Intermingling and Overlapping of Refugee Regimes in Their Transnational Connections and Agencies: Yezidi Refugees From Iraq

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In this contribution I will discuss some examples of refugee regimes which are at stake when we speak about Iraq, thus the case of the Yezidis. Using Iraq as an example, it can be shown that differences in the refugee regimes emerged, which are often contradicting and I will show how these contradictions interfere in the lives of those affected by them. The chapter elaborates on how a demographically rather small community cannot be considered in isolation, but is embedded in different regimes that overlap and that require different strategies and set conditions for agency. In various international and national statistics asylum seekers, such as the Yezidis are reduced to their citizenship and labelled, here as "Iraqi refugees". The receiving countries perspectives' hardly acknowledge that since the founding of the modern Iraqi state different refugee regimes have emerged, partly influenced by historical developments.[1]

As outlined in the introduction multiple refugee regimes are existing on the national and international level simultaneously, either side by side or overlapping or opposing each other. In terms of theory, the complexity, multipolarity and various political principles which determine the (im)mobility of people in one nation state is discussed. The complexity of refugee regimes will be shown here on the example of Iraq in general and with a specific focus on the situation of the Yezidis since 2015. Herein some of the mechanisms

1 I am grateful to Sabine Bauer-Amin and Leonardo Schiocchet for their valuable comments on a previous version of this article; this article was brought into being through a year-long, very fruitful cooperation, within a collegial atmosphere with them in Refuge Studies projects.

which regulate the movements on the regional (Yezidi/Kurdish), on the national (Iraq) and international level as well as the multiplicity of political, legal and social instruments will be scrutinized.

In this chapter instead of tackling the question of humanitarianism, humanitarian intervention and agencies' for which Iraq would provide a plethora of examples and development, I will focus on the role of transnational networks which became in some cases a considerable factor in refugee regimes. The transnational (ethnic and/or religious) networks are social actors and can be part of and become active within humanitarian practices and strategies for agency. The Iraqi and Yezidi case – as it will be shown – is not only an extraordinary example for the complexity and multipolarity of refugee regimes but shows how refugee regimes overlap, intermingle and counteract each other.

I will briefly sketch the political backgrounds and challenges which are deeply rooted in Iraqi history and discuss some of the features, ambiguities and ambivalences in the multipolarity of movements for refuge within, from and to Iraq. Different refugee regimes evolved – due to the historical and recent political situation, which as I will show cannot be seen only in the binary relation of sending and emitting nation states, but rather each has its various international implications. Furthermore, in the last decades an increased transnationalisation of some of the Iraqi communities of concern has influenced the individual actors, Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and policy makers to develop their agency. Through an empirically based investigation, I shall show the necessity of having transnational networks in focus when scrutinizing the agency of refugees.

My intention here is to discuss how some of these refugee regimes exist side by side, overlap or intermingle, showing the challenges for the nation states involved as well as for NGOs and the refugees themselves. Within the framework of this article, it is impossible to discuss the single refugee regimes in depth. It is only possible to shed light on some of the developments and discuss some of the interdependencies in this multipolarity. This encompassing approach should help to scrutinize whether and how these complex refugee regimes limit or enable refugees' agency. I refer here to various "field-sites" which span transnational relations between Iraq, Armenia, Austria and Germany.

This paper has a threefold structure: firstly, I sketch the situation in Iraq as a target, transit and emitting country for displaced people. Here, a brief reflection on the history of the Iraqi state is necessary to understand the over-

lapping and intermingling of refugee regimes. Secondly, based on empirical research, I focus on the situation and agency of Iraqi refugees from various backgrounds in Austria, and discuss their aims and prospects. I also show the consequences and impacts of the multipolar Iraqi refugee regimes. Of specific interest here is the position of the Austrian state within these regimes. The Austrian asylum system examined here is of specific concern as it oscillates between the acceptance and non-acceptance of the multicultural diversity – and thus the multi-layered reasons for the refuge of Iraqi citizens. As I shall show, it is not a question of arbitrariness but more the question of lobbying by and of policy makers and, increasingly, the importance of transnational communities. These two chapters provide the context of the multipolarity and complexity of the following case study. Thus, thirdly, I will focus on the situation of Yezidis from Sinjar (Iraq), their situation as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and asylum seekers in Europe and beyond, the meaning of the transnationalisation of the Yezidi community and, within several premises, their agency. The example shows that due to the transnational networks with Yezidi and Kurdish diaspora groups, that refugee groups do not stand in isolation, but interact with each other.

Iraq in focus

As a successor state of the Ottoman Empire established out of the three former Ottoman vilayets Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, Iraq gained its independence in 1932, when a monarchy was declared following the de facto end of the British protectorate in 1930. Iraq came into being as a result of post WWI negotiations and colonial interests and, from the beginning, was a heterogenous state with concern to the ethnic and religious belonging. The Arabic Shiite population in the southern provinces, the Arabic Sunni population in the centre, and the Kurdish, predominantly Sunni, in the north are the demographically largest groups. Besides the Arabic and Kurdish populations several ethnic and religious minorities were also scattered all over the country, as for example members of various Christian denominations, Yezidis, Shabak, Yaresan, Jews or Bahai.[2] Religious and/or ethnic belonging became much more decisive in

2 For the historical developments of the displacement of the Nestorians in Iraq see e.g. Chatty 2010, chapter 4. For the Kurdish related historical developments since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, see Chatty 2010, chapter 6 and for the history in the last 50 years

the last decade(s) in the spiral of violence. While the Iraqi regime tried to suppress, downplay or ignore religious or ethnic belonging, after the fall of the regime, various forces came into play which instrumentalized religion to mobilize people.

Géraldine Chatelard (2012) critically remarks that there are hardly any all-embracing and longitudinal studies on (forced) migration and displacement in Iraq since the founding of the state. The existing studies focus on single ethnic and religious groups, or on minority issues. The frameworks of these studies are often ideologically-driven, use specific terminologies and lead to certain ideologically-loaded interpretations. It becomes obvious, as Chatelard shows, that the driver for the numerous migration movements and forced displacement policies was always the state and a policy which had already started in the 1930s. For a comprehensive analysis, the historical context must therefore be taken into account and "…what is lacking [is] a conceptual attempt to link various types and episodes of involuntary migration together to try to make sense either of the recurrence of the phenomenon or of a certain regularity in the ways it occurs." (Chatelard 2012, 362). She refers to Aristide Zolberg's approach, that the formation of a new state can be linked closely to refugee generating processes, displacements and attempts to "homogenize" a population (Zolberg 1983 in Chatelard 2012, 363).

