

Winter 2024

ASSYRIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 3 Issue 01



PHOTOS FROM THE '23 ASSYRIAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM

Captured moments from the 2023 Assyrian Studies Association Symposium showcase a symphony of scholarly exchange, cultural celebration, and vibrant discussions, reflecting the richness and diversity of our shared Assyrian heritage.

Read more on pp. 4-7

BEDRI DIRIL, THE 2023 GRANT WINNER

Bedri Diril, recipient of the 2023 Assyrian Studies Association's Children's/Popular Book Grant, triumphs as a visionary storyteller, weaving the tapestry of Assyrian culture through his project *Assyrian Folk Tales*, destined to resonate with readers of all ages.

Read more on p. 3

ASSYRIANS IN MOTION EXHIBITION

The online exhibition *Assyrians in Motion* unfolds as a captivating visual narrative, showcasing the dynamic stories and history of the Assyrian community within the United States.

Read more on p. 1



Assyrian Studies
ASSOCIATION

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This newsletter is created and published by the Assyrian Studies Association, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization that promotes interest in the academic study of the longue durée of the Assyro-Mesopotamian heritage through supporting research, scholarly publications, and collaborative projects. It facilitates contact and exchange of information between scholars, academic organizations, and communities across various disciplines. ASA functions as an instrument to advance studies on the Assyrian people and their culture.

Assyrian Studies Association's Statement on the Palestinian/Israel Conflict

“

We, as the Assyrian members of the ASA Board of Directors are survivors of genocide and ethnic cleansing, and as such, stand firm against the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and ethnic cleansing of Artsakh Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. As academicians, *the ASA Board of Directors is calling for a concrete contribution: papers on the lasting effects of genocide and ethnic cleansing, including historic and contemporary experiences and perspectives is welcome.*

”

Assyrians in Motion, a 1937 Film of Assyrians in America Exhibit

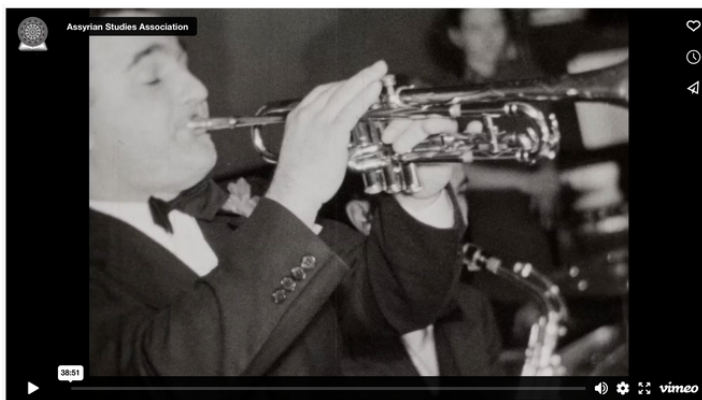
Online exhibiton created by Dr. Ruth Kambar, Assyrian Studies Board Member and Annie Elias, Assyrian Foundation of America Board Member

Assyrians in Motion, is an exhibit centered on a recently rediscovered 1937 archival film documenting Assyrian American communities in Chicago and on the East Coast. The exhibit pieces together the story of the film's inception and journey, who the filmmaker was, and shares ongoing research into the people and places depicted, based primarily on the memories of elder Assyrians watching the film.

The intention for this exhibit is that it will be a living document, a repository to which all Assyrians can contribute, a place to reminisce, tell stories, recognize and identify places, people, and traditions, to see ourselves and our ancestors. Your memories and contributions are welcome. Please accept our invitation to complete the form on the film site.

To visit the exhibition and to watch the restored, full-length 1937 archival film exactly as this forgotten cultural treasure was found in 2017, without correcting upside down images or out of sequence editing, please visit:

<https://www.assyrianstudiesassociation.org/assyrians-in-motion>



Assyrian Studies Association's 2023 Children's/Popular Book Grant Winner

Bedri Diril, a graduate of the Pera Fine Arts Radio and Television Program, has forged a path in documentary filmmaking and independent projects. As a freelancer, he has passionately contributed to various initiatives, encompassing documentary films and books centering on Assyrian culture.

Excitingly, Bedri's book project, *Assyrian Folk Tales*, has secured support from the Children/Popular Book Grant, facilitating the publication of this culturally significant work. The project's goal is to gather, preserve, and integrate Assyrian folk tales into the fabric of Assyrian culture and literature. It strives to ensure the tales endure, bringing them together for enthusiasts of this rich tradition, especially for the current and future generations of Assyrians.

