

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITIES IN IRAQ FROM 2014 TO 2018

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### ABSTRACT

The Kurds have suffered different genocides: until 2003, the abduction and killing of eight thousands males belonging to the Barzani family, the Anfal campaign, the chemical attack on Halabja, to quote the most known ones. At the same time, together with persecution for ethnic reasons, each religious minority including Christians, Yezidis, Kaka'is, Sabbeans Mandeans, Shabbaks and others, have been targeted by the Muslim majority.

Despite all the attention given by researchers to the human tragedies caused by this endless cycle of violence, very little has been written about the economic cost of the genocides committed against minorities in Iraq. Relying on primary and secondary sources the purpose of this paper is to analyse the economic impact of the genocides committed in Iraq between 2014 and 2018. We are aware of the tragedy experienced by different minorities during this time. However, we decided to focus their attention on the Christian community for two reasons: first, the availability of sufficient official data to run an exhaustive analysis; second, the conviction that this paper will provide an inspiration for future similar studies related to other minorities such as Yezidis, Kakais, Sabbeans Mandeans, Shabaks and others affected by genocide and mass atrocities in the last fifty years. This study is based on primary.

(209 words)

**KEYWORDS:** Iraq, Christians, Genocide, Minorities.

In the introduction to his new book entitled *Economic Aspects of Genocides, Other Mass Atrocities, and their Preventions* (2018) Dr Charles H. Anderton, together with other experts in the field, talk about how 'the devastating micro- and macroeconomic consequences of GMAs (Genocide and Mass Atrocities) that reverberate through households, communities, and nations.'

The aim of this paper is to apply fundamental concepts of economics to the field of mass atrocities and genocide prevention in Iraq between 2014 and 2018 as a sample the Christian community in the Ninewa area. Following the series of attacks against the Christian community it is very important to answer the following questions: How much has been lost in terms of properties and businesses, but also in terms of individual skills and future inversion? How much

has been spent in the reconstruction projects which could have been used for the economic and social development of the area? How this analysis can help to prevent these events?

We were aware during this research that our choice of limiting our research to the Christian community run the risk of obscuring the wider picture of the losses suffered by other minorities. Since this approach has never been tried before in Iraq, we think that the methodology applied in this case should be used in the case of other minorities. In the case of the Christian community, thanks to some local and international NGOs such as Schlomo, the amount of data gathered is enough to allow a tentative analysis of the economic losses experienced by the community and their consequences. In October 2018 we were invited to pay a visit to the Gamawa camp

placed between Shekhan and Dohuk. This camp hosted a few families of Arab Sunnis escaped from the outskirts of Mosul when ISIS attacked them. These people were claiming their right to make their voices heard, of talking about their houses and business which have been destroyed. When asked if somebody was collecting testimonies and data about their communities they said that nobody was doing it leaving them forgotten in their camp. We are aware that other communities are suffering from the same state of abandoned and we hope that this paper aims also at offering a starting point for further research.

The research is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include a comparison the application of economic principles to genocide studies as a new side of this discipline. Secondary sources have been collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with some members of the community chosen.

Before analyzing the economic, social and cultural losses suffered by the chosen community, the article starts with a general introduction about the violence suffered by the Christian community before and after ISIS and with the consequences of the massive diaspora caused by ISIS's intervention and the increase of Christian presence in the KRG. Later, it will introduce the challenges posed to the KRG by the increase presence of IDPs and the economic backlash caused by ISIS's intervention starting in 2014. The article will try also to show the amount of capital lost because of the against ISIS comparing it with the current calculated costs of reconstruction.

### **Brief Historical Background**

On September 16, 1969 Sorya, in the north of Iraq, was the theatre of a famous massacre against the local Christian villages carried out by the Baath regime. This is one of the most infamous acts of violence perpetrated against Christians villages who claimed also Muslim victims. The official figure talks about thirty-nine people of which twenty-four Christians and fifteen Muslims. However, recent figures talk about a total of ninety Christians including dozens burnt in the caves where they sought refuge. Situated on the banks of the River Euphrates, the memorial dedicated to the Christian and Muslim victims of the massacre has been initiated in 2011 when the victims received an honorable burial. One of the martyrs was Father Hanna Ya'aqub Oasha. The killers

did not spare women or children and before leaving they gave instructions to the local hospital not to provide help to the victims causing the death of the wounded.