Iraq is a specific example that under the guise of a modernisation paradigm, the suppression of ethno-national movements and politically undesirable movements occurred, marked by displacement and forced migration on the one hand and restrictions of mobility on the other.[3] Thus, refugee movements out of Iraq of the various emigrant groups – comprising Arabs in opposition to the regime, Kurds, Christians, etc. – before, especially during and also after the Baath regime were "driven by a set of dynamics that cannot be reduced to their relations with the state, but in each instance, state policies were a determining factor that indirectly impacted their decision to leave Iraq" (Chatelard 2012, 363).

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see Chatty 2010, 263 – 266. For the recent situation of religious groups in Iraq after ISIS - see e.g. Sevdeen and Schmidinger 2019 and for the situation in the Autonomous Kurdish Region, Schmidinger et al. 2019.

3 After the end of the British administration, the issuing of identity cards was dependent on the loyalty of citizens and their compliance with the regime. Furthermore, the food distribution system was an instrument to control mobility within Iraq.

Not only were the policies against individual minorities highly complex, multi-layered and subject to change within short time frames, but furthermore we have to analyse these interdependencies, and how these policies of forced migration and displacement were linked to each other. "The settlement of Arabs led to the displacement of Kurds and Turkmen through different administrative techniques entitling the former to food distribution, land and house ownership while depriving the others of those same entitlements (Romano, 2005)" (cf Chatelard 2012, 367).

In addition to these policy-driven displacements, we also have to take into account development induced migrations – that is for example instigated by concerns relating to the (under)development of infrastructure, etc. – within and to Iraq. Furthermore, the establishment of exile communities in Europe and America since the late 1950s became part of the refugee regimes. These historical and more-recent developments evoked a multipolarity of the Iraqi migration system, as Chatelard (2005) argues.

Furthermore, international politics were a driving force in displacement and refuge. For example, the Kurdish resistance in the north, which was able to take control of parts of the Kurdish settlement area between 1964 and 1975 was – at an international level – connected with the question of disputed territories in the South. When the long-standing conflict between Iraq and Iran over the question of drawing the border at Shatt al-Arab was settled at the OPEC conference in Algiers, the condition for Iraq's concession was that Iran gave up its support for the Kurdish movement in Iraq. As a consequence, more than 250,000 Kurdish refugees from Iraq sought refuge in Iran and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees appealed to Western states to accept refugees. Therefore, European states received contingents of Kurdish refugees, laying the ground for the shaping of a Kurdish transnational community, which showed its influence in Iraqi policy for decades after. When Saddam Hussein took power through a *coup d'état* in 1968, a "brain drain" had already started then, which caused a decrease in the Iraqi middle class in the following decades.[4]

What followed was a brutal regime in which the government pursued a "policy of terror" against its own population, against minorities, such as the Kurds and political oppositions. Thousands of villages were destroyed, mass

4 For the history of the Kurds in Iraq see e.g. Aziz 2011; Chaliand 1993; Bengio 2012; Ibrahim 1983; Izady 1992; Khalil 1985, Khalil 1989; Kreyenbroek and Sperl 1992; Makiya 1998; McDowall 2000 and Strohmeier and Yalçın 2000.

displacements organised, people expelled from the country (as for example the Faili from Baghdad[5]) and cultural rights were suspended. "The Republic of Fear", as Kanan Makiya (1998) labelled the Iraqi regime, also persecuted its opponents outside of Iraq. During the Iraq-Iran War (1980-88), one million people were killed,[6] and Kurds,[7] Shiites,[8] and smaller minorities also faced displacement, expulsion and massive state violence. In the shadow of the war the Baath regime executed a genocidal policy (Anfal processes) against the Kurdish population, in which more than 200,000 Kurds lost their lives in poison gas attacks, mass executions and tremendous state violence.[9] This genocidal policy, the Gulf War and the policy of the authoritarian state evoked a massive emigration which had its peak in 1990/91 when a Kurdish uprising was overthrown and two million refugees transgressed the Turkish and Iranian border.[10]

The developments after the Gulf War led to two UN resolutions and, based on these, to the establishment of two protection zones, under UN observation (Stansfield 2003, 79ff.). The northern one in the mainly Kurdish inhabited territory and one in the south, with a predominantly Shiite population. The international embargo on Iraq hit these zones tremendously and evoked further emigration. After the fall of the Saddam regime, the power vacuum, the destroyed infrastructure and the political instability perpetuated flight movements to the West.[11] When the invasion of allied US, UK, Australian and Polish forces started in 2003, it is estimated that between two to four million people had already left the country, which was already undergoing an

5 For the case of the Faili see e.g. Institute of Statelessness and Inclusion 2019; Minority Rights Group International 2017.

6 Pelletiere argues, that due to missing statistics the number of death could raise up to 1,5 million people (2007, 115).

7 See Izady 2004. Yildiz estimates that more than one million Kurds were displaced within Iraq, mostly under the Baath regime (2007,64).

8 In the early 1970s, a total of 90,000 Iraqi Shiites were expelled from the country. After the Algier Agreement, these deportations were briefly suspended, but at the end of the 1970s, on the eve of the Iraq-Iran war, some 200,000 people of Shiite faith were again expelled and/or deported.

9 For the Anfal processes see e.g. Hiltermann 2008; Middle East Watch Report 1993; van Bruinessen 1994; Hardi 2011.

10 "Nearly 1,5 million Kurds passed into Iran. Another 500,000 massed on the Turkish border, with only about 200,000 being allowed in by the Turks, who closed their borders after two days" (Izady 2004,85).

11 For the Post-Saddam era see e.g. (Tejel et al, 2012).

enormous "brain drain" (Sassoon 2012, 379). Further factors for emigration were the collapsed economy and infrastructure, impoverishment, low levels of services and basic needs (like electricity, water and supply), high levels of unemployment and inflation, and corruption. "The internal displacement in which more than 2,7 million lost their homes created another 'push' factor for the brain drain" (Sassoon 2012, 381). Unemployment rates were between 25% and 40%, and even higher among young people.[12]

In 2012 Chatelard argued that, "In the last few years, a multiplicity of collective actors has directed violence against the confessional, ethnic and class composition of entire urban and rural areas, displacing populations inside and outside the country, and forcing others to be immobilized" (2012, 375). From 2002 onwards the security situation had worsened, the (sectarian) violence exercised by militias increased, which lead to, for example, the kidnapping of individual people, for sectarian reasons or to enforce ransom payment, and to a high assassination rate of academics. Violence against people working in the medical sector, especially, was a driving force for destabilisation, as doctors were a soft target (Sassoon 2012, 383); as a consequence more than 35% left the country. Terror and violence against people in the educational sector fuelled further emigration. Many students and professionals decided to settle in the securer Kurdish autonomous region in the north, to continue their work.

