



# Elicitive Peace and Conflict Monitoring

A Pilot Study in Iraq

United Nations Development Programme Iraq

Cover Photo: A man stands in the doorway to his home in West Mosul, which was significantly damaged during ISIL occupation and liberation.

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## List of Abbreviations

CIMIC	Civil Military Cooperation
DDR	Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
ECM	Elicitive Conflict Mapping
IAA	Iraqi Alamal Association
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISIS	so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NMI	NATO Mission Iraq
NVC	Nonviolent Communication
TCI	Theme Centred Interaction
UIBK	University of Innsbruck
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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## Abstract

This study presents a tool for monitoring the underlying dynamics of conflicts in Iraq beyond a mere analysis of violent episodes. Through inquiring towards the so-called epicenter of conflicts, concrete potentials for local, regional and national peace initiatives are the core interest. This United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pilot study provides a basis for applying an innovative approach to conflict analysis - elicitive conflict mapping (ECM) - in broader contexts. Recommendations fostering spaces which are facilitating peace and conflict transformation, truth telling, alternative forms of justice-seeking, and dynamics of relational security have been identified. This study presents an evidence-based approach to future programme and policy development as well as a possible basis to monitor and further develop the impact of future conflict transformation activities under the umbrella of the United Nations.

## Foreword

Despite decades of conflict, the people of Iraq have remained resilient, many of them still displaced, waiting for a safe return home and to resume their lives. Recovery, however, isn't about bricks and mortar alone.

To achieve lasting peace, the combined efforts of Iraqis at all levels of society, with the continued help of the international community, is required to recognize and address the many factors that contribute to conflict today, hence the need for analysis such as that undertaken by UNDP's Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme in partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the University of Innsbruck, and Iraqi Al-Amal Association.

In 2019, with funding from Germany's Ministry of Economic Cooperation through the Credit Institute for Reconstruction, UNDP along with its partners, launched the fourth phase of its "Education for Peace in the Higher Education System" project to foster the study of Peace and Conflict among academics and students at Iraqi universities.

This report covers three years of preparation and hard work by UNDP and partner researchers to assess scientifically and understand the factors contributing to conflict in the past and impeding peace in the present. The timing of its release, coinciding with a period of continuing civil unrest, underscores the need to understand the collective experiences and interpretations of past events in Iraq as factors that contribute to shaping a lasting peace.

The Iraqi Universities Consortium for Peace Studies – established with UNDP's assistance – has seen as evidence of progress both participation in, and enthusiasm for this new field of study and research at a critical time, including the anti-government protests of 2019-2020 and a period of national reflection.

Indeed, these recent events suggest as an imperative the need for continued investment in education and peace studies as key to conflict prevention and sustainable peace, consistent with Goal 16, *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Accordingly, UNDP remains committed to a vision of peace education as supported by an institutional framework and through an innovative collaborative partnership between itself, the Government of Iraq, national and international academic institutions and civil society.



**Zena Ali Ahmad**

UNDP Resident Representative, Iraq

## Executive Summary

This report summarises the methodology, findings and recommendations of a pilot project in Iraq applying the innovative elicitive peace and conflict monitoring approach in a post-war environment. This United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Iraq project was implemented by the Iraqi Al-Amal Association (IAA) in partnership with the University of Innsbruck (UIBK) and the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research between July 2019 and June 2020.

The pilot study asked three questions: First, what are the underlying dynamics of episodes of conflicts in Iraq? Second, what is the potential for local, regional and national peace initiatives in Iraq? And third, how can elicitive conflict mapping (ECM) be applied in broader contexts?

Based on the continuous work of UNDP, IAA, UIBK and partners in establishing Peace and Conflict Studies as a new academic field in post-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Iraq, the elicitive peace and conflict monitoring tool offers an opportunity to explore and analyse new courses of action in conflicts - in a consultative and community-based manner – centred on the capacities, potential and expertise of Iraqi scholars.

The jointly developed elicitive peace and conflict monitoring tool was piloted between October and December 2019, during a period that coincided with a wave of protests across Iraq. In total, 28 researchers conducted 180 interviews with middle-range and grassroots level leaders in four cities (Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi, and Tikrit).

As a mitigating action, researchers reported their personal impressions regarding their first-hand insight into the dynamics of peace and conflict in a rapidly developing situation on a weekly basis. Their interviews were coded using a theoretical framework designed to understand the so-called epicentre of conflict: the underlying relational dynamics amongst conflicting actors that feed into the apparent episodes of conflict.

When researching possible alternative courses of action, the epistemological assumption that conflicting actors have different, sometimes contradictory understandings of peace, served as a guiding principle for the coding of the material by Iraqi and UIBK researchers. The researchers developed a total of 603 codes and 14,897 coded segments to structure the vast data set which was created to facilitate the interpretation of the data set.

A further quantitative methodology was developed to capture relevant data and information in real time following the interviews, using an online software tool accessed by smartphone, tablet or laptop. Researchers could also fill out the bilingual questionnaire offline. In addition, the online software tool required a memo to be drafted by researchers to note feedback within 24 hours following the interview.

The pilot phase of empirical research coincided with nation-wide protests beginning on 1 October 2019, as large numbers of people gathered in the main squares of major Iraqi cities. Analysis of the research material demonstrated a general sense of disconnect between many citizens and state agencies.

For example, research participants described the closure of bridges in Baghdad by the government as a conflict episode expressing this disconnect along two dimensions: first, as limiting freedom of movement and second, as catalysing the dynamics of protest. From an elicitive conflict monitoring perspective and given the evaluation of field research, the attempts of protestors to advance across the Al Jumhuriya Bridge can be seen as an effort to rebalance an overall societal system that has significantly shifted towards the idea of peace as security. This can be described through the establishment of barriers and fences as a means of protection and defence, which creates a deep sense of perceived disconnect between citizens and the political system, as stated by research participants to researchers.

Considering the high number of deaths, loss and pain involved in experiences of conflict in Iraq over the past decades, many research participants perceived injustice to be a predominant obstacle to peace. Depending on their respective backgrounds and perspectives, research participants proposed two options for peace: justice through conventional prosecution via a strengthened justice system or through a blood feud. The concept of tribes playing a central role in justice seeking is repeated throughout the material. While in some instances, tribes contributed to tensions during the monitoring phase, there have also been other occasions in which they facilitated dialogue.

In the analysis of the data, sexual violence occurred as a cross-cutting issue, appearing in many forms across society, which to different degrees and in different forms affect women, children and men. Due to the manifold occurrences of the phenomenon, tackling sexual violence is a challenging endeavour on many levels, as families, tribes, customs, laws and traditions often protect perpetrators.

Within the data analysed, research participants repeatedly expressed a need for security. This especially applies to their description of situations in which parastatal actors, such as militia groups, have been active, and where people still assume the presence of ISIS sympathisers. Regarding the future stabilisation of post-war communities, research participants repeatedly expressed concern about possible ways of reintegrating Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and ISIS-affiliated families into communities. In regard to IDP communities, there is particular concern about people considered to “belong” to ISIS families. Their role in society is viewed as a potential security threat.

Following a qualitative content analysis of all data collected, four areas of recommendation were developed in this study, which may help to explore and identify new courses of action. The recommendations focus on four fields:

First, the establishment of platforms for peace and conflict transformation. Particular emphasis is given to possibilities of political participation in public spaces, higher education and spaces for dialogue on electoral reform.

Second, the development of truth telling frameworks and the creation of historical memory components, as well as regional peace councils and “constructive journalism,” which takes an affirmative lens that does not merely focus on violent episodes of conflict but rather also reports about broader societal dynamics, such as peace initiatives.

Third, alternative forms of justice seeking are outlined. Again, historical memory as a pillar of transitional justice was identified as a key element. Further, questions of compensating victims of war, and legal reforms for providing safe spaces for survivors of sexual violence are discussed.

Fourth, security was explored as a concept that does not only require responses from the security sector, but also relational capacities that call for the involvement of civilian actors in conflict transformation efforts.

Within a comprehensive elicitive peace and conflict transformation process, special contemporary methods and tools of conflict transformation such as truth telling, transitional justice mechanisms, and participatory approaches to dialogue and “constructive journalism” could be adopted to the Iraqi context.

While such immediate actions can contribute to progress in the short term, it is also crucial to recognise that conflict transformation processes require long term commitment spanning generations. The research methodology developed in this study contributes to possible courses of action both in the short and long term.

# 1. Introduction & Background

This study was developed consistent with the principles of elicitive peace research, an approach to conflict analysis that proposes not to prescribe solutions to conflicting parties but to put their expertise and knowledge at the centre of consideration, so as to determine possible alternative courses of action in conflict. In the spring of 2019, UNDP, IAA, UIBK, and partners began discussions on developing a peace and conflict-monitoring tool applicable to the Iraqi context.

Following this, UNDP, IAA and UIBK supported capacity building activities for curriculum development and teaching Peace and Conflict Studies, in partnership with the Iraqi Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research, at nine Iraqi universities. This endeavour was a significant success, with the universities of Anbar, Baghdad and Mosul beginning their first pilot year in autumn 2019, providing the first 44 students from across the country the possibility to study Peace and Conflict Studies with the newly developed curriculum.

UNDP Iraq invited its partners into this context, jointly with the Iraqi Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research as well as representatives from partner universities. This invitation ensured Iraqi ownership, based on conscious decisions to trust in distinct approaches to and didactics of Peace Studies, which have evolved around the UIBK's Master's Program in this field. The UIBK approach to curriculum development is based on institutional experience in numerous countries around the world (Echavarría, Hamed & Taylor 2019) and examines existing local, regional and national capacities.

At the same time, this approach provides reference points for how curriculum development and teaching Peace and Conflict Studies is interpreted in different contexts of the larger international academic community within the discipline.

The project built on the expertise of Iraqi scholars, activists, IAA and the University of Innsbruck's experience in peace and conflict analysis. The work of John Paul Lederach (1995; 1997; 2003; 2005; Lederach & Lederach 2010) and his proposal for a context sensitive, elicitive approach to conflict transformation, as well as Wolfgang Dietrich's (2012; 2013; 2018) trilogy outlining a comprehensive philosophical and methodological approach to contemporary conflict transformation research and applied peace work were utilized. The framework of conflict analysis is now better known as elicitive conflict mapping (ECM). IAA is currently in the process of translating Dietrich's trilogy into Arabic, which provides a central reference point for this study and will ensure access to key literature for the emerging Iraqi Peace and Conflict Studies community.

