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# Mapping the Unseen: Harnessing Indigenous Knowledge through Participatory Mapping to Address Displacement and Housing Challenges in Post Invasion Iraq

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Middle East  
Centre

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IN POST-INVASION IRAQ

Sana Murrani

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Mapping the Unseen: Harnessing Indigenous  
Knowledge through Participatory Mapping to  
Address Displacement and Housing Challenges  
in Post-Invasion Iraq

Sana Murrani

## About the Author

Sana Murrani is an Associate Professor in Spatial Practice at the University of Plymouth. She studied architecture at Baghdad University School of Architecture at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and then completed her PhD in the UK. Dr Murrani's main research falls within the fields of architecture, human geography and urban studies in particular, the imaginative negotiations of spatial practices and social justice. She is the founder of the Displacement Studies Research Network and co-founder of the Justice and Imagination in Global Displacement research collective.

## Abstract

Post-invasion Iraq has been grappling with high rates of internal displacement and severe housing shortages for the past 20 years, largely fuelled by violence, genocide and political instability. The intricacy of these interrelated challenges necessitates contextually informed, innovative and participatory approaches to effect change. This paper proposes the use of participatory mapping as a creative tool to tap into the indigenous knowledge and wayfinding skills of Iraqis, fostering a deeper understanding of the lived realities that can contribute to the design of effective policies for managing displacement and housing issues. The rising trend of internal displacement and the subsequent housing shortages, compounded by the emergence of new cities across the country, necessitate a comprehensive housing policy, underpinned by strategic planning and coordination.



## Context: On Internal Displacement, Housing Shortages and City Expansion

In *The Iraqi Refugee*, Joseph Sassoon outlines the transformation of displacement patterns in Iraq, highlighting the transition from government-enforced expulsions prior to 2003 to the emergence of ethnic and tribal displacement following the breakdown of state structures after the overthrow of Iraq's longstanding dictatorial regime in 2003.<sup>1</sup> The sustained bombing campaign initiated by the United States and its allies that started in March 2003, aimed at ousting Saddam Hussein, has since engendered significant destabilisation in Iraq and the surrounding region. This military intervention has been a contributing factor to subsequent destruction, heightened sectarian tensions, and widespread forced displacement. In the aftermath of the 2003 bombing campaign, Iraq saw an increase in internal displacement, with individuals seeking refuge in remote locations or moving between urban centres for various reasons.<sup>2</sup> Significant events, such as the Battle for Fallujah in 2004, led to large-scale destruction and displacement, fuelling civil unrest. The period from 2006 to 2008 witnessed a new pattern of displacement that altered the social demographics and urban contexts of Iraqi cities,<sup>3</sup> leading to protracted displacement and a significant change in the sectarian and ethnic make-up of the population.<sup>4</sup> Sectarianism profoundly reshaped Iraq's social and spatial dynamics, further catalysing the emergence of multiple militias with divergent allegiances and objectives. The escalation culminated in the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants, who wrought extensive havoc of destruction and trauma across the country, notably in Mosul and Sinjar in 2014, leading to additional patterns of forced displacement. This displacement has also contributed to 'nation-destroying', as discussed by Oula Kadhum, referring to the impact of war and violence on the demography of the country, including the decline of non-Muslim minorities through ethnic cleansing and intimidation.<sup>5</sup>

Following the 2003 invasion, there has been a surge in informal housing settlements, blurring urban-rural boundaries and leading to gentrification and over-urbanisation, fuelled by a lack of planning policies and support for displaced persons. Despite attempts to close Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps and encourage over four million Iraqis to return home, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reports that the number of registered IDPs remains above one million.<sup>6</sup> This figure does not include ethnically segregated neighbourhoods or individuals residing in informal settlements, often encroaching on public or agricultural land. The informal housing sector's growth has been significant post-2003, with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement reporting 1.2 million IDPs

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Sassoon, *The Iraqi Refugees: The New Crisis in the Middle East* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Mona Damluji, "'Securing Democracy in Iraq": Sectarian Politics and Segregation in Baghdad, 2003-2007', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21/2 (2010), pp. 71-87.

<sup>4</sup> Dawn Chatty and Nisrine Mansour (2011), 'Unlocking Protracted Displacement: An Iraqi Case Study', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 30 (4) 50-83, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Oula Kadhum, 'Nation-Destroying, Emigration and Iraqi Nationhood after the 2003 Intervention', *International Affairs* 99/2 (2023), pp. 587-604, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Wing, 'Iraqi Govt Wants To End Displacement In 6 Months', *Musings on Iraq*, 18 April 2023. Available at: <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com/2023/04/iraqi-govt-wants-to-end-displacement-in.html> (accessed 19 April 2023).

and the Ministry of Planning documenting 3.2 million people in informal settlements. This situation underscores the housing crisis in Iraq, with individuals resorting to squatting on public land, abandoned buildings, disused military bases, or agricultural land, leading to the creation of *ashwaiaat* or *hawasim* (a phrase used after 2003 referring to any act of looting from the state), as they are locally known.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, the region has been characterised by significant mobility, shaping the landscapes and geopolitical terrains of displacement routes. As noted by Dawn Chatty, various groups including Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, Palestinians, Jews, Sabian Mandaeans and Yazidis have experienced both internal and external displacement in Iraq,<sup>8</sup> crossing borders and urban centres. For example, Muna Damluji highlights the heterogeneity of Baghdad prior to 2006, disrupted by the sectarian politics that drove spatial segregation during the subsequent years of violence.<sup>9</sup> The displacement was not only marked by ethnic and sectarian discrimination but was also a response to cities struggling to accommodate a high influx of displaced families. Interviewees for the ‘Ruptured Domesticity’<sup>10</sup> visual archive, part of the author’s *Rupturing Architecture* project and accompanying book, refer to this mobility as a lifeline for many Iraqis, a tactic of refuge that had been part of their lives long before the 2003 invasion.<sup>11</sup> Their experiences of displacement and mobility varied widely across social status and religious communities. Christians in Northern Iraq, for example, faced different challenges compared to those from Sinjar or the Kurdish region, each having their own unique narratives of escape and refuge. Helen Malko speaks of the Christian cultural genocide at the hands of ISIS and critiques the use of the unbalanced power term ‘disputed territories’, used by the Kurds to describe the territories in the Christian heartland located in the north of Iraq. This has an impact on the devastated communities of the north of Iraq, specifically the Assyrian Christians and Yazidi minorities in the Nineveh Plains, who ‘remain internally displaced, struggling to gather back their shattered communities and return to their homes’.<sup>12</sup>

However, this mobility was characterised by its chaotic nature, frequent moves and repeated incidents forcing people to return and move again, a phenomenon encapsulated in the protractedness of rupture in the case of Iraq. Protracted rupture serves as a framework through which we can examine and afford spatial possibilities to the refuge-making practices that emerge directly from trauma and violence, fuelling resistance and plasticity in the refuge-making spaces that emerge throughout the process. The term ‘rupture’

<sup>7</sup> Omar Al-Jaffal, ‘Informal Settlements in Baghdad: Home Is Everywhere’, *Assafir Al-Arabi*, 6 June 2022. Available at: <https://assafirarabi.com/en/45495/2022/06/06/informal-settlements-in-baghdad-home-is-everywhere/> (accessed 19 April 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Damluji, ‘Securing Democracy in Iraq’.

