

# Kirkuk in Iraqi Narratives of Victimization and the Victimizer<sup>(1)</sup>

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Narratives of victimization are a principal element in the making of subnational identities in societies afflicted by divisions and communal disputes. It is little wonder then that narratives of victimization abound in Kirkuk province, which lies at the heart of Iraq's "disputed internal areas" problem. This paper starts off by analyzing the nature of narratives of victimization and how they make use of the past in service of political projects spearheaded by political elites. It then turns to surveying and deconstructing the contending narratives propagated by communal elites in Kirkuk regarding the victimization, whether real or imagined, endured by the province's main demographic groups – Kurds, Turkmens, Arabs and Christians. By analytically surveying the narratives of victimization of these four communities, this paper seeks to ascertain the workings of these narratives and to explicate the role they play.

Iraq Kirkuk Iraqi Kurds Iraqi Christians Sunni Arabs Narratives of Victimization

The residential makeup of Kirkuk is discussed on the basis that it has been subjected to an endless series of demographic changes imposed by politicians and their nationalist programs. The interplay between demographic change in Kirkuk and politics can mean that this discussion is tainted by feelings of injustice, pain, and victimhood. Any conversation about such transformations in Kirkuk is intermixed with the desire to recreate a past demographic map, whether real or imagined, or efforts to demonstrate the centrality of Kirkuk in a context of communitarian oppression. It is thus important,

when following the progress of demographic change in Kirkuk, to distinguish between what is historical and what derives from narratives of oppression. As important as an investigation of the events may be for historical fidelity, it is no less important to examine these narratives in order to understand the differing conceptions of the communities of Kirkuk regarding the crisis in the province (including its final status), the projects suggested by the political forces representing these communities as solutions to the crisis or parts of it, and their positions on how elections for the provincial assembly should be conducted.

## Narratives of victimization and identity formation

Narratives of victimization are not necessarily fixed or faithful renditions of historical facts. True, they may not be a complete butchering of history, but they always represent a framing of history and its events for a specific purpose by their narrators. Because these purposes vary, the narratives surrounding a given event will multiply in accordance with the number of purposes. In victimization narratives,

history appears as clay to be shaped by the narrators into a group identity. This remodeled clay is then presented to members of the group as a system for understanding the world around them, and as stories to frame their collective identity, and is transformed into a tool for shaping their identities and their self-conceptualization. Such narratives are thus considered part of the foundation of human groups.<sup>(3)</sup>

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3 Mark Freeman, "Why Narrative? Hermeneutics, Historical Understanding, and the Significance of Stories," *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, vol. 7, no. 1 - 4 (1997), pp. 169 - 176.

Because of the extent to which narratives produce identity, some social scientists have coined the concept of “narrative identity.”<sup>(4)</sup> Yassin al Haj Saleh explains the role played by narratives of victimization as follows: “Narratives of victimization are part of the process of building a community, of binding its members together and fixing its cracks in a context of competition for power, influence, resources, and land, and against a background of the declining institutions of political modernity – the state, the party, voluntary groups and the individual – and the failure to establish even a minimum of political legitimacy for this concept. And because narratives build communities, there are no communities that are not oppressed in their own eyes, or more accurately, in the eyes of their leading elites.”<sup>(5)</sup>

In general, the presence of cases of communitarian conflict is not considered a necessary and sufficient condition for the emergence of victimization narratives. It also requires the presence of elites that seek, by formulating narratives around the victimization of their group, not only to defend the rights of those groups, but also – and perhaps this is more important with regard to many of these elites – to reinforce their position in “the struggle for material, symbolic and political resources within groups and in their competition with one another.”<sup>(6)</sup> In their efforts to spread awareness of a communitarian self and an imagined community, those elites exercise power over epistemology, onto which they impose their ideological coloring. It is the habit of these elites, as Hossam Matar notes, to “reproduce identities to reinforce their authority within the group and their interests, to reinforce social cohesion around a political/ideological project, and to strengthen loyalty, in order to create a monolithic entity defined

not only from within but from outside via creation and demonization of an antithetical ‘other’.”<sup>(7)</sup>

The concern of victimization narratives with the past does not result from historical interest, but from a desire to employ that past, or parts thereof, in service of contemporary goals. Such narratives cling to the past and history in response to the needs of the present, and to convey a coloring of legitimacy to projects in the present day. They summon up historical injustices to shape the memory, imagination, desires, emotions, reactions, dreams, ambitions, aspirations and identity of communities – and even their fate. However, victimization narratives are not unique in using the past to build communities. Narratives have often been used to shape collective memory, employed to produce forms of solidarity in national identity-building projects. Likewise, these projects have often made use of history, inasmuch as it is a “symbolic reserve,”<sup>(8)</sup> in order to spread feelings and bonds of communitarian solidarity based on the establishment of a connection – real or hypothetical – with difficult times.<sup>(9)</sup> In their efforts to provide the glue required to form the identity and present of a group, narratives regulate collective memories in accordance with a hierarchical ordering, “selecting the ones that are significant, and relegating the insignificant to the margins of consciousness or to the unconscious.”<sup>(10)</sup> This brings to mind Durkheim’s theory of “collective consciousness,” which he defined as “[t]he totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society [which] forms a determinate system with a life of its own.”<sup>(11)</sup>

Narratives in the simplest sense are stories that narrate events, whether written or spoken. Their importance does not lie simply in individuals’ use of them to understand the world around them but

4 Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relationship and Network Approach,” *Theory and Society*, vol. 23, no. 2 (October 1994), pp. 605 - 660.

5 Yassin al Haj Saleh: “az-Zalimūn al-‘Ādilūn: min Sardiyāt al-Mazlūmiyyah ilā Muqāwamat az-Zulm” [Just Oppressors: From Victimization Narratives to Fighting Oppression], *al-Jumhūriyya*, 07/09/2015, <http://bit.ly/2wKe5b3> (accessed 06/04/2017).

6 Ibid.

7 Hossam Matar, “Tafkīk al-Hikāya al-Madhhabiyya: al-Ghazā’ir al-Qātila” [Deconstructing the Confessional Narrative: Fatal Instincts], *al-Akhhbar*, Issue 3177, 17/05/2017, <http://bit.ly/2gJbhTY> (accessed 17/05/2017).

8 James H. Liu & Denis J. Hilton, “How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics,” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2005), pp. 537 - 556.

9 Ronald Grigor Suny, “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 73, no. 2 (December 2001), pp. 862-896; James V. Wertsch, “The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory,” *Ethos*, vol. 36, no. 1 (March 2008), pp. 120 - 135.

10 Neera Chandoke, “Narratives of memory: narratives of narcissism,” *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2000), p. 76.

11 Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, translated by W. D. Halls (New York: The Free Press, 1984), pp. 38 - 39.

also their use as an intellectual or cognitive tool in determining their positions or stances in forming relationships and social interactions. This recalls the late American psychologist Jerome Bruner's statement that the fundamental function of the mind is "life making".<sup>(12)</sup> In light of this, narratives appear to us as the legends of our time. Through them individuals make or invent their world, or at the very least invent their understanding of the world – which they see as the actual world around them. The question of whether the victimization is real or not thus becomes irrelevant. In a world steeped in narratives of victimization, "there is no difference between those who are truly victimized and those who imagine that they are so, or between those who were oppressed previously (but are no longer) and those who in past centuries were never oppressed but who see themselves now as eternal victims."<sup>(13)</sup>

Since it is impossible to be oppressed without an oppressor, victimization narratives not only seek to cast light on the suffering of the victims but also to accuse those who victimize them. In the words of al-Haj Saleh, "no group has a victimization narrative that exists separately from a narrative of a victimizer, directed against another group assumed to be unified and homogenous".<sup>(14)</sup> These narratives claim an unbreakable link with the right, which they identify with the victimized group, and see evil as embodied in the other group. The collective identity formulated by narratives of victimization is thus not a discursive but an oppositional identity based on a negative distinction from a group that they see as their oppressors. Victimization narratives are, in sum, like walls. They are simultaneously a factor of unity, discrimination and collective self-defense. They are not only a fundamental element in producing the fabric and solidarity of a community, but also in delineating its borders and the space in between them.