While ECM is a ground-breaking approach to conflict analysis, it had not been applied systematically in large-scale national contexts. A solution to the unprecedented scope and scale began with a methodological dialogue as to how ECM could be integrated into some of the existing principles of monitoring social developments. Insights from election and human rights observation missions were central to these discussions, leading to the aim of this pilot study, namely, to develop a framework for a comprehensive overview in large-scale national contexts and an in-depth inquiry into the dynamics behind violent episodes.

The pilot phase of empirical research coincided with a wave of protests that occurred in several cities across Iraq beginning on 1 October 2019. The first week of protest was followed by a short period of relative tranquillity, during the Shiite Arba'een pilgrimage. However, on 25 October 2019, people took to the streets and squares of many cities once again. These developments are centrally reflected in the accounts of the 180 research participants of this study which were collected through semi-structured interviews in the university neighbourhoods of Baghdad (Rusafa), Mosul (Al-Thaqafia), Anbar (Al Ta'amim) and Tikrit (Al-Qadisia). Further, both senior and junior researchers wrote weekly personal reports reflecting their perspectives and experiences with dynamics of conflict and peace during the 2019 Iraq protests.

The empirical data was collected in two phases between 4 November and 24 November 2019, and 25 November and 15 December 2019, respectively. Our analysis focuses on this period of data collection as well as on the five primary weeks of protests. The time period covered in this pilot study is 1 October to 15 December 2019.

## 2. Methodology

The development of an elicitive peace and conflict-monitoring tool is a step into new territory for elicitive peace and conflict research. While there have been studies that have applied the analytical frameworks of transnational peace philosophy and elicitive conflict transformation (Dietrich 2018) to contexts of national and international conflicts (Hamed 2016; Ismail 2019) before, these methodologies have never been applied so systematically in a large scale national context.

This study is, therefore, not only (1) a pilot in the national context of Iraq, but also (2) a contributor to the broader field of conflict transformation research, and (3) the introduction of an innovative methodology useful for academics engaged in the newly-developed field of Peace and Conflict Studies in Iraq and the broader region.

It has been essential for the study team to apply a methodology that puts the capacities, potential and expertise of colleagues from the Iraqi Higher Education Sector into the centre of efforts. To this end, continuous dialogue and feedback loops about the developed methodology in this context occurred. Following an assessment mission workshop in July and a verification mission in September 2019, two training workshops – one for senior researchers and one for junior researchers - were conducted in Erbil at the end of October 2019. These formats assisted the study team to develop a methodology that is context sensitive and ensured ownership for Iraqi colleagues.

Given this approach, it was particularly important to consider the expertise of the 28 Iraqi researchers collaborating in this research, as well as external consultants who provided their expertise and input on the research topic in three loops of research design and consultancy, while developing a context-sensitive research methodology. As a result, the following three questions have guided the research:

1. *What are the underlying dynamics of episodes of conflict in Iraq?*
2. *What are the potentials of local, regional and national peace initiatives in Iraq?*
3. *How can elicitive conflict mapping be applied in broader contexts?*

*Questions one and two focus on the subject of peace and conflict in Iraq. The third question outlines the broader methodological aim of developing a comprehensive approach to peace and conflict analysis that can be scaled up and applied to broader contexts in the future.*

### 2.1 Rationale for a Pilot Study

There are a myriad of methodological approaches to conflict analysis that would propose superficial methods of analysis and tend to quantify conflicts. The perspectives usually take a universalised epistemological assumption of central concepts such as peace and conflict. This is the leading approach for many international organisations, as well as donor agencies, within the peace and development cooperation field. For this study it has been central from the early moments of conceptualising this research, to propose a framework that does not follow the logic of having a pre-defined normative assumption of what peace ought to be. For example, peace could be equated to development or security as pre-defined concepts. Rather, this research builds assumptions and arguments on the basis of the theoretical postulate that peace is a concept that deserves to be thought of as a plural noun – as many peaces (Dietrich 2012), as its understandings are highly dependent on the lived experiences of people and subject to constant change.

The first step adopted was developing a primary pilot study that allows the understanding and development of an analytical framework that makes sense in the specific context of Iraq, by consulting and working with Iraqi experts and colleagues. At the same time, the goal was to develop a tool that both has been tested and is robust enough for future adaptability, depending on the specific contexts in which it is used.

Furthermore, developing a tool of analysis was important to implement an evidence-based approach to program and policy development, but also to monitor the impact of UN programme activities for purpose of recommendations based on a systematic and methodologically tested conflict analysis. This systematic approach, based on the theoretical ECM framework, has been adapted for the purpose of applicability to Iraqi research contexts and conflict realities.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of conflict and the potential for peace(s) that evolve in their midst within communities is based on transrational peace theory, as developed by Wolfgang Dietrich (2012; 2013; 2018) Innsbruck, Austria. The central assumptions of this approach, which postulates that potential for both conflict and peace constitute themselves in the relationships between conflicting actors, are subject to constant change as part of dynamic and complex social systems.

This theoretical framework proposes that human beings are rational in their behaviour – and much more. This is expressed in an approach to analysis which assumes that beyond the episode of conflict that presents itself to the beholder, one must inquire for underlying dimensions of conflict. In other words, for any given episode of conflict, for example a dispute between two neighbours, there is an expression not only of material dispute but also of his/her relational conditionality.

As people are very different in their life experiences and socialisation, we arrive at the already mentioned insight, that “peaces” are many. In order to make sense of different interpretations of peace one may find in a given setting, our analytical framework provides for a differentiation of interpretations of peace into four main categories expressed through different themes: harmony, justice, security and truth.

Transrational peace theory postulates that whichever interpretation of peace we may find in the world, it will relate to at least one of these primary themes (Dietrich 2018). When analysing potential courses of action, we have, therefore, always asked the question in which theme a specific need, expressed through an episode, may be rooted. When providing recommendations in the end of this pilot study, these different primary themes will guide the organisation of arguments.

In the tradition of multi-track diplomacy (Dietrich 2013, 161; Ramsbotham et al. 2016, 30; 32), we distinguish between three different levels of conflict analysis (see Figure 1): first, the top-leaders level; second, the middle-range leader level; and, third, the grassroots level. As the primary interest has been to develop an understanding of the impact of dynamics of conflict and potentials for peace on the ground, we opted for a primary focus on track two (middle-range leaders) and track three (grassroots) levels in the framework of this pilot study.<sup>1</sup>

### Approaches to Building Peace

#### Level 1:

##### Top Leadership

Military/political/religious leaders with high visibility

Focus on high-level negotiations  
Emphasizes cease-fire, Led by highly visible, single mediator

#### Level 2:

##### Middle-Range Leadership

Leaders respected in sectors Ethnic/religious leaders Academics/intellectuals Humanitarian leaders (NGOs)

Problem-solving workshops  
Training in conflict resolution  
Peace commissions  
Insider-partial teams

#### Level 3:

##### Grassroots Leadership

Local leaders, Leaders of indigenous NGOs Community developers Local health officials, Refugee camp leaders

Local peace commissions  
Grassroots training  
Prejudice reduction  
Psychosocial work in postwar trauma

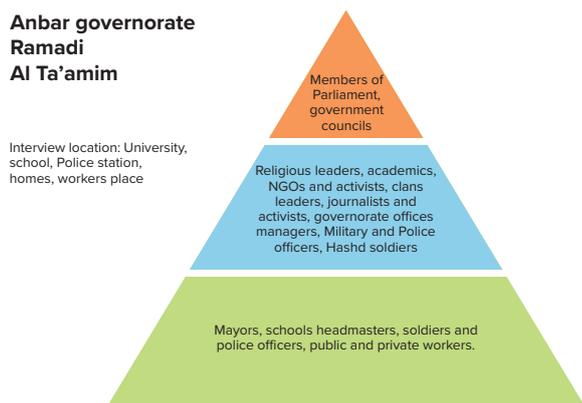
Affected Population

Figure 1: Derived from John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 39.

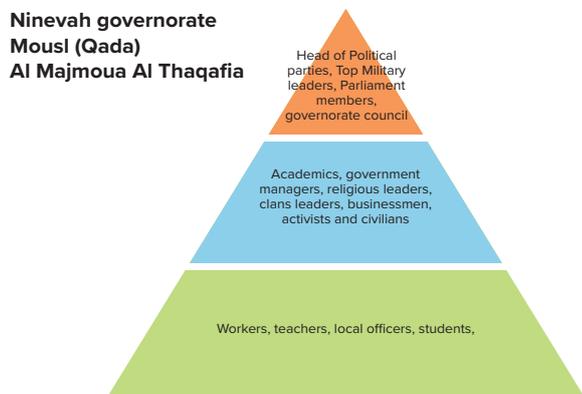
<sup>1</sup> The elicitive peace and conflict monitoring tool, however, has been developed in a manner that shall allow a conflict analysis also on the top-leaders level in the future.

This multi-level analysis framework was first developed by John Paul Lederach (1997). As much of his work is rooted in this approach as a peace practitioner in Central America, and also in African contexts, it was important to adapt the focus for actors that Iraqi researchers considered relevant in the four selected neighbourhoods. Therefore, the Iraqi researchers have developed a chart that adapts the initial Lederach sketch to the Iraqi context (see Figures 2-5).

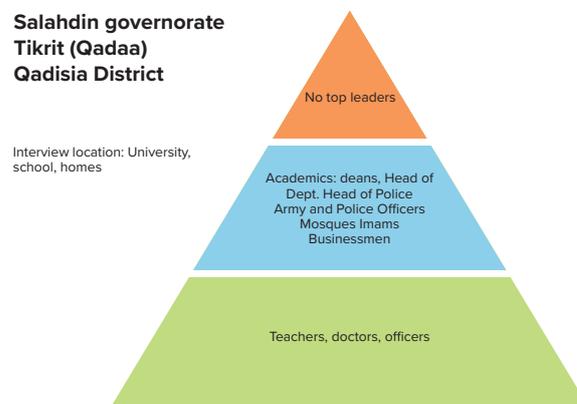
**Figure 2: Lederach Pyramid adapted to the neighbourhood Al Ta'amim, Ramadi**



**Figure 3: Lederach Pyramid adapted to the neighbourhood Rusafa, Baghdad**



**Figure 4: Lederach Pyramid adapted to the neighbourhood Al Thaqafia, Mosul**



**Figure 5: Lederach Pyramid adapted to the neighbourhood Qadisias, Tikrit**

The selected relevant actors differed between contexts depending on the researchers' descriptions of the neighbourhoods selected for this pilot study (see Figures 2-5). The researchers chose research participants (interviewees) representing a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, ethno-political identities, religious affiliations, as well as gender. Regarding gender representation, of all research participants, 30.6 percent were women and 69.4 percent were men, an imbalance resulting from an approach to snow-ball sampling in the selection of research participants. This imbalance could be accepted for the purpose of this pilot study, however in the context of further research phases the question of balanced representation of the overall population will need to be addressed even more explicitly at all phases of research.