Emigration was fuelled by the uneven socio-spatial distribution of security inside Iraq due to militias and armed groups, the internalisation of the ethno-sectarian territorial divide, the government policies to maintain displaced populations in the areas to which they have been directed or displaced, strategies of retaliation "a displacement for a displacement" in between the various ethnic/religious/political groups (Chatelard 2012, 376 f.); all of which made "mobility a security strategy for many individuals and collectivities" (378).

12 "A survey conducted in 2004 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Iraqi Ministry of Planning showed that unemployment reached an astonishing 37,2% among young men with secondary or higher education (UNDP 2005, 133)." (Sassoon 2012, 381).

Based on the annual reports of the UNHCR from between 1999 and 2013 "Iraq was the highest-ranking country of origin for asylum seekers in industrialized countries"[13] (Paasche 2016, 94).

What followed in the years thereafter was an uneven development inside Iraq and a change in the refuge regimes towards neighbouring countries. The better security conditions in the Kurdistan Region and the establishment of a democratic system[14] was not only an argument in individual asylum procedures against granting asylum status, but also became a decisive factor in the refugee regimes of European states towards "Iraqi refugees". In 2013, those persons with a temporary subsidiary protection status were forced by EU member states to return, numbering some 95,000 people, the majority of whom were Kurds (Paasche 2016, 94). At the same time, from 2012 onwards, Iraq also became a receiving country for refugees following the outbreak of war in Syria. Until December 2019, UNHCR in Iraq registered 245,810 Syrian refugees, of whom 99% were staying in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).[15]

In the year after this enforced return of Iraqi refugees from Europe, the situation in Iraq did not turn to the better, but rather worse. Not only the absence of the state (*al-ladaula* see below), but also the threat from the so-

13 In these accounts the migration movements from the former Yugoslavia is not included

14 Furthermore, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) developed a diversity policy and conveyed an experiment in pluralism; they also promoted a Kurdistani rather than Kurdish identity, which encompasses the ethnic identities of Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmens and Arabs (Stansfield 2007, 141). This form of civic nationalism, and almost more significantly the – although politically different – self-administrative experiment in Rojava with its focus on the participation of women in politics, is a model for governance for leftist groups in the Middle East.

15 UNHCR 2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/information-kit-syrian-refugees-iraq-humanitarian-inter-agency.

called "Islamic State"[16] and its expansion, its genocidal policy against religious minorities and the overall suppression and persecutions evoked mass refuge, especially from Mosul and Sinjar, and long-lasting displacement.

As outlined above in the history of Iraq, the state was the main driving force for displacement and forced migration. The recurrent instability in Iraq, the competition of various ideas of nationalism, the division of ethno-national and religious communities and their various competing militias evoked a political development which is categorized as a non-state, or in Arabic *al-ladaula*.[17] The Iraqi political situation of non-state governance is characterized with the concept of *ladaula*, which

> refers neither to a deep state nor a parallel state, but rather a mixed constellation of actors inside and outside the state organization whose operations include formal policy, extra-governmental violence, and polarizing popular rhetoric… [which] contains a spectrum of different forces and groups: political parties' militias, criminal groups, armed tribal groups, and others. In this sense, ladaula is not beyond the state, nor does it aim at ending the state; it is both inside and outside the state (Aziz 2020).

Thus, the relationship between the existing state structures and *ladaula* is not one of opposition, but rather they are entangled in multiple ways, thus complicating scenarios for getting out of this situation.

But what do these various political developments and demographic regimes mean for individual asylum applicants? All of them are seen as "Iraqi refugees" – statistics do not differentiate between the various ethnic or religious groups, many of them have experienced displacement and forced migration more than once and also their family biographies are marked by (enforced) migratory experiences. The younger generations of Iraqi refugees,

16 The so called "Islamic State" or the preceding names ISIS "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham" (i.e. Greater Syria)" or the Arabic acronym DAISH (Al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham)], or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is a Salafist terror organisation, which has never organized a state according to international law. They controlled part of Iraq (until 2017) and parts of Syria (until 2019) and executed genocides against the Non-Muslim population, destroyed cultural heritage sites and carried out war crimes in civil wars in the region. Internationally IS is ranked as a terrorist organisation, which has recruited fighters internationally. The IS has spread and executed its terrorist activities far beyond Iraq and Syria, in the Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe.

17 In correct Arabic transliteration "al-lā-daula".

especially, were raised in war situations and can hardly remember years without warfare. In the following discussion, results of qualitative research projects with refugees from Iraq in Austria, conducted between 2015 and 2019 are presented. I shall critically discuss here, how the current refugee regime in Austria allows them a space for elaborating agency and imagining their futures.

Refugees from Iraq in Austria

In the course of 2016 during the refugee movements from the Middle East and Central Asia to Europe, several strategies were employed to grant or not grant asylum to applicants. In Austria, somewhat similar to the situation in other European countries, refugees from Syria were able to gain asylum more easily and quickly than people from Iraq were.

The Austrian refugee regime for Iraqi asylum applicants extends back to the mid-1970s. In 1975, following the defeat of the Kurdish resistance movement (as a consequence of the Shatt al-Arab treaty, see above) and refugee movement, the Austrian government accepted 103 Kurdish refugees due to an appeal of the UN High Commissioner. In the following decade between twenty and sixty persons from Iraq applied for asylum annually.[18]

It is estimated that during the regime of Saddam Hussein about 4,000 to 5,000 people from Iraq came to Austria: these were predominantly Kurds, but also Arabs who were in resistance against the regime and Christians of various denominations. There was an increase of applications during the Iraq-Iran war (1980 – 88) and due to the genocidal policy against the Kurds (1988/89). Another state-led admission program arose due to the defeat of the Kurdish resistance and the mass exodus in 1991, when about 200 people were accepted. As the Austrian refugee regime became more rigid, however, many people were only able to seek refuge via human trafficking. There was an increase of applications in between 2001 and 2003 (especially of people from Iraq).[19] Another resettlement program was organized in 2011 for thirty Christians, who were fleeing the violent persecution of Islamic extremists and already

18 So, for example, sixty-two in 1980, thirty-three in 1981, fifty-one in 1982, and thirty-seven in 1983 (see Fercher 1995, 70). As the Austrian statistics do not reflect the ethnic or religious belonging, we only have information regarding former citizenship.

19 In addition to Afghanistan, Serbia, Russia and Turkey (see Berger and Strohner 2016).

had family members or relatives in Austria.[20] The quota[21] of cases which were recognised decreased in the following decade, e.g. to only 25% in 2016.