<sup>10</sup> Sana Murrani, Ruptured Domesticity Visual Archive, 2023. Available at: <https://ruptureddomesticity.org/> (accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Sana Murrani, *Rupturing Architecture: Spatial Practices of War and Protection in Iraq 2003-2023* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Helen Malko, ‘Heritage Wars: A Cultural Genocide in Iraq’, in Jeffrey S. Bachman (ed.), *Cultural Genocide: Law, Politics, and Global Manifestations* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 207–26, p. 218.



often connotes a medical emergency due to the sudden material breakage or burst of a cohesive entity, typically stemming from intense strain.<sup>13</sup> However, its philosophical foundations lie in the epistemology of evasive structures and systems that undergo disruption (as suggested by Machiavelli's situationist disruption), fracturing (in line with Hobbes's destructionist break), or interruption (echoing Hume's empiricist interruption).<sup>14</sup> Building on Spinoza's 'dual aspect' conception of rupture, Martin Holbraad, Bruce Kapferer, and Julia F. Sauma describe 'critical rupture' as possessing both negative characteristics and the capability to serve 'as a positive or dynamic impulse towards escape, redirection, reconstitution and sometimes renewal'.<sup>15</sup> This duality imbues rupture with both destructive and generative qualities. The scholars further assert that rupture challenges prevailing modernity narratives, including resistance paradigms, and might instead spotlight scenarios where interference with dominant narratives proves more strategic than mere resistance.<sup>16</sup> This dual nature of rupture transcends mere oppositional dialectics, focusing on diverse disruptions and shifts in power dynamics. This was evident in the multiple escape routes and detours sought during aerial bombardments, sectarian violence and ISIS attacks that interviewees shared with the *Rupturing Architecture* researcher.<sup>17</sup> These constant moves led to unplanned urban densification and the emergence of informal housing, or *ashwaiyat*, still a major challenge for Iraqi cities.

A somewhat less explored feature of displacement within research on Iraq, yet one that featured heavily in the interviews for *Rupturing Architecture*, was the concept of the tactics of mobility – a necessity that underpins all refuge-seeking practices. Violence across the past few decades in Iraq's history forced people to make choices (if they had any), and those with limited options were of course adversely affected – to this day, many are still stuck in protracted displacement. For the few who had choices, there were several possibilities for seeking refuge, as well as opportunities for return. Interviewees described this condition of seeking mobility as a way of life that many Iraqis had to endure for years, even before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While displacement often connotes uprootedness and transition, it also involves active, albeit nonlinear, processes of domesticity and refuge-making. Research spearheaded by Ashika L. Singh notes that these seemingly opposing concepts can reveal spatial practices emerging from the intersection of displacement and domesticity.<sup>18</sup> This ongoing negotiation between uprootedness and homing practices significantly alters the social and spatial makeup of cities, villages, and borders, blurring boundaries between instability and refuge-making.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Waite (ed.), *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> A.T. Kingsmith, 'On Rupture: An Intervention into Epistemological Disruptions of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Hume', *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 31/4 (2017), pp. 594–608.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Holbraad, Bruce Kapferer, and Julia F. Sauma (eds), *Ruptures: Anthropologies of Discontinuity in Times of Turmoil* (London: UCL Press, 2019), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Murrani, *Rupturing Architecture*.

<sup>18</sup> Ashika L. Singh, Alessandra Gola, Luce Beeckmans and Hilde Heynen, 'Displacement & Domesticity Since 1945: Refugees, Migrants and Expats Making Homes, Following the EAHN's Sixth Thematic Conference (Brussels, 27–28 March 2019)', *Architectural Histories* 8/1 (2020), pp. 1–9, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Paolo Boccagni, 'Homing: A Category for Research on Space Appropriation and "Home-Oriented" Mobilities', *Mobilities* 17/4 (2022), pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17450101.2022.2046977> (accessed 4 December 2023).

The intricate issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq remains a significant challenge, with numerous IDPs still residing in camps, tents, and makeshift shelters, a situation that worsens with each passing year. Particularly hard-hit are marginalised communities such as the Yazidis of Sinjar, who face not only societal discrimination but also a scarcity of participation in educational and political systems. Multiple studies highlight the complexities surrounding the question of return following ISIS attacks.<sup>20</sup> Despite a strong desire to return home and to their communities, many IDPs express reluctance due to fears of insecurity and potential intimidation by militia groups. Their practical return is contingent on various conditions that these studies show: firstly, there is the state of their housing and infrastructure, many of which are severely damaged or completely destroyed. Secondly, the state of security in the region and the relationships between local communities, IDPs, and law enforcement are critical. Thirdly, resource availability (financial, physical, and mental health resources, as well as education and employment opportunities) plays a role. Fourthly, environmental changes and the climate crisis impact potential return, with rapid deforestation, desertification, overurbanisation, and densification altering the landscape significantly. Lastly, the uncertain political landscape, particularly in Northern Iraq (due to tensions between the central and Kurdish governments), exacerbates the situation.<sup>21</sup> These factors, combined with ‘hosting fatigue’ in regions like Kurdistan that have been supporting IDPs for two decades, have contributed to prolonged displacement and lack of support for returns.

Data from the UNHCR’s Operation Data Portal<sup>22</sup> and the OCHA’s ReliefWeb<sup>23</sup> reveals the spread and demographics of IDPs across Iraq. As of December 2022, over one million Iraqis are registered as IDPs, with an estimated four million unregistered residing in informal settlements. These figures include a significant number of returnees who, while having returned to their region of origin, have not been able to return to their actual homes. IDP camps are particularly prevalent in urban centres across the country, and notably in the Kurdish region of Iraq, Nineveh, Baghdad, and Basra. The sectarian violence has further exacerbated forced displacement and mobility, particularly from rural sites into urban centres, for various reasons, including financial, environmental, and employment factors. This displacement has significantly impacted poorer, less educated sections of society, who have largely settled in urban areas from the rural regions of the country.

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<sup>20</sup> Frazer MacDonald Hay, *Post-Conflict Issues of Housing, Land and Property in Iraq 2017* (Baghdad: International Organization for Migration, 2017). Available at: <https://www.humanitarianlibrary.org/resource/post-conflict-issues-housing-land-and-property-iraq> (accessed 7 April 2023); Shelter Cluster and UN-Habitat, *The Status of Housing Rehabilitation Programs in Iraq in the Post ISIL-Conflict*, *Global Shelter Cluster* (Iraq: Aziz Abultimman, 13 April 2021). Available at: <https://sheltercluster.org/iraq/documents/status-housing-rehab-programs-iraq-post-isil-conflict-en> (accessed 3 July 2023); Dina Sabie, Samar Sabie, Cansu Ekmekcioglu, Yasaman Rohanifar, Fatma Hashim, Steve Easterbrook and Syed Ishtiaque Ahmed, ‘Exile Within Borders: Understanding the Limits of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Iraq’, *Proceedings of the Fifth Workshop on Computing within Limits 1* (2019), pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3338103.3338104> (accessed 13 April 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Kadhum, ‘Nation-Destroying’.

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR, ‘Iraq: Refugee and IDP Population Map’, *UNHCR Operational Data Portal*, 21 January 2020. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/73530> (accessed 22 September 2022).

<sup>23</sup> OCHA ReliefWeb, ‘Iraq: Key Figures’, 2022. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/country/iraq#maps-infographics> (accessed 13 January 2023)

Hundreds of informal settlements started appearing across the country, particularly near urban centres. Informal settlements in cities like Baghdad and Basra lack basic infrastructure like sanitation, electricity, and health services, yet continue to grow both spatially and demographically. These settlements stand in stark contrast to the expected prosperity of oil-rich cities like Basra, where 20 percent of the city is estimated to comprise informal settlements.<sup>24</sup> These settlements often follow master planning strategies implemented in the 1950s and 1970s. Since then, urban growth has mostly adhered to the initial blueprints, with expansion from city peripheries to centres. According to a UN-Habitat report, these settlements in Basra have emerged due to several factors: the city's relative success attracting people from poorer areas; the failure of legal planning systems and the construction industry to meet housing demand; and the willingness of lower-income households to invest in housing despite the risk of eviction and demolition.<sup>25</sup> Basra's strategic location and its status as the largest city in southern Iraq has led to several waves of displacement and return, stretching the city's resources and exacerbating its housing needs. Informal settlements have sprung up on vacant land, between existing neighbourhoods, and on abandoned agricultural lands due to drought, deforestation, and desertification.