Drawing from his experiences as an Assyrian documentary filmmaker, he has visited Assyrian diasporas in Europe and America, creating several documentaries about the Assyrian people. These experiences have fueled his commitment to this project, now in its finalization stage.

On behalf of the Assyrian Studies Association, we extend heartfelt congratulations to Bedri on this remarkable accomplishment!



Bedri Diril



Excerpt of Bedri Diril's *Assyrian Folk Tales* project.

Photos from the 2023 Assyrian Studies Symposium

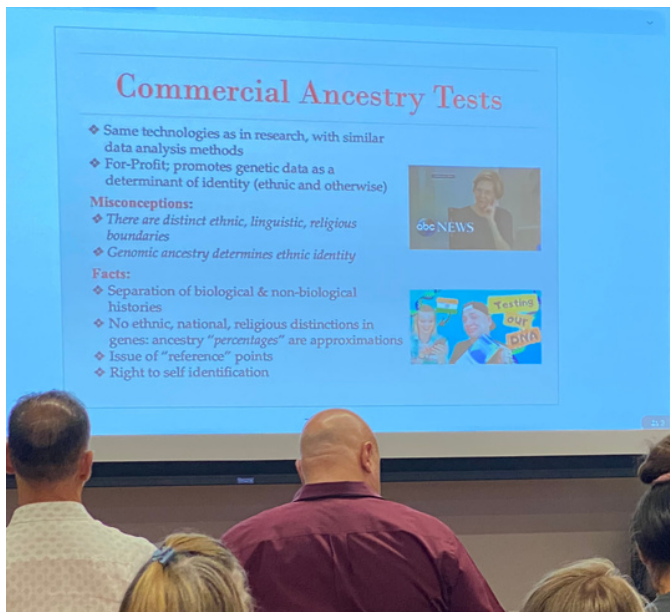
From August 11-13, 2023, the Assyrian Studies Association hosted the first biennial Assyrian Studies Symposium at Stanford University. This three-day event welcomes eighteen scholars hailing from diverse corners of the globe. These distinguished individuals converged to share and expound upon their research findings, collectively contributing to the growing body of knowledge dedicated exclusively to the Assyrians. The symposium acted as a unique forum, drawing together scholars whose academic pursuits are intricately woven into the fabric of Assyrian Studies. The experts provided their research in their respective fields, shedding light on various aspects of Assyrian history, culture, and heritage.



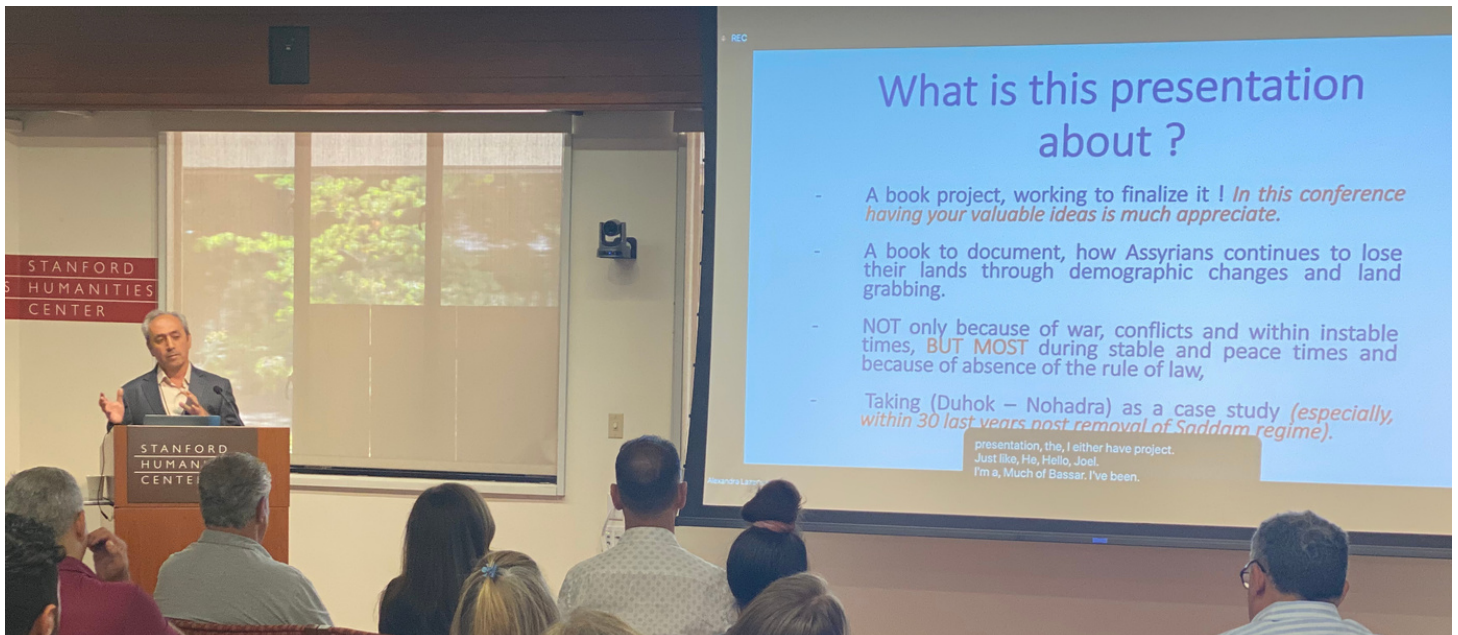
Caption: Top left, Dr. Helen Malko, Alexandra Lazar, and Dr. Sargon Donabed. Top Right, Cynthia Yonan, Sargis Yonan, Daniel Sada, Dr. Shamiran Mako, and Donatella Yelda. Bottom Left, Dr. Nahrain Kamar.