When confronted with an incident of violence, for example a suicide bombing, one may quickly conclude the identities of the victim and the perpetrator, or who is right and who is wrong. The image of violence as it appears to beholders seems rather clear. However, such moral judgment is not the primary intention of this study. The aim is to inquire into the relational and systemic patterns that lay behind such a violent episode. This is accomplished by asking how the four underlying different layers of ECM feed into an incident of violence.

The first layer considers the sexual-family relationships of the suicide bomber and the people closest to them as well as the communities that might be affected by the bombing. In a second layer, the socio-emotional-communal conditionalities of the conflict actors deserves careful consideration: the concrete relationship and positionality of a person is central to understanding the episode. Underlying dynamics can be found in the so-called epicentre of conflict, which is here described by different layers. Third, the mental-societal dimensions of conflicts are key. Understanding how a person imagines themselves as being part of society is crucial. The way conflicting parties perceive themselves contained in their struggles, for example, through institutional frameworks, is key. Such institutional frameworks could be schools, universities, or parliaments. However, this third layer also refers to the extent conflicting parties perceive themselves subject to constitutional and legal frameworks and, crucially, how they function. The fourth layer considers the spiritual conditionalities and practices of persons in conflict. This sphere is highly experiential, and this is where the rational analysis of conflicts has long reached its limitations. For the purpose of the analysis of peace and conflict there will be no claim of any absolute truth about the belief systems of conflicting parties. Rather it seems crucial, and indeed only respectful, to recognize this as a crucial dimension of conflict for these parties, when they occur in their conflict narrative, and should be treated as part of their respective truth about conflict.

In addition to these layers of conflict, it was found that Iraqi ethno-political groups play a crucial role in conflict. While one can argue that they are implicit to Dietrich’s (2018) conflict analysis, the dimension is explicit in this analysis, as a dimension of conflict that intersects with all the layers outlined above (see Figure 6).

In the contexts researched, it became clear that specific groups appear to be in a particularly volatile position in society. Stigmatisation of certain either externally ascribed or self-defined identity groups appears as sometimes random, but frequently as systemic. It would go beyond the scope of this pilot study to provide a comprehensive analysis of all these groups. For such analysis, the research project would need to work with a significantly broader sample at a later stage.

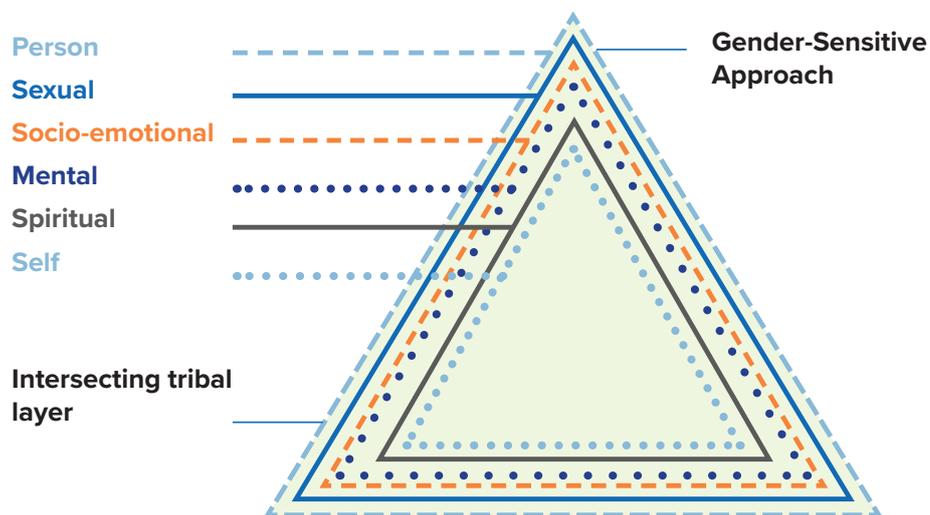


Figure 6: Tribal Layer and Gender-Sensitive Approach to Elicitive Conflict Analysis, adapted to the Iraqi Context

However, the examples for volatile positionalities outlined in this study shall provide insights into sexual violence as experienced by many women, men and children, and simultaneously call for a differentiated approach to the analysis of sexual violence.

## 2.3 Case Selection, Methods of Data Collection & Research Cycle

In total, 28 researchers conducted 180 research cycles across Iraq, from 4 November to 15 December 2019, consisting of eight steps (see Figure 7, Phases & Cycle of Research, below).

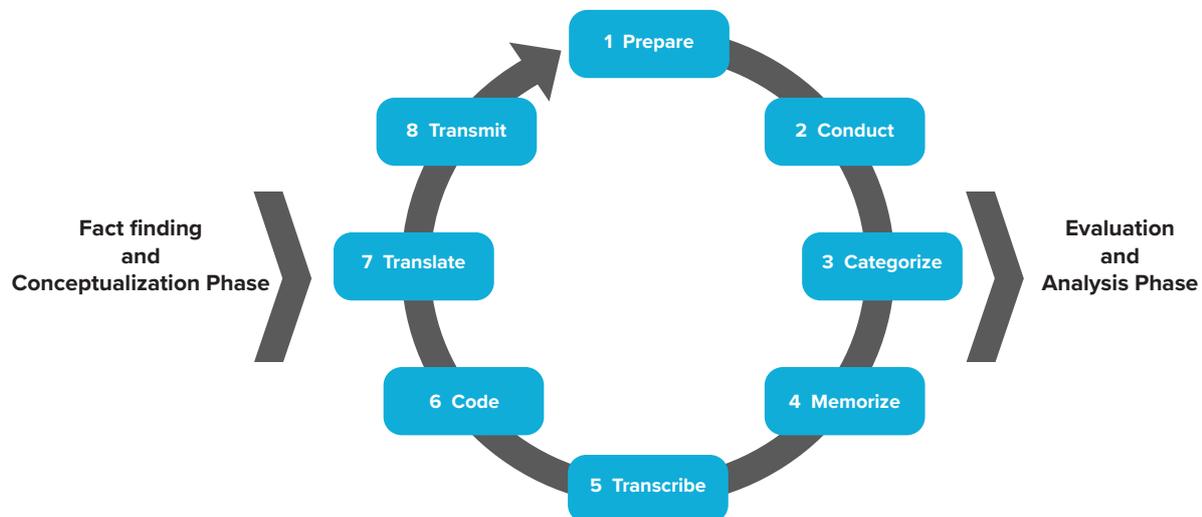


Figure 7: Phases & Cycle of Research

The research process consisted of a preparatory phase, followed by an empirical research cycle, consisting of eight steps for each interview conducted in order to guarantee coherent research standards (see Figure 7). First, participants prepared the respective interview; second, they conducted a semi-structured interview (qualitative); third, they categorised and documented the information obtained with an online questionnaire (quantitative); fourth, they created an online memo including summary and answers to open guided questions; fifth, the interview was transcribed either by the researchers themselves or by contracted research assistants trained by UIBK; sixth, the researchers coded the interview; seventh, the coded interviews were translated into English; and eighth, the interview was transmitted to UIBK, where it was securely stored while the data was deleted from the researchers' hardware devices to reduce risk of leaking sensitive information. In parallel to this empirical research process, the researchers wrote six personal reports reflecting their experiences with peace and conflict in the midst of the 2019 Iraqi protests.

During a preparatory phase, experts in the fields of the Iraqi security sector, gender, civil society and ethno-politics were invited to make presentations. In line with the core assumption of this project that universities and their environments are potential platforms for peace in societies in transition, UIBK, in close coordination with colleagues from the universities of Anbar, Baghdad, Mosul and Tikrit, selected political sub-districts near the universities for study. These areas include Al-Rusafa<sup>2</sup> (Baghdad), Al Magmuaa Al Thakia (Mosul), Al Tamim (Ramadi) and Al-Qadisiya (Tikrit). While the initial intention was to focus our analysis on the respective neighbourhoods exclusively, research participants provided answers that allow for insights about the rest of the city.

As an analytical framework for selecting research participants, a multi-levelled approach to conflict transformation, in line with the pyramid of conflict (see Figure 1), as introduced by John Paul Lederach, provided a starting point later adapted for the Iraqi environment by the pilot study's senior researchers in response to Iraqi researchers, and most critically, their evaluation of ethno-political and tribal dimensions of conflict. Next, an initial research design was developed, which was again presented to, and validated by, Iraqi scholars in order to assure coherence and ownership by the Iraqi researchers. A training workshop followed, during which all 28 researchers were prepared to write and file standardised personal reflective reports, which were introduced as a mitigating action in response to the unexpected eruption of protests across the country.

<sup>2</sup> Former Al Mu'taridah neighbourhood

## Interview location:

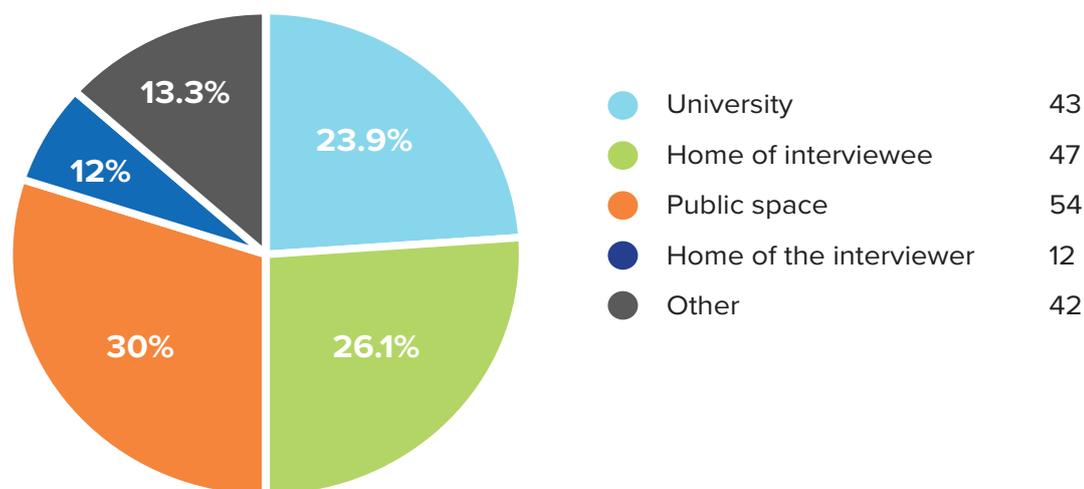


Figure 8: Locations of Interviews

During step 1, preparation of the interviews, researchers identified the relevant stakeholders. Research participants either had to qualify as grassroots leaders (researched by junior researchers) or middle-range leaders (researched by senior researchers). The researchers selected their participants to reflect the full spectrum of leadership within one category (mid-range and grassroots). Emphasis was put on the importance of identifying a safe space to conduct and record the interview, such as the universities, participants' homes or similar, alternative locations identified by the researchers (see Figure 2).