Iraq had been dealing with a housing shortage long before the 2003 invasion, but the situation was aggravated by the invasion and subsequent displacement patterns. While it is untrue to suggest that the Iraqi government had no plans to address this, their efforts have been largely unsuccessful due to a lack of understanding of the complexities, inadequate cross-sector collaboration, and frequent changes in leadership.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, corruption and a lack of financial plans have hindered progress. Despite government promises to close the displacement file and provide financial incentives to returnees, unrealistic timelines and plans for city expansion have proven insufficient. These issues underline the country's ongoing struggle with housing and displacement.<sup>27</sup>

The Ministry of Planning in Iraq has approved 17 new residential cities across the country, including Bismaya and Al-Rafeel city, but their contribution to the massive housing crisis remains limited.<sup>28</sup> Over the past two decades, billions of dollars have been invested in

<sup>24</sup> Mortada Muzaffar Sahar Al-Kaabi, 'Applied Solutions to Tackle Random Housing in the City of Basra', *The Arab Gulf* 47/3-4 (2019), pp. 362-411.

<sup>25</sup> Babar Mumtaz and Ivan Thung, Basra Urban Profile, October 2020. Available at: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/03/basra\\_urban\\_profile\\_-\\_english.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/03/basra_urban_profile_-_english.pdf) (accessed 20 April 2023).

<sup>26</sup> Hamzeh Hadad, 'Path to Government Formation in Iraq: How Violence and Elite Sectarianism Lead to Consensus Governments', *Foundation Office Iraq*, 7 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.kas.de/documents/266761/0/Hamzeh+Hadad+-+Path+to+Government+Formation+in+Iraq+2022.pdf/54d58e79-343a-8460-6c1d-a02c34f986b1?version=1.0&t=1641904073323> (accessed 22 November 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Zaher Moussa, 'The Campaign to Demolish Encroachments in Iraq: A Fire That Stung Millions', *Assafir Al-Arabi*, 28 May 2022. Available at: <https://assafirarabi.com/en/45344/2022/05/28/the-campaign-to-demolish-encroachments-in-iraq-a-fire-that-stung-millions/> (accessed 19 April 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Haider Ibrahim, 'Mega Projects Do Little to Calm Iraq's Housing Crisis', *Al-Monitor*, 2022. Available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/07/mega-projects-do-little-calm-iraqs-housing-crisis> (accessed 24 April 2023).

various housing projects, some of which have stalled, while others are progressing in phases. These new developments are often conceived as independent cities, with little regard for connectivity to the main cities where public institutions and higher education are located. High housing costs, lack of job opportunities, and issues like regular power outages further discourage Iraqis from moving to these new cities.<sup>29</sup> From a socio-spatial perspective, these new cities do not consider the social makeup and living preferences of potential residents, possibly deepening feelings of resentment and sectarianism. These new cities also exacerbate tensions and trauma caused by various waves of displacement, creating social and economic divisions. Climate crises have also significantly impacted the Iraqi landscape, altering indigenous practices and putting pressure on urban housing. These crises, similar to war and violence, create additional forms of trauma and spatial injustice, suggesting that spatial lessons learned can help Iraqis navigate future challenges. The absence of a national urban strategy in Iraq has led the Kurdish region to invest in studies to understand and address urban growth in northern Iraq, informed by research on urban sprawl,<sup>30</sup> and similar studies are taking place on new forms of rurality<sup>31</sup> in the Mediterranean context and elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> A more nuanced approach to the issue of informal settlements could lead to more sensitive, locally-led strategies.

## Issues

Although the history of Iraq's housing crisis predates the US-led invasion in 2003, it is critical to acknowledge that the situation has been aggravated by the numerous instances of displacement and ethnic cleansing that have occurred after 2003, effects of which continue to resonate over the past 20 years. In this challenging context, Iraqis found their lives upended, necessitating an urgent and continuous search for shelter and refuge from war and violence. This greatly affected their mobility, whether within their neighbourhoods, across cities, or even beyond the country's borders. The quest for safety often led them to seek refuge in relatives' homes or shelters, constantly moving to escape potential targets and relocating to neighbouring cities for security. The already severe housing crisis was further strained by the absence of comprehensive data on homes damaged or destroyed during the bombings. By the end of 2003, Baghdad alone had over 50,000 homeless

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<sup>29</sup> Sara Mahmood Al-Jawari, Suhad K. Al-Mosawy, Ahmed A. Al-Jabari and Abdulsahib N. Al-Baghdadi (2020), 'Strategic Analysis of New Cities (Case Study Basmaya City - Republic of Iraq) An Analytical Study of Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 459/6 (2020): 062108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/459/6/062108> (accessed 24 April 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Sivan Hisham Al Jarah, Bo Zhou, Rebaz Jalil Abdullah, Yawen Lu and Wenting Yu, 'Urbanization and Urban Sprawl Issues in City Structure: A Case of the Sulaymaniah Iraqi Kurdistan Region', *Sustainability* 11/485 (2019), pp. 1–22.

<sup>31</sup> Rosanna Salvia, Pere Serra, Ilaria Zambon, Massimo Cecchini and Luca Salvati, 'In-Between Sprawl and Neo-Rurality: Sparse Settlements and the Evolution of Socio-Demographic Local Context in a Mediterranean Region', *Sustainability* 10/10 (2018), pp. 36–70.

<sup>32</sup> Jamal Ahmad Alnsour, 'Managing Urban Growth in the City of Amman, Jordan', *Cities* 50 (2016), pp. 93–9.

people,<sup>33</sup> and by the end of 2019, Iraq was short of 2.7 million homes, a stark increase from the 1.5 million shortfall initially reported.<sup>34</sup> This relentless search for shelter honed the Iraqi people's ability to be agile and adapt to constant movement, a skill that was severely tested, particularly during the sectarian violence of 2006 and 2008, which resulted in the ethnic segregation of cities.<sup>35</sup> The sectarian violence following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 induced unprecedented internal displacement, reflecting deep-seated ethnic divides, which continues to impact the country. As of 2022, over six million Iraqis were internally displaced across the nation's 18 governorates, as reported by the UN's IOM.<sup>36</sup> The lack of rebuilding, housing shortages, crumbling infrastructure, and a scarcity of public services have contributed to widespread decline in Iraq's cities and villages.

Through extensive interviews with diverse groups of Iraqis from across Iraq, a unique narrative of resilience, ingenious mobility, and creative wayfinding emerges, illuminating the extraordinary ways in which they navigate displacement and housing scarcity. Their narratives underscore a deep understanding of their spatial environment, revealing unique methods for locating safe routes, adapting to new shelter and refuge conditions, and maintaining critical social networks amidst adversity. Regrettably, these valuable insights are often overlooked<sup>37</sup> by current housing and displacement interventions,<sup>38</sup> which tend to lean on macro-level data and general assumptions, failing to encapsulate the lived experiences of the affected population. Simultaneously, the Iraqi government's efforts to close the displacement file and address housing shortages, including the creation of new peripheral cities around major urban centres such as Baghdad, risk perpetuating patterns of spatial injustice if they lack a deep understanding of the local context and the complex needs of the displaced and housing-deprived populations.

Participatory mapping offers a promising solution. By tapping into the indigenous knowledge, memories, and experiences of Iraqis, it can provide nuanced insights into the spatiality of trauma and displacement, and their housing needs. This approach not only empowers individuals and communities to voice their experiences, needs, and aspirations but also facilitates their active contribution to imaginative planning and decision-making processes. As a result, it can foster the development of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable housing policies and displacement interventions uniquely tailored to the Iraqi context.

<sup>33</sup> IRIN News, 'Housing Problems Increase as Conflict Hits Hearth and Home', *The New Humanitarian*, 4 August 2005. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/194386> (accessed 23 February 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Ali Abdulhadi Al-Mamouri, 'Serious Housing Crisis Creeps up on Iraq', *Al-Monitor*, 23 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/07/iraq-economy-housing.html> (accessed 10 February 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Damluji, 'Securing Democracy in Iraq'.

<sup>36</sup> IOM in Iraq, 'IOM: UN Migration', 2022. Available at: <https://iraq.iom.int/iom-iraq> (accessed 9 December 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Kenyon Lischer, 'Security and Displacement in Iraq: Responding to the Forced Migration Crisis', *International Security* 33/2 (2008), pp. 95–119.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Marfleet, 'Displacement and the State - the Case of Iraq', in Khalid Koser and Susan Martin (eds), *The Migration-Displacement Nexus: Patterns, Processes, and Policies* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 96–118.