In spite of the suffering that narratives of victimization promote, they do not cease to elevate victimhood, which does not take the form of

humiliation or contempt but appears instead as high moral standing. It is no surprise then that there are many lessons in victimization narratives, perhaps the most important of which is what the Danish social scientist Sofie Danneskiold-Samsøe calls the "morality of suffering."<sup>(15)</sup> Victims, in their own victimization narratives, transcend the pains of their victimhood, seizing a moral victory from its jaws. The crueler and more bestial the oppressor appears in victimization narratives, the higher the position of moral beneficence the victim occupies. Victimization narratives thus have a dramatic dimension. At their core is the story of a struggle between good and evil - between rejection and resistance on the one hand, and control and subjugation on the other. This is how narratives are able to serve as focal points for resistance and provide an element of collective mobilization.<sup>(16)</sup> However, victimization narratives play down, if not remove entirely, sympathy for, or understanding of, the injustice enacted on the other group, whether by those who carry the banner of the victimized group or by others. They preclude the possibility of the victimized group engaging in victimization. And just as they conceal the oppression of the other group, they are also employed to conceal oppression within the group itself.<sup>(17)</sup>

There is a salvationist bent hidden within victimization narratives. Since they leave no space for doubt regarding the moral superiority of the victim, they leave the door wide open to the fantasies of the victim's future victory over the victimizer – the victory of the group that sees itself as an embodiment of good over the group it sees as emblematic of evil. On a site of conflict awash with contradictory narratives like Kirkuk, where stories of victims and victimizers are flung about in every direction, these narratives contribute to the perpetuation of the conflict and its reproduction in ever more complex fashions as time goes by. They build up collective feelings of pain and anxiety and stimulate a lust for vengeance in the oppressed. They do not stop at simply producing an overwhelming desire to one day dance on the

12 Jerome Bruner, "Life as Narrative," *Social Research*, vol. 54, no. 1, Reflections on the Self (Spring 1987), p. 12.

13 Kan'an Makiya, *Hawāmiṣh 'alā Kitāb al-Fitna* [Commentary on *Al-Fitna/The Rope*], (Beirut: al-Jamal Publications, 2016), p. 9.

14 Al-Haj Saleh.

15 Sofie Danneskiold-Samsøe, "Victims in the Moral Economy of Suffering: Narratives of Humiliation, Retaliation, and Sacrifice," in: Steffen Jensen and Henrik Ronsbo, (eds.), *Histories of Victimhood* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 240.

16 Phillip L. Hammack and Andrew Pilecki, "Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Political Psychology," *Political Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 1 (February 2012), pp. 75 - 103.

17 Al Haj Saleh.

oppressor's grave, but also encourage members of the group to take a sterner path, the path of confronting its victimization or what it sees as such.<sup>(18)</sup> Feelings of defeat, degradation, rage and resentment are capable of mobilizing members of the group to a collective

action which does not exclude violence from its list of options.<sup>(19)</sup>

With this in mind, examined below is the position of Kirkuk in some of the narratives of victimization so common in Mesopotamia.

## Conflicting Kirkukian narratives of victimization

### 1) The Kurdish narrative

Kirkuk occupies a special place in the common Kurdish victimization narrative and in Kurdish political discourse. Within this narrative it appears as the 'heart of Kurdistan', the 'Jerusalem of the Kurds'. Just as such rhetorical vocabulary conveys a halo of particularity and glory, indeed sacredness, to Kirkuk's position, it also aims at projecting an overwhelming wave of emotion onto its image in the Kurdish collective consciousness, most importantly a nostalgia for a distant past – regardless of whether it is real, hypothetical or imaginary – and a longing for a particular future. It summons up the same sort of feelings that are associated with Jerusalem, feelings which have so often set alight the consciousness of Arabs and Muslims, most of whom see the city as the capital of a future Palestinian state and as a sacred city which cannot be abandoned or conceded. This is not to say that the Kurdish narrative does not recognize the diversity of Kirkuk's makeup, but that although it recognizes this diversity as a unique trait of Kirkuk, it emphasizes the historical depth of the Kurdish presence there, and thereby reinforces the Kurdish national movement's claim that it is an inseparable part of historic Kurdistan. The Kurdish narrative thus employs history for its own purposes, and those who promote it – thinkers, academics,

intellectuals, politicians and party ideologists – make use of their research tools to establish that it was the Kurds' forebears, specifically the Luwians and the Hurrians, who built Kirkuk. They then concentrate on later stages of history in which Kirkuk was part of the Kurdish emirates of Ardalan and Baban, and the fact that it was made the capital of the Ottoman Vilayet of Shahrizor from the 16th century until 1879 (when the capital was moved to Mosul).<sup>(20)</sup>

The Kurdish narrative arms itself with numbers to affirm that the Kurds always constituted the largest ethnic group, if not the majority, in the Province of Kirkuk. In this context, no source is more cited by this narrative than the 1898 encyclopedic work *Kamusü'l-Âlam*, by the Ottoman-Albanian historian Şemseddin Sami, in which he states that three quarters of Kirkuk's inhabitants in his time were Kurds, while the other quarter was made up of Arabs, Turkmen and other groups.<sup>(21)</sup> This affirmation, despite researchers' scepticism, has become axiomatic in the Kurdish victimization narrative in Kirkuk, and foundational for similar assertions regarding Kirkuk's demographic makeup in later phases. This position has also been adopted by the former Iraqi president and leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Jalal Talabani, stating that the Kurds constitute a majority in the province, while the Turkmen make up a large

18 Francesca Polletta, "Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements," *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 21, no. 4 (December 1998), pp. 419 - 446.

19 Khaled Fattah & K. M. Fierke, "A Clash of Emotions: The Politics of Humiliation and Political Violence in the Middle East," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2009), pp. 67 - 93.

20 Ahmad Mahmoud Khalil, "Dirāsāt fī t-Tārīkh al-Kurdī 'l-Qadīm: Kurdiştān Tārīkhiyyan wa-Jughrāfiyyan" [Study in Ancient Kurdish History: Historical and Geographical Kurdistan], *Kulilk*, 27/11/2012, <http://bit.ly/2yD7vmV> (accessed 25/03/2017); Nuri Talabani, "Kirkūk Madīnatān Kānat Juz'an min Imāratay Ardalān wa-Bābān" [Kirkuk as a City that was Part of the Ardalan and Baban Emirates], Part 1, *al-Jaras*, 2 July [no year], <http://bit.ly/2j4FP70> (accessed 02/05/2009); Liam Anderson & Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk: The Ethnopolitics of Conflict and Compromise* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 13.

21 See for example Qays Qaradaghi, "Kurdiyyat Kirkūk fī Ahamm Wathīqa Kurdiyya", Kurdiştān Regional Government website, 02/07/2005, <http://bit.ly/2vO6zOR> (accessed 01/02/2017).

