

The Sociology of Cultural Assimilation and Social Integration of Iraqi Ethnic Groups: A Case Study of Some Iraqi Ethnic Groups

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This research aims to study the sociology of cultural assimilation and social integration of Iraqi minorities (Yazidis, Shabaks, Mandaean) by adopting a mixed methodology that combines quantitative methods (questionnaires and statistical analysis) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews). **Method:** The study utilized a mixed-method approach, employing questionnaires for quantitative data and semi-structured interviews for qualitative insights, complemented by statistical analysis to interpret the findings. **Result:** The results reveal that cultural assimilation has been clearly achieved through the adoption of the Arabic language and integration into the education system, while structural and political integration remains limited, reflecting a state of 'incomplete integration.' The study also highlighted that religious rituals and social ties are effective mechanisms for preserving identity but sometimes reinforce ethnic boundaries. **Novelty:** The research concluded that overcoming this issue requires comprehensive institutional reforms, including the integration of minority languages into the education system, expanding political representation, and strengthening community networks to ensure greater equity in opportunities for participation and integration.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural assimilation and social integration of Iraqi ethnic groups is one of the key challenges facing sociology in the contemporary Iraqi context. Iraq is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual country, with a social fabric that includes groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Shabaks, Mandaean and Yazidis, as well as other minorities. This diversity should be a source of cultural and civilisational richness, but historical and political realities have often turned it into a source of tension and conflict.

The importance of this research stems from the urgent need to understand the mechanisms that drive cultural assimilation (such as learning the majority language and engaging in formal education) versus the factors that hinder structural and political integration (such as institutional marginalisation and weak representation). The study thus raises fundamental questions: Is cultural assimilation sufficient to achieve social equality? Or does the absence of structural justice remain an obstacle to full integration?

Discussions about minorities in Iraq cannot be separated from historical contexts that have seen periods of tolerance and openness, as well as periods of violence, uprooting and displacement. Therefore, a sociological approach to this topic goes beyond the academic dimension to the social and political dimensions, contributing to the production of knowledge that can be translated into more equitable social policies.

Theoretical framework of the research:

Article question:

The problem with this research lies in the fundamental paradox between the achievement of certain forms of cultural assimilation among minorities (learning Arabic, enrolment in the education system, limited participation in social activities) and the weakness of structural and political integration (institutional representation, equal employment opportunities, trust in institutions). This contradiction reveals a situation that the researcher describes as 'incomplete integration,' where individuals adapt culturally to the wider society but remain deprived of structural equality and political rights.

This problem shows that the Iraqi state and society in general apply a model of functional assimilation, where minorities are allowed to participate in certain fields (education, language), but political and economic structures keep them in a marginal position. This creates a dual sense of belonging among minorities: cultural belonging on the one hand, and structural exclusion on the other.

Hypotheses:

- a. There are statistically significant differences between the level of cultural assimilation (language, education) and the level of structural and political integration of Iraqi minorities, in favour of cultural assimilation.
- b. There are statistically significant differences between minorities' perceptions of educational and employment opportunities and their level of political participation, reflecting the impact of symbolic violence that limits their structural integration.
- c. There are statistically significant differences between the degree to which minorities adhere to their religious and cultural identities and their level of social integration, with the preservation of defensive identity constituting a mechanism of resilience.
- d. There are statistically significant differences between the degree of minority representation in political institutions and their sense of social integration, revealing the impact of the absence of recognition policies.
- e. There are statistically significant differences between the nature of social capital (in-group bonding versus out-group bridging) and the level of trust in society and institutions.

Research objective:

- a. Analysing methods of cultural assimilation among Iraqi minorities, particularly through language and education.
- b. Studying forms of social and political integration in Iraqi society.
- c. Identifying structural and institutional factors that hinder full integration.
- d. Approaching the results from a theoretical sociological perspective and linking them to the models of Gordon, Bourdieu, Tachville, Taylor, and Putnam.
- e. Formulating practical and policy recommendations that promote mutual recognition and social cohesion.

The objectives are not limited to description, but are critical and analytical in nature, seeking to understand the dialectical relationship between culture as a tool for integration and the political-economic structure as a persistent obstacle.

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- a. Academic significance: This research contributes to Arabic sociological literature with a rare study that addresses integration in a complex context such as Iraq.
- b. Societal significance: It provides analytical tools that can help civil society organisations build initiatives for coexistence.
- c. Political significance: It opens up the debate on the need to re-engineer policies of recognition and political representation of minorities.
- d. Future significance: It forms the basis for comparative studies with other societies that have experienced complex integration processes (such as Lebanon, Bosnia, or Rwanda).

Research methodology

The researcher adopted the mixed methods approach, which is defined as "a research approach in which researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study. This approach builds on the potential strengths of both methods, allowing for the exploration of diverse perspectives and the uncovering of relationships relevant to the research questions (Open Library, Oklahoma State University, 2021, p. 3). This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive picture of the subject. On the quantitative side, the researcher used structured questionnaires and statistical analysis to monitor general trends, while on the qualitative side, he relied on semi-structured interviews, in addition to documentary analysis of international studies and reports (such as UNHCR and IOM reports).