## Methodology

Understanding the interplay between the multiple ruptures and forced displacement within Iraqis' memory, imagination, and trauma that unfolded between 2003 and 2023, necessitates an innovative mapping approach. To avoid the 'mimetic/representational' pitfall,<sup>39</sup> a method of deep, participatory mapping is essential. The maps produced serve as critical frameworks for capturing the iterative narratives of trauma and memory in spatial and temporal dimensions transcending time and space (Figure 1). They embody the spatial storytelling of Iraqis affected by war and violence, integrating layers of identity, belonging, and memory-work. This form of mapping captures fleeting moments of significance, encapsulating detailed accounts of trauma that continually evolve as memories are recollected, relived and retold.<sup>40</sup>

Similar deep mapping methods have been used by Sarah De Nardi who describes these processes as 'boundless' and 'open-ended as life experience itself; the process is made of, and reflects, multiple affectual linkages, experiential assemblages and imaginaries'.<sup>41</sup> The resultant maps are characterised by their transient nature and 'more-than-textual' visual storytelling with 'affectual textures'.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the maps produced as part of the *Rupturing Architecture* project are both cognitive, critical and counter-cartographic geographies, and oral histories rich in contexts, concepts, and socio-spatial fragments.<sup>43</sup> Without depicting violence graphically, they interpret violence as part of a creative process to foster understanding, assign meaning, and create disruption. This methodology aligns with Daniele Rugo's non-representational approach, which sees visibility as a deconstructive process and visibility as a constructive one, forming new interpretations and meanings of conflict memory.<sup>44</sup>

A compelling example of the power of creative mapping can be explained through Murad Ismael's maps. Ismael, who was interviewed for the *Rupturing Architecture* project, is the President of Sinjar Academy and a co-founder of Yazda.<sup>45</sup> Based in the US, he gathered crucial GPS data from Yazidis escaping Sinjar during the ISIS invasion in August 2014. His maps were crucial for the survival of Yazidis who walked for days while others had to cross international borders. Often created in real-time, his maps pinpointed sniper locations, charted the paths Yazidis took through Mount Sinjar, identified where they awaited rescue, and traced the routes taken by ISIS into the town. Murad's maps, informed by on-the-ground information from fleeing Yazidis, outlined safe routes, locations of ISIS cells, and areas for US troops to drop supplies.<sup>46</sup> They underscore the importance of place-making and place-attachment in survival, showing how collectively produced, responsive maps can directly save lives.

<sup>39</sup> Daniele Rugo, 'The Patch as Method: The Arts' Contribution towards Understandings of Conflict', *International Political Science Review*, 2023. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121231177442> (accessed 10 July 2023).

<sup>40</sup> Veronica della Dora, 'Performative Atlases: Memory, Materiality, and (Co-)Authorship', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 44/4 (2009), pp. 240–55.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah De Nardi, *Visualising Place, Memory and the Imagined* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Rob Kitchin, Justin Gleeson and Martin Dodge, 'Unfolding Mapping Practices: A New Epistemology for Cartography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38/3 (2013), pp. 480–96.

<sup>44</sup> Rugo, 'The Patch as Method'.

<sup>45</sup> Murad Ismael, Interview with author, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Valeria Cetorelli, Isaac Sasson, Nazar Shabila and Gilbert Burnham, 'Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A Retrospective Household Survey', *PLOS Medicine* 14/5 (2017), e1002297. Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297> (accessed 12 April 2023).

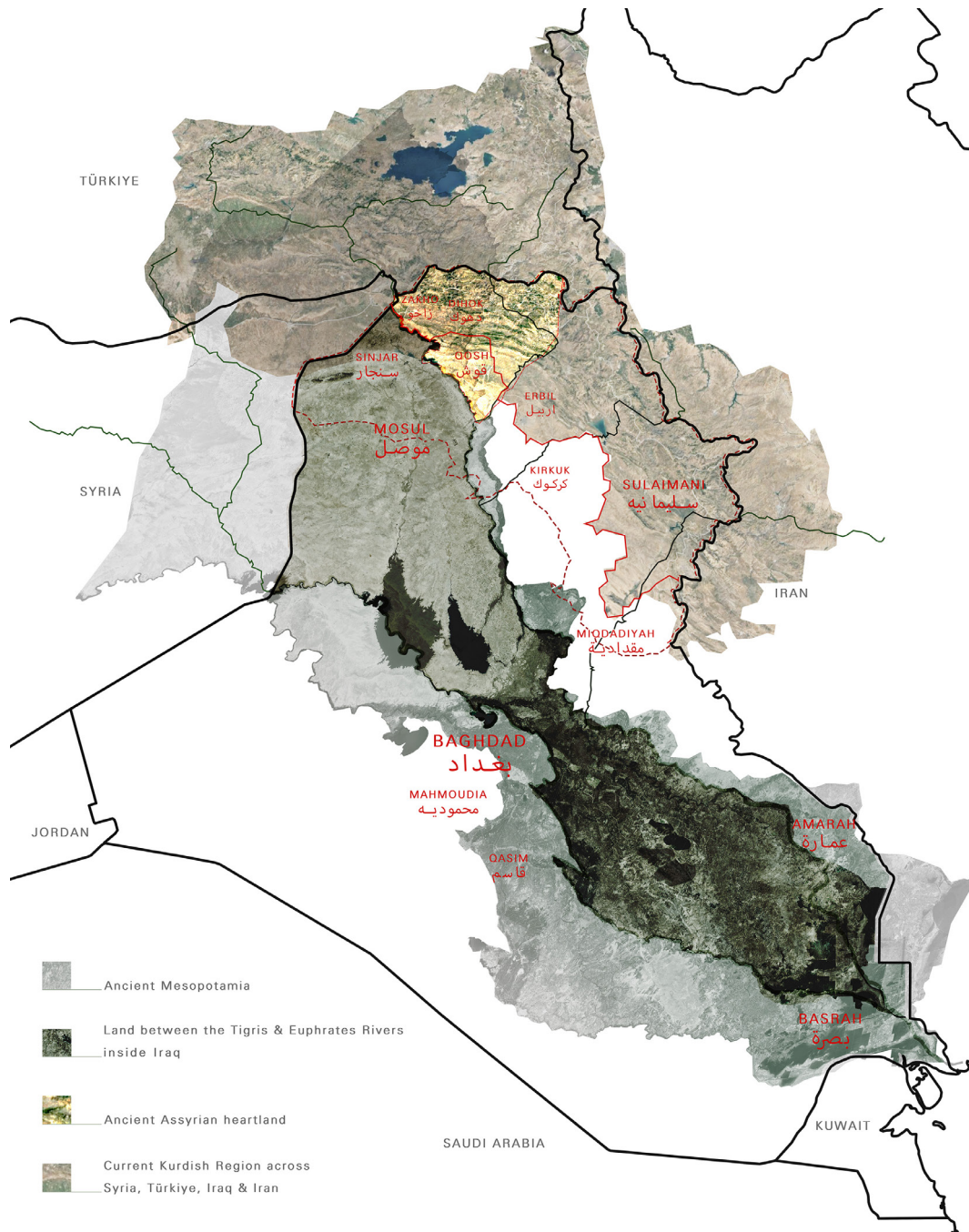


Figure 1: A geopolitical map of Iraq that traverses time demonstrating the layers of history that have shaped the land since the making of modern Iraq from the earlier Mesopotamian region. The map shows the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, as well as the internal divisions within the land, including the soft borders which cut through the Nineveh Plains, driving a wedge of contested territories, origins and belongings into the history of the region.