Various Turkmen writers have refuted Şemseddin Sami's assertions regarding Kirkuk. See for example: Arshad al-Harmazi, *at-Turkumān wa'l-Waṭan al-'Irāqī* [Turkmen and the Iraqi Nation], 3rd ed. (Kirkuk: Kirkuk Waqf İnstitūte, 2003), p. 157; Necat Kevseroğlu, "Şamsuddīn as-Sāmī Şāhib Qāmūs al-A'lām wa-Kirkūk" [Şemseddin Sami, Author of *Kāmūsü'l-A'lām*, and Kirkuk], *Mawsū'at Turkumān al-'Irāq* [Encyclopedia of Iraqi Turkmen], 24/04/2013, <https://archive.li/pOwX1> (accessed 01/02/2017).

percentage of the population of the city. Arabs, on the other hand, are a minority not exceeding 10% of the province's population.<sup>(22)</sup> Many Kurdish politicians and writers, who continuously reaffirm that before systematic efforts to change the demographics of the province, Kirkuk had always had a Kurdish majority, make the same argument.<sup>(23)</sup>

Speaking to Kurdish politicians in Kirkuk about the ethnic composition of the city opens the door to boasts about a majority, as if its existence were an accepted fact. Such boasts of numerical superiority flow easily off the tongue of Rizgar Ali, former head of the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly and a member of the PUK's Politburo, who says that "the Kurds constitute the majority, then the Arabs, then the Turkmen, then the Chaldo-Assyrians." Ali provides no documentary evidence for his claim, contenting himself with references to precise provincial population statistics, before stating that "if we take the number of Kurds in the Provincial Assembly as a yardstick... there are 21 of them versus 11 Turkmen and 7 Arabs, distributed over various lists."<sup>(24)</sup> He consequently makes use of the 2005 election results in order to calculate the respective numerical weights of Kirkuk's constituent elements. The results produced by these elections do show the victory of the Kirkuk Fraternal List, led by the Kurdish parties who hold 26 seats, as opposed to 9 seats for the Iraqi Turkmen Front – a joint electoral list made up of several Turkmen parties – and 6 seats for the Arab List, which competed under the umbrellas of the Iraqi Republican Alliance and the National Iraqi Alliance.<sup>(25)</sup> But the evidence Ali puts forward does not accord with his own logic. If election results were the measure of the size of the different groups, then it would be the Turkmen and not the Arabs – as he claims – who would be the second-largest community.

The Kurdish victimization narrative regarding Kirkuk occupies a central position in the Kurdish

national movement's struggle, where the Kirkuk dilemma is invoked as an insurmountable obstacle in all negotiations held between Baghdad and the Kurds from 1963 to 1991. The veteran Kurdish politician and former Iraqi MP Mahmoud Uthman notes that the self-rule agreement concluded by the Iraqi government and the deceased Kurdish leader Mullah Barzani on 11 March 1970 "provided for the normalization of affairs in Kirkuk and the holding of a census of the inhabitants of the province in order to incorporate it into what was then called the Autonomous Area (now the Kurdistan Region), but the provincial population records were transported to Baghdad and then meddled with. A year later relations between the Kurds and the government soured."<sup>(26)</sup>

The Kurdish narrative is full of references to the measures taken by the Iraqi government which led to a reduction in the number of Kurdish inhabitants in Kirkuk. It relays stories of the oppressive and arbitrary measures taken by the Ba'ath government against the Kurds; in particular, forcible relocation, Arabization, and mass killings, which reached their most barbaric point during the Anfal Campaign of 1988. Although it does make reference to the injustices inflicted on the Turkmen under the old regime, these are generally little more than rhetorical flourishes and necessary affirmations of the all-encompassing tyrannical dimension of Saddam Hussein's rule, without in any case arriving at equivalence between the victimization of the Turkmen "other" and the victimization of the Kurdish "us". No victimhood can match the victimhood of the Kurds in this narrative – and no one is more morally righteous than the victims themselves.

When discussing the Anfal campaign, the Kurdish narrative emotionally presents it as a rite of passage for the Kurds towards a unique position in an open space of history full of victimization and barbarity. The "barbarity of these campaigns and the genocide

22 Jalal Talabani, *Kurdiştān wa 'l-Haraka al-Qawmiyya al-Kurdiyya* [Kurdistan and the Kurdish National Movement], 2nd ed., (Beirut: Dār at-Ṭalī'a, 1971 [1963]), p. 36.

23 See for example Nuri Talabani, *Mintaqat Kirkūk wa-Muḥāwalāt Taghyīr Wāqi 'ihā al-Qawmī* [The Kirkuk Area and Attempts to Change its Demographic Character], 3rd ed. (Erbil, Aras Publications, 2004).

24 Maad Fayadh, "Kirkūk... Quds al-Akrād" [Kirkuk... The Jerusalem of the Kurds], *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Issue 10986, Friday 26 December 2008, <http://bit.ly/2xQRj0Y> (accessed 01/04/2017).

25 It should be noted that the Kurdish parties took part in these elections as a unified body under the Fraternal List, while the various Arab and Turkmen lists took part against a backdrop of strong calls for a boycott among Arab Sunni circles in Kirkuk.

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that the former regime conducted against the Kurds had no precedent in humanity's long history."<sup>(27)</sup> Such a crime serves as shorthand for a memory swollen with crimes committed against the Kurds: "the Anfal campaigns were no coincidence, nor the first barbaric act against the Kurdish people – they were preceded by other crimes."<sup>(28)</sup>

The Kurdish narrative does not stop at simply disseminating sadness, pain and anger, but aspires to overturn the effects of Arabization, publicly proclaiming its goal of restoring the balance of groups that existed in Kirkuk prior to the demographic changes conducted by the Iraqi state before 2003. It affirms the necessity of sending the *wāfidīn* (internal migrants) back to their home regions and of the return of Kirkuk's original residents who were driven out of their homes and relocated elsewhere during Arabization – most of whom are Kurds. The *wāfidīn* in Kirkuk are seen as settlers, encouraged by the previous Iraqi government to take up residence in the city in order to change the demographic make-up of the province. In this narrative there is no space for Arabs from other parts of Iraq moving to Kirkuk for work or for financial reasons or any other. The narrative neglects any coercive measures taken by Kurdish parties – harassment, arrests, threats etc. – to compel the *wāfidīn* to return to their home regions. As in victimization narratives more generally, we see that the oppressed 'us' in the language of the Kurdish narrative cannot possibly be oppressors. The narrative thus works to depict the *wāfidīn* as themselves wanting to leave Kirkuk and go home in exchange for the incentives the government provides. In a 2008 interview, Dler Dermami, the former Kirkuk Province Media Director, emphasized that "there are a great number of Arab families who came during Saddam Hussein's tenure as part of the Arabization of the city and who want to go back to their home provinces in exchange for a government grant of 20 million dinars per family and a plot of residential land in their home province."<sup>(29)</sup>

The Kurdish victimization narrative aims at closing the curtain on the question of Kirkuk and the disputed areas, proposing their incorporation into the Kurdistan

Region as part of the final status of the province. It does not only frame this project as a Kurdish right because of their historical victimization, but also invokes the logic of the prodigal son returning to the mother's embrace. This framing is clear in an article by Nechirvan Barzani, the KRG Prime Minister, in which he states that "[w]e must have restitution for the wrongs committed against our people. In Kirkuk, an integral part of Kurdistan, historically and geographically, our people were expelled, and the provincial boundaries manipulated. There must be a timetabled referendum, on a fair suffrage and with the right boundaries, to enable the Kirkuk governorate to join the rest of Kurdistan."<sup>(30)</sup> What is meant by "manipulation" of the provincial boundaries is the measures taken under Ba'th Party rule to change the administrative boundaries of Kirkuk by removing some districts and areas with Kurdish majorities and adding others with Arab majorities.

The Kurdish narrative persistently repeats its call to implement Article 140 of the Permanent Iraqi Constitution, which includes a road map to solve the problem of disputed areas, including Kirkuk, and has been unshaking in its rejection of the contention that this Article is now defunct because of the expiry of the implementation deadline – 31 December 2007. This insistence is rooted in a deep belief in the necessity of returning Kirkuk to Kurdistan. Kirkuk, which conjures disappointment and hope simultaneously in Kurdish collective consciousness, will continue to be a source of pain for the Kurdish victimization narrative as long as it remains outside the borders of the Kurdistan Region.

## 2) The Turkmen narrative

A deep concern with the city of Kirkuk is perhaps one of the most prominent features of the Turkmen narrative. Since it seeks to defend what it sees as the victimhood of the Turkmen and their greater right to the governorate, it mobilizes emotion and feelings expressing the centrality of this city in Iraqi Turkmen consciousness, and its status as an important symbol of the Turkmen presence in Mesopotamia. The Turkmen victimization narrative is concerned with asserting

27 "Al-Anfal Jarīma Lā Taghtafīr" [The Anfal is an Unforgivable Crime], KRG Website, 16/04/2006, <http://bit.ly/2xQaNtw> (accessed 01/02/2017).