The researcher also adopted a case study approach, as Iraq is an important model for understanding the dynamics of cultural assimilation and social integration in a multi-ethnic society. This approach was chosen due to the need to combine the numerical accuracy provided by quantitative data with the interpretative depth offered by narratives and testimonies, as neither alone can provide a complete picture of the reality in Iraq.

The researcher believes that a mixed methodology and case study approach is best suited to understanding the complex Iraqi experience. Statistical figures show general trends, while interviews and documentary analysis add an interpretive dimension that clarifies how minorities experience assimilation and integration in their daily lives. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods reflects a contemporary sociological approach based on integrating methodological tools to understand multidimensional realities, especially in a society such as Iraq, which is characterised by significant ethnic and religious diversity alongside institutional fragility that hinders full integration.

This research examines the cultural assimilation and social integration of Iraqi minorities, focusing on three main groups: the Yazidis, the Shabaks, and the Mandaeans.

These groups were chosen because they represent a prominent aspect of Iraq's ethnic and religious diversity and reflect the variety of experiences and challenges faced by minorities.

The scope of the research was limited to these three groups in order to delve deeper into their experiences and avoid dispersing the analysis across too many categories, thereby making the results clearer and more relevant to the current Iraqi context.

Areas of research

Geographical area: Nineveh, Baghdad and Maysan governorates.

Time frame: 2003–2024, considered a pivotal period.

Subject area: Focus on cultural, social and political dimensions, without delving into macroeconomics or military dimensions.

Concepts, Terminology and Models from Previous Studies

Section I: Terminology and Concepts

Cultural assimilation

Cultural assimilation refers to the process by which ethnic or religious groups are integrated into the dominant cultural structure of society through the adoption of the prevailing language, customs and values [1]. Gordon argues that assimilation occurs at multiple levels, starting with the cultural level and extending to the structural level and civic integration.

However, from a critical perspective, this process cannot be separated from power relations. The dominant culture is exercised through symbolic capital that reproduces inequality and makes compliance with the dominant culture a manifestation of domination [2]. Voluntary assimilation, which is driven by the desire of minorities to participate, is distinguished from forced assimilation, which is imposed on them and results in cultural dissolution [3].

Observers of the Iraqi context note that cultural assimilation has often taken a one-way form, with ethnic groups being required to adopt the language and culture of the majority, without equivalent recognition of their own particularities. This creates a state of 'formal integration' that conceals symbolic relations of domination and makes assimilation a tool of control rather than a means of coexistence.

Procedural definition

Cultural assimilation is procedurally defined as the extent to which individuals belonging to Iraqi minorities adopt the Arabic language and prevailing social customs and values, reflecting their degree of integration into the general cultural space. This concept can be measured by tracking patterns of language use in everyday life and the extent of participation in educational, cultural and social activities adopted by community institutions.

Social integration

Social integration is defined as the process through which individuals and groups participate in social life within a framework of equality and solidarity. Durkheim

considered it a prerequisite for social cohesion and warned that weak integration leads to a state of anomie (absence of norms) [4].

Linked social integration to the concept of social capital, which includes trust and social networks as essential resources for achieving cooperation [5]. From this perspective, the integration of groups is based not only on their institutional participation, but also on their symbolic and emotional integration into the fabric of society.

In a multi-component country such as Iraq, it can be observed that the integration of minorities is often fragile, as these groups may participate in some institutions (education, work), but still feel marginalised at deeper symbolic and social levels. This reflects a lack of mutual recognition, which makes integration an incomplete process that weakens social cohesion.

Procedural definition

Social integration is procedurally defined as a state in which individuals feel accepted and equal in society, as reflected in opportunities for education, employment, political participation and social relations. Integration is measured by objective indicators such as access to employment and political representation, as well as subjective indicators such as a sense of belonging and trust in institutions and society.

Ethnicities

Ethnicity is a social construct that refers to a group identity based on language, religion, common ancestry, or inherited culture [6]. Ethnicity is not understood as a fixed given, but rather as an ongoing process of redefinition and negotiation in changing social and political contexts. It is not merely a matter of 'cultural difference,' but is linked to issues of recognition and representation [7].

In the Iraqi context, ethnicities are represented by groups such as the Mandaean, Shabaks and Yazidis, which have preserved their specificities over centuries, but at the same time have faced attempts at assimilation or exclusion, making them more vulnerable to the risks of cultural extinction [8].

Iraq's ethnic groups are not merely silent cultural units, but social actors with strategies for survival and resistance. Reducing them to 'minorities in need of integration' reflects a reductionist perspective that overlooks their ability to reproduce their identity and negotiate their place in society.