At the time of our visit to Sorya in the spring 2016, the construction of the memorial site has been stopped due to the deteriorating economic situation in the Kurdish Region after 2014. A condition shared by other similar projects in the region. This massacre constitutes a pivotal moment in the relations between Christians and the state in Iraq and later in the Kurdish region. Establishing a direct link with the past "The Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council (CSAPC) referred to the depth of the tragedy that was a continuation to the events of Sayfo and Sumele in an attempt to empty Iraq of one of its indigenous components that co-existed with the other components of KR in a real brotherhood attested by the mixture of Christian and Muslim martyrs' blood in the village of Sorya".<sup>1</sup> But, what was the Sayfo and Sumele attempt to "empty" Iraq from Christians? Unlike the Armenian genocide which recently received a deserved but late attention from the world of politics and from academia, the Sayfo events mentioned, happened on the wake of the more known Armenian genocide and were in some way obscured by the Armenian tragedy. However, among Assyrians and Christians in general the memory of this event has been passed on from generation to generation. Sayfo, a word which means sword in Aramaic, was not the first act of violence against Christians perpetrated by other groups. However, it was the first one dictated by the rising of nationalism in the area. In 1915 the Ottoman empire was transforming itself into the Turkish state and any element which constituted an obstacle to its formation was perceived as an enemy that needed to be eliminated. It was also the first time, and this is true in the case of the Armenian genocide, in which organized and planned violence dictated by the intention of killing and ethnic cleansing a particular area was implemented by a state.

This uncontrolled violence had to repeat itself in 1933 when the newly formed state of Iraq sparked the violence against Assyrians and Christians in an attempt to push them away from their original land in the Niniwa area. Thirty years later, in 1964 Christians became victims of the policy of forced Arabization implemented by

the Baath party. In his book entitled *The Year of the Sword: Sayfo - The Genocide Against the Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (2017), Önvér Cetrez analyses how the reiteration of traumas in the history of a single community constitutes a no healed trauma resulting in two inherited feelings: the fear of distrust and the feeling of fear. Both feelings, along with other traits which the author indicates as determinant in the process of the formation of collective memory, are both present in the narrative offered by the remembrance of the Sorya massacre perceived and presented within a narrative familiar to the Assyrian-Christian historical narrative.

Chronology in this case is a very important factor from Sayfo (1915) to Sumele (1933) to Sorya (1969) Assyrians have always been the targeted victims of state-led violence.<sup>2</sup> The question which consciously or unconsciously any member of the Assyrian-Christian community asks himself, in particular after ISIS, is not 'if' other waves of violence are coming but 'when' and 'how' they are going to survive them. The most recent events have the power to awake memories of persecution and death which can compromise current relationships and attempts to heal past and present wounds.

As a consequence of this reiterative re-living the past dramatic experience it is necessary to investigate how the community responded to them in the different historical times. Önvér Cetrez interviewed the second and third generation of survivors of Sayfo and it was clear from the testimonies that the distrust and fear with in which they grew up not only disrupted their present lives but is also reinforced by the last events of persecution and terror unchained with the invasion of ISIS in the Niniwa area. Önvér Cetrez in his article explains very well what are the consequences of these trauma along the generations: the sons and daughters of the victims of the Holocaust retain all the fears transmitted to them even if they never faced the same fate. If this imprinting is so strong, in the case of the Christians who see this repeating at every generation is even stronger also because facing the idea of total extinction from their original homeland added a sense of displacement and loss of identity.<sup>3</sup>

Distrust and fear is directed to both the other components of the society and the international

community usually too slow to act or too interested in defending its own interests to care about the destiny of the single groups within the society. Western religious authorities themselves see the Christians of the middle east almost as the remnants of a biblical past with no more than historical links with the contemporary, western Christian community. An attitude that sometimes can jeopardize their relationship with the Christians communities in the West.