Caption: Top, attendees of the 2023 Assyrian Studies Symposium. Bottom Left, Esther Elia presenting her research. Bottom Right, Dr. Eve Sada, addressing the speaker.



Caption: Top Right, photo of audience watching the *Assyrians in Motion*, A 1937 Film of Assyrians in America. Top Right, Dr. Ruth Kambar presenting her research related to the *Assyrians in Motion*, 1938 Film. Bottom Center, Dr. Michel Shamoon-Pour and Dr. Sargon Donabed during the *Assyrian Identity in the Genomic Era: Lessons From History and Contemporary Usage* roundtable discussion.



Caption: Center Top, Mikhael Benjamin presenting his research. Bottom Left, Dr. Sargon Donabed. Bottom Left, Dr. Nahrain Bet Younadam, Mary Isaac, and Alexandra Lazar following their panel presentation, *Assyrian Struggle: Grievances, Genocidal Impact, and Marginalization*.

SYMPOSIUM SHORT ARTICLE:

The 1924 Expulsion of the Assyrians of Urfa and Their Second Exodus

by Mark Tomass,
Adjunct Professor, Harvard University

In February 1924 the Assyrians residing in the North Mesopotamian city of Urfa were banished and forced to settle in the city of Aleppo. This paper is the first attempt to document their expulsion. The first section chronicles the expulsion based on three separate sources: (1) Oral family history, (2) a recently discovered and translated 1924 “Appeal by the Assyrians” addressed by the expelled Assyrians to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, and (3) archived diplomatic communications regarding that expulsion.

The second section places the expulsion in the historical context of the late Ottoman period, when Turkish political leaders and citizens, came to see Asia Minor’s Christian communities as a danger to their state’s survival.

They were determined to eliminate this danger by eradicating the presence of Christians. Non-Muslims were considered traitors, guilty of collaborating with outside Christian powers to dismember the Ottoman Caliphate. Although different approaches were taken by succeeding regimes to deal with Christian communities due to shifting political, military, and demographic conditions, the outcome remained the same. The first of three campaigns by the Turks using various instruments of ongoing oppression started in 1894. Mass slaughter, attrition, exile, and forced conversion to Islam were some of these instruments. By 1924, the Turks had exterminated four million Christians from Asia Minor.

The third section describes the founding of the Assyrian Quarter in Aleppo. The fourth section examines the bleak prospects for the remaining Assyrians of the Assyrian Quarter in their homeland amidst the ongoing Syrian Conflict, and finally, section five forms a prognosis for the survival of the Assyrian identity in the diaspora among the various Assyrian sects.