The Austrian government recognized ethnic and religious factors in the specific resettlement programs during the beginning phases of the arrival of Iraqi refugees. However, in later years the refugee regime did not distinguish accordingly between the various ethnic or religious groups, although in Iraq the multipolarity of refuge accelerated. In Austria, refugees were then seen as Iraqi citizens, therefore no specific statistics exist which inform about the ethnic or religious belonging and the respective rates of acceptance. What is obvious here is the difference and contradictions between national categorizations ("Iraqi refugees") and regional, religious, political and/or ethno-linguistic identifications of the refugees themselves. Labelled as "Iraqi refugees", they see themselves not only or not as predominantly Iraqi, but rather as Kurds, Yezidis, Turkmen, Sunnis or Shiites. These different logics of categorizing become especially pertinent in the case of people from the de facto-autonomous Kurdish Northern Iraq and the Yezidis who seem to have a strong sense of groupness and identification.

The refugees reflect the diversity within Iraq, which can also be seen in the various political associations, diasporic groups and religious communities.

From 2015 onwards many of the Iraqi applicants received a "white card", which means that the asylum procedure was accepted and that, usually, a residence permit card would be issued. This card confirms that the asylum seeker now has a right of residence for the duration of the procedure. However, the residence permit card is not an identity document, but only serves as proof of identity in proceedings before the Federal Office for Foreigners and Asylum (BFA).

Even before the refugee movement from 2015 onwards, Austrian asylum procedures were protracted and applicants had to wait – in some cases several years. Thus, the Iraqi refugees were aware that their procedures in Austria could take a long time, and with an unfortunate outcome they might only gain a temporary residence status or, at worst, have to leave the country. What many of them had in common was, that they had started in Turkey, managed to cross the Mediterranean in inflatable boats and made their way, via Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary, or Croatia/Slovenia to Central Europe. Only those who could afford between 8,000 and 10,000 Euro managed their refuge

20 See Knapp 2001.

21 Berger and Strohner 2016, graphic 4.

hidden in trucks all the way from Turkey. Some Iraqi citizens who came before 2014 sought refuge via the UN, family reunion procedures or through kin who helped them to get a visa – then they could manage the way via plane from Iraq or neighbouring countries.

Reasons for refuge from 2014 onwards were multifaceted. Young men got caught in between the various militias in central and southern Iraq and were forced to join these paramilitary groups – coercive methods employed include torture, the kidnapping of younger family members, assassination of kin, physical and psychological pressure at the work place and expropriation. Baghdad and larger cities were constantly hit by bomb attacks committed by the various combatants. The forces of al-Qaeda and the IS exercised genocidal persecution, fuelled hatred and forced people to combat against each other. The instrumentalisation of religious belonging and sectarianism was also enforced by other belligerent parties, mainly the several militias which had arisen. Especially those informants who were the offspring of bicultural or bireligious families (mostly from Sunni and Shiia denominations), were constantly attacked, discriminated against and could hardly make their living between Shia or Sunni dominated and politicised quarters. In 2014 when the so-called Islamic State captured various regions in Iraq, the genocidal policy against the Christian and the Yezidi population evoked a mass flight. While many of the Christians from Mosul and the Ninive plains could not hope for a further existence in Iraq, and tried to leave the country, more than 200,000 Yezidi refugees from the Sinjar province stayed as IDPs in the refugee camps in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq (see below).

In Austria during a pilot study undertaken in 2016,[22] many of our informants had been awarded a white card. At best, some Iraqi refugees had gained subsidiary protection, which means that the protection status is granted by decision and for an unlimited period, while their residence permit is limited in time and has to be extended (bi)annually. In case the political conditions in the country of origin changes, the residence permit can be revoked. This was the case with people from the Yezidi denomination – some of whom had come even before the genocidal persecution by the so-called Islamic State in

22 The pilot study was realized at the Institute for Social Anthropology and the Institute for Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), Vienna. Sixty narrative interviews in the respective mother tongues were conducted. The focus was on: the reasons for refuge; the managing of the refuge itself; educational, occupational and family backgrounds; and their expectations in Austria.

2014. This was also the case for those Iraqi citizens who could prove additional reasons (severe illnesses or gender-specific violence) beyond the overall turmoil and constant, highly dangerous situation. Others who had been in an assailable position (such as in the secret service, critical journalists, opposition party members, etc.), were still holders of a white card. So many of our interlocutors were in limbo, aware that their legal issues would not be settled in due course, and slowly realising that they had hardly any outlook for family reunions. It was mostly men who were sent first, having left their family members in Turkey or in Iraq where they awaited the possibility to follow. The relative safety of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), then the northern provinces, were a main argument used in the asylum procedures when people were not granted asylum. They would have a safe region within Iraq where they could return to – although enough regard was not given to the prerequisites required for settling in the KRI, such as the acceptance of the person by high ranking officials, etc.

Hardly anybody brought up the losses of their basis of life through warfare, dispossession and displacement during our interviews – it seemed that it was taken to be a part of the fate of Iraqi citizens, an already taken for granted element which nobody really stressed in specific. Our younger interlocutors explained that they had constantly lived in a war-torn society and connected their biographical stages to the wars they went through.

In a study conducted in 2017/18,[23] we again interviewed people from Iraq,[24] who had applied for asylum in Austria. At that point, the majority had already stayed in Austria for two, three years and for many their procedure was not settled yet. They were still holding white cards and were in the midst of the asylum procedure. Several complained that they were still waiting for their interviews, and thus the next step for decision in their applications. They were in a limbo; one of our informants said it is "empty time" for him, during which he could hardly make a living. Some of them had also gained migratory experiences, as they had lived for several years in Syria, Egypt or in other countries of the Middle East. Consequently, the "condemnation of

23 See the Innovation Funds Project Loslassen–Durchstehen–Ankommen, at the Institute for Social Anthropology and the Institute for Urban and Regional Research. The interviews with Iraqi refugees were conducted by Sabine Bauer-Amin and Leonardo Schiocchet. I am thankful to refer to this empirical work in this chapter.

24 These were different interlocutors than from the first study.

waiting" expressed as "empty time" might also relate to their former migratory experiences, where they had experiences in acquiring new competencies in their adaptation to a new country.

Some of the younger men interviewed had finished an academic education, but could not find an academic position and had worked in various craft trades, as a carpenter, baker or confectioner in Iraq. While they were trained to work in these occupations, they did not gain a certificate of an apprenticeship comparable to those in Austria. The procedures of learning a craft cannot be compared with strict apprenticeship programs, which are very locally bound systems in Europe. In Austria, to go through the nostrification procedure to acknowledge academic education is costly, so several did not see the sense in undergoing the process before their asylum application was settled. Although the Employment Service Austria[25] – the state institution for service at the labour market – has established training programs, based on so called *Kompetenzchecks* for refugees. However, gaining a vocational qualification, based on their previous jobs, was hardly doable for those in limbo, who could not access all the prescribed German courses and language steps.