So, how much the previous scenario impact the economy of a particular group like the Christian one? How much has been lost in terms of properties and businesses, but also in terms of individual skills and future inversion? How much has been spent in the reconstruction projects which could have been used for the economic and social development of the area? How this analysis can help to prevent these events?

In order to be able to answer these questions it is important to take into consideration economic principles that only recently have been applied to the study of genocides or mass atrocities. These principles can be at a macro level with the calculation of the losses after a conflict or at a microeconomic level to understand the economic causes and effects of genocides and mass atrocities at the level of individuals, households, and communities shaped by their distributional dimension. In this case 'Targeting of individuals in cases of mass atrocities often is the result of either perceived or real conflicts over the distribution of power and resources in society.' (Justino, P. 'The Microeconomic Causes and Consequences of Genocides and Mass Atrocities', in Charles H. Anderton and Jurgen Brauer, *Economic Aspects of Genocides, Other Mass Atrocities, and Their Preventions*, Oxford, 2016.)

This article will attempt to base the discussion on the collection and analysis of eyewitness accounts, on the direct experience of business men acting on territories torn apart by conflict and civil war. This is a fairly new approach not only for Iraq but also for other cases of genocides and mass atrocities around the world. However, before embarking in the analysis of a single community it is necessary to offer a general economic background of Iraq and in particular the KRG between 2014 and 2018.

In the last few years the economy of the KRI has suffered a strong halt due to the war with

ISIS and to the deteriorating relationship with the Iraqi government. Most of public employees have seen their salaries dramatically reduced and the private sector struggles to fulfil the demand for employment.<sup>4</sup> The situation deteriorated further after the referendum for independence held on 25th September, 2017. The renewed military confrontation between the KRI and the central government for the control of disputed areas in Kirkuk and in the Niniwa area has worsened an already precarious situation with the arrival in the region's main cities of a new wave of IDPs. In addition, the decision of the central government to ban international flights to the region caused further damage to the regional economy.<sup>5</sup> The current economic crisis has the official starting date of June 2014 with the advent of ISIS. Since 2014 the influx of refugees, mainly from Syria have changed dramatically the demography of the region and in particular of the main cities such as Erbil, Dohuk and Slemaniya. According to figures reports by the KRG and the UN the situation has turned into a full-blown humanitarian crisis. At the beginning of 2015, there were 257,000 Syrian refugees and 1,003,000 Iraqi IDPs in the KRI. In addition, there were around 250,000 IDPs who came to the region before 2014. Therefore, in early 2015, the total number of refugees and IDPs added up to 1.5 million in the KRI. This constitutes as 28 percent increase in KRI's population. Out of a total IDPs and refugees, 60 percent are in Dohuk. The large number of Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees reside in many of the same host communities, placing strains on the local economy and access to public services.<sup>6</sup> This situation has prompted the need for a short, medium term response in order to guarantee refugees and IDPs security and a decent life in the camps.<sup>7</sup>