Below is the full text of the “Appeal by the Assyrians” translated into English for the first time in 2022 by Abdulmesih Bar Abraham:

*An Appeal by the Assyrians
To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey
Your servants’ request...*

We present the sad state of the Assyrians who were exiled from Urfa to the fore of your inclusive protection, which is all-encompassing. We ask for mercy regarding the calamity they have suffered. It is impossible to deny that the Assyrian communities have been under the administration of the Ottoman State for six hundred years and, recently, the Turkish Republic. They stood out for their loyalty and good intentions, never hurting the Turkish citizens or the administration in any way.



The community, by the nature of its devotion, has suffered difficulties and hardships not even experienced during World War I. They have sacrificed life and property to the government. Instead of being rewarded for their allegiance, disaster was retaliated against them. They were displaced and killed alongside other Christians. We hoped and expected to live untroubled, thanks to the general peace agreement. Unfortunately, the policy of extermination applied to the Christians in Turkey during World War I, and the following deportation of the survivors continued with the armistice. Sheikh Safvet Efendi, now a member of parliament, came to Urfa from Ankara only five months ago. He declared that Assyrians should be executed, formed the "People's Party," and provoked the public with orders and fear. The governor of Urfa, [Ismail] Izzet Bey, and the head of the municipality and the People's Party, Haji Mustafa Kamil Efendi, revealed the need for Assyrians to leave. This warning, initially unheeded, was executed through intimidation, fear, and terror. Abdelahad Mardo, an elderly community member, was accused of going abroad and contacting the enemy. He was deported after paying more than six thousand Lira worth of movable goods and having his property confiscated.

Qarekin, an Armenian pharmacist, was killed in the street—his property confiscated. Gangs entered the wealthier community homes at night, robbing and issuing death threats. The community was tortured, filled with despair, and unsafe in their homes. They asked the governor for a solution to their problems and were offered:

1. The head of each family would sign official documents to legitimize the narrative of leaving voluntarily. Then quickly leave the country. The situation would be telegraphed to Ankara's government.
 2. Contact no party, public or confidential, regarding the matter.
 3. The entire community must pay 1,100 Osmanli Gold coins for the protection of lives, property, and honor to the border.
 4. This "agreement is sealed, documented, and affirmed by oath (irreversible.)
- The conditions were accepted by Urfa's Assyrians due to pressure and distress. The amount demanded from the community was collected and given to Haji Mustafa Efendi. The state inspector in Urfa was made aware of the forced payment. Unfortunately, by the time he had started the investigation, a majority of the community had already emigrated. The investigation was ultimately unsuccessful because those in charge of it lacked authority. The Assyrians sold their movable property for little value, while the government confiscated their immovable properties. The chief of the Badilli tribe, Said Beg, and a parliament member of the Othaguça tribe, Bedri Ağa's son-in-law, took buildings on formalities and false promissory bills.

Some beneficiaries received little or nothing in return for their homes (which were forcibly sold) or where ownership rights were relinquished, leading to debts owed to surrounding villages not being paid. They could not pay their existing debts while new debts were imposed on them by obscurely named authorities, which they had to pay compulsorily. Having given a lot of money to gangs, they left Urfa with just enough to cover the road expenses to Aleppo. The Assyrians were loyal for 600 years and are minorities with guaranteed rights by the [Lausanne] Peace Agreement. Unfortunately, we cannot think or dream of returning to Urfa due to the unfair and hostile behavior that has been aimed at us. Not until we first see compensation for forced abandoned personal movable property and/or exchange free of charge, as well as for religious structures and charitable institutions, such as churches, places of worship, monasteries, schools, and places belonging to Diocese and foundations. Secondly, compensation for losses and damages suffered from oppression and expulsion from the homeland community. Third, we hope Your Excellency will accept the special respect of helpless people, with an expectation of your kindness and help in this matter for people inside and outside Urfa.

On behalf of the Assyrian Protestant Community of Urfa,
[Signed by] Basus Ya'qub, Acting Spiritual Leader

SYMPOSIUM SHORT ARTICLE:

Was there an Assyrian Tehlirian?

