Due to population growth, migration, displacement and exodus of the Assyrians, it is likely that the 1997 census does not accurately represent the population distribution of all three governorates. A list of resettled Assyrians as well as a list of IDPs should be obtained from the Ankawa Council. But parts of the population will most likely not be covered, in particular, recently displaced people who have moved to new areas.

- Fieldwork

ICRC staff would have to be extensively trained in implementing the survey tool by researchers from the Fafo Institute of Applied International Studies (Fafo AIS). The first round of training should take place within KRG controlled region under the protection of US military units operating in northern Iraq. Core staff from ICRC's offices in each governorate should be present under Fafo's supervision. Fieldwork should be completed within two months in the Mosul Governorate. Data collection in the Governorates of Arbil and Dohouk can be completed afterwards for comparison reasons.

After each selected PSU had been mapped and listed, interviewers should be sent to 10 selected households. Interviewers can be organized in teams of five, with individual supervisors who continuously provide guidance and check the quality of all incoming interviews. Furthermore, supervisors from Fafo staff should also visit the interviewer teams. Upon completion of the interviews, the information should be sent to the governorate office for registration and inspection, then to the Ankawa main office for coding and data entry. During the data entry process, extensive quality control should be implemented, and questionnaires should be sent back to the Fafo headquarters in Oslo. Completed data files should be continuously sent to Fafo's headquarters in Oslo, Norway, where further quality checks can be implemented.

Areas Covered by the Survey-The survey would examine housing conditions, the availability of

infrastructure and services, and environmental issues. The survey first must look at the delivery of basic services such as electricity, water, and sanitation, emphasizing not only households' access to networks but also on the quality and stability of supply.

The households' dwellings should be described with reference to the type, size, number of people in dwelling, and tenure arrangements, in order to provide information pertaining to the space in which individuals live. Furthermore, damages to dwellings caused by acts of war or lack of maintenance should be described and analyzed in relation to households' plans and states of repair. The survey should also describe individuals' satisfaction with different aspects of housing and the environment in close vicinity to the dwelling. The survey must look at households' access to social services, focusing mainly on health and education services. All analysis would be done in relation to households' geographical place of residence and socio-economic status.

The survey must describe and analyze the characteristics of the Assyrian population in northern Iraq. The dynamics of any population can be described in terms of births, deaths, and migration, paying specific attention to the population's age and gender structure. Particular emphasis should be placed on infant and child mortality in the Assyrian community. The demographic effects of war and strife should also be discussed.

The survey would consider the supply, demand, and quality of education in the Assyrian community. The supply of education encompasses physical infrastructure and public spending; demand is related to various aspects of enrollment; and the quality of education refers to how the system works internally. Special emphasis should be given to enrolment levels and characteristics, as well as to the achieved education and literacy levels in the adult population. The geographic and socio-economic differentiation of educational achievements should be considered. The survey should deal with labor-force participation and employment. The analysis would outline some of the difficulties inherent in estimating employment and unemployment in an economy like northern Iraq, and would consider aspects of both visible and hidden underemployment. The distribution of occupation and industries in northern Iraq should also be addressed**.** The survey should describe the result of work, specifically the income and wealth of households. Data collected on household income, the material possessions of households, and subjective measures of destitution and poverty can be used to portray income patterns, which in turn would lead to an analysis of inequality. The data obtained may not allow for a full-fledged poverty analysis, but insight into the characteristics of poverty in the Assyrian community of northern Iraq can be gained through an analysis of how people perceive their situation. The survey should include questions on Assyrian autonomy. The households should be asked whether they would like to form an Assyrian autonomous region on their traditional ancestral lands.

In all cases, the interviews must be conducted face to face, using a standard questionnaire, developed by professional research organizations. Some 10 percent of the questions should be contextual, and in some cases unique to the governorate.

Conclusion

This research project would be the first of its kind conducted exclusively on the Assyrian community in northern Iraq. This research would serve many purposes:

- Define the geopolitical Assyrian community within the current Iraqi context.
- Identify the institutional structures by which the Assyrian community functions
- Gather statistical information by which to measure the demographics of the Assyrian community within the three governorates
- Identify the geographic disparities within each of the three governorate structure

- Determine the overall socio-economic needs of the Assyrian population in the northern Iraq region.
- Identify the Assyrian political structure operating in northern Iraq
- Establish the geographical outline of an autonomous, self-administered region for the Assyrians in northern Iraq.
- Effectively tailor policy for long-term sustainability of the Assyrian community of northern Iraq within an autonomous structure.

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