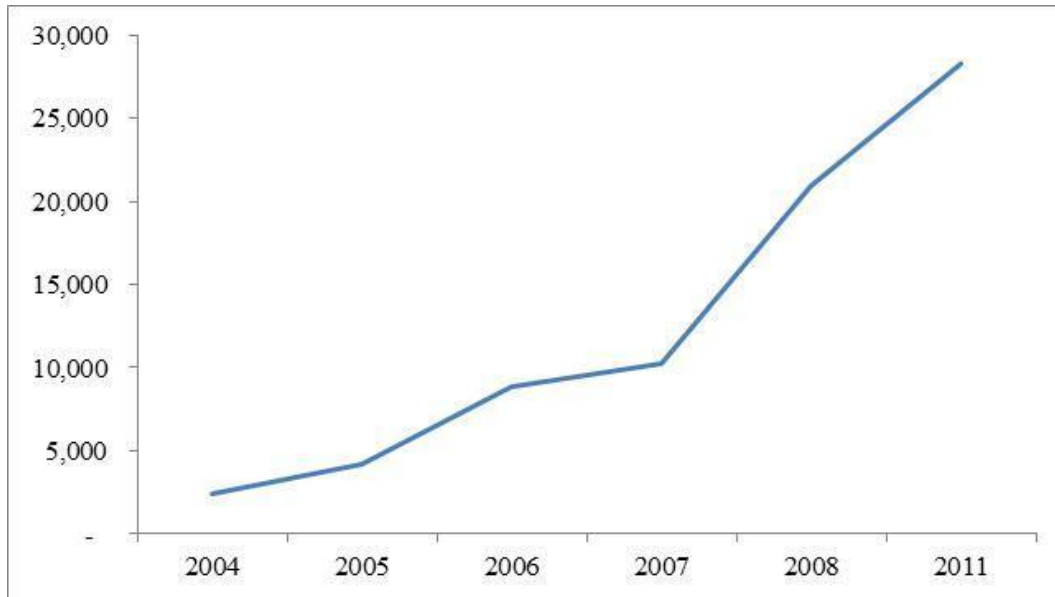
Despite the advent of ISIS and the capture of Mosul signed the beginning of this crisis, other events took place in the last three years, and in

particular in 2017, which made the recovery more difficult. The first one in chronological order is the referendum for the independence of Kurdistan held in September 2017 and the consequent closure of the regional airports by the central government in retaliation for the referendum. The other event took place on October 17, 2017 with the violence that engulfed the area of Kirkuk on October 17, 2017 with the intervention of the Iranian backed militia Hash Al Shaabi, which again threatens the stability and security of the area preventing many IDPs, in particular Christians and Yezidis from returning to their own villages and to participate in their reconstruction.

Until 2014 (see graph below), the economic indicators of the show that a relatively secure environment allowed in the KRG an economic progress which contrasted with the economic indicators of the whole of Iraq in the same period of time. This fast economic development was driven primarily from the revenue from the oil industry. However, construction agriculture and services also contributed to the 8% of economic growth.

The prevalent oil economy in Kurdistan, as it happened in other middle eastern countries, transformed the region into a rentier state able 'to fend off pressure for sharing of wealth' and consolidate oligarchic control by enhancing both the distributive, welfare and coercive power of the state'.<sup>8</sup> This dependency has the result of creating a workforce completely dependent from the state's revenue. The following chart shows the public expenditures of the KRG before the crisis.

The political events mentioned above, together with the presence of a 'rentier' economy, had serious consequences on businesses in the region has been very high, and its full involvement is needed in order to face and overcome this crisis.

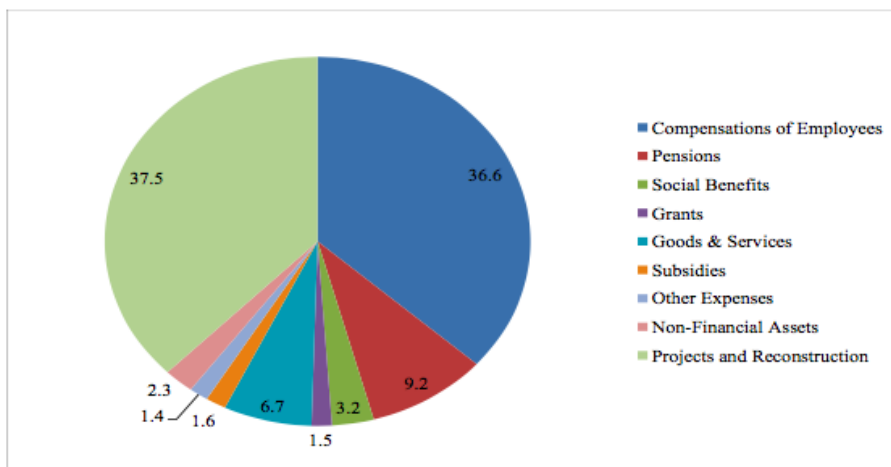


Source: KERSO

KRI: GDP at Current Prices, 2004-2011

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**Figure 1.2: KRG: Economic Composition of Public Expenditures, 2013**  
(% share in KRG budget allocation)



Source: KERSO

The political events mentioned above, together with the presence of a 'rentier' economy, had serious consequences on businesses in the region has been very high, and its full involvement is needed in order to face and overcome this crisis. The need for a new economy, a diversified one, which can create new investment and employment opportunities constitutes one of the main challenges facing the business community. However uneven the economic development could have been, it is clear from these data that a pe-

riod of prolonged peace can enhance the economic development of an area guaranteeing social stability and coexistence.