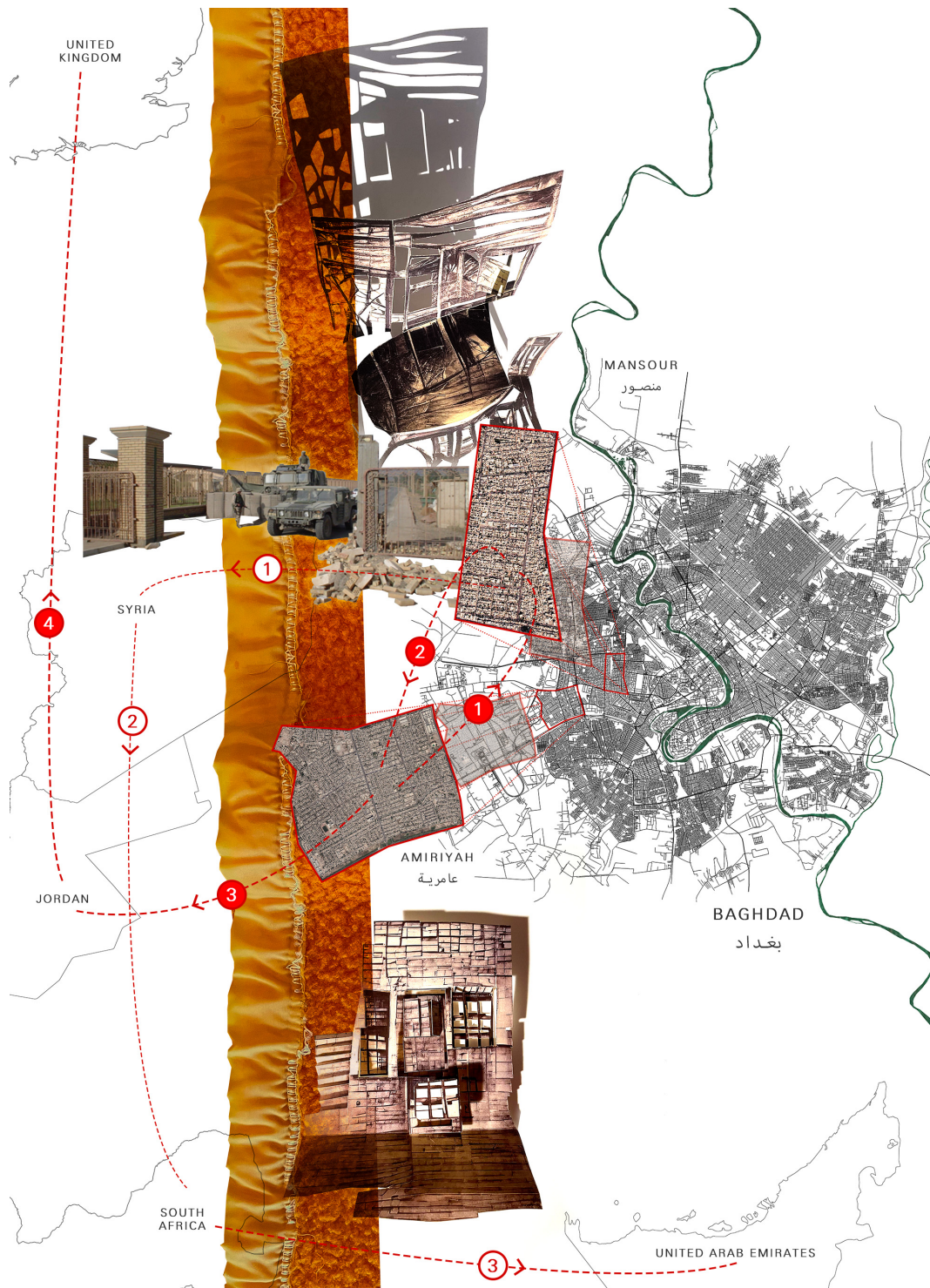


Figure 2: A map showing the journeys taken by two cousins (Sana and her cousin Farah) seeking refuge inside Baghdad and outside Iraq and the spatial and material objects they created during the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

‘Our map traverses material and spatial refuge-seeking quests, from the makeshift corner in my house, near the built-in cupboard in the living room, to Farah’s dining room table, ... large enough for my family of four to nest underneath it. An item as mundane as an old blanket now holds such significant and varied memories: of childhood, of warmth, of stopping shattered glass from hitting our bodies, and of hiding money in its seams as I fled the country a few months later. After my departure, Farah was able to make a major contribution to her field, veterinary medicine, by finding refuge for all the animals in Baghdad Zoo just before leaving Iraq herself. Neither of us has since returned.’ (Sana Murrani, *Rupturing Architecture*)



Another example of the power of map-making was evident in how the maps produced as part of the ‘Ruptured Domesticity’ project were received by participants in the project and, equally, by the audience of an exhibition of the maps at the LSE Middle East Centre in April and May of 2023.<sup>47</sup> This was part of a series of events marking the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Before the start of the US-led military attack on Iraq in 2003, while Baghdadis were digging wells, storing dry food and filling up buckets with clean water, Iraqi Kurds were preparing themselves for a chemical attack in case Saddam Hussein chose to retaliate against them for allying with the US. The collective trauma and memory of the Halabja massacre, ordered by the Saddam regime in 1988, meant that in 2003, the Kurds were busy creating chemical masks from coal wrapped in cotton fabric and sealing their windows and doors with nylon sheets. This particular moment, depicted across the maps of traumas as told by participants, created moments of empathy and demonstrated the power to sow seeds for reconciliation and future social cohesion across diverse Iraqi belongings and identities.

Following the regime’s fall in 2003 and 2004, the lack of law and order spurred a surge in kidnappings and rape. Consequently, Iraqis repurposed their rooftop water tanks and clay ovens as safe spaces for women and girls in their families. This adaptive behaviour exemplifies refuge at varying levels: from spaces within homes to material objects (Figure 2) like the famous Iraqi flat bread that became the lifeline for survival for many Iraqis (Figure 3), a prayer book one interviewee always carries, or another’s diary detailing every bomb, explosion and household dispute. Participants noted the evolving significance and sense of identity associated with home spaces and objects. Examples include Yazidi traditional attire (Figure 4), an Assyrian calligrapher’s tools (Figure 5), and literature that defined one’s father’s activism. These personal practices present an indigenous perspective on war and violence objects<sup>48</sup> and shift our understanding of historicity.

Mapping and tracing these spaces and material objects allows us to delve into ‘micro-geographies’<sup>49</sup> of memories, events, and personal spaces. Rupture was found in material objects just as they were situated within mobility detours.<sup>50</sup> This characteristic of rupture highlights multiple dimensions across time, encompassing emotional, material, and geospatial trauma forms. Mapping these rupture scales iteratively and thematically necessitated performatively coding oral interviews, emphasising crucial events selected by the interviewees, and aligning them with shared photos depicting spatiality and material objects. Each of the maps produced encompasses collapsed geographies of mobility, three-dimensional pop-up books derived from major traumatic oral interviews, trauma object photomontages and relevant interview quotes. These maps visualise previously undocumented traumatic histories. Many interviewees expressed regret over not having documented these traumas more extensively at the time. These counter-maps visually encapsulate fleeting memories, resulting in detailed maps, each depicting Iraq’s diverse rupture journeys.

<sup>47</sup> Murrani, Ruptured Domesticity Visual Archive.

<sup>48</sup> Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra (eds), *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Tim Cole, ‘(Re)Placing the Past: Spatial Strategies of Retelling Difficult Stories’, *The Oral History Review* 42/1 (2015), pp. 30–49.

<sup>50</sup> Charishma Ratnam and Danielle Drozdowski, ‘Detour: Bodies, Memories, and Mobilities in and around the Home’, *Mobilities* 15/6 (2020), pp. 757–75, p. 670.



Figure 3: A map of Basra traces the trauma of a Basrawi who grew up during the years of UN sanctions on Iraq. The Iraqi flat bread signifies refuge throughout these traumatic times and into the years of sectarian violence in post-invasion Iraq.

