



WHERE DO
I LIVE?

Iraq

Across Northern Iraq, like elsewhere in the region, the legacy of Daesh (Islamic State) casts a long shadow. There are many displaced people, and a large percentage of these are women and children. Our study here focuses on women and families in Iraq at different stages of the return journey; those still in internally displaced people (IDP) camps, transitioning to places of return, or relocating to new places. Even years after the defeat of Daesh, many people remain in IDP camps and suffer great hardship and deprivation due to the dire conditions. Obstacles to safe and durable return include stigma from association with Islamic State, gender-based discrimination experienced by abandoned, widowed or single mothers, and children suffering suspicions of extremist ideologies. There is a general lack of work and basic services such as adequate sanitation. Living long-term in tents poses additional challenges, such as fire risk, leaks, stifling heat, lack of privacy and overcrowding. Children are furthermore deprived of a proper education, safety, play areas and the psychological security required to recover from trauma and displacement. This research considers the long-term implications for wellbeing and security of children and families suffering protracted displacement.

Protection mechanisms are weak, and women and their families suffer compounded vulnerabilities around security, education, healthcare and basic services such as drinkable water. Many people have left the camps. However, with nowhere to go, some are stuck living outside but next to the camp, as their sole contacts and sources of information are there. Such informal settlements are likely to become shantytowns.

The de facto detention of children in such camps violates the laws of war and international human rights law. Some of the children lack formal documentation and have not been registered as citizens of any country, making them stateless despite being guilty of no crime, nor legally able to commit crimes. The mass detention, in effect incarceration, of large numbers of people constitutes collective punishment, which is illegal. This post-Daesh environment has led to the 'feminisation and infantilisation' of displacement and suffering, as men have been killed, imprisoned or fled.



THE SO-CALLED ISLAMIC STATE (ALSO KNOWN AS I.S., ISIS, ISIL OR DAESH) IS A JIHADIST GROUP, WHICH CLAIMS AUTHORITY OVER ALL MUSLIMS AND SEEKS TO ESTABLISH AN ISLAMIC CALIPHATE ACROSS THE LEVANT REGION OF THE MIDDLE EAST.



IN AUGUST 2014, A U.S.-LED COALITION ...

... BEGAN AIRSTRIKES AGAINST ISIS IN IRAQ. BY DECEMBER 2017 THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT DECLARED VICTORY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE GROUP.



THE CONFLICT LEFT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE INTERNALLY DISPLACED IN CAMPS SET UP IN NORTHERN IRAQ AND ELSEWHERE.



THE INHABITANTS OF THESE CAMPS ARE A DIVERSE MIX OF REFUGEES AND RETURNEES; THEY COME FROM A VARIETY OF ETHNICITIES AND FAITHS ...

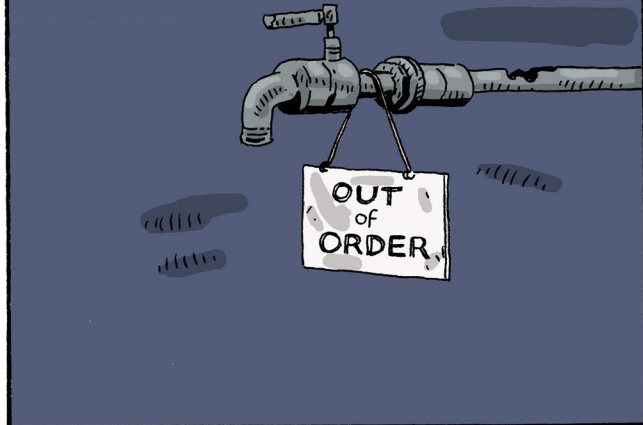


... SYRIAN, YAZIDI, KURDISH, SUNNI AND CHRISTIANS.

WITHIN CAMP POPULATIONS THERE IS A 'FEMINISATION AND INFANTILISATION' OF DISPLACEMENT AND SUFFERING, AS THE MEN HAVE BEEN KILLED, IMPRISONED OR FLED.