28 Ibid.

29 Fayadh.

30 Nechirvan Barzani, "Why Kurdistan insists on Kirkuk," Financial Times, 15/08/2005, <http://on.ft.com/2eN50JI> (accessed 31/03/2017).

its hegemony over history. Although it does not deny the presence of other, non-Turkmen communities, it affirms that Kirkuk is a Turkmen city historically, linguistically, and culturally, and nonetheless resorts to statistics to confirm that the Turkmen constituted the largest ethnic group in Kirkuk before 2003. The Iraqi MP and former President of the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly Hasan Turan cites an unpublished document produced by the Iraqi security forces in 1997 that indicates that “the number of Turkmen in Kirkuk was 360,000 people, 45% [of the population]. The Arabs constituted 30% and the Kurds 20%.”<sup>(31)</sup> This belief in the Turkmen’s numerical superiority appears clearly in their statements, both elite and non-elite, and in their debates and rhetoric. Yet it also betrays at the same time a deep pain rooted in the tragedy of their relative weight decreasing under the pressure of the demographic changes that have befallen the city, whether before the fall of the Ba’ath regime in 2003 or after.

As in any narrative that flexes the muscles of numbers, the other side of boasting about how many of “us” there are is to refer to how few of “them” there are. Mixed in with assertions of the Turkmen’s historical numerical superiority in the city, tainted with the pain of a group that suddenly finds itself as the minority, we see assertions that the other constituent groups – Kurds and Arabs and Chaldo-Assyrians – always constituted numerical minorities in the city, with notable development only taking place after the discovery of oil in Kirkuk in 1927. In the historical reading of the changes to the demographic character of the city after the discovery of oil offered by Suphi Nazım Tevfik, a former Iraqi army officer and now a leader of the Iraqi Turkmen Front, there is an expression that admits no other interpretation. In the immediate aftermath of the discovery of oil, “thousands of northern Iraqis in particular converged on the city, including Assyrian, Chaldean and Armenian Christians first of all and Kurds, Arabs etc. later, while other Iraqis came to set up commercial and economic interests. There was rapid development in the environs of this rich city, which was connected to Baghdad and

Irbil by a railway and more than five governorates (then ‘provinces’) by paved roads. Meanwhile, the Military Command of the Northern Region was established (1927), various large camps were built in [Kirkuk]’s suburbs, and thousands of young Kurds and other inhabitants of the Provinces of Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Irbil and Mosul joined its ranks.”<sup>(32)</sup>

Although Tevfik restricts himself to discussion of the developments of the demographic picture of the city of Kirkuk, the Turkmen narrative is not lacking in narrators who extend this picture to most of the Kirkuk Governorate and the surrounding areas. Many Turkmen politicians and writers are very keen indeed to cast light on the historical Turkmen presence in a wide range of areas not only within the modern borders of Kirkuk Governorate but in broad swathes of northern Iraq as well.<sup>(33)</sup> These areas, including regions which currently have a heavy Kurdish presence like Irbil, and which extend in a crescent shape from the Iraqi-Syrian border to the Iraqi-Iranian border, have been accumulated by Turkmen nationalist ideology on the basis that they constitute the Turkmen homeland (*Türkmeneli*). The close connection made between these areas and Turkmen nationalist ideology, as well as the resonance it enjoys in popular Turkmen consciousness, may further sharpen and deepen the sense of loss, defeat, and fear of the future in the Turkmen victimization narrative.

The Turkmen narrative concerns itself with the memory of the city of Kirkuk, with all the wealth, prosperity, fluctuations, trials and tribulations of the land, the competition of states, instruments of oppression and the horrors of wars and sieges have conspired to produce. But it remains haunted by an anxiety to prove a deep-rooted Turkmen historical presence in the city. And just as the narrative has sought to establish a firm foundation for the Turkmen presence in Iraq by tracing its beginnings in Mesopotamia back to the first century AH, and has set aside a broad space for the consecutive Turkmen migrations and the Turkmen emirates that ruled great swathes of it,<sup>(34)</sup> it is absolutely untiring in its long

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32 Suphi Nazım Tevfik, “Wāqī’ aṣ-Şirā’ ‘Alā Kirkūk wa’l-Manātiq al-Mutanāza’ ‘Alayhā” [The Reality of the Conflict over Kirkuk and the Disputed Areas], paper presented at the Conference Arabs and Kurds: Interests, Fears and Commonalities, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, 29 April – 1 May 2017.

33 See for example Erşat Hürmüzlü , pp. 13-16; Hasan Uzman, “Turkumāniyyat Kirkūk Qabl wa-Mā Ba’d at-Tārīkh (bi’Khtişār)” [The Turkmen-ness Of Kirkuk In Prehistory And History (In Short)], *Nahnu ‘t-Turkumān* website, 08/04/2017, <http://bit.ly/2y8h1PP> (accessed 04/10/2017).

34 Hürmüzlü , p. 15 - 16.

examinations of the great Turkmen influence on the city's cultural life. The narrative's preoccupation in this regard indicates a sharp awareness of the pivotal role of language in the formation of identity and the provision of a protective cocoon for it. Turkmen politicians, writers, intellectuals and activists are unremitting in their reminders that it was the Turkmen language that prevailed in Kirkuk in the first years of the modern Iraqi state, citing evidence given by Iraqi and foreign historians. And the Turkmen narrative does not look at Kirkuk's identity solely through the lens of language, but also from the perspective of Turkmen cultural heritage in its various manifestations: popular legends and stories; the names of neighborhoods, alleyways, and places (by no means exclusively); the fruits of cultural and intellectual production; and the press.<sup>(35)</sup>

The Turkmen victimization narrative resembles other victimization narratives in that it believes, with something approaching pride, that there are unique features that distinguish its own victimhood from the other victimhoods competing to occupy center stage in Kirkuk. The Turkmen narrative, as in other victim narratives, is best encapsulated in stories of spilled blood and unjust aggression. The Turkmen narrative trumpets its woes, laden with the various massacres of the Turkmen in Kirkuk in the modern period. These massacres range from the murder of several Turkmen citizens after clashes in Kirkuk marketplace on 4 May 1924 by a group of Assyrian soldiers attached to British forces (known as the *tayyārīs* or the "levy"), to the moment on 12 July 1946 when Iraqi policemen opened fire on workers striking for higher wages in Gavurbağı Park, to the massacre of Turkmen in the city by armed elements from the Communist Party and the Kurdistan Democratic Party on 14 July 1959.<sup>(36)</sup> It is from these massacres that the Turkmen's victimhood acquires its uniqueness.