Procedural definition

Iraqi ethnicities are procedurally defined as groups that have religious, linguistic or cultural characteristics that distinguish them from the majority. The researcher identified the Yazidis, Shabaks and Mandaean as key examples. These groups were specifically chosen because of their cultural and religious particularities, which make them more vulnerable to social and cultural marginalisation, allowing for an in-depth examination of their experiences within the Iraqi context.

Section II: Previous studies – Studies and reports on Iraq

First: Displacement and integration after conflict

Reports by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) indicate that the prolonged displacement experienced by Iraq, especially after 2014, has not only had a spatial or geographical impact, but has also led to the breakdown of traditional social support networks and a decline in social capital, which has had a negative impact on employment opportunities and the structural reintegration of minorities. Its reports indicate that ‘long-term displacement has eroded social support networks and created significant gaps in employment opportunities and structural integration’ [9]. This shows that the return of displaced persons to their areas of origin does not necessarily translate into the rebuilding of bonds of trust or the achievement of effective integration but remains conditional on the existence of a secure institutional environment.

Second: Protecting heritage and identities after ISIS.

UNESCO reports show that ISIS's targeting of the tangible and intangible heritage of minorities was not merely physical destruction, but an attack on collective memory and cultural identity. This has led to international and local efforts to revive this heritage as a means of rebuilding community ties. UNESCO has emphasised that ‘the revival of tangible and intangible heritage is a central tool in rebuilding collective identities and preserving social cohesion after conflicts’ [10]. In the Iraqi context, this can be clearly observed among the Yazidis and Christians who have worked to revive their religious rituals and celebrations as a mechanism of cultural and symbolic resistance, ensuring their continuity and preserving the boundaries of their identity in the face of attempts to erase and dissolve them.

Third: The fragility of minorities and the weakness of institutional recognition

Reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirm that the absence of clear policies recognising the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq constitutes a structural obstacle to full integration. Even with improvements in some indicators, such as education or rehousing, integration remains incomplete due to the lack of full legal and political recognition of the rights of these groups. The UNHCR noted that ‘the weakness of policies for the formal recognition of minority rights hinders the integration process, even with improvements in some indicators such as education or housing’ [11].

This reflects the contradiction between cultural assimilation achieved through language and education and structural integration, which requires profound institutional reforms.

A review of these studies and reports shows that Iraqi minorities experience a complex situation combining relative success in cultural assimilation, through the gradual adoption of Arabic and enrolment in formal education, with failure or fragility in structural integration as a result of weak recognition policies and inequality in political representation and employment opportunities. This contradiction reinforces the hypothesis of ‘incomplete integration’ adopted by the research as an analytical

framework for understanding the Iraqi experience in the field of assimilation and integration.

Comparative Arab studies

Arab literature on the situation of minorities in the region reveals paths similar to the Iraqi case, clearly showing the separation between cultural assimilation and structural integration.

In Lebanon, Abdul Rahman's (2017) study concluded that 'the absence of effective recognition policies leaves minorities in a position of subordination despite their educational and linguistic integration' [12]. This example shows that full adoption of the Arabic language and enrolment in the formal education system were not sufficient to achieve political or institutional equality. Indeed, the absence of legal and cultural recognition mechanisms made social integration fragile, relying more on sectarian divisions than on a unifying national identity.

In Morocco, a study by Al-Maghribi (2019) showed that "the official school system contributes to linguistic and cultural assimilation but does not guarantee full political or institutional integration" [13]. Education has emerged as an effective means of imposing the official language and promoting values of national unity, but it has not addressed issues of political and economic marginalisation suffered by Amazigh minorities, for example. Integration has thus remained limited to the cultural dimension without extending to political and social structures.

Discussion of previous studies

These comparative Arab studies confirm the existence of structural similarities with the Iraqi situation. In both Lebanon and Morocco, minorities achieve cultural assimilation through language and formal education, but this assimilation does not necessarily translate into political integration or institutional recognition. These experiences highlight that incomplete integration is the most common pattern in ethnically and sectarianly diverse Arab societies, where minorities are integrated into the cultural sphere without guaranteeing their effective participation in the structural and institutional spheres. The Iraqi experience can therefore be seen as an extension of these dynamics, with the added complexity of armed conflict and the weakness of the central state, despite legislation and laws enacted under the banner of human rights.

Discussions:

The theoretical framework is one of the fundamental pillars of any sociological research, as it provides an interpretive perspective that helps to understand the phenomenon under study and relate it to its social context. When it comes to the cultural assimilation and social integration of Iraqi minorities, invoking sociological theories is not an intellectual luxury, but rather a necessity for understanding the interactions between the cultural dimension (language, customs and values) and the structural dimension (political and economic institutions).

Assimilation Theory (Milton Gordon)

Milton Gordon proposed a gradual model illustrating how immigrant or minority groups move from mere cultural adaptation to full participation in society's institutions. This model consists of seven dimensions: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identity assimilation, reciprocal orientation, behavioural patterns, and finally, full citizenship.