SAFEGUARDING MECHANISMS ARE WEAK, AND WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES SUFFER COMPOUNDED VULNERABILITIES AROUND SECURITY, EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE AND BASIC SERVICES SUCH AS DRINKABLE WATER.



SOME CHILDREN IN THE CAMPS ARE DE-FACTO STATELESS, DESPITE BEING GUILTY OF NO CRIME, NOR LEGALLY ABLE TO COMMIT CRIMES. THIS CONSTITUTES COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT AND IS ILLEGAL UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW.



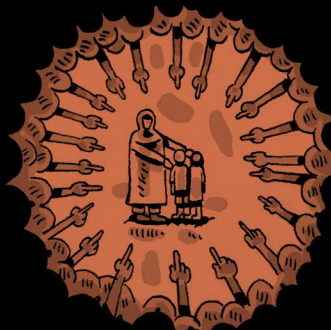
MANY PEOPLE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO LEAVE THE CAMPS BUT WITH MINIMAL RESOURCES AND FEW OTHER OPTIONS, THEY HAVE ENDED UP STUCK NEXT TO THE CAMP, SUCH INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS OFTEN EVOLVE INTO SHANTYTOWNS.



THE CAMPS ARE MANAGED BY UNHCR AND THE PASHMERGA (THE SECURITY FORCES OF THE KURDISTAN REGION, A SEMI-AUTONOMOUS POLITICAL ENTITY WITHIN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ). THE PASHMERGA HAVE OVERALL RESPONSIBILITY.



THE SAFE RETURN OF THESE INDIVIDUALS IS OBSTRUCTED BY STIGMA FROM THEIR ASSOCIATION, OR PERCEIVED ASSOCIATION...



...WITH ISIS TO GENDER-BASED STIGMA EXPERIENCED BY ABANDONED, WIDOWED OR SINGLE MOTHERS.



THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING THE RETURN OF 25,000 PEOPLE OVER 3 YEARS, WHILST ALSO WITHDRAWING FROM THE REGION.

DESPITE THE PERSISTENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, THERE IS AN ABDICATION OF GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE PEOPLE.



I CAME HERE NINE YEARS AGO
AS AN ELEVEN YEAR OLD.

I WATCH THE KIDS.

THEY'RE FRUSTRATED
BECAUSE THERE IS NO
PLACE FOR THEM
TO PLAY.

THEY'RE BORED
AND THAT CAN
LEAD TO
CONFLICT.

دردشة

ضوء

ثرثرة

THEY HAVEN'T
SEEN LIFE OUTSIDE
THE CAMP. THIS IS NOT
THE BEST PLACE FOR
THEM BUT LIKE ME,
THEY HAVE NO
CHOICE.

THEY ARE SO VULNERABLE.



THIS PLACE IS A PLACE OF CONFUSION, RUMOURS
AND GOSSIP. I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE TO GO
FOR RELIABLE INFORMATION I CAN TRUST.

WE GET SOME INFORMATION FROM NGOS
BUT TO BE HONEST, I DON'T ALWAYS
TRUST THEM EITHER.



IF YOU'RE PREPARED TO TAKE
LONG WALKS AND STAND IN
LONG QUEUES, WITH THE CHANCE
OF BEING TURNED DOWN, THERE
ARE SOMETIMES RATIONS BEING
DISTRIBUTED...



...AND THERE ARE CAMP SERVICES,
BUT THEY'RE INTERMITTENT. YOU
CAN'T DEPEND ON THEM.

EVEN A HEALTHY PERSON GETS
SICK HERE, DUE TO THE CONDITIONS.
THIS ENTIRE PLACE IS AFFECTED
BY DISEASE.



THERE'S NO SEWAGE SYSTEM
AND DIRTY WATER IS ALWAYS IN
THE STREET WITH THE GARBAGE.
AND WHEN IT RAINS, EVERYTHING
TURNS TO MUD.



IT SMELLS SO BAD!