In a memorandum sent to Abdulkarim Qasim in July 1959, Turkmen citizens from Kirkuk asserted that "a wave of terror and injustice has appeared in the skies of unhappy Kirkuk that no other country has seen the like of, even in the worst days of bygone ages. This wave was targeted at us, and we, the Turkmen, stand alone."<sup>(37)</sup>

In its attempt to preserve the unique victimhood of the Turkmen, the Turkmen narrative emphasizes the violations of their cultural and linguistic rights that they have experienced over the ages in Iraq – and particularly in Kirkuk – under the aegis of the modern Iraqi state, such as the previous regime's renegeing on their decision to allow teaching in Turkmen in the early 1970s.<sup>(38)</sup> It also leans towards affirming that the "ethnicity correction" (*taṣḥīḥ al-qawmiyya*) campaign carried out by the previous regime after the 1997 Census as part of its attempts to "Arabize" Kirkuk affected Turkmen more than any other constituent group in the province. Tahsin Kahya, a member of the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly, of the Article 140 Committee, and of the Political Office of the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen – one of the largest Shi'i Turkmen parties – states that the ethnicity correction decree "encompassed the Turkmen nation alone." This is because the old regime set out through its implementation to "exercise pressure and force Turkmen citizens to correct their ethnicity, [in such a way that] if they did not, they were exposed to the loss of rights, seizure of property, employment issues or deprivation of citizenship rights." While the Turkmen narrative is concerned with casting light on the injustice that beset the Turkmen under the old regime, at the same time it seeks to show the urgency of providing redress by "working to put in place a mechanism for rapid resolution by abrogating expropriation and confiscation decrees and issuing new decrees re-establishing citizenship rights."<sup>(39)</sup>

35 See for example Ata Terzibaşı, *Tārīkh at-Ṭibā'a wa'-Ṣ-Ṣiḥāfa fī Kirkūk* [The History of Printing and the Press in Kirkuk], translated to Arabic by Mevlüt Taha Kayacı (Kirkuk: Turkmen Front, 2008); Nusret Mardan, "al-Wujūd at-Turkumānī fī Kirkūk ka-Namūdhaj li't-Taākhī al-Ithnī Tārīkhan wa-Ḥādiran" [The Turkmen Presence in Kirkuk as an Model of Ethnic Fraternity, Historically and Today], *Turkumān al-'Irāq* Issue 3, Year 1 (March-April 2004), <http://bit.ly/2wIm2ig> (accessed 02/07/2017); Yavuz Nurettin Sabır Ağaoglu, "Shawāhid 'Alā Turkumāniyyat Kirkūk" [Evidence that Kirkuk is Turkmen], *Naḥnu 't-Turkumān* website, 16/04/2010, <http://bit.ly/2vNSsV> (accessed 02/07/2017); Avni Ömer Lütfi, "al-Huwwiyya at-Turkumāniyya wa-Mā Jāwazahā... Fī Mādīhā wa-Ḥādirihā" [Turkmen Identity and Beyond... Past and Present], *al-Minbar at-Turkumānī* website, <http://bit.ly/2wLgwd0> (accessed 02/07/2017).

36 Hümmüzlü , pp. 56 - 93. It should be noted that the Turkmen narrative ignores the attacks by Turkmen on Assyrian and Christian households in Kirkuk the day after this incident, resulting in many deaths, in revenge for the killing of their compatriots the previous day.

37 Ibid, p. 80.

38 C.f. ibid, pp. 117 - 121.

39 Tahsin Kahya, "al-Mādda 140 min ad-Duštūr ad-Dā'im: Qirā'a wa-Taṣawwurat wa-Ārā'" [Article 140 of the Permanent Constitution: A Reading, Conceptualizations and Opinions], Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation website, <http://bit.ly/2xQFs38> (accessed 10/01/2017).



The Turkmen victimization narrative has its own particular manner of broadcasting complaints about the oppression that has been inflicted on the Turkmen. It is keen to emphasize that the ouster of the old regime has not meant that this oppression has gone away, but paved the way for a transformation in the identity of the Turkmen's oppressors. Those who weave this narrative do not miss any opportunity to shed light on the large and unnatural increase of Kurdish inhabitants in Kirkuk since 2003. They accuse the Kurdish parties – particularly the two main parties, Jalal Talabani's Kurdistan Patriotic Union (KPU) and Masoud Barzani's KDP – and the KRG authorities of putting in place procedures and offering incentives since 2003 aiming at increasing the number of Kurds living in Kirkuk in order to change its demographic makeup.

The Turkmen narrative is awash with complaints about the "Kurdification" of Kirkuk, summarized by Hasan Turan as follows: "the number of Kurds has risen because of the relocation of thousands of Kurds from the Kurdistan Autonomous Region to Kirkuk in order to Kurdify the city." Turan asserts that the Turkmen have no objection to the return of the Kurds who were deported from Kirkuk to the Governorate during the reign of the old regime, but is quick to say that "we are against other Kurds who are not inhabitants of Kirkuk being brought in with the purpose of deciding the referendum question in the Kurds' favor."<sup>(40)</sup> Complaints of this kind are particularly widespread in Turkmen political discourse, which does not attribute any of the events that the city has witnessed since 2003 to coincidence, circumstance, or fate, but feeds off a conspiracy theory that assumes a carefully drawn-up plan driving events towards the victory of Kurdification.

The Turkmen narrative thus points us to an invisible hand controlling many of the events following the

fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, whose final goal is Kurdification of the Governorate. In a speech given at a tribal conference in Baghdad in July 2008, the President of the Turkmen Justice Party, Enver Bayraktar, asserted that the looting, burning down of government buildings and destruction or theft of population records after the city was taken by US and Kurdish Peshmerga troops in 2003 was only the beginning of a plan that aimed to "swallow up the Governorate and separate it from Iraq" as well as "marginalize and exclude" Arabs and Turkmen.<sup>(41)</sup>

When considering the solutions produced during the drafting of the new Iraqi constitution in the post-2003 period for the problem of Kirkuk and the disputed areas, complaints are intermixed with rejection in the Turkmen narrative, which raises its voice in protest against Article 140. The clamoring of Turkmen protests in this regard drowns out all other Turkmen voices, including those of smaller Turkmen parties affiliated with Kurdish parties, whose position accords with the Kurdish position and who thus support Article 140.<sup>(42)</sup> Before the expiry of the Article's final implementation date in late 2007, Turkmen politicians were insistent in warning of dangerous repercussions if it were to go into force.<sup>(43)</sup> No sooner had the time stipulated by the constitution for its implementation passed, then they began to emphasize, in the words of Hasan Turan, that "Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution is invalid because the [stipulated legal] window of validity has closed."<sup>(44)</sup>

Despite the protests of the Turkmen narrative regarding Article 140, it is still haunted by a preoccupation with overturning the injustices experienced by the Turkmen during the rule of the Ba'ath Party, and ultimately proposes solutions inspired in many respects by the content of that same Article. The narrative thus affirms the "necessity of reversing the

40 Fayyadh.

41 "Naṣṣ al-Kalima Allatī Alqāhā as-Sayyid Anwar Bayraqdār fī Mu'tamar 'Ashā'ir al-'Irāqīyyah" [Text of speech given by Mr. Enver Bayraktar at the Iraq Tribal Conference], *Nahnu 't-Turkumān* website, 30/07/2008, <http://bit.ly/2vNJ6NH> (accessed 04/05/2009).

42 Note the first Turkmen Conference, held on 11 February 2008 in Irbil with representatives of various small Turkmen parties, whose officials demanded the implementation of Article 140 in the course of the Conference. İrfan Kerküklü, General Secretary of the Turkmen People's Party and a member of the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly on the Kurdish-led Kirkuk Fraternal List, is quoted as saying that "the conference aims to support efforts made to implement Article 140 of the Constitution, for the public good of Iraq and of the Turkmen people."

See "Bid' A' māl al-Mu'tamar at-Turkumān al-Awwal fī Irbīl" [Turkmen Conference Begins in Irbil], KRG Website, 11/02/2008, <http://bit.ly/2wIYxFU> (accessed 06/03/2017).

43 Sumedha Senanayake, "Iraq: Ethnic Tensions Increasing In Oil-Rich City," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 2, 2006, accessed on 6/3/2017, at: <http://bit.ly/2j4PLgC>

44 Fayyadh.

policy of the fallen regime and returning the city to the previous status quo, by normalizing affairs and reestablishing the rights of those negatively affected by those policies. This is a natural right of all citizens: to enjoy their rights, exercise their freedoms and reside in their original place of residence (*mawṭinihi 'l-aṣli*).<sup>(45)</sup> The Turkmen victimization narrative, beset by defeats and disappointments, thus seeks to flee the pain of the present and the wounds of recent history, and satisfies itself with nostalgia for a long-lost era before the era of victimization.