In the specific case of the Kurdish region as a whole some growing sectors in Dohuk and Erbil are in the agricultural/livestock, food manufacturing/food processing, hospitality/service and construction sectors (IOM, 2015). Dohuk plays an important role in agriculture and industrial production due to its abundant natural resources, including water wells,

canals and lands, with approximately 41% of IDPs in Dohuk relying on agricultural labor as their primary source of livelihood (IOM, 2015) followed by daily waged labor in construction. *“The tourism industry is growing, and the governorate hosts a few oilfields and is rich in sulfur, phosphorus, and marble. Dohuk also connects the Kirkuk-Turkey oil pipelines”* (IOM,2015). Erbil is a capital city of KRG, inhabited by 1.35 million individuals of local communities (Kurd, Arab, Turkmen, Chaldeans, and Assyrians). In the last 5 years 335,000 individuals (77,600 refugees and 257,000 IDP’s) have sought refugees in refugees in Erbil governorate. According to UNHCR displaced people are now made up 25% of the total urban populations in Erbil governorate (UNHCR, 2016).<sup>9</sup>

### **Economic Aspects of Genocides: The Case of Christians in the Niniwa area**

Some of the Christian living in the Niniwa Area after 2003 were returning after a displacement in Baghdad lasted since the 1950’s as part of the Arabisation process. Most of them were living in the Dora neighborhood and were making a living through commerce of working for the government. This displacement had already affected the Christian community whose children were taught Arabic in school as one of our interviewee currently living in Jordan states:

“We were allowed to talk about our religion but not about our ethnicity. They were forcing us that we were Arabs. Some of the people interviewed remember that when they were reading history there was not mention of Christians and sectarianism was an everyday occurrence even during Baath time.”<sup>10</sup>

Christians became one of the major target of the sectarian violence that engulfed Baghdad after 2003. Numerous attacks to churches and worship places together with continuous threats, killings and kidnappings made life very difficult in the capital and some family started to go back to their original villages. This caused an increase in the population in the area with the consequent need for more infrastructure. This demographic change involved also Mosul.

Unfortunately, Christians did not find in the Niniwa Area the peace they were looking for when they left Baghdad. The intervention of ISIS and the violence to which the different groups were subject started with the gradual tearing off the social fabric of the people living in Mosul. The violence reported by Christians went back to many years before. Mosul,

the second largest city of Iraq, was a unique example of coexistence. In its majority Muslim it hosted Christian and other minority including Sunnis. However, first hand testimonies place a gradual deterioration of relationship between communities much before the arrival of ISIS. Rumors, voices of an Islamic Shi’a militia could not have escape the attention of people who had been already the target of Al Qaeda. Christians started to feel threatened along with Sunni Muslims living in the area. Some of their most prominent representatives started to receive threat while kidnappings, indiscriminate killings and other threat announced the worse. Some of the testimonies gathered by the Schlomo organization show that the threat began before 2014 with the advent of ISIS. One of the testimonies from Mosul, victim code D.S.N., says:

“We had [been] exposed to several abductions, threats, murder attempts, and the death of my father as a result of fear in 2013. I used to work in Grains Manufacturing Department in Mosul and as a goldsmith after work. After I have been threatened for many times, I moved my goldsmith’s to Tillskoff and I left my job for thirty days. After that I was warned to be dismissed from my job, so I went back to my job. Later, my brother (N.S.N.), was a university student, was abducted in 2013 and was released for 20,000 US dollars ransom after torturing him.”<sup>11</sup>