The people interviewed were forced to rely on social benefits, as they were unable to find jobs as, in addition to their white card, they also need an employment permit. Instead, they experienced competition and repression in the illegal working market, where they were exploited in restaurants or in the cleaning sector.

Without additional resources it is almost impossible to find a flat in and around Vienna, where most of them had moved to from the assigned accommodation in the countryside, in order to have better possibilities in the housing and working market. What many faced in these two or three years of stay in Austria was the issue of dequalification of their education and expertise. Only a few had managed to do a vocational training and if so, still faced joblessness.

Compared to the Syrian refugees the agency of Iraqi asylum seekers was limited due to the legal prescriptions, structural limitations and the protracted state of their asylum application. Some had decided to do an internship at NGOs, GOs or a voluntary service year or month – and they hoped that this would improve their chances for getting the asylum status. During the peak of the refugee movement in 2015 and 2016 some of our interlocutors were already engaged in associations which provided first support to

25 Arbeitsmarktservice (AMS) in German.

refugees. The *Train of Hope* was such a loose network, which emerged out of civil society, and which was active at railway stations where they supported newcomers or transiting people with their basic needs and in translations. Those who had good English competency, translated from Arabic, Kurdish or Farsi into English and allowed communication with the engaged civil society. Some of them continued these translation services – predominantly without any payment – for the newcomers over the following months. Close relations with Austrian voluntary workers enabled these engaged persons to establish personal networks with the civil society and widen their contacts. This helped them to find a room or a flat for a reasonable price, or as one informant expressed "Social relationship is the key of life". The repeated changes of residence and the overstretched housing market, especially in Vienna, was a further factor for family reunions being unrealizable.

Members of the Kurdish and Iraqi Arabic diasporic associations,[26] for example, were active at the beginning in supporting the newcomers arriving at train stations, refugee camps or in their first adaptations. This was based more on individual engagement and, to a lesser degree, on the diasporic/ association level.

Due to the extremely complex situation in Iraq with many belligerent parties being involved, some people did not easily trust the diasporic associations, or co-ethnics (from whom some felt exploited in housing or job issues) but instead relied more on Austrian NGOs and activists. A general argument was that relations which were predominantly in the diasporic community would not help them to improve their German language acquisition. For Iraqi refugees in Austria, there is a protracted temporariness inherent in the asylum regime which creates vulnerability and which hampers agency. Many of the interviewed Iraqi refugees have a transnationally dispersed family, with kin in various nation states in Europe and the Middle East. In this early application stage, without having identity cards to move freely wherever they want, they cannot uphold the kin networks in the ways that they had

26 Interestingly the established Kurdish diaspora gained its influence, coherence and a further momentum in self-organisation during the mass flights of Kurds from Iraq at the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, when they were officially assigned with the caring for newcomers. The development was twofold, either out of these diasporic associations representatives for and of the autonomous region emerged or representatives of the Kurdish political parties in Austria became more active also in these diasporic organisations.

intended to. Psychological distress caused by the protracted asylum procedure, the difficult housing question, the experiences of dequalification in occupational concerns and the fading prospects of family reunification caused a constant feeling of being estranged. The possibilities which were established in the Austrian refugee regime, therefore, were not easily accessible for the Iraqi refugees in limbo, but only for those who had already gained asylum or a subsidiary protection status and who could then move on in the language acquisition program, nostrification of academic degrees, apprenticeships or trainings, etc.

This protracted temporariness was also found to be a decisive factor in a survey study of IOM about complex migration flows from Iraq to Europe, realized among Iraqi migrants in European countries in 2015 (IOM 2016).[27] A high number of interlocutors in this IOM study originated from the governorates of Anbar and Nineveh, and had already previous experiences of internal displacement within Iraq. In this survey the majority of respondents were from Arab Shiite (50%) or Sunnite (30%) origin, with only 13% being Sunni Kurds and 3% Yezidis. The majority were 30 years old or even younger, 93% were male and had university education (41%), or secondary education (47%), (IOM 2016, 5ff.). The high level of education is remarkable. 80% of the interlocutors had no hopes in their future in Iraq. From the people interviewed, 270 had expected a refugee status, but only half were granted asylum. More than 50% were still waiting for the asylum procedure to be processed and almost two thirds expressed their unwillingness to return to Iraq (IOM 2016, 21). Several factors seem to be the same as shown within our own studies (gender, education, protracted asylum procedure). But from such statistics alone the refugee regimes of and for the various Iraqi communities and social groups (ethnic, religious, socio-political) are hardly retraceable. Furthermore, statistics and numbers alone will not easily encompass all the impediments which come up in case of a a return migration (see below).

27 The informants were staying in Germany (180), Austria (172), Finland (55), Sweden (43) and Hungary (30).

KRI – region of safety and transition[28]

In 2016 the KRG[29] announced that more than two million refugees and IDPs, originating from Syria and Iraq were housed in the Autonomous "Kurdistan Region of Iraq". In comparison, there were about 5,2 million inhabitants counted in the autonomous region. Within the refugee and IDP statistics, about two million people were counted, comprising IDPs from Iraq (mainly due to the IS occupation of Mosul), about 250,000 refugees from Syria, 300,000 Yezidis and about 100,000 Assyrians who sought refuge from ISIS, in addition to Sunnis who fled from Shiite territories, dominated by militias. For the young autonomy which was slowly establishing its economy, stability, and infrastructure this challenge of handling refugee movements and displacement fostered instability and hampered the way out of the decade long crisis (see Frantzmann 2016, 17).

In 2019 our research team learned that more than 50% of our interlocutors (from 2016) had already left Austria, many of them before their status was decided and before IS was defeated in all Iraqi provinces. The reasons and motivations for seeking asylum were divergent as also were the reasons for a return migration to Iraq in the last decade. Even the divergent motives of return are an important factor for refugee regimes. In addition to the better security situation in, and political autonomy of, the KRI, the economic growth and infrastructural development in the northern most regions probably also contributed to decisions for a return migration. This post-exile transition was also fostered by Iraqi Kurdish politicians. As Erlend Paasche in his study on return migration to Iraq outlines, returns could be temporary as well as permanent, and with various scenarios in between; therefore new concepts are required, with more concrete sub-categories, which also encompass "return-visits", "long-term return", split up households with long-term returnees and return visitors (2016, 22). Paasche also explained the differences in return migration in the Iraqi Kurdish case based on the length of stay in exile. The first wave of refugees were seen as elite pioneers (1974 – 1991), those coming to Europe between 1992 and 1998 were seen as reactive second-wavers and those proceeding between 1999 and 2014 as proactive third-wavers (Paasche 2016, 51 f.). "Asylum migration continued during the 2000s despite improved

28 KRI Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

29 KRG means Kurdish Regional Government, which is the official ruling body of the Autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

macrostructural conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan and worsened conditions for asylum seekers to Europe. Migration became more proactive, in other words, and self-perpetuated" (Paasche 2016, 93). Compared to asylum seekers from the rest of Iraq, residents of the KRI in the third wave did not flee from violent disorder like refugees from the rest of Iraq, but rather from the overall socio-economic and security situation, and on the basis of individual political decisions.