When possible, researchers conducted a preparatory meeting to brief the participant regarding the research context and process with the help of a one-page project information sheet.

During step 2, the interviews were conducted based on semi-structured guidelines. All questions had been elaborated in dialogue with Iraqi researchers and consultants during the aforementioned assessment and verification mission. This ensured a context sensitive approach and consistency in terms of how the specific research interest was framed.

During step 3, after the semi-structured interview, the researchers asked the research participants a number of quantitative questions and for completion of an online questionnaire via an online tool that was developed for this pilot study in order to categorise the data gathered. As mentioned, the categories outlined in the questionnaire were developed in three feedback loops with Iraqi senior researchers. The questionnaire could be filled in online via smartphone, tablet and laptop. Researchers could also download the program interface to their devices, which allowed them to fill in the questionnaire offline, prior to submission. The questionnaire used was bilingual (Arabic/English) and could be completed in either language by ticking single choice and multiple-choice answers. The questionnaire also provided boxes to write qualitative answers to open questions.

During step 4, within 24 hours after the interview, the researchers completed and submitted a memo via an online interface. The aim of this step was threefold: (1) a quick and coherent overview regarding the context discussed; (2) quality assurance; and (3) immediate feedback helpful to assess the on-going research process itself. In writing their memos, the researchers followed guiding questions regarding their immediate insights and interpretations from the interviews consistent with the jointly developed theoretical framework of conflict analysis. Further, researchers could add personal views concerning any challenges or problems associated with their research and/or need for support or clarification before progressing further. The memos were submitted to UIBK within 24 hours after completing the interviews.

During step 5, researchers transcribed the interviews using sample Microsoft Word documents distributed by mail through UIBK’s coordination unit. As the data analysis was later based on content analysis, colloquial language could be changed to standard Arabic by the researchers. Further, pauses, overlaps of words, feelings and emotions could be indicated through the use of special symbols.

During step 6, the researchers coded the transcribed interview. To prepare the material for the later systematic large-scale analysis with MAXQDA 2020 software at UIBK, the coding was done in a simple Microsoft Word document table. In the first loop of open coding, researchers were asked to generate new codes through open coding. In the second loop, researchers added an additional layer of theoretical codes in line with the codebook and applied colour codes to the text in line with the layered approach to elicitive conflict analysis. This was done by indicating the levels (grassroots, middle range and top-leadership levels), themes (harmony, justice, security and truth), as well as colour codes for the layers: family, tribe, community, society, and religion /spirituality.

During step 7, researchers were asked to translate the material to English before submitting it to UIBK’s coordination unit. IAA provided researchers with support for translations as necessary.

Finally, the translated material was transmitted to UIBK within one week after conducting the interview. Immediately after the translation of the interview all data was deleted from the researchers’ hard drives. After an initial quality assessment by UIBK, the researchers could obtain feedback, as necessary, from the coordination cell as a means of quality assurance. For secure and anonymous communication with UIBK, confidential and anonymised researcher codes and email accounts were set up which were also used to transfer files.

A risk matrix developed collaboratively with researchers was activated and a comprehensive mitigating action document was developed in close dialogue between all partners. To make the joint decisions for adaptation transparent, an outline from the mitigating action agreement document, developed on 7 October 2019, after the first week of protests, was included. The nation-wide, anti-government protests escalated to one of the worst security challenges in years. According to news reports, by early October more than 100 people had died and approximately 6,000 protestors had been injured. Live ammunition had been used against protestors, before large scale protests gradually subsided due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time of publication.

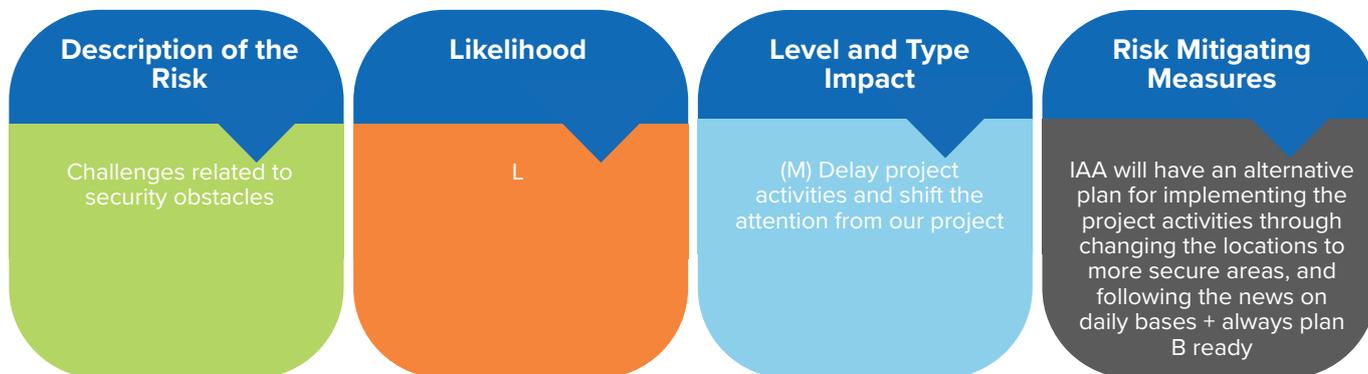


Figure 9: Outline from the Project Assessment Matrix

RISK	MITIGATION	PROBABILITY	IMPACT
<b>SECURITY</b>			
Security situation inside Iraq	Readjustment of research design Delay of implementation Relocation of researchers	M in Mosul, L in the rest	Low
Security situation of the individual researchers and research participants (personal safety; could be stopped/ prevented/attacked)	Providing information and training Security tree with Coordinators and tracking App Official letter of Faculty, Ministry and Project	High	Medium

Figure 10: Risk assessment matrix developed in the framework of the research design verification workshop with senior researchers in Erbil on 27 September 2019



Academic researchers participate in training on the social tension mapping tool.

In regard to the research design outlined in the report of the verification mission, adaptations were made to mitigate the security risk for researchers and research participants and all field research activities that included suspension of interviews with third parties. It was only after a joint workshop during the last week of October, in parallel with the re-emergence of nation-wide protests, that it was decided, in close consultation with all researchers, to implement the research nevertheless, while implementing personal reflective reports by the researchers as a mitigating action. This allowed continuous first-hand insight into the dynamics of peace and conflict in a rapidly developing situation. The material gathered through these reports has been helpful in gaining perspectives about changing social dynamics over a pre-defined reporting period. From a theoretical perspective, this reporting proved to be a strong advantage because it provided the researchers with the possibility to express themselves and their personal views, while having been trained to suspend their moral judgements about the research participants they were interviewing. Therefore, the integration of continuous reporting mechanisms will be strongly considered in the future.

## 2.4 Methods of Analysis

After the completion of each research cycle, the researchers submitted their interviews in a pre-defined basic code structure to the team of analysts at UIBK. The data were analysed with qualitative content analysis, in central reference to Schreier (2014) and Mayring (2005), which was newly adapted for the purpose of elicitive peace and conflict monitoring. The codes used for the purpose of data interpretation were pre-defined by those researchers who conducted the interviews in Iraq and therefore understood the interview contexts.

In this study, two distinct kinds of code system were applied; one that is deductive and one that is inductive. The purpose of this was to apply an analytical framework that allows for a differentiated and comprehensive analysis of conflicts, beyond violent episodes, as well as their inherent potential for peace. Additionally, the purpose was to inquire into local particularities, forms of knowledge, and experience vital for a differentiated, human-centred approach to conflict transformation that takes the specific realities of respective communities into account.



Young researchers participate in training on the social tension mapping tool.

The pre-coded data was then imported into the data analysis software MAXQDA. This program was used to support the systematic review and analysis of the large-scale data generated in the process of the pilot study. In this process, the analysts further differentiated the coding system by adding analytical categories and a distinct data landscape for each of the chosen districts and cities. Next, the data was categorized in chronological order, which allowed for a time-sensitive perspective towards the changing social developments. Three different levels of conflict analysis were differentiated in the coding system, allowing for contrast between grassroots- middle-range- and top-leader perspectives.

Once a preliminary dataset was gathered, two trial coding loops were run. Following the principle of validation in qualitative content analysis (Schreier 2014, 179), the concept-driven codes were validated. Twelve documents for the trial phase were randomly selected and three team members applied the preliminary code system. Respective choices of codes amongst the team were then compared. Whenever there were differences in the application of the codes, the conceptual definitions were further discussed and where necessary, refined and adjusted. In addition, a trial coding phase of the concept-driven coding system was run with Iraqi researchers, in order to have the data-driven coding system validated. This inclusion of Iraqi researchers into the validation process was crucial to guarantee a high degree of context-sensitivity of the newly developed lenses. At the end of this trial phase, the code system was adapted to a final version and then applied to the rest of the material.

When inquiring for central patterns in each of the researched districts and cities, an approach to segmentation was used that consists of both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The latter was used to find the topics that have been discussed the most, while the qualitative approach was applied to inquire about significant patterns. To be able to not only compare, but also analyse these topics across the researched districts, each segment of the selected topics was paraphrased. This step enabled the identification of thematically relevant patterns to explore their interconnections.

Through this process the empirical data was embedded within an analytical framework, making it possible to formulate recommendations that are context sensitive, and simultaneously relevant to a national policy. The draft recommendations were discussed with both junior and senior researchers during a validation workshop in Baghdad in March 2020.

To analyse the 2019 Iraqi protests, it was crucial to organise the data in a way that allowed application of a framework of regional and time sensitivity differentiation as well as a distinction between the different layers of conflict. The same logic applied to the second topic of former ISIS families and their return to Iraqi communities, however without the emphasis on time sensitivity, as the phenomenon analysed is subject to mid- and long-term change processes. Regarding the third topic of sexual violence, a theme centred analysis focusing on the most central and significant sub-topics that had evolved in the process of categorising the data was applied.