### 3) The Arab Narrative

Most remarkable about the Arab victimization narrative in Kirkuk is its novelty. Its *raison d'être* derives from the occupation of Iraq and its repercussions, and it is based on newly-formed feelings of injustice, oppression and marginalization felt by Sunni Arabs in Iraq. The US-led invasion was a milestone for Sunni Arabs as a group, a rite of passage heralding the arrival of a political system woven anew from an unfamiliar cloth that had never been encountered before. This explains, to a great extent, how heavily laden the Arab victimization narrative is with the bitterness of those who have experienced the vagaries of time and the overturning of states and who have been crushed by sudden changes in the societal order. This narrative is supported by objections to the recent destruction, chaos, and warfare witnessed on the Iraqi political stage. It is a narrative in which complaints of oppression and marginalization overlap with shouts of refusal and protest.

Because bitterness is fertile ground for fear, the bitterness of the present seeks to generate new fears regarding what is yet to come. No other future fear in this narrative looms larger than that of the incorporation of Kirkuk into the Kurdistan Region. Just as it protests against the projects, “plots” and maneuvers aiming at annexation or attachment of the Governorate to Kurdistan, the Arab narrative is also full of complaints about the changes to Kirkuk’s demographic makeup that have taken place since 2003. It sees in every demographic change a step towards the project of incorporation. Since it does not

attempt to impose its national identity on Kirkuk as the Kurdish and Turkmen narratives do, it must affirm the mixing of ethnicities in the Governorate. Just as some classical scholars believed that Iraq was called Iraq because of the “intertwining of the roots (*'urūq*) of trees and palms therein”,<sup>(46)</sup> the Arab narrative affirms the intermixture of ethnicities (*a'rāq*) and cultures in Kirkuk. It uses this pluralism to create an image of Kirkuk as a microcosm of Iraq, reflecting the ethnic and national diversity, multiculturalism and religious or confessional plurality of the country more broadly.

Based on this mosaic-like particularity, the Arab narrative is quick to emphasize that Kirkuk, as a symbol of Iraqi unity, should belong to all Iraqis. As a city that is a home to Iraqis of all sub-identities, it can only remain under an administration subject to the central government in Baghdad that concerns itself with representing all the constituent groups. The Arab narrative’s preference for this solution, the fruit of its search for something that might calm the fears of Kirkuk’s Arabs for the future, is given expression by Rakan Sa'id al-Jubouri, Deputy Governor of Kirkuk, a scion of the Arabs of Hweija: “given that Kirkuk is a multinational city, it requires a special solution, a shared administration in which Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen share power equally and which is directly subordinate to Baghdad.”<sup>(47)</sup>

The Arab victimization narrative echoes the complaints made by the Turkmen about the demographic changes that occurred in Kirkuk immediately after the invasion of Iraq. It highlights the terrorization of many Arab families by Kurdish elements, resulting in large numbers of them leaving the Governorate since 2003. This was the line taken by Abdulrazzaq al-Abboudi, a member of the Arab Consultative Assembly in Kirkuk, who spoke in 2007 about “more than 100,000 families who have been forced, by malicious threats, accusations, and being prevented from working, to leave Kirkuk and return to the cities of the south. The majority of them are from Basra, Amara and Najaf.” He also accused the Kurdish Peshmerga forces of having “put great pressure on Arab families reaching the extent of

45 Kahya.

46 Abū Zakariyā Muḥyiddīn Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-Asmā' wa'l-Lughāt* [Education in Names and Terms], p. 2. (Cairo: Idārat at-Ṭibā'a al-Muniriyya, 1344 AH; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya) p. 55.

47 Fayyadh.

threats, expulsion and deprivation of their rights.”<sup>(48)</sup> The steps taken by the Kurdish security forces against the *wāfidīn* represent a reserve of anecdotes that the Arab victimization narrative draws on to demonstrate the great injustice imposed on the Arabs of Kirkuk in the post-2003 period. For example, the harassment campaign that many Arab migrant families were exposed to in Kirkuk in September-October 2010 stirred up a broad wave of protests and condemnations in Arab circles in the governorate, as well as calls to establish a special Arab self-protection force in the city.<sup>(49)</sup> At around the same time, the Arab MP for Kirkuk Governorate Omar Khalaf Jawad al-Jubouri held a press conference at the Iraqi Parliament in Baghdad in which he accused the Kurdish security forces and security apparatus, the *Asayîş*, of using intimidation and death threats to force Arab *wāfidīn* and migrants to leave the governorate.<sup>(50)</sup>

Whatever the reality, the Arab victimization narrative reveals an anxiety regarding any change to the numerical balance between the different communities at the expense of the Arabs, who formed a large portion of the population of the governorate before the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime.<sup>(51)</sup> And since it adopts a line exonerating the community of any wrong, it must deny that those Arabs who came to Kirkuk before 2003 arrived as part of a project aiming to change the demographic reality of the city. Rakan Sa’id al-Jubouri, in this context, states that “the Arabs in Kirkuk do not recognize [accusations of] immigration or demographic change, since the Arabs who came to Kirkuk in the era of Saddam Hussein are Iraqi and have the right to live in any Iraqi city.”<sup>(52)</sup>

In the midst of these complaints voices arise within the Arab narrative that ascribe the demographic changes in Kirkuk Governorate after 2003 to the “hegemony” of the Kurdish side over administrative and political decision-making.<sup>(53)</sup> Since the narrative traces this demographic change back to factors of force and hegemony, i.e. of injustice and oppression, it is difficult for it to openly concede at the same time that some of those Kurds who moved to Kirkuk after 2003 were previous deportees who had chosen to return to their home governorate. It believes that most of the Kurds who flooded in after 2003 are not originally from Kirkuk, but from other governorates – indeed, that some of them are not even Iraqi to start with, but are Syrian, Turkish or Iranian.<sup>(54)</sup>

Despite the volume of complaints about demographic change in the governorate after 2003, the Arab victimization narrative is very sensitive regarding Arabization and demographic change in Kirkuk prior to that year. It picks up its agonizing feelings of defeat and loss, marshals its evidence and its figures, and leaps to defend itself. It does not see discussion of Arabization as a description of reality, but as belonging to the realm of politically-motivated exaggeration, if not entirely false accusation. The MP and former Minister Muhammad Ali Tamim adopts this line in presenting his evidence in response to talk of Arabization, stating that the Arabs who arrived in the 1980s did not take up residence in the houses of the deported Kurds but in neighborhoods specifically built to house them. He quickly asserts that they constitute no more than 20% of the Arabs of the city.<sup>(55)</sup>

48 “100 Alf ‘Ā’ila ‘Arabiyya ‘Tujbaru’ ‘Alā Mughādarat Kirkūk” [100,000 Arab Families ‘Forced’ to Leave Kirkuk], *al-Ghad* (Jordan), republished in the digital newspaper *al-Iraq*, 04/10/2007, <http://bit.ly/2gOzlbK> (accessed 19/07/2017).

It is clear that the number of families that al-Abboudi claims have left Kirkuk – 100,000 families – is very high indeed. Assuming the average number of members in one Iraqi family is 5 people, this means that approximately 500,000 people left Kirkuk in early 2007, which is difficult to imagine because it would have created an obvious demographic vacuum.

49 The author has copies of threats signed by the “Kirkuk Youth Movement” and addressed to Arab migrant families in Kirkuk in September/October 2010. He also has a copy of a handwritten complaint sent by one Hasan Fannah Hammoudi to Deputy Governor Rakan Sa’id al-Jubouri on 5 October 2010.

50 *Al-Iraq al-Yawm* news broadcast, Alhurra Iraq, 29/09/2010.

51 For example, Deputy Governor of Kirkuk Rakan Sa’id al-Jubouri states that “in 1998 the Arabs constituted 58% [of the population] of Kirkuk.” Cf. Fayyadh. However, this proportion is dubious, and its source is unknown.

In 1997, according to estimates given in 2006 by the Minister of Planning Ali Ghalib Baban, the percentage of the city’s inhabitants who were Arabs was 72%. See Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Central Organization of Statistics and Information Technology, communication from Minister of Planning and Development Coordination Ali Ghalib Baban to Minister of Justice Hashim al-Shibli, *Th S/274*, 3 October 2006.