Abdulmesih BarAbraham,
Mor Afrem Foundation

In an Ottoman-Garshuni article titled *Anyverd Kahramanları* (*The Heros of Aynverd*) by Naum Faik published in the December 17, 1921 issue of the Huyodo (Union) Magazine, which he edited (1921-22), Faik laments about the fact that Armenians take care of their heroes in an exemplary manner, while Assyrians would not sufficiently help the people of Aynverd [türk. Gülgöze] and Azakh [Idil] who had heroically resisted during the genocide time. To illustrate his argumentation with a concrete example, Naum Faik, without mentioning his name, specifically refers to a well-known Armenian personality to make the case that the Armenian people did not shy away from generously and comprehensively helping their people when needed; he argues that:



The Armenian people collected thousands of dollars in Amerika and sent the money to save a young man from conviction, a man who had murdered the tyrant Talaat [Pasha]. After saving him, they provided him with special needs and issued permits for him. They reproduced his photo and sold it by the thousands. Today, his picture hangs on the wall of every Armenian house in very honorable place.

What is particularly striking here is, that Naum Faik is referring here to none other than the 24-year-old Armenian student Soghomon Tehlirian, who shot and killed the former Ottoman Interior Minister and Grand Vizier Talaat Pasha in the open street of Berlin on March 15, 1921.

Mehmed Talaat Pasha was one of the leaders of the Young Turk movement and leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918, also known as the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP); as such, he was one of the main perpetrators of the first genocide of the 20th century. As allies of the Germans in World War I, leading Ottoman politicians had unofficially, but with the knowledge of the German authorities, been granted asylum in the German Empire after the defeat in November 1918.

Soghomon Tehlirian, to which Naum Faik refers in his article, was caught and charged with murder; however, the subsequent trial of Tehlirian focused attention on the murder of Armenians during World War I. The trial became known as the "Talaat Pasha Trial" because the focus was not on Tehlirian the murderer, but on the genocide. German missionaries such as Johannes Lepsius and military officers, among them Otto Liman von Sanders, who had witnessed the Armenian genocide in Anatolia were heard as witnesses during the trial. The trial ended after only two days with Tehlirian's acquittal.

Further down in his article, which is translated for the first time into English here, we learn through an important additional explanation why Naum Faik refers to the Tehlirian case. He writes:

In the previous issue of Huyodo and based on an excerpt taken from the "Meraat-ul Gharp" [The Mirror of West] we wrote that Memduh Memduh, who was instrumental for the inferno and disasters of Diyarbakir and Mardin, was murdered by Bahho Ibn Malke and, that for the treatment of the wounds inflicted on the body of this brave man, he is currently in one of the hospitals in Beirut.

Historically there is no doubt, that Memduh Bey (Gevranli-Zade Mamduh Bey), of whom Naum Faik speaks, was a high Ottoman official and a key figure responsible for the execution of horrible genocidal acts during 1915 in the Vilayet of Diyarbakir. He was police chief of Diyarbakir and a Young Turk loyalist. Memduh Bey was also a member of committee organized by Dr. Reshid Bey, the Vali (governor) of Diyarbakir, for the 'solution of the Armenian question.'

Thus, Naum Faik's analogy comparing Bahho Ibn Malke's killing Memduh Memduh with Tehlirian killing Talaat Pasha is therefore by no means exaggerated and therefore apt.

The detailed and extended article will explain the reasons for the discovery of this historical incident a century later. In addition we will describe the motives and circumstances of the murder of Memduh Bey based on further explanations provided by Naum Faik, which ultimately led to Bahho Ibn Malke's stay in a hospital in Beirut.



Caption: Left, Naum Faik, an Assyrian poet, journalist, and teacher, remembered as one of the founding fathers of modern Assyrian nationalism during the early 20th century. Right, issue of *Bethnahrin* magazine dated from March 15, 1930 featuring a goodbye message to Naum Faik who passed away on March 5, 1930. Image credit: diyarbakirhafizasi.org.

SYMPOSIUM SHORT ARTICLE:

Over three Decades (1992-2022)! How Assyrians in Iraq Continue to Lose their Historical Lands- Duhok, a Case Study

Mikhael Benjamin, Chairman, Board Directors
Nineveh Center for Minority Rights

The material presented at the ASA's conference is a part of the book project on *Demographic Change and the Seizure of Assyrian Lands*, which reflects the ongoing situation, its various reasons and various forms. I have been working on this project for many years now, by collecting documents and by conducting fieldwork and follow-up on these issues. The planned book will include an introduction that provides an overview of the demographic changes over a century since the foundation of the Iraqi state in 1921, with the main focus on the last thirty years (1992 - 2022), specifically in Duhok Governorate. Duhok is presented as a case study and an expressive model of this issue, and how it occurs not only in times of war, unrest, and conditions of instability, but also times of peace and security, especially due to the weak rule of law.