## 2.5 Research Ethics

Conducting research in conflict comes with a large number of ethical questions. These questions were discussed intensively with our project partners and Iraqi senior researchers and reflect the joint standards of research agreed upon between the project partners. Considering dynamic political environments, there is a requirement to adjust these standards in accord with all stakeholders whenever necessary. The readiness to flexibly respond to unexpected situations is the imperative of responsible research in contexts of armed conflict.

This study follows the principles of active listening (Rogers and Farson 1987) when engaging with colleagues. In order to facilitate this process, it has been a matter of principle to always work in a team of at least two people in the room, of whom one person was taking very careful note of the discussions, while the second colleague was facilitating the workshop formats and holding the space. At the end of each day, notes were compared and translated into preliminary reports. Bilateral meetings were arranged with Iraqi colleagues to discuss any questions or identified gaps.

The physical and emotional well-being of both the researchers and the research participants was at the centre of all considerations. Researchers were given the possibility to opt out from the research at any time if they felt uncomfortable with their work. This consideration was central from the very beginning and became even more important as the protest movement started in October, creating a more politically unstable research environment than anticipated. To be able to respond flexibly to this situation a three-fold ethical strategy was introduced.<sup>3</sup>

First, the researchers were asked to submit short reports after each of the interviews, in which they were asked to directly indicate how they felt during the interview. This data was reviewed by an Arabic speaking research assistant in Innsbruck, who reported any concerns or irregularities directly to the principle investigators. This qualitative approach to monitoring the situation of the researchers was accompanied by a quantitative questionnaire in which the research participants were asked how they felt during the interviews (see Figure 9).

**During interview I felt:**

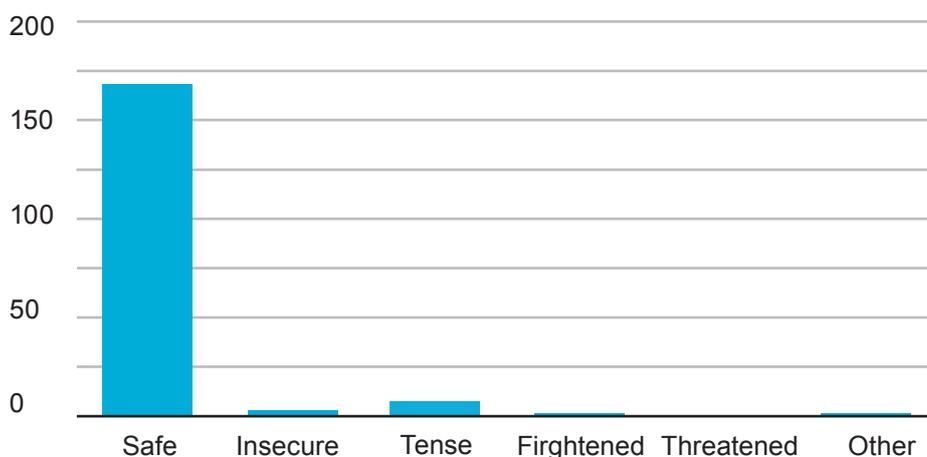


Figure 11: Responses of researchers to the question whether they felt safe during the interview.

3 For further reading on this matter see the chapter on methodological reflections below.

The responses were continuously monitored and indicate that the vast majority of all interviews were conducted in an overall environment experienced as safe, with none of the research participants indicating that they felt threatened, a situation that would have triggered a chain of responses, in close coordination with the project partners.

Secondly, the above-mentioned reporting was introduced as a mitigating action, which allowed researchers to engage in an alternative framework of conducting their research. Besides methodological advantages that accompanied this decision, the researchers could choose to continue their work, to which they had shown a high level of commitment.

Thirdly, the researchers themselves were trained with several communication tools central for peace work (Dietrich 2013). These included active listening, principles of theme centred interaction (TCI), and non-violent communication (NVC). The training on active listening emphasised the quality of suspending judgement about the other, even if one fundamentally disagreed with the narrative encountered. Given a context of protracted armed conflict and the recognition of high level of emotional involvement in the same, the team introduced some of the central principles of TCI (Cohn 2004; Schneider-Landolf, Spielmann and Zitterbarth 2017) to support researchers to meet their personal needs. Two postulates were central in this training. Researchers were encouraged to, “Be your own chairperson” (Röhling 2017). From an ethical perspective, this is considered a request which, in the research process, gave agency to researchers themselves, to decide how to act in each situation, without the imperative of having to follow the predefined structure of the research design, if considered inappropriate for a specific situation. Similarly, researchers understood that “disturbances and passionate involvements take precedence” (Hoffmann 2017, 95). In other words, the researchers did not have to pretend that they are able to describe and code their data from an allegedly neutral perspective. Rather their connections within the contexts of the research were acknowledged and they were encouraged to find spaces to address them. This could be done either through their weekly reports, in peer conversations with their fellow researchers in Iraq, and/or also in direct conversation with members of the coordination team in Innsbruck.

Nonviolent communication (NVC) was introduced as a supportive communication tool that offers the possibility to not only communicate with others in a more nonviolent way, but also to inquire into the meaning behind messages received. The four steps of NVC (Rosenberg 2003; Dietrich 2013) are: to observe; to inquire into the feelings of self and others that might be related to an observation; to inquire into any subsequent derived need; and, finally, to formulate or inquire into any further request. NVC was considered an important additional component to the ethical considerations as it equipped researchers with a potential tool to navigate through any communication challenges.

In addition to these three central ethical dimensions, research participants were asked to express their informed consent about the research. To provide them with accurate information, a sheet was created describing the research context for researchers to distribute. All data was acquired anonymously, and a numbering system was used to refer to both researchers and research participants in an anonymous manner throughout the study so as to protect researchers and sources alike.

To coherently assure the highest ethical standards and to secure confidentiality as well as the safety of all partners, all researchers and research participants involved throughout the research project signed a code of conduct along with their project contracts with IAA. This document included a commitment to maintain strict impartiality in the context of their research work and to avoid any expression indicating bias or preference in relation to national authorities, parties, sects, or to any issue of contention in the political as well as the peace and conflict transformation process. Further, researchers committed to refrain from displaying or wearing any partisan symbols, colours or banners during the conducting of the interviews and research work for this project; and from arguing or discussing with research participants about questions of truth, issues of facts, or expressing opposing views and opinions. Finally, all members committed to protect the identities of the research participants by only using number codes instead of names when communicating with others, to protect soft and hard copies of the interviews, and to delete all soft and hard copies after submitting transcribed, coded and translated interviews.

## 3. Key Findings and Recommendations

Elicitive Peace and Conflict Monitoring provides an opportunity to flexibly analyse different aspects of conflict. As this is a pilot study, possible recommendations are outlined in the following section, drawing on key findings in an exemplary manner. They are organised in four key areas: spaces for peace and conflict transformation, truth telling, alternative forms of justice seeking, and relational security. Each of them constitutes a possible entry point for peace and conflict transformation work, offering opportunities for balancing relationships in conflicting systems. The following recommendations outline possibilities for how the observed tensions during the monitoring phase offer possible entry points for conflict transformation work on both grassroots and middle-range leadership levels. .

### 3.1 Spaces for Peace and Conflict Transformation

The conflict analysis dynamics in the selected neighbourhoods have shown tensions within society, communities, tribes and families that pose a considerable constraint for peace. To address this challenge, this study recommends the exploration of three potential spaces conducive to peace and conflict transformation. Such spaces can be established flexibly across different contexts.

#### 3.1.1 Public Spaces and Political Participation

There is a broad sense of disconnect between many Iraqi citizens and state agencies. Particularly the international zone in Baghdad has become a symbol for the physical separation of governmental institutions, international organisations and political decision makers on one side, and large parts of Iraqi society on the other. The occurrence of tensions between protestors and security forces at the entrances to the international zone appears as an expression of a systemic imbalance leading to this disconnect. Several top-level state officials responded with a variety of statements to the protests, including President Barham Salih, who expressed understanding for the demands of the youth in the protest movement to peacefully engage based on their democratic rights. Simultaneously, he called upon people to respect the law and to abstain from the use of violence (Government of Iraq 2019). What transpired was viewed by protesters as a use of brute force, with the expressed intention of diminishing the protest movement through violence, including the use of live ammunition, tear gas, and water cannons to confront people on Al Jumhuriya Bridge (Aboulenein and Jalabi 2019; Amnesty International 2020; Human Rights Watch 2019).

All bridges with access the international zone were closed by 2 October 2019. Research participants described this closure of bridges in Baghdad in two dimensions: first, as limiting freedom of movement and second, as catalysing the dynamics of protest. With the recorded use of violent, often lethal force, the protest sites changed dynamically. As people continued taking to the streets, there were several incidents in which citizens tried to gain access to the international zone. On 31 October 2019, thousands of protestors marched towards the international zone from Tahrir Square.

Evaluating the field research from an elicitive peace and conflict monitoring perspective, the attempts of protestors to advance across the Al Jumhuriya Bridge needs to be seen as an effort to rebalance an overall societal system that has significantly shifted towards an approach to peace based on security. Such an approach primarily focuses on the establishment of barriers and fences as a means of protection and defence, which creates a deep sense of disconnect between citizens and politics. In recognition of this challenge, it is recommended *to explore possibilities to facilitate dialogue and spaces for encounter between citizens and political decision makers.*

#### 3.1.2 Spaces for Higher Education

Starting on 27 October 2019, a wave of student strikes emerged throughout Iraq. They were conducted in all four research contexts (Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi and Tikrit) and across ethno-political boundaries. While there may be regional particularities in the strikes, the collected data indicates their joint urge for political agency and active citizen participation.

Universities as social spaces play a crucial role as catalysts for social innovation and change as they fulfil at least three functions. First, they are sites where the debates from the squares are



Students at Baghdad University participate in the first Diploma for Peace and Conflict Studies pilot at Baghdad University, supported by UNDP, and partners Iraqi Al Amal and University of Innsbruck.

continued. Students take their insights from the squares back to the classroom, where they continue their debates. Second, universities are also places where possible alternatives to an often-criticised status quo in society can be explored and where visions for change can be articulated in an affirmative environment. While these are sites of protest, they simultaneously provide spaces for constructive dialogue and activism. Research participants reported how several campus workshops were organised for both faculty and students, aimed at exploring possibilities for peaceful political engagement. Such initiatives occurred within an overall societal context of community engagement with both grassroots and middle-range leaders' involvement. Third, besides the student bodies that are actively involved in the protests, professors were also brought into the debates. The interview material indicates that in certain cases, some of them found themselves in a role with double loyalties. On the one hand, there were significant sympathies towards, and often support for the protest movement. On the other hand, they were faculty members at state universities, and to some degree, also dependent upon the state. Negotiating their positions in these difficult realities, with all the potential consequences of taking a stance, has been described as personally challenging.