'I have this feeling and a memory from when I was young. We were struggling financially during the war when my mother used to make bread from poor-quality flour, but I used to think it is the best bread ever. I used to walk around the house with a piece of her bread in my mouth all the time. During the early years of secondary school, I ate hardly anything apart from my mother's bread. I gained a lot of weight and my teeth suffered. I was forced to stop eating it because of my health. Now every time I see or smell bread, a painful memory comes to mind, reminding me of the war and the hardship and how I once was addicted to bread.' (Wadi, A. (2022), Interview with Sana Murrani)

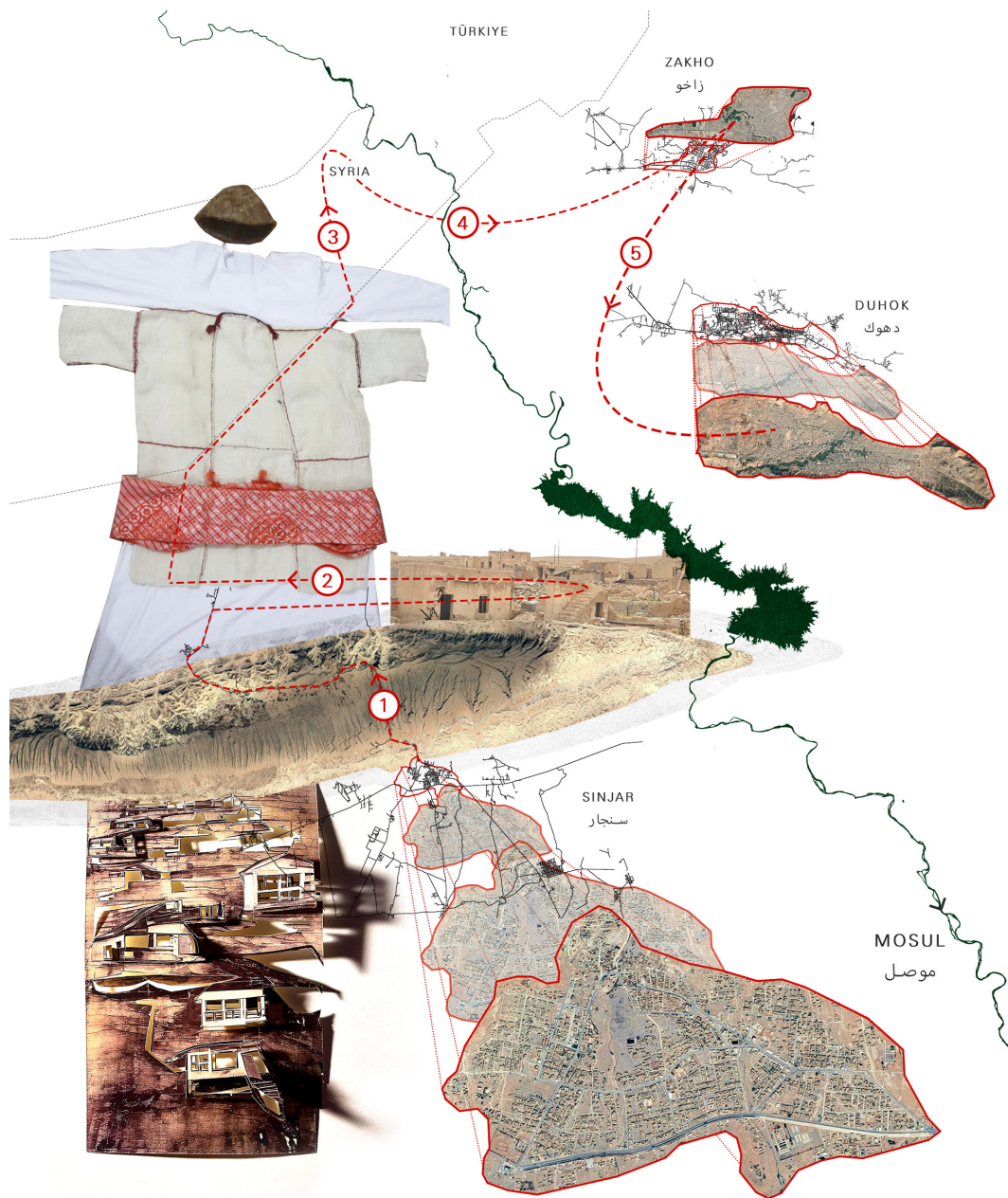


Figure 4: A map traces the journeys on foot taken by a Yazidi family escaping ISIS atrocities in 2014 that began from the south of Sinjar, passing through Mount Sinjar, into the Iraqi Syrian border and back into Iraq through the Kurdish region. They only brought the most essential items with them including their traditional Yazidi attire.

‘When ISIS attacked from the south of Sinjar, there was no other route for us other than the mountain. All routes outside Sinjar were blocked. Our only option for escape was towards the mountain. Yazidis who knew the mountain well also knew that, once we reached the mountain, other routes and options would be possible either towards the Syrian border to the west or towards the Kurdistan region to the northeast of the mountain. Nevertheless, all of these routes are treacherous, and none of them is fit for cars, only possible for skilled hikers. Remember, we had elderly people, pregnant women and small children. My wife was heavily pregnant at the time with our second child when we made that journey. We walked for three continuous days. We could not take anything with us and the little we took we had to leave behind in order to continue to climb with little weight on us. August is incredibly hot in Iraq, we had no water or food, but we had to continue our walk regardless. We were walking with other families and people helped each other.’ (Sameer, S. A. (2022), Interview with Sana Murrani)