This book aims to provide factual evidence through tracking and documenting dozens of cases in order to demonstrate what happened and is happening to the Assyrian lands, and how the Assyrians are losing their historical lands, day after day and year after year, both systematically and otherwise. These cases show how the processes are variable and in times invisible, and how they occur during times of war and peace, and how many factors intertwine and come together to eventually lead to the same unfortunate result.

Some of the major events leading to the Assyrians losing their lands include:

- Events of the Semele massacre of 1933
- Kurdish movements and the conflict with the government (early 1960s)
- The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)
- The Anfal Campaign (1988)
- The Iraq Invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War (1991).
- The Sectarian events of 2006-2007 and beyond
- The ISIS control of Nineveh 2014.

However, between 1992 and 2022, specifically in the studied area (Duhok Governorate), which was assumed to be a safe area and had a period of stability and peace, we discover that what has been happening with the Assyrians losing their lands is not much different from what happened in times of conflict and instability.

The most important reasons leading to land loss are:

- The problems inherited from the time of the previous regime, and even before that, were not resolved, but rather worsened and intensified (due to the absence of the rule of the law).
- The influence and power of the clans that control lands, and the absence of the rule of the law in redressing the rights holders.
- Influential people with power and authority (governmental and partisan) who invest in their influence to seize lands are not subject to the law.
- Government decisions and actions that illegally seize lands while the laws are not enforced.
- Direct and indirect pressures on the original owners
- Internal, regional and even international conflicts victimizing the land owners, which forces them to leave their lands, and in the absence of law, others invest in, and seize their land.

What is today's reality?

Of the remaining 95 sites in Duhok Governorate (including a small village, sub-district center, district center, and city center), there are more than 58 villages or sites in which Assyrian ownership of the lands has been lost, over 61% of the 95 sites. The percentage reaches 80% (76 cases) if we count each case, including when in one village there is more than one case of seizure of a specific land or property. The area of these lands may exceed 47 thousand dunams of land (excluding hundreds of previous villages that were seized or evacuated of their residents). Finally, this book is an attempt to be a document that proves the right of the Assyrians' and their ownership of their historical lands, for the benefit of everyone interested in the issue of land, and every person with an interest in defending them, and to clarify to local, national and international public opinion what is happening to the indigenous Assyrian people.

This book aims to provide a set of legal solutions (local, national and international legal framework), as well as some preventive solutions, how it is possible to invest in the capabilities of immigrants and the Assyrians in diaspora, and how to advocate on the basis of international human rights law.



Photo credit: Mohammed Sawaf/ARF via Getty Images.

SYMPOSIUM SHORT ARTICLE:

Territorial Autonomy and Ethnic Protests: How Regional Autonomy Shaped Grievances and Protests by Assyrians in Northern Iraq

Nahrain Bet Younadam, Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow
The University of Arizona

My case study analysis on ethnic protests by Assyrians in Northern Iraq and Kurdish regional autonomy may have created opportunities for grievances to arise by local groups. My evidence is rooted in eldwork interviews with Assyrian elites and civilians in Northern Iraq, online sources including newspapers, magazines, policy reports, archival material, and scholarly research. I also gathered data on instances of protests by Assyrians Christians in Iraq between 2005-2018. The protest data reveal that Assyrians mostly protest the Kurdish Regional government and most protests by Assyrians center on disputes over political institutions.



What are the consequences of regional autonomy on the ethnic minorities within regions? Countries struggling with ethnic conflict sometimes grant territorial autonomy to regionally concentrated minority groups. By allowing ethnic minorities to govern over their own territory, ethnic minorities may be less likely to initiate a rebellion against the state. However, almost every region with some degree of autonomy has regional ethnic minority groups not formally recognized or empowered. How does the introduction of autonomy arrangements shape conflict outcomes between ethnic minorities with autonomy status and ethnic minorities excluded from autonomy arrangements?