Strengthening the agency of both students and university staff in contexts in which a plurality of political perspectives is articulated, is essential. The specific universities (Anbar, Baghdad, Basrah, Mosul, Tikrit) engaged in establishing Peace Studies as an academic discipline deserve mention. At these key institutions, a broad network of academics and students academically engaged in the subject of peace has been established. This network constitutes a key resource for peace and conflict transformation work. We therefore recommend *providing and facilitating the establishment of platforms for political participation and dialogue as well as psychosocial support and counselling for students and faculty members.*

### 3.1.3 Spaces for Dialogue about Electoral Reforms

On 12 November 2019, according to Iraqi state media, the Iraqi government decided to postpone upcoming provincial elections to an unspecified date. In this context, the Iraqi Parliament held a special session to discuss the crisis. Research participants criticised this move, and in that context, also repeatedly articulated wishes for electoral reforms. This was also echoed by the Special Representative



A family stands in the courtyard of their home in West Mosul, which was damaged during ISIL occupation and liberation.

of the UN Secretary General Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert as she proposed election reform and anti-corruption measures to address the crisis (Iraqi Parliament Council 2019). This statement, in turn, was widely recognised within the protest movement.

Research participants in the pilot study also expressed the need for strengthening participation in political decision-making processes in Iraq. To address limited democratic legitimacy following past partial boycotts of elections, and to channel citizens' needs and interests into political representation, consultative electoral reforms have been demanded. Research participants have indicated a need for more direct forms of political participation. In this context, it appears crucial to consider ways of finding inclusive representation of citizens, including women and minorities.

The influence of ethno-political groups and tribes as traditional authorities and their impact on the pluralistic realities within Iraqi society has been repeatedly mentioned throughout the material. They constitute key actors in national, regional and local political decision-making processes, and exerting influence across the political institutions. Hence, they are central when considering efforts in peace work to further stabilise the political system of Iraq. There is value-added in including traditional and regional authorities in a consultative process regarding electoral reforms and peace initiatives. As previous elections have been subject to repeated dispute and both national and international critique, it appears crucial to strengthen citizens' trust in the electoral system. Besides the *necessary dialogue on electoral reforms, citizen and international election observers, as well as peace and conflict monitors, could strengthen confidence in future Iraqi elections.*

### 3.2 Truth Telling

When analysing the three key topics outlined in this study, it was found that truth and memory about conflict were built around very particular narratives. This often implies a creation of a singular understanding of history, as well as a censorship of quality sources of information, such as journalism. In recognition that this constitutes a severe obstacle for peace, the research focuses on three possible entry points to facilitate the development of pluralistic narratives about peace and conflict.



A man stands in the doorway to his home in West Mosul, which was significantly damaged during ISIL occupation and liberation.

### 3.2.1 Creation of Pluralistic Historical Memory

Each of the four contexts researched has local particularities regarding how history is perceived and narrated. For example, Tikrit's Baathist history, as the former home city of Saddam Hussein, plays a significant role in the perception of the city by people from other parts of the country. Citizens of Tikrit are often described as sympathizers with, or former parts of, the Saddam regime. From the accounts collected in this research, it appears that many citizens of Tikrit reject this attribute. Rather, it appears that this historic involvement, that accorded them with significant degrees of privilege under Saddam, are ascribed by others as a form of stigmatisation. This becomes apparent in several accounts, for which the following quote, describing the interrogation of a man from Tikrit at a checkpoint north of the city stands as an example. "Why aren't you wearing gold and where is Saddam's money?" (44.03\_20191215Eng, Pos. 4) The mention of gold is a reference to the relative economic privilege that Tikrit enjoyed under the Saddam regime. Such language that labels a part of society collectively as scapegoats is itself a form of violence and may, in turn, lead to other forms. It also constitutes a projection of collective historic experiences that, so far, have not been addressed systematically.

Research participants in Mosul also were confronted with similar historic experiences. As the former self-proclaimed capital city of the Iraqi ISIS caliphate, Mosul constitutes a particular focal point for post-war reconciliation efforts. In contrast to findings in Tikrit, several episodes in the Mosul material describe the high degree of destruction - including experiences of urban warfare and use of civilian shields and house to house fighting - research participants repeatedly emphasised that most fighters and their families were either killed or fled Mosul, yet the level of social acceptance in their former communities has become particularly low.

The historical memory of people, full of personal and collective traumatic experiences, must be treated with attention and care in any effort towards conflict transformation. While there have been understandable attempts made to move on and leave the past behind, there is no escape from these memories and the realities they continue to create, shaping present life realities.

The challenge in Tikrit and Mosul, like in other parts of the country, therefore is how to address them constructively, in a manner that allows individuals to move on, yet without leaving behind the experiences that have shaped society so fundamentally.

Historical memory may contribute to the transformation of protracted conflict dynamics. However, in the Iraqi context, such an approach has not yet been explored systematically. As the research material indicates, tensions within settings of both recent and long-term historic experiences of large-scale violence have a direct impact on daily lives of citizens. These experiences are partly rooted in colonialism and pan-Arabism and later are manifested through the more recent history of the US invasion as well as the rise and fall of ISIS. Also, in the conflicts occurring around the protests described in the gathered material, one can observe how history is in the making in the varying perceptions of daily conflictive realities. This is particularly expressed in the different qualities of commemorating death in the protest movement. Whether someone dies a “hero” or an anonymous “everyman” largely depends upon the perspective of those writing conflict history. In contrast, a pluralistic approach to historical memory would aim at providing space for the documentation of different accounts even if they are contradictory at times. Therefore, it is recommended to consider a systematic approach to creating pluralistic historical memory. This may assist in better understanding past experiences, as well as current patterns of conflict, by exposing intergenerational patterns of family, community and national relationships. It appears crucial to consider at least five adjustable components, when creating an approach to historical memory:

- 1) Iraq during colonialism and the monarchy
- 2) Iraq between the foundation of the Republic and the fall of Saddam
- 3) Iraq between the US invasion and the rise of ISIS
- 4) Iraq during partial ISIS occupation
- 5) From post-ISIS Iraq to the 2019 protest movement

Considering these different dimensions may provide a framework for the creation of an approach that provides (1) a comprehensive historical memory and a space for a multitude of accounts; (2) acceptance of contradiction and acknowledgement of differences as a basis for rebuilding networks of relationships for generations to come; (3) a differentiated, pluralistic approach to forming regional and national contents about historical developments as references for school curricula. Universities as well as civil society organisations, in close interaction with local communities, may take a pivotal role in such efforts.

### 3.2.2 Regional Peace Councils

In challenging circumstances, in which the state has been completely absent for several years due to the ISIS occupation, traditionally well-established tribes are appearing as particularly central actors. Research participants reported that tribes in Anbar governorate, for example, in close coordination with security forces, gathered to address challenges related to a blood feud. Together they created a document, the so-called People’s Covenant of Anbar, in which they declared that one ought not to seek responsibility for the actions of another person under ISIS (Sanad for Peacebuilding 2018). Research participants describe that this has substantially eased the conflictive tensions on a community level. Their initiatives have substantially improved the level of physical security within the communities and, subsequently, also provided a framework to deal with issues related to the protest movement.

In close relation to the recommendation of creating a historical memory component, stands the recommendation to consider creating regional peace councils. While they can play a crucial role in collecting and documenting different narratives about conflict and identifying potentials for peace, they can also serve as mediating bodies in conflicting settings. In this regard, tribes at times already have well-established mediation networks and conflict mitigation mechanisms.

Additionally, it would seem advisable to explore the possibility of truth telling approaches to reconciliation in contexts where communities are divided along ethno-political and tribal lines of conflict. Considering Iraq’s diversity, *collecting oral history narratives about subjective conflict experiences of Iraqi citizens across generations, ethno-political, tribal and religious backgrounds under consideration of gender and minority groups is recommended.*



Local Peace Committees, supported by UNDP, attend a workshop in Baghdad in October 2020.

### 3.2.3 Transformative Journalism

The right to articulate opinions and the freedom of speech have been described as constrained throughout the data by research participants. Incidents, such as targeting news agencies as well as intimidating journalists and social media activists, appear to be common in Iraq (Amnesty International 2019). As media freedom is restricted through censorship and the monopolisation of news, people frequently cite a lack of access to independent quality information sources. Additionally, as hate speech and inflammatory language are widely spread, many research participants have mentioned a need for spaces where a plurality of opinions can be expressed. These observations point towards a severe obstacle to stability. To tackle this issue, it is recommended to inquire into possibilities of strengthening local forms of journalism. Further, training journalists in aspects of safety for work in fragile security environments and raising awareness for quality journalism may contribute to strengthening a plurality of perspectives in the reporting on peace and conflict in Iraq.

Transformative journalism aims at embedding stories and news within a certain context. A transformation-focused journalist creates room for information, which not only addresses the reader, but makes engagement with various perspectives on a given topic visible and possible. This style of writing and reporting explores possibilities to inquire for alternative courses of action in dysfunctional conflicts through discussing topics critically, while leaving the agency on forming an opinion deliberately with the reader. This type of journalism requires training. We therefore recommend *establishing capacity building for transformative journalism through train the trainer formats. These formats allow the further development of professional and ethical journalistic standards.*

### 3.3 Alternative Forms of Justice-Seeking

Considering the high number of deaths, loss and pain involved in experiences of conflict in Iraq over the past decades, injustice was perceived as predominant by many research participants. Depending on their respective backgrounds and perspectives, research participants proposed justice through conventional

prosecution and a strengthened justice system, but also through blood feud, as options for peace. Tribes, as central players for justice-seeking, were mentioned throughout the material. While in some instances they have acted as parties within tensions during the monitoring phase, there have also been other occasions in which they facilitated dialogue. Being actively affected by the loss of lives, they are involved parties, which constitutes a risk for further destabilisation of the political situation. This risk may be mitigated by a number of alternative forms of justice seeking, including oral history approaches, the compensation of victims and the support of cultures of memory and peace education.

### 3.3.1 Creating Historical Memory as a Pillar of Transitional Justice

In contexts where there have been experiences of large-scale violence and loss of loved ones, people have a right to know the truth about what has happened. There are indications that reconciliation with former ISIS fighters and their families has been attempted. One research participant stated, “Community reconciliation is possible through sessions between those affected and these fighters, to acknowledge their crimes, and tell the truth about their roles.” (28.02\_20191105\_Eng, Pos. 16) Such proposals point to potentially integrating approaches of truth telling into a comprehensive approach to peace and conflict transformation in Iraq.