52 Fayyadh.

53 Muhammad al-Tamimi, “‘Arab al-Muḥāfaẓa Yuṭālibūn bi-Taqāsum al-Manāṣib as-Siyāsiyya wa’l-Idāriyya wa’l-Amniyya” [The Arabs of the Governorate Demand Political, Administrative and Security Positions Be Shared], *al-Hayah*, 23/12/2008, <http://bit.ly/2xcB5SS> (accessed 09/05/2009).

54 Fayyadh.

55 Saleem Matar, “Hiwār Hāmm Ma’ an-Nā’ib Muḥammad ‘Ali Tamīm: Ḥaqā’iq Majhūla ‘An Arab Kirkūk!” [An Important Discussion With MP Muhammad Ali Tamim: Little-Known Facts about the Arabs of Kirkuk!], *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, 08/02/2008, <http://bit.ly/2xsW3wy> (accessed 09/05/2009).

This was echoed by Sheikh Abdullah Sami al-Asi, leader of the Arab group in the Kirkuk Provincial Council – who was assassinated on 21 July 2013 – in an interview I conducted with him in 2009, in which he told me that “the *wāfidīn* settled on lands owned by the state and not by any [private] person.”<sup>(56)</sup> As the Arab narrative concedes that some neighborhoods were destroyed under the previous regime, it is forced to attribute this to development. Sheikh Abdullah, for example, cites the construction of the third bridge in Kirkuk city, which according to his account required the destruction of houses owned by Kurds, Turkmen and even Arabs in order to facilitate the streamlined flow of traffic in the city center.<sup>(57)</sup>

In its response to talk of Arabization, the Arab victimization narrative does not stop at simply wiping out the stain of taking up residence in the houses of deported Kurds from the image of the Arab *wāfidīn*, but also rolls out justifications for the policies aimed at changing the demographic map of Kirkuk that were adopted by the previous regime, ascribing them to security. Sheikh Abdullah takes this line, arguing that Arabization sought to create a “security belt” to prevent the spread of armed Kurdish revolution to the Kirkuk oil fields. He was quick to affirm that the Arabs who settled in Kirkuk under the auspices of the “security belt” fled the governorate during the military operations that toppled the Ba’ath regime in 2003.<sup>(58)</sup>

The Arab narrative dedicates a lot of time to Arabization, evoking feelings of wounded dignity. Among the protests about percentages and figures, the justifications and extenuating factors, its response conveys a preoccupation with authenticity. A cloud of doubts regarding the historical depth of the Arab presence in Kirkuk – rooted in a tribal value system that elevates origins, ancestry, and genealogy to the level of the sacred – constantly looms over this narrative. Acknowledging Arabization would carry with it implications and hidden accusations that most of the Arabs in Kirkuk are from outside the governorate. By denying that Arabization ever took

place they are affirming the authenticity of the Arab portion in its demographic structure and the long pedigree of their presence there. The leader of the Būḥamdān tribe in Iraq, Sheikh Ali Hamdani, who died in February 2016 – and who did not conceal from his audience that he had once been a member of the Ba’ath party branch in Kirkuk – evoked this claim to authenticity in his affirmation that the members of the Būḥamdān tribe in Kirkuk were the “original Kirkukis” and among the oldest Arab tribes to settle in Kirkuk.<sup>(59)</sup> Muhammad Ali Tamim, who was a history professor before entering politics, goes even further, stating that the Arabs came to Kirkuk in periodic waves of migration beginning at the time of the Islamic conquest, with the most prominent being the arrival of the Jubūr, Ubayd and Banī Ṭayy tribes to Kirkuk between the 17th and 19th centuries CE.<sup>(60)</sup> Equally, and in a fashion reminiscent of mutual name-calling, Tamim believes that the beginning of the intensive Kurdish presence in Kirkuk came with the emergence of the oil industry there in the 1920s, which created job opportunities that triggered a wave of internal migration from all regions of Iraq.<sup>(61)</sup>

Much as the Arab victimization narrative preoccupies itself with giving expression to the pains of injustice that it considers to have weighed heavily on the Arabs of Kirkuk since 2003, it is also broadcasts the fear of a greater injustice posed by Article 140. The “normalization” stipulated by Article 140, which guarantees the return of the *wāfidīn* to their home regions, warns of the excision of a broad and demographically important swathe of the Arabs in Kirkuk. Rakan Sa’id al-Jubouri openly and loudly claims that “the Arabs of Kirkuk were and are absolutely opposed to Article 140 of the Constitution.”<sup>(62)</sup> As part of its efforts to demonstrate the injustice of Article 140, the Arab narrative refers us to what the *wāfidīn* recall of their coming to Kirkuk, looking for work or fleeing the arbitrary behavior of the authorities. This raises an implicit question – what have those Arabs who came to Kirkuk as *wāfidīn* done to deserve deportation?

56 Sheikh Abdullah Sami al-Asi, leader of the Arab group in the Kirkuk Provincial Council, one of the Sheikhs of the Ubayd tribes in Kirkuk, in conversation, Kirkuk, 11/05/2009.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Sheikh Ali Hamdani, leader of the Būḥamdān tribe in Iraq, in conversation.

60 Matar.

61 Ibid; Sheikh Abdullah Sami al-Asi, in conversation.

62 Fayyadh.

The Arab victimization narrative is dominated by feelings of resignation regarding the likelihood of any end to the injustice faced by the Arabs of the governorate in the foreseeable future. Rather, it looks to more distant horizons – it sees nothing but difficult days to come. There are almost no indicators of any imminent change in the balance of power under the favorable circumstances granted to the Kurdish national project by turmoil in Iraq and Syria. The narrative bemoans the lack of support for the Arabs, deepening its conviction that the whole world has turned its back on the community and on what is right – which in its view rests with this community. It is full of sadness, bitterness, and fear, waiting for fate to grant salvation and an overturning of the balance.

#### 4) The Christian narrative

The Christian community in Kirkuk is made up of four ethno-religious groups: the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the Syrians, and the Armenians. With the exception of the Armenians, who migrated or were forcibly removed to Iraq in the late Ottoman period, the Christians have long lineages in Iraq and Kirkuk, some of which are traceable back to the cradle of the first civilizations in Mesopotamia 5,500 years ago. This deeply-rooted history gives the Christian narrative of victimization in Kirkuk a particular importance, despite the Christians' general lack of practical influence on political events in the governorate because of their small numbers and their steady diminution over the last few centuries. The Christian narrative celebrates its ability to claim the earliest historical presence in Kirkuk, affirming that the city – although it has been a melting pot in which different peoples and types have intermingled throughout history – was originally an Assyrian city called Arrapha (later Arabised as 'Arafa, today the name of a majority-Christian area in Kirkuk city).<sup>(63)</sup>

The Christian narrative is preoccupied with the existential fear that has dogged Christian consciousness in Iraq since the first days of the modern Iraqi state. It is quick to invoke death and oblivion in past and present, the tragedies of both, and fear of the future. The massacres committed against the Assyrians by the Iraqi army and certain Arab and Kurdish tribesmen in the town of Simele in northern Iraq in 1933 are particularly prominent.<sup>(64)</sup> Although the Simele massacre took place in a period rife with such fiery events, the town is still invoked very frequently in the Christian narrative, which continues to immortalize the name by way of symbol, memory and martyrdom. This is very clear indeed in the writings of contemporary Assyrians, as well as in the following excerpt from a book by Terry Botros: “Simele is a piercing scream by the Assyrians in the face of them all – Iraq and its army, the Kurds, and all the international organizations. A scream that says: a people who resorted to nothing more than the writing of petitions and letters to draw attention to their victimization, but were met with murder, imprisonment and rape by an organization tasked with defending the country and its children.”<sup>(65)</sup>

While the ghost of Simele remains ever-present in the Christian victimization narrative, the groups held responsible for what the Christian narrative considers to be the unending injustice inflicted on the Christians in Iraq become ever more numerous. On the one hand, there is ample complaint regarding the targeting of Christians in Kirkuk and the contested areas under the Arabization policies adopted by the previous regime; on the other, protest of the terrorization and eviction of Christian villages in the Nineveh Plain by Kurdish groups since 1991.<sup>(66)</sup> Neither does the Christian narrative, in some of its manifestations, spare the KRG and major Kurdish parties from accusations of taking “systematic measures... in areas under Kurdish control to marginalize and oppress Assyrians”.<sup>(67)</sup> The

63 Adil Abdulkarim al-Hakim, “Kirkūk, Aşlan Wa’sman” [Kirkuk: Origin and Name], in various authors, *Mawsū’at Kirkūk Qalb al-‘Irāq* [Encyclopedia of Kirkuk, Heart of Iraq], (Beirut: Dār al-Kalimah al-Ḥurrah), pp. 39-40, <http://bit.ly/2wJuPkk> (accessed 04/02/2017).