WHERE DO I LIVE? I DON'T LIVE ANYWHERE!
I DON'T HAVE A TENT. I DON'T KNOW WHERE
TO GO. I HAVE TO BORROW OR USE
SOMEONE ELSE'S. IT IS NOT SAFE BUT I
HAVE NO CHOICE.



I HAVE APPLIED FOR AID MANY TIMES,
BUT THEY HAVE NOT PROVIDED IT BECAUSE
I HAVE NO TENT REGISTERED IN MY NAME.



THE IS NO PRIVACY IN THE CAMP
AND LOTS OF NOISE ALL THE TIME.



EVEN WHEN I USE A TENT THERE IS ONLY
TWO METRES BETWEEN THEM, SO WE
HEAR EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE
NEIGHBOURS TENTS. I CAN'T SLEEP DUE
TO THEIR NOISE.



THERE ARE NO OPPORTUNITIES HERE. EVERYONE
IS JUST STUCK AND FRUSTRATED.

BUT I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE BECAUSE OF
THE SITUATION IN MY COUNTRY, SYRIA IS
EVEN MORE UNSTABLE.



THERE IS NO
SAFETY THERE.

THE HOUSE I HAD THERE; ISIS BLEW IT
UP. IF I GO BACK, I WILL HAVE TO SET
UP A TENT, AND HERE IN THE CAMP,
I ALSO LIVE IN A TENT. SO WHAT'S THE
DIFFERENCE?!



EVERYONE HERE IS DISTRESSED,
OUR MENTAL HEALTH IS
EXHAUSTED, ESPECIALLY THE
YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN.

MY LIFE IS AT A STANDSTILL; I
CAN'T STUDY OR WORK, PRIMARILY
BECAUSE I AM DIVORCED. PEOPLE
SPEAK ILL OF ME.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE TRIED TO
START A FIRE OR THROW STONES
AT MY TENT BECAUSE I AM
DIVORCED!



I AM VERY AFRAID OF FIRES.
EVERYONE FEARS TENT FIRES.



I AM MOST AFRAID FOR MY
CHILDREN THOUGH. I TRY MY BEST
TO KEEP THEM SAFE BUT THE
ONLY THING I CAN DO IS TO KEEP
THEM AT HOME, LIKE A PRISON.



I AM AFRAID OF SO MANY
THINGS.



MY CHILDREN
WAKE UP WET AT
NIGHT WHEN IT RAINS.
OR THEY ARE TOO HOT WHEN
THE SUN SHINES. THE TENT
SCARES THEM, BECAUSE IT MOVES
IN THE WIND AND RAIN.



MY TWO CHILDREN HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS AND
ARE NOT ACCEPTED INTO SCHOOLS. THEY FACE
BULLYING FROM OTHER CHILDREN AND
EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION.



I CAN'T EVEN WASH MY CHILDREN. HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO BATHE THEM WHEN THERE'S NO TAP WATER NEARBY?



THERE USED TO BE AN ORGANISATION THAT FILTERED THE WATER BUT IT NO LONGER FUNCTIONS, SO THE WATER IS DIRTY AGAIN.



THE WATER TANKER COMES ONLY ONCE A MONTH, SO WE ARE OFTEN FORCED TO DRINK DIRTY WATER. I WORRY THAT WE WILL ALL GET SICK BUT I DON'T KNOW WHO TO TURN TO FOR HELP. EVERYONE HERE JUDGES ME BECAUSE I AM DIVORCED AND MY CHILDREN ARE DISABLED.



I GET DEPRESSED AND SOMETIMES FALL ILL BECAUSE I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY CHILDREN AND I CANNOT MEET ALL THEIR MATERIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS. I LOVE THEM BUT I CANNOT HELP THEM.



THE PEOPLE RUNNING THE CAMP DON'T PROVIDE ENOUGH FOR THE CHILDREN, NOT ENOUGH MILK, CLOTHES, TOYS... OUR CHILDREN NEED MORE TO BE HEALTHY AND HAPPY.