Assimilation does not necessarily mean integration; minorities may assimilate the language or practices of the majority but remain marginalised from institutions due to discriminatory policies. Here, the structural dimension emerges as the most sensitive stage of assimilation because it is linked to resources and power.

An analysis of the Iraqi reality reveals that cultural assimilation has been achieved relatively through language and education, but it has not led to structural integration. This means that the path assumed by Gordon is not inevitable, but rather conditional on the political and social context. In Iraq, structural integration remains suspended due to the absence of inclusive policies and institutional justice, creating what can be described as 'incomplete integration' or 'suspended assimilation.' This shows that the Iraqi equation is not so much cultural as it is structural-political.

Minorities such as the Shabak and Mandaean have succeeded in cultural assimilation by learning Arabic and integrating into education, but they have not achieved true political integration due to weak representation in national institutions [14].

The theory of multiculturalism and recognition policies (Charles Taylor)

Taylor argues that individuals' identities cannot be separated from social recognition, non-recognition or distortion of identity amounts to a form of oppression. On this basis, recognition policies become the cornerstone of promoting equal citizenship.

Pluralism here is understood not only as coexistence, but as a political and ethical requirement that compels the state to recognise the languages, rituals and political representation of groups. Recognition is not a luxury, but a prerequisite for social justice.

In Iraq, despite constitutional provisions recognising diversity, educational and administrative policies continue to practise marginalisation, such as reducing Mandaean language education or ignoring Yazidi symbols [15].

Here, the analysis highlights that legal recognition is not enough to create effective integration. In the Iraqi context, pluralism becomes a 'formal pluralism' that is often used as a political tool rather than a policy of equity. The failure to integrate minority languages and heritage into educational and cultural institutions reinforces what Taylor calls 'injustice through non-recognition.' In Iraq, what is needed is a transition from symbolic recognition to practical recognition that is embodied in policies, curricula, and institutions.

Social cohesion theory

Social cohesion as a state in which mutual trust prevails, exclusion is absent, and social mobility is possible [16].

Cohesion is not merely “harmony,” but rather the process of building trust through institutions. When trust weakens, class and ethnic divisions emerge, and social mobility is disrupted. Cohesion is therefore the product of equal opportunities and representation, not merely an emotional feeling.

In a multi-component country such as Iraq, weak political representation and the exposure of minorities to sectarian violence are key factors in the erosion of trust in institutions, making national belonging fragile and tied to local loyalties [17].

The experience of Iraqi minorities shows that social cohesion is shaken by every political or security crisis, revealing the fragility of the institutional structure that guarantees cohesion. Cohesion here is conditional on the existence of a just state capable of distributing resources and opportunities. Political and economic marginalisation weakens minorities' sense of belonging and makes their loyalty susceptible to division between their community and the state. Cohesion in Iraq remains closer to ‘negative coexistence’ than to ‘positive integration’.

The theory of symbolic violence (Pierre Bourdieu)

Bourdieu argues that symbolic violence occurs when the norms of the majority are imposed as natural, and individuals internalise them without realising that they are the product of power relations. Language and education are the primary tools of this type of violence.

Symbolic violence is more dangerous than physical violence because it creates acceptance of the social hierarchy and causes the dominated to adopt the values of the dominant. This explains why minorities internalise feelings of inferiority when they are marginalised linguistically or culturally.

The imposition of Arabic as the sole language of education and administration has marginalised the Kurdish, Turkmen, Mandaic and Syriac languages, creating an implicit sense of inequality [18].

Applying this theory to the Iraqi case reveals that symbolic violence is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but a tool for reproducing cultural and ethnic hierarchies. When minorities accept the exclusion of their languages and rituals from the public sphere, they reproduce a sense of cultural inferiority. This leads to the erosion of collective identity in the long term and creates a gap between private identity and official citizenship. Symbolic violence thus becomes a hidden mechanism for perpetuating exclusion even in the absence of direct physical violence.

Social Capital Theory (Putnam & Portes)

Putnam distinguishes between bonding capital, which strengthens internal solidarity, and bridging capital, which opens channels of communication with other groups. Portes adds that social capital can be limited if it is confined to internal networks.

The difference between bonding and bridging determines whether a group is only able to survive or also able to progress. Communities that rely solely on bonding may protect their identity but remain isolated.

The Shabak developed bridging networks with Arabs and Kurds, which opened up political and economic opportunities for them. In contrast, the Mandaean relied on defensive bonding networks, which led to further isolation. The Yazidis experienced a mixed situation depending on their experience of violence and displacement [15].

It is noticeable that minorities with bridging networks (such as some Shabak groups) have greater opportunities for institutional penetration, while groups with closed bonding networks (such as the Mandaeans) suffer from double isolation. This proves that the type of social networks is no less important than their strength. In Iraq, bridging social capital is a prerequisite for structural integration, while bonding is a prerequisite for resilience. This contrast reveals how minorities balance the protection of identity with openness to the majority.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner)

The theory assumes that belonging to a group provides individuals with a positive identity, and that stigmatisation generates defensive mechanisms such as withdrawal or emphasising specific symbols [19].