Paasche argues, that the return is as sensitive as the flight was, due to the high expectations of and for returnees, e.g. coming back with material or social capital, as successful businessmen or academics. "The experience of return among empty-handed, socially stigmatized forced returnees caused great distress. Future plans were a delicate subject because such returnees were often mired in debt, with grim prospects" (Paasche 2016, 51).

The refuge regimes discussed here have to deal with the ambivalence arising from this background of multiculturality/ethnicity/religiosity, and which cannot be compartmentalized into a single ethnic or religious belonging, but rather intermingles. Ignoring, or over-stating, exclusionary belongings therefore will not reflect the socio-political reality, which on the other hand is also undergoing enormous transitions in response to actions of the belligerent parties.[30] In some cases, the increasing importance of transnational networks and connections are visible, while for others these do not exist. For example, the Christian communities of the Middle East were the focus of church lead initiatives, programs and specific humanitarian associations, with their own advocates for their cause. People with bicultural origin, whose parents have both Sunni and Shiite backgrounds, could not rely on proponents or a lobby for their cause.

Those people in our study who gained asylum or permanent residence status were predominantly of non-Sunni Muslim denominations, above all the Christians and the Yezidis. While the Christian population gained specific support from church institutions in Austria (Catholic as well as various

30 Plebani refers to the interculturality in Iraq: "Mixed areas and mixed communities have always been one of the main features of the Iraqi social fabric (….) It is of outmost importance, then, to launch a series of confidence-building measures operating at all levels in direct coordination with Iraqi institutions and social groups, NGOs, and foundations, to restore the culture of diversity that has defined the Iraqi model for decades, to strengthen the bonds between communities inhabiting areas affected by significant ethno-sectarian polarisation, and to promote a serious dialogue over Iraq identity and future" (Plebani 2017, 162).

oriental Christian churches), it took time until the Yezidi received similar attention. For decades, Yezidi refugees in Austria were seen as Iraqi refugees and up until 2014 hardly any differentiation was made. Although the Yezidi community in Austria has increased since 2000, for a long time the specific reasons for their persecution were not recognized. On the contrary, some of my interlocutors, heads of a Yezidi association, argued that people were not granted asylum, with the official argument "that nobody knows who the Yezidis really are." [31] This changed over the course of the years, especially with official acknowledgements of the genocidal processes in Sinjar since 2014 and the elaboration of specific admission programs in Germany.

In the following I will briefly outline refugee regimes for the Yezidis and employ a comparative perspective to show intersections of these systems and the meaning of diasporic transnational connections.

Yezidi refugees from Sinjar

I outlined the historicity and multipolarity of the Iraqi refugee regimes in the first section, focusing on the refugees from Iraq during and after the Saddam regime, and discussed the Austrian asylum system in relation to Iraqi refugees in the second. I shall now turn to the situation of the Iraqi Yezidi refugees in particular and will herein analyse the forces for and the meaning of the increased transnationalisation of Yezidis over the last two decades. These transnational networks are of growing importance, both in interfering in refugee regimes in host countries on the one hand and in the possibilities for agency on the other.

From August 2014 onwards, Yezidis from the region of Sinjar (kurdish Şingal, arabic: Sinǧār) in the Nineveh Governorate in north-western Iraq became victims of the devastating attacks of the so-called "Islamic State". "The province Niniveh, as Sinjar was part of, was the most dangerous governorate already in 2009. The city of Mosul was ranking highest on the list of the most violent cities in Iraq. Sinjar became a 'peripheral area', from where people could hardly move to other zones in Iraq, due to the Public Distribution Systems (PDS) of nutrition rates" (Savelsberger et al. 2010). Even during the Baath regime they were displaced from rural areas, forced to live in so-called collective towns and experienced Arabisation, instrumentalisation, dispossession

31 Personal conversation with a Yezidi activist in August 2017.

and impoverishment. This region was and is outside KRG control, but is of particular interest for the KRI and the Iraqi state. The predominantly Kurdish speaking Yezidis were encompassed as Kurds, although many of them stress their own identity and belonging, based on their specific socio-religious structure.

When IS fighters were approaching in 2014, the defensive units hastily withdrew and left the civil population to the attackers. The majority of the population of Sinjar, numbering between 250,000 and 450,000 people, had to flee. Several hundred people, especially small children and the elderly, did not survive the strain of the escape. According to the United Nations, 5,000 Yezidi, mostly men and young adolescents, but also some children, have been executed and about 7,000 Yezidi girls and young women have been abducted. They were sold as slaves and experienced systematic sexual violence, forced Islamisation, and other forms of degrading treatment. Only half of them have been freed to date. The intentions of extermination were obvious, as the IS also systematically destroyed the Yezidi cultural heritage. The European Parliament, and several human rights organizations and governments have stated that the enormous brutality of displacement and persecution were acts of genocide. Within the framework of a broad-based anti-IS coalition, the terrorist organisation was largely driven out of the Sinjar region. But for the years thereafter Sinjar has remained a disputed territory between the various local power militias, the Kurdistan Region Iraq and Iraqi national forces, thus the situation has been too insecure and unstable for refugees to return (see Kaválek 2017).

"According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in 2005 some 550,000 Yazidis resided in Iraq, more than two-thirds in Sinjar district itself (UNHCR 2005, 6). The precise number nowadays is unknown, but it is surely significantly lower with many Yazidis having emigrated" (Kaválek 2017, 13). Estimations are thus between 250,000 and 400,000 (see UN Habitat 2015, 4 in Kaválek 2017,13 and Cerny 2020, 2) and as Kaválek notes, that about 275,000 IDPs (including non-Yezidis) sought refuge in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

"Estimated seventy thousand of them then became refugees and left for Europe" (Černý 2020, 2; in reference to Rudaw 20 March 2017). Driving forces for migrations were insufficient aid, the overall economic crisis in Iraq, the economic decline in the Kurdish Region and the poor distribution of aid, the overall insecurity for Yezidis, the demand for space in refugee camps, unsuitable social conditions, distrust in state institutions and towards Muslims, and

that their homeland was for years a disputed territory (Černý 2020, 2-5). In the aftermath, the struggle for Yezidi loyalties,[32] the discussion about ethnic belonging and identities, as well as splits in political and military loyalties worsened the overall situation (see Černý 2020, 12). In 2017 only 29,000 people had returned (Kaválek 2017, 13; referring to IOM 2017, 11).