SOMETIMES, I CRY AND SAY I JUST CAN'T BEAR THE PRESSURE.



NOBODY WANTS US HERE. THERE ARE PRESSURES FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS, OUTSIDE THE CAMP, FOR US TO LEAVE.

IF I COULD I WOULD LEAVE THIS PLACE, OF COURSE I WOULD! I'M ONLY HERE IN ORDER TO PROTECT MY CHILDREN.

I TALK TO MYSELF SOMETIMES, WONDERING WHY THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME.



THE PROBLEMS HAVE BECOME BIGGER THAN ME, AND I SIT, CRYING, BECAUSE OF THE CHILDREN'S ISSUES. I NO LONGER WANT TO HAVE MORE CHILDREN BECAUSE I AM DISTRESSED. I DON'T GO OUT FOR VISITS OR EVEN TALK TO PEOPLE AROUND US.

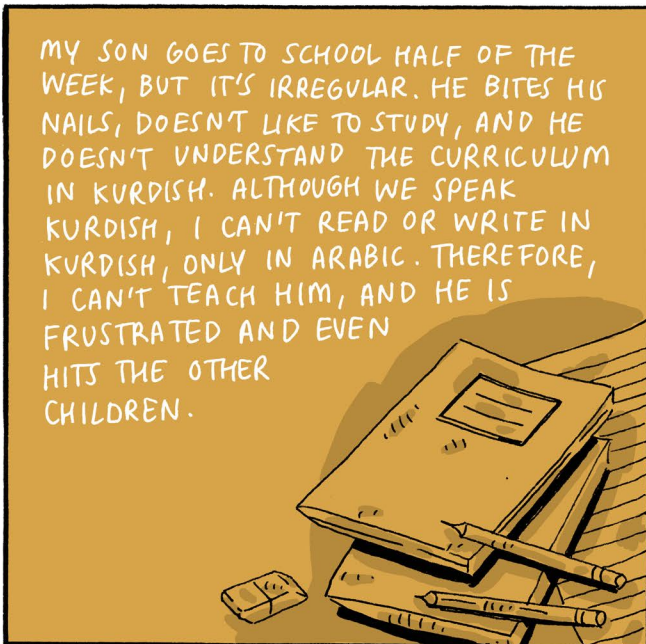
MY CHILDREN ARE AFRAID, EVEN DURING THE DAY TIME. MY DAUGHTER GETS SO SCARED IN THE EVENING, SHE SOMETIMES SCREAMS IN THE NIGHT.



THE CAMP NEGATIVELY AFFECTS MY CHILDREN. EACH DAY SEEMS WORSE THAN THE ONE BEFORE, DESPITE MY EFFORTS NOT TO LET IT IMPACT THEM. I TRY TO CONVINCE THEM THAT WE ARE FINE AND THAT EVERYONE IS FACING THE SAME SITUATION.



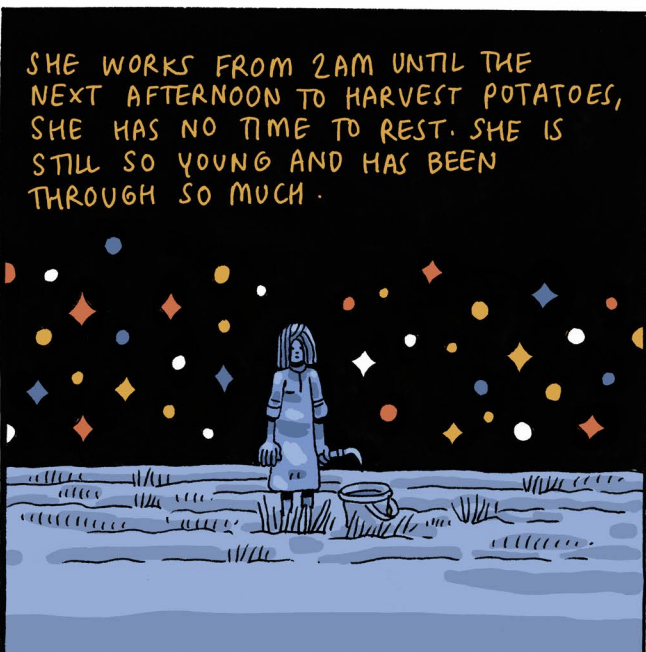
MY SON GOES TO SCHOOL HALF OF THE WEEK, BUT IT'S IRREGULAR. HE BITES HIS NAILS, DOESN'T LIKE TO STUDY, AND HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE CURRICULUM IN KURDISH. ALTHOUGH WE SPEAK KURDISH, I CAN'T READ OR WRITE IN KURDISH, ONLY IN ARABIC. THEREFORE, I CAN'T TEACH HIM, AND HE IS FRUSTRATED AND EVEN HITS THE OTHER CHILDREN.