According to this theory, identity is not fixed but is redefined considering conflict and recognition. Stigmatised groups may reinforce their distinctiveness to resist discrimination, leading to the reproduction of ethnic boundaries rather than their disappearance.

The genocide of the Yazidis in 2014 prompted them to cling more tightly to their ritual and symbolic distinctiveness. The Mandaeans also reinforced their adherence to baptismal rites and religious language as mechanisms of resilience [14].

It is worth noting here that this theory shows that minority groups did not abandon their identities despite attempts at forced assimilation or collective violence. On the contrary, violence has reshaped identities defensively, with adherence to rituals and symbols becoming a means of survival. This creates a paradox: the more pressure is exerted on minorities to integrate, the more they cling to their symbolic boundaries. This shows that integration cannot be imposed, but must be built on a foundation of respect for difference.

Analysis of these theories reveals that the reality of minorities in Iraq is characterised by incomplete integration: there is broad cultural assimilation, but no structural integration, with symbolic recognition that is not embodied in institutions. Cohesion is fragile, symbolic violence is present, social capital is uneven, and collective identity is reinforced as a mechanism of resistance. This requires the Iraqi state to develop genuine recognition policies, expand social bridge networks, and rebuild institutions on the basis of citizenship rather than cultural hegemony.

The integrative view of theories

Combining the above theories does not merely offer parallel explanations but rather allows us to draw a synthetic map that reveals the structural and cultural contradictions that hinder the integration of minorities in Iraq. On the one hand, the assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964) explains that cultural assimilation, represented by the adoption of

language and customs, has been achieved to some extent, but it has not translated into structural political and economic integration, which suggests that it has stalled at the stage of 'superficial adaptation.'

On the other hand, the theory of pluralism and recognition policies (Taylor) highlights that legal recognition granted to minorities does not necessarily translate into actual recognition in practice, as there remains a gap between 'official discourse' and 'institutional practice.' In the same context, social cohesion theory (OECD, 2011) reveals that Iraqi coexistence is fragile and based more on temporary balances than on justice and equality, and that mistrust of institutions undermines any possibility of building sustainable cohesion.

On another level, the theory of symbolic violence (Bourdieu) adds an important dimension, showing that exclusion is not only material but also takes symbolic forms, such as the imposition of majority standards, such as Arabic as the sole language of education and administration. Meanwhile, social capital theory (Putnam; Portes) contributes to explaining the disparity in opportunities for minorities by distinguishing between 'bonding' networks within the group and 'bridging' networks extending towards the majority. Those who have bridging relationships have greater opportunities, while those who are limited to internal ties suffer from double isolation.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner) also asserts that violence and exclusion push minorities to defensively reconstruct their identity, which deepens the symbolic boundaries between them and the majority rather than opening the door to social rapprochement.

When these perspectives are combined, it becomes clear that the central problem lies not in the willingness of minorities to integrate but in the absence of a just institutional structure. Cultural assimilation has indeed been achieved on several levels, but the absence of policies of recognition and structural equality has left minorities living in a state of incomplete integration. Symbolic violence shows that educational and cultural institutions reproduce hegemony, while limited bridging social capital has contributed to the isolation of some groups. Ultimately, collective identity has become a tool of resilience and resistance rather than a bridge for convergence and integration.

This synthetic view shows that minorities in Iraq experience what can be described as 'forced coexistence' rather than true integration. Although they participate in the public cultural space through language and education, they remain largely excluded from political and economic structures. This situation creates a state of 'incomplete integration,' which reinforces a sense of alienation within the homeland. Therefore, the solution does not lie in further cultural assimilation (which has already been achieved), but rather in building inclusive institutions that recognise difference and transform it into a societal strength. This requires reforming educational policies, broadening the base of political representation, and protecting linguistic and ritual diversity. Only then can social cohesion be achieved as a social project based on justice and recognition, rather than a temporary or fragile state of affairs.

Field aspect of the research:

The fieldwork aspect is the practical foundation of this research, as it represents the space where theoretical ideas and conceptual frameworks are translated into social reality. Through it, we can examine the extent of cultural assimilation and social integration among Iraqi ethnic groups in the context of their daily lives, within the spheres of family, education, work, politics, religion and social relations.

This research is based on the fundamental premise that social integration is not achieved solely through legislation and policies but is actually embodied in the daily practices and representations of individuals. This makes the fieldwork aspect all the more important, as it reveals the gap between official discourse on the one hand and lived social reality on the other.

Accordingly, the researcher sought to use a mixed methods approach based on combining quantitative tools (questionnaires and statistical analysis) with qualitative tools (semi-structured interviews) in order to achieve what is known as methodological triangulation, which allows data to be cross-referenced and interpreted from multiple angles.