Even after the defeat of IS, official sources from the KRG[33] mention that, in February 2020, 264,720 individuals were registered as refugees (predominantly from Syria, but also from Turkey and Iran), and 787,705 individuals as IDPs. Therefore, all together more than one million IDPs and refugees still remain in the KRI, with almost half in the governorate of Erbil, 30% in Duhok and the rest in Sulaimaniya. About 40% of the IDPs are Sunni Arabs, 30% Yezidis, in addition to Kurdish Muslims from provinces outside the KRI, Christians and "others" (as for example, Turkman, Armenians and Shabaks). In 2021 due to official numbers from the Kurdistan Regional Government the numbers of refugees and IDPs has hardly decreased.[34]

Only a small percentage of the Yezidis managed to take refuge in Europe, while the majority were doomed to remain as IDPs in the refugee camps in the Kurdistan region. The situation only changed years later, with an agree-

32 The KRG has been actively promoting the Kurdish ethnic identity of Yezidis living in disputed territories, especially in the post-2003 period (see also Musings on Iraq, 2014; Savelsberg, Hajo and Dulz, 2010). "Consequently, the Yazidi leadership was increasingly caught between the KRG and Baghdad and ended up increasingly politically divided (ICG, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2009; PAX for Peace, 2016, 20-21)." (see Kaválek 2017, 14). Even in the time of the Baath Regime a strong Arabisation politic was enforced (Priest 2019, 200).

33 http://jcc.gov.krd/contents/files/25-02-2020/1582612800.Humanitarian%20Situational%20Report%20(2-20)%20for%20February%20%20Kurdistan%20Region%20of%20Iraq.pdf.

34 Kurdistan Regional Governement 2021: Humanitarian Situational Report: No. 6 (IDP's: 664,561, 241,190 Syrian refugees, 8,450 Turkish, 10,510 Iranian, 738 Palestinian and 83 "other" refugees).

ment in September 2020, which allowed the IDPs to successively return.[35] The cumulative causes for seeking refuge in Europe shows several self-reinforcing mechanisms, which create new social dynamics and bring forth new drivers for migration (Černý 2020, 12 ff.). But seeking ways to apply for asylum, in Europe or beyond, was difficult to manage on an individual basis for Yezidis. According to our interviews Iraqi refugees spent between 6,000 and 8,000 US Dollars per person to manage the flight to Europe.

In the following I will scrutinize what influence Yezidi diasporic communities can have, to support people in their refuge and asylum application. Here I shall take a closer look at the importance of diasporic, transnational networks for managing refuge, for interfering in some of the state refugee regimes and for building up agency. I will scrutinize the question of agency on behalf of the refugees and of those already established, but who had fled decades ago themselves and who are now important agents in the transnational networks.

When in August 2014 the Yezidis in Sinjar faced genocidal persecution, Yezidis in Armenia followed the reports on the Internet and satellite TV. This Armenian Yezidi community – descendants of refugees of the persecutions lead against non-Islamic denominations in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War – comprised, at its peak, up to 60,000 persons.[36] The genocide in Sinjar 2014 had an enormous impact on Armenian Yezidis. There were a series of reactions from the Republic of Armenia, both from the state and civil society. It was the then Armenian President, Serzh Sargsyan, who made the persecution of the Yezidis a topic amongst international bodies, including the UN General Assembly. Concurrently, Armenians along with other Christians in Iraq as well as in Syria had to seek refuge, especially when IS attacked their livelihoods and cultural heritage. For (ethnic) Armenian refugees from

35 In October 2020 an agreement was settled between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish regional government over the future of Sinjar. Various militias should no longer control the region, the authority of the Iraqi central government should be restored and Yezidis should be integrated into the state forces. The stability should be restored and article 140 of the Iraqi constitution (which enables a referendum regarding the future political belonging) should be realized, as also a reconstruction of the infrastructure and new elections for mayors. Up until this time, details about the agreement have not been published and Yezidi associations long for codetermination in these processes (see Ezîdî Press, 11 October 2020, www.ezidipress.com)

36 Dalalyan 2012; Schulze and Schulze 2016; Six-Hohenbalken 2019

Iraq and Syria, the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq was a transit country for proceeding to the Transcaucasian Republic of Armenia. Here a specific refugee regime evolved, which was rather exclusive. Refugees with ethno-religious Armenian origin, verified through their denomination and language skills, easily gained Armenian citizenship. Through this, they are integrated within a transnational network in which the influential Armenian diaspora has had a stronghold since the fall of the Soviet Union. For Armenian refugees, the Republic of Armenia became not a resident but a transit country which provided them with the necessary documents to commute further to North America or other western destinations, where transnationally organized Armenian NGOs were active. None of these legal opportunities were open for those Yezidi refugees from Iraq, who managed the refuge to the Republic of Armenia. A few Yezidi families have managed the flight by taking the direct plane from Erbil to Yerevan. When I conducted interviews with two families who came from Sinjar, I learned that both families were from a village raided by IS in 2014. Only through refuge to the mountains with thousands of others and, finally, with the help of the Kurdish YPG/YPJ[37] fighters from Rojava (Kurdish region in Syria) were they saved and brought to refugee camps in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as IDPs, or in Rojava.[38] Several tried to move further as, intimidatingly, the distance between some of the refugee camps and the IS fighters was only a few kilometres.

Family A numbered before the refuge 32 members, comprising the parents, the married and unmarried children and their grandchildren. The parents tried to gain asylum with half of their children and grandchildren in Armenia, while the others stayed as IDPs in the refugee camps in Kurdistan Iraq. Likewise, family P, which once had ten people, managed refuge to Armenia with five people. When I came in touch with them in 2015/2016 their residence status in Armenia had not been clarified, as at that time they only had a temporary residence permit. This meant that the children were not enrolled in school, they could not receive medical care and did not get any financial support. They were instead relying completely on private financial funding from donors, on support by the very engaged Armenian Yezidi community, and on

37 *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin* [Women's Defence Units], *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* [Peoples Defence Units] (the male counterpart), the Kurdish militias in Syria, which are close to the PKK units in Turkey.