MY DAUGHTER HAD TO LEAVE SCHOOL AND START WORKING SO THAT WE COULD SURVIVE.



SHE WORKS FROM 2AM UNTIL THE NEXT AFTERNOON TO HARVEST POTATOES, SHE HAS NO TIME TO REST. SHE IS STILL SO YOUNG AND HAS BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH.



WE ARE ELEVEN PEOPLE LIVING HERE, INCLUDING EIGHT LITTLE ONES. TWO OF THEM ARE MY CHILDREN, AND SIX BELONG TO MY HUSBAND'S FIRST WIFE.



OF COURSE THIS AFFECTS ME, IT'S EXHAUSTING! I AM BUSY FROM MORNING TO EVENING.



SOMETIMES MY CHILD ASKS ME TO HUG HIM OR PLAY WITH HIM, OR FEED HIM, BUT I CANNOT BECAUSE I AM BUSY WITH CHORES. THIS AFFECTS HIS MENTAL STATE, AND MINE.



ONCE, MY YOUNGEST SON FLED THE TENT BECAUSE HE WAS SEVERELY BEATEN BY MY STEPDAUGHTER, HE TOLD ME HE RAN AWAY OUT OF FEAR OF BEING KILLED. HE EXPERIENCES NIGHTMARES.



I FEEL FRUSTRATED, EVERYONE IN THE CAMP FEELS THIS WAY. WE JUST WANT SECURITY AND STABILITY, AND THAT'S NOT AVAILABLE. IT'S NO KIND OF LIFE.

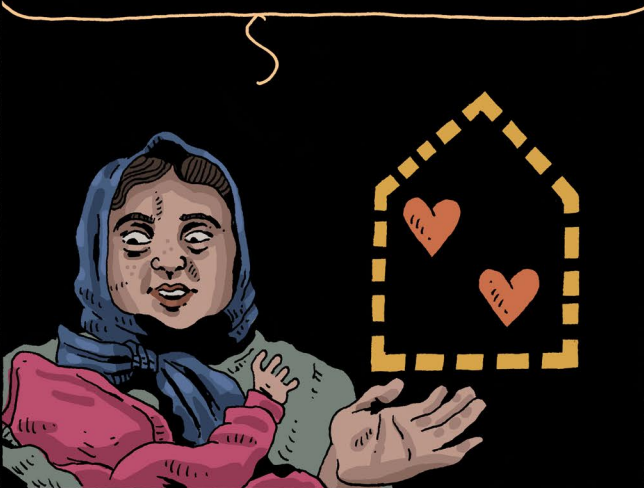


MY FAMILY IS FAR FROM ME, AND MY HUSBAND DOES NOT ALLOW ME TO VISIT THEM.



MY CHILDREN ARE ADDICTED TO MOBILE PHONES, BUT WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO DO?

I WISH THERE WAS A CENTRE WHERE WE COULD TALK, VENT, OR GET ADVICE ON WHAT TO DO. I JUST NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE.



BUT I STILL HAVE FAITH THAT OUR LIVES WILL IMPROVE. THAT WE WILL RETURN HOME. I HAVE HOPE FOR OUR FUTURE.



Credits

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