The process of truth telling, leading to the creation of historical memory, has been recognized as a key factor to avoid singular approaches which can contribute to future violent episodes in post-war conflict transformation settings. Consequently, considering approaches to truth telling on community levels is recommended as part of a comprehensive approach to transitional justice.

Collecting historical memory requires both community engagement and suitable institutional frameworks. To this end, the creation of centers for historical memory in collaboration with academic and civil society institutions could constitute a primary step toward, and basis for increased awareness related to past events and also assist in addressing societal challenges related to conflict through alternative courses of action in the future.

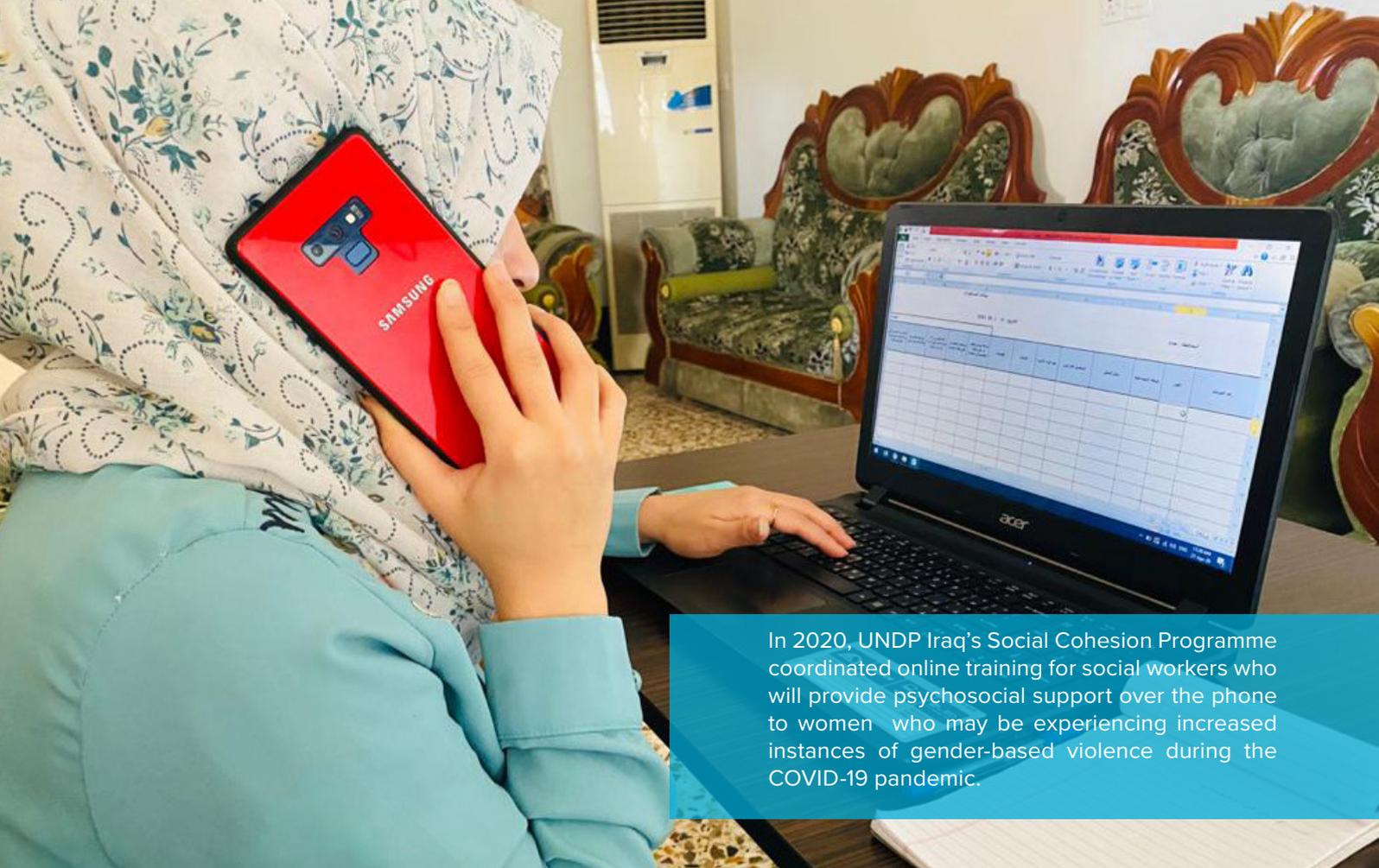
The gathered interview material indicates that several initiatives explore the possibility to once again discover and nourish relational bonds that transgress previously perceived strong boundaries, which have been separating communities. In this process it becomes apparent that victim-perpetrator divides, as they are known through conventional approaches of justice seeking, may not suffice. The relationships, not just of individuals, but of families, tribes and communities are and will remain complex. For example, research participants said that in Mosul there is no “easy solution” for how to resolve issues due to a past that continues resonating strongly in people’s day-to-day experiences. To address these complex relationships, *exploring possibilities of facilitating citizen engagements with cultures of memory as integral parts to ongoing efforts of peace education is recommended.*

### 3.3.2 Recognition and Compensation of Victims

Research participants repeatedly emphasised that the scale of the atrocities has been severe across the researched contexts. For example, in Anbar, a research participant described the “destruction of infrastructure, schools, government institutions and homes” as particularly terrible and added that this “led to the refusal to integrate ISIS back into communities in Anbar [...] and I am certain that Anbar and all Iraqi provinces refuse to reintegrate those whose hands are tainted with Iraqi blood.” (11.04\_20191201\_eng, Pos. 11) In a collective societal context, this implies that the relatives of former ISIS fighters, even in cases where they have not been directly involved in acts of violence, are seen as related to ISIS. This becomes apparent in the following description of how tribal laws have been applied to ISIS family members:

They were deported and barred from returning and some of them have no security indications on them but their sons do. So, you know that law only holds the guilty accountable and it doesn’t drag others, but in tribal laws they blame the parents for their son’s mistakes because they did not prevent and control him so they are to blame in public. (10.01\_20191018Eng., Pos.11)

Despite this tribal context that exposes ISIS families to the risk of revenge, there have been some attempts by provincial governments to move former ISIS family members back to their homes. Nevertheless, there is substantial resistance from local residents because of the experiences of loss and suffering.



In 2020, UNDP Iraq's Social Cohesion Programme coordinated online training for social workers who will provide psychosocial support over the phone to women who may be experiencing increased instances of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, exploring victim-centred approaches to justice seeking that draw on local forms of conflict transformation, complementary to strengthening the independence of the judiciary is recommended. To facilitate justice seeking while reducing the risk of further destabilisation through blood feud, other existing extrajudicial mechanisms of conflict transformation can be explored. This may imply mechanisms which lead to the recognition and compensation of victims.

### 3.3.3 Legal Reforms as Means of Providing Safe Space for Survivors of Sexual Violence

In the analysis of the data acquired, sexual violence has occurred as a cross-cutting issue, appearing in many forms across society, which to different degrees and in different forms affects women, children and men. A research participant explains:

Sexual violence undoubtedly exists. [...] There is a child who got married at the age of 13 to a 40-year-old person. When he had intercourse with her, there was bleeding, and therefore she stayed in the hospital for about 3 months, and after that she died. [...] Because of tribal customs, they said she died from a stroke. (44.06\_20191127\_ eng, Pos. 9)

As this quote indicates, tackling sexual violence is challenging, because perpetrators are often protected by families, tribes, customs, laws and traditions. A research participant describes this pattern as follows:

Sexual violence is everywhere and in many shapes. [...] The problem is that the families try to cover it up, as we say 'kiss and make up'. As a result, these cases do not even reach the ministry. Therefore, there is no solution to these cases. (28.01\_20191104\_ Eng, Pos. 13)

As this quote indicates, there are dynamics which create a largely hostile environment for survivors of sexual violence, who have neither a chance to express their accounts nor a safe place to go beyond the structures of their families due to a lack of psychosocial support settings.

Appropriate mechanisms for the protection of victims are lacking in current legislation in Iraq. This is a point of concern within the advocacy work of IAA and other civil society organisations to implement a “Protection against Domestic Violence Law.” The 2019 version would provide the necessary legal and institutional frameworks to establish so-called safe centres for survivors of sexual violence. Further, it would provide for the essential care and rehabilitation of victims and prosecution of perpetrators, as well as support for media to report, and civil society to openly denounce conflict related cases of sexual violence.

Regarding the concept of safe centres, it appears of utmost importance that they are developed in very close dialogue with, and ideally supported by, local communities, in order to facilitate their efficiency and sustainability. Therefore, besides reform of national legislation, it is crucial to consider supporting local interventions and already existing networks that provide legal and psychosocial services, information and moral support for survivors of sexual violence. This could include all-female spaces. However, sexual violence as a phenomenon concerns society as a whole; it is not a woman-only problem. The challenge, however, lies in the question of how sexual violence can be addressed constructively. This also implies the question of how men can be integrated as agents of change, moving away from creating stigma around those who are vocal about sexual violence. Beyond that, family counselling that provides a space to address conflicts as well as experiences of violence within relationships, would constitute a helpful step towards addressing domestic abuse in all its forms.

From a conflict transformation perspective, besides the crucial question of psychosocial support and physical protection for survivors of sexual violence, the question is whether this alone can contribute to a reduction of sexual violence within the larger societal contexts of Iraq. Therefore, *educating and training teachers and professors in their capacities to take conscious decisions on how they choose to address sexual violence as part of their pedagogies is recommended. This requires an explicit capacity building effort for educators willing to facilitate such awareness raising processes amongst students.*

### 3.4 Relational Security

Within the data analysed, research participants repeatedly expressed the need for security. This was particularly relevant to their description of contexts in which parastatal actors, such as militia groups, were active, and where people still assume a presence of ISIS sympathisers. Regarding the future stabilization of post-war communities, research participants repeatedly expressed concern about possible ways of reintegrating IDPs and ISIS families into communities.

Considering on-going paramilitary operations across Iraq with considerable numbers of casualties, perceived security threats appear valid and require responses from the security sector. In this context, peace is often framed merely as a task for security forces. However, from a conflict transformation perspective, arguably not only does peace require material stability but it also includes relational, emotional and psychological dimensions. Therefore, considering the role of civilian actors remains critical to a comprehensive approach towards security.