I answer this question by examining how autonomy arrangements shape ethnic protests within autonomous regions. This theory presumes that ethnic minorities at the local level (i.e. states, provinces, regions, etc.) may be excluded from national governing institutions in systems with and without autonomy arrangements as they remain distinct from the national government through distance and ideology. However, the introduction of autonomy arrangements at the local level may increase the marginalization of local ethnic minorities in at least two ways. First, local ethnic minorities may lack the political power to block unfavorable regional legislation for their groups, given they may be too small to challenge or constrain regional government authority. Second, the regional government may stand as a barrier for local minorities seeking national-level policy changes since the preferences of local ethnic minorities may be masked by the policy goals of the region's majority group. The marginalization of regional minorities within national and regional governments may increase grievances among regional ethnic minorities since they cannot rely on either government to respond to their concerns. These outcomes reduce the security of regional minority groups and may push demands for greater self-determination by ethnic group members.



Photo credit: Afin Hamid—AFP/Getty Images. Right,

To illustrate this theory, I develop a case study that highlights the implications of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution - which constitutionally enshrined regional autonomy for the Kurdish majority in Northern Iraq - on grievances and protests by Assyrians within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). My evidence is rooted in semi-structured interviews with political elites and civilians from Assyrian communities conducted over the course of two-week period in March 2018, empirical reports from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (UNCIRF), the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the Assyrian Policy Institute (API), multiple scholarly work, and online media publications.

My research shows that between 2005-2018, Assyrians in Iraq consistently protested the Kurdistan Regional Government in addition to protesting the central Government of Iraq. Protests against both governments underscore the ongoing marginalization of Iraq's vulnerable minority communities, even within regions where we expect their grievances to be addressed. Further, I find that most protests by Assyrians against the regional and national governments center on disputes over political institutions including matters of representation, discrimination, and constitutional amendments. Finally, nearly half of all protests occur within Nineveh, a governorate that remains disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the central Government of Iraq. This final point highlights possible consequences to territorial disputes between regional and central governments, namely, the failure to respond to local minority concerns when the local authority remains contested.

Overall, this analysis brings attention to the important nuances to the regional autonomy project. To date, most research on solutions to ethnic conflict typically focuses on the relations between regional majority groups and the central government. By focusing mainly on this dynamic, scholars leave out the ways in which institutions designed to appease ethnic conflict at the national level may shape internal conflict outcomes among local ethnic minorities. Ethnic conflict within autonomous territories in Northern Iraq reveals solutions to ethnic conflict at the national level may have created conflict outcomes between groups in local Iraqi societies. By exploring the consequences of these institutions on regional ethnic minority groups, this paper adds to the knowledge on potential issues that must be addressed when choosing institutions as means to resolve ethnic conflict.

ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHTS:



Photo credit: Joseph Hermiz.

Joseph Hermiz, University of Chicago, PhD Candidate, Publishes *Assyrian* in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*

Article Link: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Assyrian>

Joseph Hermiz is a Ph.D. candidate in Late Ottoman/Modern Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago's Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations. His research is focused on the political and social history of the Assyrians during World War I and his master's thesis explored the intersection of identity and archaeology in the published works of Assyrian archaeologist and diplomat Hormuzd Rassam.

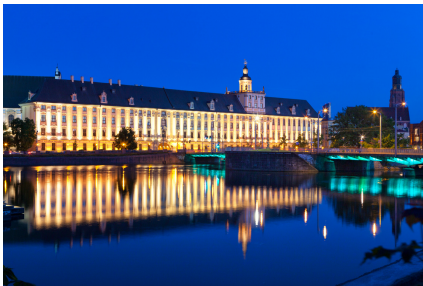
Article: *Experiences of Assyrian Refugee Women Seeking Care for Chronic Pain: A Qualitative Study*
by Areni Altun, Helen Brown, Elizabeth Sturgiss, and Grant Russell

Article Link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12939-023-01891-w>

The article discusses how Assyrian refugee women exhibit some of the highest rates of chronic pain yet the diversity and challenges of health care systems across countries pose numerous challenges for refugee women trying to access quality health care.



Photo credit:
International Journal
for Equity in Health.



Nicholas Al-Jeloo and Abdulmesih BarAbraham to Present at the International Conference: Forced Migrations - History - Literature - Memory

February 21-24, 2025 - Willy Brandt Center for German and European Studies, University of Wrocław (Poland)

Conference Link: http://www.ifg.uni.wroc.pl/wp-content/uploads/konf/2024/02/historia_literatura/CFP-MIGRAMEM-EN.pdf

The conference aims to comprehensively present the issue of forced migrations in the 20th and 21st centuries, assess this phenomenon, and reflect on contemporary approaches to it. The conference will be conducted in Polish, German, and English.



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