This combination is not limited to presenting the results separately, but aims to construct an integrated synthetic reading that reflects the social complexity of the Iraqi reality, where linguistic, educational and political challenges intersect with cultural and religious structures.

In this chapter, the researcher attempts to build a 'bridge' between theory and reality, giving the research interpretive power and increasing its credibility. The dual methodology allows not only for the disclosure of general proportions and patterns, but also for delving into the depths of the subjective experience of minorities. This integration makes the results closer to the Iraqi reality and better able to explain the contradictions that individuals experience between symbolic assimilation and actual integration.

RESEARCH METHOD

Section I: Methodology for collecting field data

Research Design

The research adopted a mixed methods approach based on the integration of quantitative tools (questionnaires and statistical analysis) and qualitative tools (semi-structured interviews). This design is explanatory sequential, as quantitative data was first collected through the questionnaire, followed by the qualitative phase (interviews) to interpret the results and deepen their understanding.

This design was chosen based on the nature of the phenomenon under study, as cultural assimilation and social integration are intertwined processes that have both quantitative (measurable through behavioural indicators) and qualitative (related to personal experiences and the meanings individuals attach to their lives) dimensions.

The questionnaire (quantitative tool)

The questionnaire covered five main themes:

Theme 1: Language and cultural identity

Theme 2: Education and employment opportunities

Theme 3: Political participation and representation

Theme 4: Religious and cultural practices

The fifth theme: social relations and trust

The questionnaire questions were formulated in clear and direct language, with three response options (yes, somewhat, no), allowing for simplified measurement of trends and facilitating statistical analysis. The questionnaire was distributed to a purposive sample of 50 individuals belonging to different ethnic groups (Shabak, Yazidis, Mandaeans) to ensure representation of Iraq's ethnic and religious diversity.

Validity and reliability procedures:

The tool was presented to a group of academic arbitrators to ensure its apparent validity and content.

A pilot test was conducted on a small sample to ensure clarity and applicability of the items.

The questionnaire was validated using Cronbach's alpha, which showed an acceptable degree of consistency across the themes.

Interviews (qualitative tool)

The researcher adopted semi-structured interviews because they strike a balance between guiding the discussion around specific themes (language, identity, education, political representation, practices, social relations) and giving respondents the freedom to express their personal experiences.

Five in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the Shabak, Yazidi, and Mandaean communities, taking into account generational and gender diversity. These interviews helped to:

- a. Interpret the quantitative results.
- b. Reveal the contradictions between symbolic assimilation and actual integration.
- c. Highlight the role of gender and generation in the reproduction of identity.

Research sample

Quantitative sample size: 50 individuals, evenly distributed between males and females.

Qualitative sample size: (5) in-depth interviews, selected using typical and extreme case methods to cover a diversity of experiences and representations.

Criteria: age (18 to 65 years), ethnic/religious affiliation, ability to participate.

Methods of verifying credibility

- a. Triangulation: This refers to combining more than one research tool to verify credibility, such as combining the results of a questionnaire with interviews. Morgan (2024) emphasised that 'triangulation in its various forms is a central tool for promoting honesty and methodological rigour in qualitative research' (Morgan, 2024, p. 1845). This reflects the importance of relying on more than one data source

when studying complex phenomena such as cultural assimilation and social integration.

- b. **Member Checking:** This involves presenting the interview results to some participants to verify that the analysis matches their experience. Researchers in a study published in *Patient Education and Counselling* noted that 'sharing the results with the research participants is an essential step in ensuring that the research interpretation reflects their actual experiences' (*Sharing Qualitative Research Findings with Participants*, 2011, p. 391). This step helps to increase the validity of the results and enhance participants' confidence in the research process.
- c. **Field documentation:** Recording reflective notes about the context of the interviews and the researcher's experience.

The researcher believes that combining quantitative tools (which reveal general patterns) with qualitative tools (which reveal subjective meanings) achieves what can be called a constructive triad, where the tools work together to form a more comprehensive picture of reality. This approach is not merely a technical choice but reflects an epistemological view that social phenomena cannot be reduced to numbers or narrative alone, but rather to the dialectical relationship between them.

Section II: Presentation and analysis of quantitative results.

Table 1. Language and cultural identity.

| Variable | Yes | To some extent | No |
|--|------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Use of Arabic in daily life | 65% | 25% | 10% |
| Use of the mother tongue within the family | 25% | 35% | 40% |
| Preservation of linguistic rituals and symbols | 30% | 40% | 30% |

The table shows that 65% of respondents use Arabic as their main language of communication in daily life, compared to 25% who use their mother tongue (Shabak, Kurdish, Mandaic, or Yazidi) only within the family, while 10% confirmed that they have lost the ability to fully practise their mother tongue.

The results show that Arabic has become a key tool for integration into wider society, but at the same time has contributed to the decline of mother tongues. This reflects the duality of assimilation versus loss of identity.