#### 3.4.1 Communication of Security Forces and De-Escalation of Crowds

During the time period of the pilot study, polarised confrontations between security forces and protesters occurred in many places and in myriad forms. Security forces were confronted with allegations of the use of violence against protesters, such as the disproportionate use of tear gas. Further, several research participants emphasised that civil activists were targeted by security forces in places such as Baghdad’s Tahrir and Khilani squares. For example, a research participant gave the following testimony, “The riot forces also continued to beat protesters and prevented paramedics from rescuing them until they reached death. Also, kidnapping continued indiscriminately.” (2803\_eng, Pos. 5) Further, teargas was used widely. According to Amnesty International (2020) teargas grenades used were:

modelled after high-explosive military grenades designed for combat. Sometimes nicknamed ‘smokers’ by protesters, these are M99 grenades made by Serbian

manufacturer Sloboda Ćaĉak as well as M651 tear gas grenades and M713 smoke grenades manufactured by the Defense Industries Organization (DIO) of Iran. Weighing around 250 grams, these grenades are up to 10 times heavier than standard tear gas canisters. Security forces in Baghdad have targeted these directly at groups of mainly peaceful protesters, with their very design maximizing horrific injury and death (Amnesty International 2020).

In addition, “live ammunition by masked gunmen and snipers” (ibid) was used against protesters. From 3 October 2019 onwards, a night curfew was enforced as an additional attempt to clear the streets from protests. In light of the high numbers of deaths in public spaces with activities of several, often unidentified, armed groups, it appears essential to put central effort into the establishment of a unity of command. Further, functional channels of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) appear key in order to approach and handle situations of polarised confrontation through a more comprehensive approach to peace and security, one that frames security also as a relational task. Supporting *training on relational capacities for security forces, as well as a future emphasis on means of communication and de-escalation of protests, with particular consideration for strengthening the role of civilian actors in peace work* is recommended.

### 3.4.2 Post-Traumatic Stress and its Transformation

The research material indicates that post-traumatic stress was not only widespread during the tension of the 2019 Iraqi protests, but is also rooted in long-term historic experiences. This is described in the following interview passage regarding the experiences of war from the US invasion in 2003 to the occupation of ISIS in 2015. “It was a very harsh experience, we lost security and assurance and we can’t sleep at night because we expect raids and we fear shelling and mortars” (10.06\_20191215\_eng., Pos. 7). Another research participant describes how she and her family had already seen the worst during the days of the Saddam regime, when her brothers were executed for political reasons as members of the opposition. With such countless experiences, embodied deeply and collectively, one can argue that the 2019 protests evolved within a period of a post-traumatic crisis. A similar phenomenon has been observed by Vivienne Matthies-Bonn (2017) in post-Arab-spring Egypt. In the context of her research, she describes how traumatic experiences continue to have a psychic impact on protesters experienced as, for example, nightmares and anxiety.

Several research participants indicated that participating in the protests was highly traumatising, however experiences of loss and trauma vary by individual. Research participants stressed that families play a particularly important role for people involved in the protests to process the challenging, sometimes traumatising experiences. In the absence of psychosocial support in the public sphere, individuals turn to family members for support. While not a substitute for professional psychosocial support, families, nevertheless, have been described by research participants in several interviews as a balancing factor and a place where they feel safe to talk, as in the following account from mid-December 2019: “We do speak about it; we all speak with pain [...] even sometimes it is [...] a kind of despair inside us like for how long, how many people should die and suffer and be tortured so that things will be stabilized” (22.04\_20191221\_Eng Pos 112). Families have become particularly important for people who have experienced violent conflict in the context of protests.

These and other accounts suggest there is an urgent need for additional, professional spaces for crisis intervention and psychosocial support, in turn, leading to the recommendation to support and train a pool of psychosocial peace workers to work with people in settings of trauma.

### 3.4.3 Community Re-Integration of Families perceived as ISIS-affiliated

Several research participants have stressed that the process of reintegrating IDPs into communities comes with challenges. While there are several community efforts for their reintegration, they are sometimes perceived negatively. Such negative perception is sometimes based on a perceived link of IDPs to ISIS through family affiliation. According to research participants, the process of reintegrating families who are perceived as having previously been affiliated with ISIS into communities, comes with particular challenges.

This becomes evident in the following quote:

A few days ago, I saw that a child was killed, no one knew exactly where his family was, I inquired about him a lot, then I knew that his family were from ISIS, people came and took him strangling him [...] and then tied him to a stone and then threw him into the river, because his family was ISIS. (07.02\_20191223eng, Pos. 15)

Often the political affiliations are difficult to comprehend, as it is challenging and usually impossible to oversee the complex political and militant relationships. The material indicates that sometimes IDPs are only perceived or accused of being part of ISIS, while frequently there is little evidence for such accusations. In any case, people are being “othered” or excluded from society. It appears that dynamics of “othering” of certain parts of the IDP camp populations contribute to a changed perception of people who assume that families with perceived ties to ISIS no longer belong to their society.

A research participant whose father was killed by ISIS and now, remarkably, provides support to the family members of former ISIS combatants, provided the following quote. “I forgive these children because they have no guilt and some members of society blame and anger me because I sometimes help ISIS wives or children by providing them with meals or psychological assistance in voluntary activities” (35.08\_20191216\_Ara, Pos. 39). Accounts such as this underline the challenging circumstances of providing community support to IDPs who are perceived as former ISIS family members on a community level. “Othering,” in the sense of drawing a clear line between who is considered part of a community and who is not, is predominant. The recent historic experience of ISIS in many communities across the country contributes to the emergence of a moral code of conduct that, through social distance, creates a feeling of historic distance from the experienced atrocities. This can be seen as a protection mechanism by affected communities. While this appears as a psychological means of self-protection, it simultaneously limits the possibility of (re-) building relationships. Ultimately, this may manifest as a severe constraint to conflict transformation.

From a conflict transformation perspective, the relevant question is how the reintegration of families who are perceived as being affiliated with ISIS into communities can be facilitated. Following the recommendations of the IOM (2020), physical security, which appears fragile, particularly in the newly liberated areas, needs to be considered a priority. This concerns both local communities and families who are living in camps, and appears as a task for security forces but also requires good civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), as security here also carries a relational component which requires a civilian effort for psychosocial support. *Both military and civilian efforts to facilitate security necessarily need to be considered as fundamental to any serious efforts for peace.*

## 4. Methodological Reflections, Lessons Learnt and Potential Steps Ahead

While the overall research design and methodology have worked well in the context of this pilot study, there are certain elements which deserve careful consideration for adaptations in the framework of future research.

Regarding the analysis of the material (180 interviews, 81 mitigating action reports, nearly 15,000 coded segments), it was important to follow a systematic method that approaches each topic episodically and then explores it further layer by layer. In this layered analysis of the material, two things are important: first, it is essential to always have a conceptual openness to adapt the theoretical framework of transnational peace analysis to a given context. In the context of this study in Iraq, this has implied introducing an additional tribal layer to the analysis. Additionally, it has been crucial to then apply all layers systematically to the interpretation of all data. This means that if, for example, there is no mention of the sexual-family layer in a given context, one directly needs to ask why this is the case. However, such systematic application of a pre-defined theoretical lens should not be understood as an imperative to follow a static structure when presenting the data. Quite to the contrary, the experience of this pilot study provides a solid empirical ground to argue that the framework of analysis as outlined by Dietrich (2018) provides just one of many possible ways of moving through the layers.

Data analysis shows a tendency for the mental-societal layer to emerge as central to certain episodes of the two protest phases. However, it is important as a researcher to recognise instances where layers fluctuate or where one or more has been left out entirely. For example, the mental-societal layer may be followed by the spiritual-transpersonal layer, or followed by the tribal layer, leading to the question of why, for example, the socio-emotional-communal and the sexual family layers have been left out in the narrative.

Concerning possible future lenses of conflict analysis and the methodological approaches derived from them, Iraqi research contexts are strongly characterised by collective understandings of society. Findings show a tendency for participants to hesitate to discuss how their individual experience feeds into conflict and vice versa. For example, when research participants were asked about experiences in the second-person singular, they tended to respond in the first-person plural. In preparing future methodologies, it would, therefore, seem important to avoid a focus on individualised analysis and rather to stress the personal dimensions of conflict as part of the larger whole. A sensitive approach to research in this context would need to aim at moving carefully back and forth between both singular and plural dimensions (I/we) in dialogue with the research participants so as to better explore and understand both.

The data analysed has repeatedly provided clear insights into patterns of potential violent escalation of conflicts. The different degrees of involvement and presence of tribal representatives, as well as various militia groups in the protest squares as responses to the killing of civilians, can be seen as one such indication. Such observations relate to the idea of “early warning” systems. If such conflict monitoring is done in a time-sensitive manner in the future, such information could factor into immediate recommendations for United Nations (and other) operations and programmatic initiatives to facilitate conflict transformation and peace.

In terms of potential steps for follow-up research on peace and conflict dynamics in Iraq, analysis of the pilot study data suggests several possibilities:

1. The analytical framework can be adapted for the purpose of qualitative and mixed-methods project evaluation, for example, in UN peace projects and operations.
2. While the tool has been tested on a rather limited scale in this pilot study, it is ready to be scaled up to Iraq as a whole, as well as a larger regional context in the Middle East. If applied in significantly different contexts, it would be crucial, however, to plan for a proper fact-finding and research design adjustment phase in close dialogue with central stakeholders.
3. To derive significant insights about the developments of peace and conflict over time, it would be crucial to consider longer monitoring periods, potentially ranging over several years' time.

Further, it would be important to expand the scope of perspectives researched beyond the target groups of research participants selected for the pilot study. This may include a stronger emphasis on tribal politics, religious and ethno-political leaders, representatives of regular and irregular armed forces, as well as an expansion to the country's top-level leadership.

4. Data analysis offers a perspective as to how historical memory is created (or not) and this, in turn, has a significant impact on the forms conflicting episodes take. Therefore, a future programmatic focus on truth telling and the creation of a differentiated historical memory component would appear to be key for successful long-term conflict transformation efforts.

There are many other possibilities for the tool's use and adaptation in a context sensitive manner not only in Iraq. For example, UIBK has developed a similar project design with colleagues at Jimma University, Ethiopia, to monitor conflict dynamics in the context of national elections.

The challenges to peace and conflict in Iraq are many. Understanding the complexities of their dynamics will be crucial to developing research-informed programmatic interventions, as well as policies for peace in Iraq. By putting the expertise of Iraqi scholars at the centre of research design and implementation, this pilot study constitutes one step in this direction.

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