This happened before July 18 2014 when, as the same witness, victim code D.S.N. reports that:

“[...] all the Christians in Mosul were threatened either to leave the city, be Muslims, tribute, or murder so we fled heading to Tillskof. In Alarabu Quarter, we had been robbed. They took our money, gold and our car, too. We fled again on August 6 as a result of ISIS terrorist Organization invasion in that area.”<sup>12</sup>

The advent of ISIS broke the weak equilibrium of co-existence between communities. The destruction of Christian communities in particular in Mosul and in the surrounding villages reduced even further the Christian presence in the country threatening its survival. The result was the physical destruction and loss of churches, houses, but also the destruction of a whole community trying to establish itself in the region. The inevitable, dramatic demographic change is resumed in the following data provided by the Schlomo organisation.

places	Number of victims	Sectors			Costs Estimated
		Agriculture	Manufacture	Trade	
Qaraqosh	1915	416	417	1082	US\$82,543,106,500
Bartella	781	107	173	501	US\$ 34,678,212.00
Tel Kaif	97	24	21	52	US\$ 6,991,000.00
Bashika	228	34	66	128	US\$ 8,069,000.00
Telskuf	118	9	17	92	US\$ 4,732,300.00
Batnaya	66	22	12	32	US\$ 2,859,000.00
Karemlash	208	70	42	96	US\$ 8,470,404.00
Mosul	161	6	88	67	US\$ 36,922,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>3574</b>	<b>688</b>	<b>836</b>	<b>2050</b>	<b>US\$82,645,828,416.00</b>

**Source:** Schlomo Organization for Documentation.

The one suffered by the Christian community after 2014 is perhaps the most damaging demographic change experienced by the community in its history. Out of one and a half million Christians only around 300,000 are currently living in Iraq. This had a huge impact on the economy of the Niniwa area Plain which most of them do not consider it a safe place any longer. As a consequence, in addition to the physical

destruction it is important to count the economic impact of the war. As we saw previously in the research conducted on this topic by member of the business community in the Kurdish region, the losses are substantial and can last for many years. The following chart offers an estimated number of victims in Mosul and in the main Christian village of the Niniwa area after 2014.

**The Christians IDP's from Mosul And Nineveh Plain to inside and outside of Iraq because of ISIS attack in 2014:**

No.	Region	Fam. No.	Ind. No.
1	Baghdad	927	3519
2	Kirkuk	340	1700
3	Erbil	11340	66906
4	Dohuk	8112	42895
5	Sulaymaniya	295	1475
6	Jordan	1170	5800
7	Lebanon	2180	10900
8	Turkey	600	3000
	<b>Tot.</b>	<b>24964</b>	<b>136195</b>

**Source:** Schlomo Organization for Documentation.

The table above shows that damage is not limited to buildings and properties destroyed, but that this can be directly linked with the number of human losses in the different areas. It is also important to notice that the previous table takes into account only three main economic sectors: agriculture, manufacture and trade. The cost estimated is more than 82 billion US dollars. This is a very interesting results because according to an article published by Reuters in February 2018 in a conference held in Kuwait on the topic of reconstruction in Iraq the total cost of it has been calculated around 88 billion US dollars. The Planning Minister Salman al-Jumaili said that ‘The seven provinces attacked by the militants suffered \$46 billion in direct damage, including the destruction of 147,000 housing units, and the security forces took \$14 billion in losses. Tens of billions more were lost indirectly through damage to the wider economy and years of lost growth’.<sup>13</sup>