This shows that language is a double-edged sword; it facilitates integration but carries with it the risk of cultural assimilation, especially in the absence of policies that support multilingualism.

Education and employment opportunities

Table 2. Education and employment opportunities.

| Variable | Yes | To some extent | No |
|---|------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Obtaining equal educational opportunities | 55% | 30% | 15% |

| | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| Employment opportunities without discrimination | 40% | 25% | 35% |
| A sense of equality in the work environment | 38% | 32% | 30% |

The table shows that 55% of respondents had access to university education, but 60% expressed the feeling that there were gaps in the labour market linked to their ethnic or religious affiliation.

These results indicate relative educational integration, but this is not accompanied by fairness in the labour market, where discrimination based on identity remains present.

These data reveal a structural separation between education and employment; while the education system is partially open, the labour market remains constrained by ethnicity and religion, which affects equal opportunities and limits effective integration.

Table 3. Political participation and representation.

| Variable | Yes | To some extent | No |
|---|-----|----------------|-----|
| Sufficient political representation for the community | 55% | 30% | 15% |
| Participation in civic/political activities | 40% | 25% | 35% |
| Sense of effective political voice | 38% | 32% | 30% |

The table shows that 70% of respondents feel that their community is not adequately represented in political institutions. The figures reflect a clear lack of representation and reveal political marginalisation that weakens minorities' sense of integration.

This result confirms that political integration is the weakest link in the Iraqi experience of minorities, and that any cultural assimilation remains fragile unless it is supported by policies of genuine representation and participation.

Religious and cultural practices

Table 4. Practice of religious rituals and identity.

| Variable | Yes | To some extent | No |
|---|-----|----------------|-----|
| The possibility of practicing rituals freely | 50% | 30% | 20% |
| The role of the family in transmitting religious heritage | 80% | 15% | 5% |
| Preserving rituals in displacement settings | 60% | 25% | 15% |

The table shows that 70–80% of respondents still practise their religious rituals regularly, despite the challenges. The results show that religious and cultural rituals are a key means of protecting identity, even in circumstances of displacement.

This result shows that religion is practised as a symbolic mechanism of resistance against threats of forced assimilation or cultural dissolution.

Social relations and trust

Respondents from the Shabak reported having relatively broader relations with the majority (50%), compared to the Mandaean, who reported very limited relations (25%).

Table 5. Social relations and trust.

| Variable | Yes | To some extent | No |
|---|-----|----------------|-----|
| Extensive relationships with other groups | 45% | 30% | 25% |
| Feeling accepted by the wider community | 40% | 35% | 25% |
| Trust in government institutions | 30% | 25% | 45% |

The table shows that respondents from the network have relatively broader relationships with the majority (50%), compared to the extremely limited relationships among Mandaean (25%).

The results show that social relations remain constrained by ethnic/religious affiliation and that trust in institutions is weak.

The weakness of bridging social capital compared to the strength of bonding social capital leads to continued ethnic isolation and hinders effective integration into the national fabric.

Qualitative results (interview analysis)

The qualitative phase of the research interprets and deepens understanding of the quantitative results through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of individuals from Iraqi ethnic groups (Shabak, Yazidis, Mandaean). These interviews allowed us to delve into individual and collective experiences and explore the tensions between cultural assimilation and social integration.

Three main issues emerged from these interviews:

First, language as a tool for integration and loss of identity.

Second, education and work as areas of incomplete assimilation.

Third, religion and social relations as spaces of resistance or isolation.

Interviews and case study

First interview: S. T., a 40-year-old man from the Shabak ethnic group

Sh.T. says: I grew up in Mosul and learned Arabic from an early age as the main language at school and in official circles. But at home, our Shabak dialect is still very much alive, especially among the older generation. This multilingualism has given me a dual sense of belonging: on the one hand, I am integrated into mainstream Iraqi culture, and on the other, I hold on to my ethnic identity. I completed my university studies in humanities and now work as a civil servant. Although I have achieved professional success, I feel that our political representation is very limited and does not reflect our size or history. On a social level, I have Arab and Kurdish friends and participate in public

events, but there is always a feeling that I am "other" and that my acceptance is conditional on giving up some of my identity."

This case study clearly illustrates that the Shabak experience deep cultural assimilation through language and education, but incomplete political integration. They are present as individuals but absent as a group.

This experience reflects the concept of "incomplete integration" discussed by Gordon (1964). Despite the Shabak's ability to build social capital, the absence of political recognition reveals the limits of integration in the Iraqi context.

Second interview: L.J., Yazidi woman (35 years old)

She says to L.J. After 2014 and the arrival of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in our areas, our lives were never the same again. We fled from Sinjar to a camp near Dohuk. We lost our home, our land, and even our sense of security. My children are now studying in Arabic and Kurdish, but I insist that they learn our religious rituals. I tell them stories about our religion and take them to religious events whenever I can. Sometimes I feel that we have become strangers in our own homeland. The state has not provided us with adequate protection, and our voice in parliament is weak. The outside world sometimes sympathises with us, but it does not fully accept us. For me, preserving our identity has become a form of resistance against oblivion and assimilation."