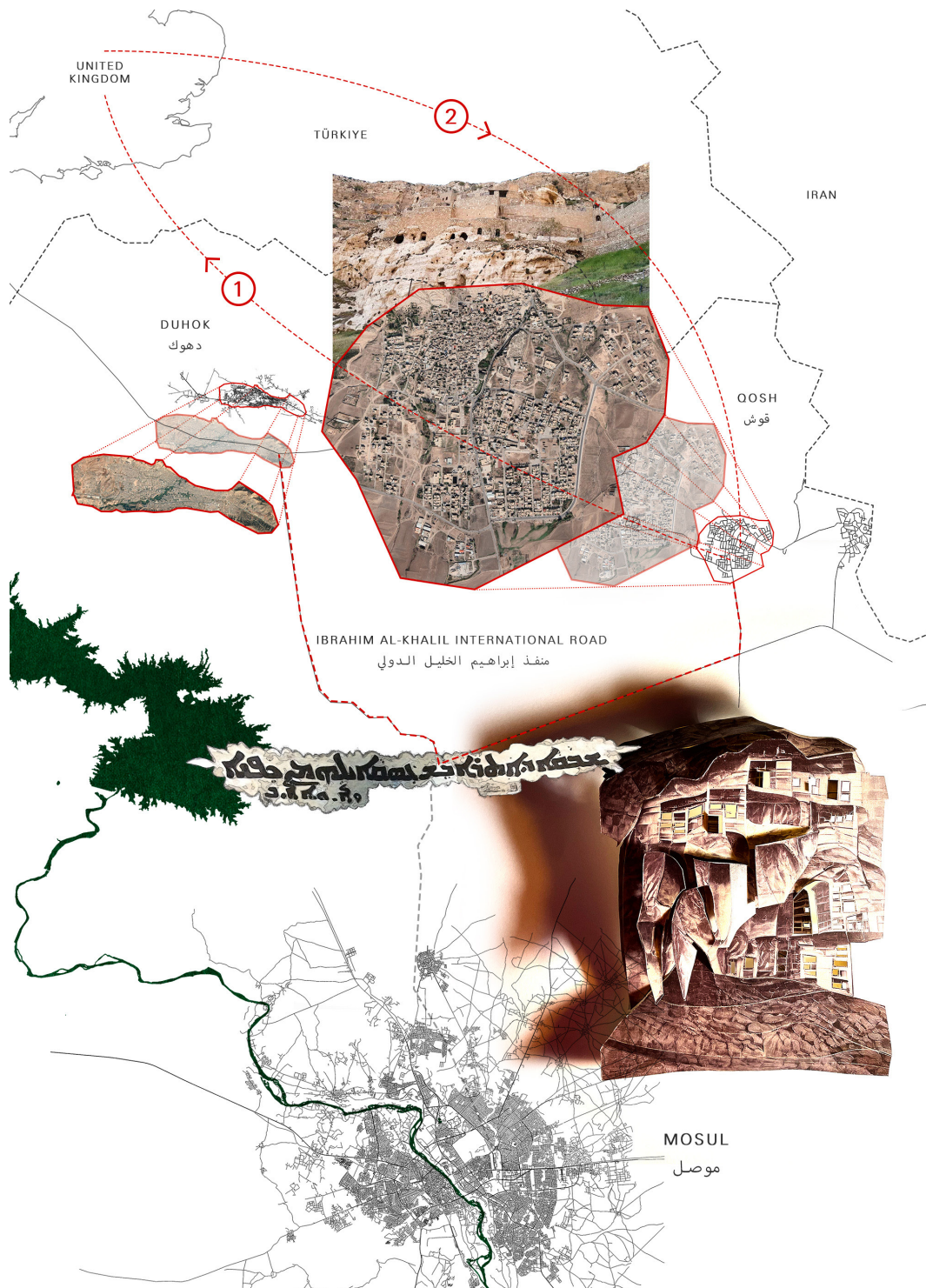


Figure 5: A map of an Assyrian Christian family from Alqosh featuring the historic monastery and the family's calligraphy tools, these were rescued as they were evacuating Alqosh escaping an imminent ISIS attack in 2014.

“The state of Alqosh is desperate now in terms of displacement. A large number of people have left the country for good. Fears are rising for the future existence of Christians in the north of Iraq. The more people leave, the weaker the community becomes, where we become prone to vulnerability and to further forced displacements due to ethnic and religious belongings. I fear for our identity getting lost in the politics of the region. I was really concerned to what would happen to our monastery [built in 640 CE] if it falls into ISIS hands. I fear for my childhood memories and the people we knew and the way of life we have been preserving for centuries.’ (Qasha, R. (2022), Interview with Sana Murrani)

Together, the project maps chronicle episodes of violence. They also spotlight the innovative ways in which people grapple with trauma and establish refuge spaces. They collectively form a living archive of spatiality, extending everyday spatiality's meaning, being steeped in past trauma, present conditions, and future imaginaries. Drawing from Sarah Dillon's term, these maps possess a 'palimpsestuous'<sup>51</sup> nature, offering more than just the original interview insights. Through various visual techniques, these compositions forage a wealth of design possibilities. Meanwhile, interview quotes complement these visuals (see quotes accompanying the maps), marrying meaning with the creative process behind this knowledge making practice.

Merging imagery and text, this method cultivates nuanced interpretations, bridging distinct Iraqi geographies, each with its socio-cultural and political importance, yet sharing the relentless pursuit of refuge, traversing past and present spaces and visions of the future. These instances highlight why creative mapping is an essential tool in navigating complex socio-spatial realities. Creative mapping within crises of refuge seeking and making, provides a contribution towards 'other ways of doing architecture', where spatial production and agency merge together in a proactive and a practical process.<sup>52</sup> Nishat Awan, Tatiana Schneider and Jeremy Till have previously highlighted that 'Spatial agency shows how negotiation, tenacity, imagination, participative spatial encounters, and one's own understanding as a morally responsible actor, might together lead to a different and more ethical understanding of spatial practice.'<sup>53</sup> This perspective situates spatial production and practice within the political realm, but not in the traditional sense of governance and structure. Instead, as Melanie Dodd suggests, it encapsulates the broader spectrum of negotiations and interactions crucial to public life and civil society.<sup>54</sup> The framing of creative mapping as a methodological challenge is situated within a feminist spatial practice that seeks an ontological recontextualising of practice, advocating for a creative approach driven by experimentation, performance, and ethical considerations.<sup>55</sup>

The challenge in mapping refuge in times of crisis lies in recognising and addressing the complexities of structural relations – causes, consequences, and actors involved. This process necessitates a reimagining of architectural and spatial practices, especially in crisis contexts, to accommodate the intricate interplay of temporality, incompleteness, and multiplicity of spatial production. Mapping refuge goes beyond the traditional focus on basic needs, adaptability, cost-effectiveness and practicality in humanitarian shelter. It demands a deeper engagement with the materiality of mapping refuge – its spatiality, performativity (as fundamentally social and political), and its challenges related to purpose, resistance and responsibility. Thus, the practices of creating refuge, home-making and homing are inherently political. They involve negotiations and performances that extend beyond mere inhabitation, embodying a richer, more complex understanding of spatial practices.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> Melanie Dodd (ed.), *Spatial Practices: Modes of Action and Engagement with the City* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019).

<sup>55</sup> Meike Schalk, Ramia Mazé, Thérèse Kristiansson and Maryam Fanni, 'Anticipating Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice', in Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson and Ramia Mazé (eds), *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms, Activisms, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections* (Baunach: AADR, 2017), pp. 13–24, p. 15.

These distinctive characteristics of spatial practices in response to trauma underscore the transformative potential of creative map-making. As part of this policy, it is recommended to incorporate these principles as guiding frameworks for future spatial interventions, particularly those responding to post-war trauma.

1. **Recognise Spatial Reclamations:** Acknowledge the importance of creatively and adaptively appropriating spaces and buildings in survival and place-making strategies.
2. **Understand Terrain Negotiations:** Appreciate how individuals negotiate both literal and metaphorical landscapes amidst continuous trauma, and ensure that such spatial practices are considered.
3. **Value the Alchemy of Materiality:** Celebrate the creative repurposing of objects as reflections of resilience and adaptation, and highlight the importance of such resourcefulness.
4. **Consider Routes of Mobility:** Be aware of the role of creative cartography under duress, and give thought to how safe passage and innovative wayfinding strategies could be supported during times of trauma.
5. **Respect Scale Transitions:** Acknowledge the skilful navigation of spatial experiences, from the intimate to the geopolitical, and consider the resilience of these adaptable spatial practices.
6. **Foster Memory-Driven Futures:** Understand that past experiences are the basis for reimagining worlds, and consider how the retelling and reinvention of memories can be nurtured, honouring the power of human creativity in overcoming adversity.

These six characteristics<sup>56</sup> offer a guide rather than a directive for policy-making, presenting a way to appreciate the complex dynamics of resilience, negotiation, agency, and power amidst trauma. In turn, this understanding could help shape more empathetic architectural responses to post-war scenarios.

## Policy Options

1. *Holistic Approach to Trauma:* Consider trauma as not only an individual, psychological experience but also as a social, communal, and spatial phenomenon. This perspective encompasses the physical environment, cultural norms, and community resilience factors. This approach broadens the scope for policy interventions, including urban design, social work, mental health services, and community development. Examples can be seen in the work of Nabeel Hamdi, one of the pioneers of participatory planning particularly through his seminal work in *Small Change* that pushed the limits of the practice of planning through the art of small changes in Global South cities and how informal knowledge produced contributed to notions of spatial justice in the Global North.<sup>57</sup>
2. *Spatial Justice:* Policies should address the underlying spatial inequality and justice issues that exacerbate trauma and impede recovery. This includes unequal access to housing, public services and safe spaces. Policies should aim to redistribute resources and opportunities more equitably. A more nuanced example can be seen in the rela-

<sup>56</sup> These principles appear in the author's forthcoming book, *Rupturing Architecture*.

<sup>57</sup> Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change: About the Art of Practice and the Limits of Planning in Cities* (London and Sterling: Earthscan, 2004).

tionship between gender and home formation and how these play significant roles in the making of Iraqi society. In *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation*, Zahra Ali adds that religion, political power, kinship, social class and divisions between urban and rural ways of living all contribute to the construction and fragmentation of the nation. Viewing these through the lenses of feminism and gender, Ali further adds that ‘being a woman is also being positioned within these groups and that ethnicity, sect, religion, class, location, kinship relations, and political and symbolic powers are all gendered in multiple and complex ways’.<sup>58</sup> Needless to say, spatial practices of dwelling, home and domesticity are not free from oppression, gendered power imbalance, abuse, and forced eviction and therefore an implementation of such policy requires a careful investment in changing mindsets towards spatial justice.