64 Yusuf Malek, *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians*, (Kimball Press: New Jersey, 1936), Chapter XVIII, Pp. 116 - 128.

See also: Khaldun S. Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (April 1974): 161-176; Khaldun S. Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (June 1974), pp. 344 - 360.

65 Terry Botros, “Summayl ar-Ramz al-Abadī Li’ dīhād al-Āshūriyyīn” [Simele, the Immortal Symbol of the Oppression of the Assyrians], Elaph website, 05/08/2016, <https://bit.ly/2Pq4ySK> (accessed 04/02/2017).

66 William Warda, “Democracy in Iraq or Ethnic Cleansing of the Assyrians?” *Assyrian International News Agency*, 25/12/2015, <http://bit.ly/2gJIO05> (accessed 04/02/2017).

67 Lisa Söderlindh, “Assyrians Face Escalating Abuses in 'New Iraq,’” *Inter Press Service*, 03/05/2006, <http://bit.ly/2eNZHdd> (accessed 05/02/2017).

emergence of the new Iraqi regime following the fall of the Ba'ath also provided the Christian narrative with endless anecdotes, violent incidents and crimes against Iraqi Christians and their places of worship and work in circumstances marked by savagery.

The narrative's sense of existential fear became critical with the escalating flow of brutal incidents targeting Christians in various areas of Iraq, including Kirkuk. Naturally, this fear, which pervaded the Christian narrative more and more with every act of violence against Christians, reached its peak with the fall of Mosul to ISIS. The death, oppression and displacement experienced by the Christians in the Nineveh Plain produced a discourse peppered with the vocabulary of extermination and ethnic cleansing. This language likewise appears in the words of the leader of the Syrian Orthodox in Irbil, Metropolitan Mar Nicodemus, who has said that "if we want to give expression to what has happened to us all – to me and to my flock, and all the Christians of all sects who were present in Mosul – then we say [one] word: genocide (*ibāda jamā'īyya*). Yes, I repeat – genocide, ethnic cleansing."<sup>(68)</sup>

Although many Iraqi Christians have seen emigration as an escape from the storm of events that continues

to rage across Iraq and the bestial violence that has accompanied it, it has added new fear to the Christian narrative: the fear of disappearance. This is the fear that most vexes Christian religious leaders and politicians in Kirkuk, and which has driven them to warn repeatedly of the consequences of migration and reaffirm that the Christians are "natives of the city".<sup>(69)</sup>

A siege mentality is manifest in the Christian victimization narrative in Kirkuk. It gives expression to a group that finds itself trapped between fear of extermination and fear of disappearance. On top of all this fear, the narrative is weighed down by political divisions, which lead to divisions on the future of Kirkuk. While some are opposed to it being incorporated into Kurdistan, others support incorporation, with some trying to sell the former under the banner of self-rule for Christians within the framework of the KRG and a larger space for those who want to establish their own Christian region in Nineveh. The Christian narrative thus relies on fear of the surrounding environment, on weakness and division, and is pervaded by desperation, misery and loss of hope.

## Conclusion: Narratives and the Resurgence of Civil Conflict in Kirkuk

Kirkuk becomes more than just a place in the victimization narratives woven around it by its various elites, and it acquires deep symbolic dimensions. While the Kurdish narrative raises Kirkuk to the level of a Jerusalem – not in the religious sense, but as the first and final *qibla* of the Kurdish national project – in the Turkmen narrative it shines as a beacon of the Turkmen presence and their unique historical role in Iraq. In the Arab narrative it is a canvas of historical diversity and the unifying Iraqi national project, while in the Christian narrative it appears as one of the focal points of their existential fear.

Likewise, as has been noted above, these narratives are generally given to issuing absolute and certain judgements regarding the city's national and demographic makeup. There is something particularly attractive about the numerical weight of

national groups for Kirkuk's victimization narratives – something to do with the magic of majorities and the feeling of strength they produce. But the other side of this pride in numbers that dominates these narratives – except for the Christian narrative to some extent – may be that the larger the numbers of the victimized group grow, the more scandalous the injustice they experience. It is as if these narratives are implicitly saying that for a smaller minority to be victimized is bad, but for a majority or larger minority to be victimized is much worse.

The Kirkuk victimization narratives are rich in historical content, but every one of them presents a different account of pages and chapters from the history of the governorate in illuminating the oppression of their own people – even though all of them are operating in a shared historical space. They

68 "al-Muṭrān Mār Nīqūdīmus Yakshifu 'An as-Saby al-Masīḥī Fī'l-Mawṣil" [Metropolitan Mar Nicodemus Uncovers Christian Slavery in Mosul], Addiyar, 11/08/2014, <http://bit.ly/2w9Zzas> (accessed 05/02/2017).

69 Gerald Butt, "Don't flee Kirkuk, Iraqi Christians are urged," Church Times, 06/05/2009, <http://bit.ly/2wLzWZ8> (accessed 23/07/2017).

are selective in their reading of history, in that they draw on selected events or sometimes aspects of these events to present while ignoring others that might show members of their national group in the role of victimizer. What is noticeable is the importance of massacres as a fundamental theme in the construction of these narratives, which attempt to show their communities passing through baptisms of fire and blood. The attraction of these massacres demonstrates that the past weighs heavy on the present in all the Kirkuk victimization narratives. In this evocation of the historical injustice inflicted on a given community, they also worsen the image of community that committed this injustice, and inspire a desire for redress or even revenge. From another perspective, victimization narratives look through the lens of the present and its future projects in their selective readings of the past. History is placed here in the service of the present; these narratives look at history in a fashion created by the elites of national groups for the present and the future. This is clearest in the overwhelming concern of all the narratives to establish which group was present in Kirkuk first – in their eyes, this confers a greater claim to the governorate, to forge its present and plan out its future.

Perhaps most dangerous in the temptation to read the past and the present through these narratives of victimization is that they reinvigorate oppositional

feelings towards the group or groups that they put in the “victimizer” box, and feed negative differentiation against everybody other than the victimized group. These narratives, through their presentation of distinct and in many ways contradictory images of the past of the governorate, and their affirmation of the victimization of a given group, preclude the possibility of re-establishing coexistence and creating a cross-community consensus around the present and future of the governorate. None of the narratives see any acceptable future except the one it believes will wipe out or erase the injustice inflicted on its community – not the injustice that weighs down other communities. Faced with contradicting narratives and competing victimizations, it becomes clear to a great extent why the elites of Kirkuk’s communities are unable to agree on anything important concerning them, whether related to demographic figures, electoral registers and their amendment, participation in power and decision-making in the governorate, solutions to property disputes, the passing of a provincial assembly electoral law that would encompass Kirkuk (or at the very least its own particular law), or anything else. As these problems come to present ever more difficulty in solutions and compromises, narratives of oppression appear fundamental to the reinvigoration of intercommunal disputes in Kirkuk – a city suffocated by newly conscious identities.

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