38 Rojava is the Kurdish term for West. It relates to the western parts of the Kurdish inhabited territory but also to an intended independent political unit.

occasional food donations from NGOs. They saw little future for themselves and their families – they were stuck. Further travel from Armenia to another country seemed impossible due to their lack of personal documents or financial means. In the course of 2016, family P managed to proceed to Turkey, while family A was still in Armenia before returning to Iraq two years later. Both families could hardly develop any agency, but were in a legal and social limbo. They could not accept the possibilities for making a living in Armenia, which had been offered to them by their Yezidi hosts: namely taking over one of the farms which was previously abandoned (due to the economically motivated high emigration rates) and renting animals to build up their own flock. Being formerly employed as workers in Iraqi oil companies, they could not see their future as livestock breeders in a remote village in Armenia without having the proper skills and language knowledge. Some of the Armenian Yezidis were disappointed when the refugees could not accept their offer and turn it into an agency, as they had imagined for them.

The Yezidi community with a more than a century existence in Armenia is the largest acknowledged minority, and faces the same socioeconomic conditions as the majority population there. Having received a lot of cultural promotion during the Soviet Times and up until the present day, the inequality became obvious in the exclusive refuge regime in Armenia which was integrated into international politics along with an influential worldwide Armenian diasporic national identity. Yezidi refugees from Iraq, Turkey or Syria, however, were excluded from this refugee regime, which was solely based on (ethno-religious) Armenianness.

While the oldest Yezidi diaspora had been established in Armenia after WWI, the largest Yezidi diaspora today came into being in Germany during the last few decades and has already become established demographically as the country with the second largest Yezidi population worldwide.[39] Soon after the persecution in Şingal 2014, the Central Council of the Yezidis (*Zentralrat der Êzîden*) actively sought dialogue with NGOs, media and politicians in Germany to organize immediate help for the refugees and those still captured by IS. The German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg managed to accomplish a remarkable humanitarian undertaking, namely the Special Quota Project, through which 1,100 victims of IS, primarily Yezidi but also Chris-

39 See e.g. Tagay and Ortaç. 2016 and the Society of Yezidi Academics in Germany, Gesellschaft Yezidischer AkademikerInnen gea-ev.net.

tians, were brought from the camps in Kurdistan Iraq to Germany.[40] Traumatized women and children especially were in particularly bad situations following the death or disappearance of their husbands or fathers. Women and children were under multiple threats and with hardly any chance of reaching Europe on their own. The project was supported by German members of the government, representatives of all parliamentary factions, cities and municipalities, churches and civil society. The realisation of this pilot project was only possible through the lead of, and collaboration with, Yezidi diasporic organisations and their activists (politicians, psychologists, physicians, lawyers) and the highest Yezidi religious representatives in Iraq. The project's intention was to provide specific medical and psychological care, as there are only a few institutions in Kurdistan Iraq to take up this task.[41] This initiative was possible due to the decades long supportive relationship between German institutions[42] and the Yezidi communities and, especially, the upcoming generations, who are active in community based and integration projects and have gained leading positions in health care and social institutions.

In addition to that, Yezidi female activists in Germany initiated several relief projects for Iraq. Worldwide attention was gained for the Yezidi girls and women who were freed from IS and who were able to speak about their experiences in public, above all Nadia Murat, who was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2018. But many others also gave testimony in public, publishing their ordeals and becoming spokeswomen for their community. They transgressed the patriarchal traditions and found their own ways to speak out, to represent Yezidi women and to gain a voice in the international public. This concurred with the agency of Yezidi women in diaspora, who were themselves refugees or the offspring of displaced people. Even before IS, the young Yezidi generations in the homeland and in diaspora argued for a rethinking of strict religious prescriptions in Yezidism – the product of self-protection in a century-long hostile environment (such as strict endogamy) – which causes tensions and even violence in families.[43]

40 Blume 2016, see also gea-ev.net.

41 Therefore, the follow-up project comprised the training of experts in the KRI, such as trauma therapy courses held at the University of Dohuk.

42 This is mainly based in Nordrhein-Westfahlen and Baden- Württemberg.

43 "Yazidi women acquire new aspirations and replace (or rather complement) Yazidi men in fulfilling their traditional roles and obligations. For example, Yazidi women from the highly conservative and isolated Sinjar region learn new skills in refugee camp workshops (for example sewing) and, for the first time, even enter the labour

Consequently, the new agency of women arising due to these tremendous violent incidents and all the suffering in the aftermath, encompasses even older claims as well as incredible coping strategies with genocidal violence against women. Unspeakable sexual violence, questions of sexual (im)purity, of honour and of the position of women in society are at stake and, specifically, within this Yezidi women in residence countries and, likewise, as IDPs have gained a strong voice. The protection of the Syrian Kurdish fighting units, the YPG and especially the YPJ, the female Syrian Kurdish fighters who contributed enormously to the defeat of IS, are also of particular importance for the internal societal transformation and external representation.

Conclusion

An integrated view on some of the single developments of refuge from, within and to Iraq has shown the necessity to have a multi-layered and gradual approach in figuring out characteristics and transformations of the multiple refugee regimes affecting Iraqi refugees. Analysis of the single regimes, their recent developments and historical depths, as well as transformations within this and their concurrence with other sub-regimes is necessary to grasp the multipolarity of the Iraqi refugee system as a whole. The next step to be analysed comprises the specific policies of the receiving states, their preparedness and political agenda in order to recognize the framework of interdependencies between the sub-regimes. Elaborating on these steps is also a prerequisite for understanding the scope for agency of the people. In addition to discussing the opportunity structure in a receiving state, we must also determine the prerequisites and scope of agency: avoiding the states of legal limbo – in which many refugees live - and granting secure living environments and prospects for enabling trust. This is a necessary step to develop agency: an agency of individuals as well as of associations for a sustainable adaptation.

As has been shown above, some of the Iraqi refugees are reluctant to be connected with Arabic or Kurdish diasporic associations, especially those whose belonging is bicultural (Sunni/Shia) or from a marginalized minority. But transnational associations of minorities can have an important influence in interfering in refugee regimes, in trust building processes and, in the long

market (very often as employees of domestic or international NGOs and humanitarian organizations)" (Černý, 2020, 11).

run, in supporting the agency of individuals. Through the comparison of the Armenian and German cases it becomes obvious that some of the refugee regimes are competing each other in the receiving state, and it is dependent on socio-economic possibilities and national ideologies as to whether a diasporic community can build up a stronghold for people seeking asylum. The concurrence of state policies and transnational associations' attempts to impact on these regimes has, up until now, not been studied in comparison. The Yezidi-German case also shows that agency for and of the newly arrived asylum seekers can have its impacts in transition processes of a transnational community. These interdependencies require further research and conceptualisation.

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