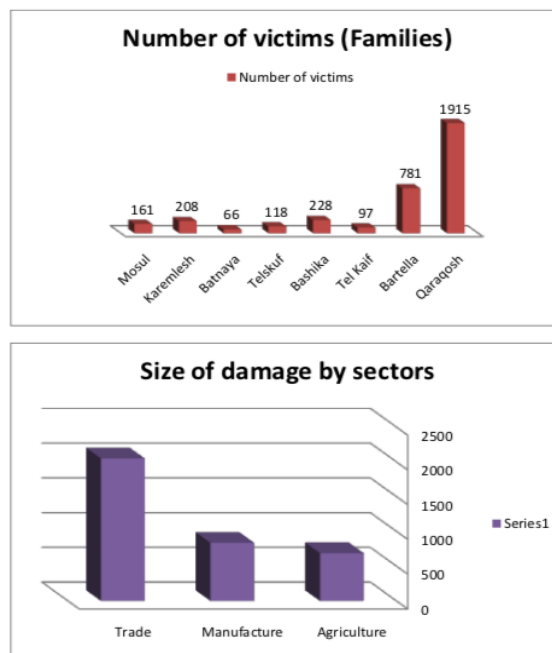
Comparing the two amounts, it is evident that in the case of the war against ISIS the estimated costs of reconstruction are more that the costs of the losses caused by the conflict.

Economic destruction means also that the businesses which could have helped to rebuild and develop the community do not exist anymore. The charts below show how some of the most important economic sectors have been affected since 2014. Agriculture, manufacture and trade resulted the most affected in relation to the number of victims. This constitutes a very new approach to the subject of post conflict reconstruction which takes into consideration not only the most immediate loss but also long term factors.

The following charts also prove this point again relating the loss of chosen economic sector to

The number of victims.

The sample of this study represents around 1% of the population of Mosul



Source: Farhad Al Kake



## Conclusion

It is clear from this research that economic costs of reconstruction are much more on the long run than the costs of a sustainable and peaceful society. Skills, knowledge and energies are lost in the process and they are very difficult to replace. Entire communities with their ancestral culture are heavily compromised due to loss of lives and massive emigration. The case of the Christian community in Iraq is only one example, unfortunately not the only one.

The aim of this article was to analyse of the relationship between genocide, mass atrocities and their economic cost in Iraq. To our knowledge no similar study has been carried out in the country before. We realise that by choosing to restrict chronologically our research to the last four years which saw the advent of ISIS run the risk to overlook other, equally disrupting experiences of genocide and mass atrocities. In addition, we are aware that by choosing as an example the Christian community we are excluding other groups such as the Yezidis who were much more affected by ISIS than Christians. However, we hope that this approach can be extended to other communities and that this effort can constitute a blue print for further research in this specific field.

## FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Sorya Martyrs Laid to Rest in Their Village, 19/09/2011,

<http://www.ishtartv.com/en/viewarticle.35376.html> accessed May 8, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Donabed, p. 154. Notes 63, 67 at p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Cetrez, Öner A. 'The Psychological Legacy of the Sayfo: An Inter-generational Transmission of Fear and Distrust', in *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo – The Genocide against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire*, David Gaunt, Natures Atto and Soner O. Barthoma (eds.), Bergham Books, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> *The Kurdistan region of Iraq: assessing the economic and social impact of the Syrian conflict and ISIS*, The World Bank Group, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> *Baghdad's Flight Embargo on KRI's Airports has direly affected Millions of People Across Kurdistan Region and Iraq*, Joint Crises Coordination Center, KRG, <http://jcc.gov.krd/en/article/read/146>

<sup>6</sup> The refugee and IDP numbers are obtained from the KRG Ministry of Planning; and from the KRG and United Nations' *Immediate Response Plan Phase II (IRP2) for Internally Displaced People in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*.

<sup>7</sup> It is not the purpose of this report to analyse the

reality of the refugee camps. More information about the costs of the refugees' crisis can be found in the report entitled *KRI: Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, released by the World Bank Group in 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 278.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, *Displacement as Challenge and Opportunity. Urban profile: Refugees, internally displaced persons and host community*, Erbil Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, April 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Remel Somo, 25 March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Schlomo Organisation for Documentation, *Mechanism of Work*, 2017, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Maher Chmytelli, Ahmed Agagy, 'Iraq says reconstruction after war on Islamic State to cost \$88 billion'. [online] Available at: (<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-iraq-reconstruction/iraq-says-reconstruction-after-war-on-islamic-state-to-cost-88-billion-idUKKBN1FWOPH>). [Accessed, 07 February, 2019].

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