3. *Mapping as a Method*: Incorporate innovative and participatory mapping methods as a tool for understanding trauma and its spatial dimensions. These methods can provide valuable insights into the diverse experiences of trauma, highlight areas of need, and help design targeted interventions. This approach can also empower communities by valuing and incorporating their local knowledge and perspectives. Following the devastating 2020 explosion in Beirut’s port, which resulted in more than 200 fatalities and displaced over 300,000 individuals, professionals from various disciplines at the American University in Beirut’s School of Architecture and Design responded proactively. They established the Beirut Urban Lab, a collaborative platform dedicated to critical inquiry and engaged research in contemporary urbanisation. This initiative, involving architects, planners, critical cartographers and educators, works together with urban citizens to foster ‘just, inclusive, and viable cities,’ as articulated by the Beirut Urban Lab itself.<sup>59</sup> Iraq is yet to engage with participatory forms of development practices across the fields and disciplinary boundaries we are discussing here.
4. *Community Participation*: Involve communities in planning and decision-making processes, giving them agency in shaping their environment and recovery processes. This approach fosters ownership, resilience, and more sustainable outcomes. Ammar Azzouz’s recent study, *Domicide: Architecture, War and the Destruction of Home in Syria*, advocates for proactive measures in response to the complete obliteration of cities. He proposes initiatives that include fostering collaborations with native architects and researchers (in his case, Syrians), establishing platforms within educational and cultural contexts, and developing mentorship and co-leadership opportunities in research projects.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Zahra Ali, *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p 48. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108120517/type/book> (accessed 22 March 2022).

<sup>59</sup> Beirut Urban Lab, ‘About’, n.d. Available at: <https://beiruturbanlab.com/en/About> (accessed 3 April 2022).

<sup>60</sup> Ammar Azzouz, *Domicide: Architecture, War and the Destruction of Home in Syria* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2023).

## Policy Recommendations

While the four policy recommendations outlined below are individually familiar, their innovative combination into a cohesive, participatory and creative method of practice represents a novel approach especially in the context of Iraq.

1. *Develop Trauma-Informed Urban Design Guidelines*: Based on the understanding of trauma as a spatial phenomenon, develop urban design guidelines that promote healing and resilience. This could include creating safe, welcoming public spaces, ensuring access to green spaces, or designing housing that fosters community connections and provides a sense of security and belonging.
2. *Enact Spatial Justice Policies*: Advocate for and implement policies that address spatial inequalities. This may include investing in underserved neighbourhoods, ensuring affordable and adequate housing for all, improving access to quality public services and preventing forced displacement.
3. *Promote Participatory Mapping Initiatives*: Support initiatives that use participatory mapping methods to understand trauma, its spatial dimensions and its impact on communities. Ensure the findings from these initiatives are used to inform policy decisions and design interventions.
4. *Establish Community Participation Mechanisms*: Create mechanisms that facilitate community participation in planning and decision-making processes. This could include public meetings, participatory budgeting, or collaborative planning workshops. Build capacity within communities to engage effectively in these processes.



## Conclusion

This policy paper has elucidated the potential of creative mapping methods in addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges posed by violence, forced displacement, and housing shortages in Iraq over the past two decades. By critically engaging with these methods, we can create a richer understanding of the socio-spatial and temporal dynamics of the country, thus allowing for the development of more nuanced and effective policy responses. However, the implementation of creative mapping methods should not occur in isolation. It is vital to actively engage with Iraqi communities who have directly experienced the consequences of violence and displacement. These communities offer invaluable insights that, when incorporated, lead to more contextually relevant, sustainable, and effective policy solutions.

Moreover, recognising the complexity and multifaceted nature of the challenges Iraq faces, an interdisciplinary approach becomes a necessity rather than an option. It allows for a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected layers of trauma, memory and refuge, thus enabling more holistic responses to ongoing housing shortages and displacement issues. Lastly, we cannot underestimate the role of narrative and representation in shaping public and political debates, which in turn influence policy direction. Nuanced narratives that truly reflect the realities on the ground can stimulate more informed discussions, challenge prevailing assumptions, and ensure that the voices of affected Iraqis are heard. Tim Cole introduces the concept of ‘double distance’<sup>61</sup> where past spatial strategies are recounted within oral history interviews. This ‘double’ signifies the chronological gap (then and now) and geographical distance (there and here). It underlines the embodiment of spaces and places within oral narratives, transforming them into ‘oral (historical) geographies.’ These narratives reflect not just the linear progression of past events, but also their spatial dimensions. They demonstrate how people position themselves and others in relation to past events, revealing the layered meanings attached to these events. In summary, mapping as a method has the potential to visually and spatially dissect the complexity of past traumas, memories, and experiences, offering profound insights into the socio-spatial dynamics of displacement in Iraq.

Mapping as a method offers a transformative approach for policy development. This research methodology showcases how mapping, particularly deep mapping, can be a potent tool for unpacking complex social issues like trauma and displacement. The strength of mapping lies not only in its capacity to visually represent data but also in its ability to create a narrative and dialogue around a specific place, its history and the lived experiences of its inhabitants. In the context of policymaking, the deep mapping approach can facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. By layering various sources of data – oral histories, memories, indigenous narratives – policies can be informed by the multidimensional realities of the affected communities. This, in turn, can lead to more contextually appropriate, sensitive and effective policies. Collaborative map-making with the affected communities further enhances this methodology’s poten-

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<sup>61</sup> Cole, ‘(Re)Placing the Past’, p. 33.

tial. It ensures that the resulting maps – and, by extension, the resulting policies – are anchored in the lived experiences and perspectives of those most intimately affected by the issues being addressed.

Adopting this innovative, participatory, interdisciplinary, and representational approach can transform the manner in which we understand and address the trauma and challenges that have marked Iraq's recent history. In turn, this can lead to the development of more responsive, effective, and sustainable solutions for the people of Iraq. Moving forward, it is crucial to bear in mind that every policy intervention implemented in the region has the potential to either wound or heal. We must strive, through innovative and sensitive approaches, to ensure our efforts contribute to the healing process. In *Seeking Spatial Justice*, Edward Soja utilises 'seeing the search for social justice as a struggle over geography',<sup>62</sup> a concept he appropriates from Edward Said, in the context of urban planning. Building on Edward Soja and Edward Said's intricate 'struggle over territory',<sup>63</sup> we propose a continuous negotiation and rupture of struggling *with* and *within* geography (continual place-making). This approach aims to delve into critical spatial practices from the viewpoint of Iraqis. We urge policymakers to engage more directly with spatial justice concepts, to consider trauma in a non-linear timeline, and to approach forced displacement and refuge through a lens that emphasises lived experiences. We encourage a paradigm shift centring around the inclusion of those affected in policy development processes through creative mapping, thereby fostering a more intimate and nuanced understanding of space and place. We are hopeful that such a shift will lay the foundation for policy responses that are sensitive to the complex realities of those navigating disrupted landscapes and contribute to lasting, positive change in the region.

By putting spatial justice at the forefront, we emphasise that policy should address the spatial causes and consequences of social injustices and inequalities in Iraq. The integration of spatial justice into policy can lead to more equitable outcomes, especially in societies grappling with the aftermath of conflict and large-scale displacement. We believe that innovative methods like creative mapping can contribute to this endeavour, fostering more inclusive and just solutions for Iraq's future.

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<sup>62</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', *Critical Inquiry* 26/2 (2000): pp. 175–92, p. 182.



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Jack McGinn

**Cover Image**

'An abandoned house in the Old Town of Mosul. The door is still chain locked, like many others. The house was checked by demining teams. The check mark on the wall says: آمن the Arabic word for "safe". Demining teams are still active around the city. They still find explosives every now and then. We also still hear of post-WWII incidents, the legacy will live longer than we thought. The Mosul liberation battle is considered the 2nd longest urban battle in modern and contemporary history.'

Quote and photograph by Ali Al-Baroodi 2022

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