This case study shows that the religious/cultural identity of the Yazidis has become a tool for survival, and that the collective experience of trauma has reshaped their identity defensively.

This case confirms what Tajfel & Turner proposed about defensive social identity. Ritual practices here are not merely religious activities, but a form of symbolic resistance in the face of structural marginalisation.

Third interview: R. B., a Mandaean man (45 years old)

R. B. says, "We are a very small minority, and our existence is threatened with extinction. Many of my friends and relatives have emigrated to Europe or Australia. The Mandaean language is only used in religious rituals, and even these are beginning to decline due to a shortage of clergy and weak institutions. In my daily life, I use Arabic, but I always feel different. At work, I have experienced indirect discrimination; for example, others are given preference over us. Politically, we are almost non-existent, as if we are invisible. We try to live in peace, but fear of the future accompanies us every day."

This case study illustrates symbolic violence (Bourdieu), whereby the group becomes invisible in the public sphere. Reliance on ritual language alone reflects a decline in cultural capital, while structural and political isolation drives migration.

The researcher believes that the Mandeans represent a typical case of what could be called 'impossible integration'. They live in society, but at the same time they are outside it, which drives them to seek alternatives through emigration.

Fourth interview: H. A., a young man from Shabak (20 years old)

H.A. says, "I am a university student in Mosul. My daily life depends entirely on the Arabic language, and I have more Arab friends than friends from my own community because we share the same academic environment. Sometimes I feel very close to the majority, but in certain situations I am reminded that I am different. I have not considered political work because I do not see it as representing us. What matters to me now is finishing my studies and finding a job, but I am still concerned that my background may affect my career prospects.

This case study reveals generational shifts within the network: the new generation is more linguistically and socially integrated, but still faces invisible barriers in politics and employment.

The experience of young Shabak people shows that cultural integration does not necessarily translate into structural equality. In fact, deep engagement may increase awareness of the gap between social integration and political exclusion.

Fifth interview: T. K., Yazidi woman (50 years old)

T. K. says: I spent my childhood in Sinjar in a cohesive environment where we practised our rituals with relative freedom. But after we were displaced to the camp, everything changed. Today, I see my primary role as preserving our identity from extinction. I teach my daughters and grandchildren religious songs and stories from our heritage, and I insist that they learn our history. Sometimes others ask us to integrate more into society, but I believe that preserving our identity is the only guarantee of our survival."

This interview highlights the central role of women in reproducing identity, as they become guardians of collective memory. It is gendered resistance against marginalisation and assimilation.

The researcher believes that the Yazidi situation reveals that identity is not static but is redefined in response to crises. Women in particular have become the main bearers of the group's cultural project, which strengthens the resilience of identity despite threats.

General conclusion

The interviews showed that Iraqi minorities live in a dual situation: on the one hand, they achieve a degree of apparent assimilation through language and education, but on the other hand, they face structural exclusion in the fields of politics and work. In response to this, religious rituals and family relationships have formed effective mechanisms for protecting and preserving collective identity. These findings complement the quantitative analysis, confirming that partial integration, unless accompanied by genuine institutional and political recognition, remains fragile and prone to producing feelings of alienation.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches and interpreting their results in a comprehensive manner

1. Language acquisition and loss of mother tongue

The quantitative results showed an increase in daily reliance on Arabic (65–70%) compared to a clear decline in the use of native languages in public spaces. Meanwhile, interviews, especially with the Shabak, revealed linguistic duality, with Arabic being used at university and work, while native languages or dialects were relied upon at home. However, there is growing concern about the disappearance of the mother tongue among younger generations. Sociologically, this can be explained as a successful transition in terms of cultural assimilation, as conceptualised by Gordon (1964), but it is accompanied by symbolic linguistic violence that normalises the standards of the majority and marginalises minority languages [2].

The researcher believes that language here is a double-edged sword; it is both a tool for integration and a tool for erasure. Without a multilingual education policy, cultural integration will remain incomplete, reinforcing symbolic participation and weakening ethnic identity.

2. Education and employment opportunities

The results of the research showed relative educational integration across good levels of university achievement, but this was not matched by equal employment opportunities. Interviews with Mandaean and Yazidi revealed limited opportunities despite their achievements, due to discrimination or weak support networks. This can be explained by social capital theory (Putnam; Portes), whereby those who have bridging networks with the majority enjoy greater opportunities, while those who rely on internal ties remain doubly isolated.

Researcher's comment: This gap reveals that a 'certificate of integration' in education does not necessarily translate into the labour market, as inequality is reproduced through informal channels such as mediation and stereotypes.

3. Political participation and institutional representation

The quantitative results showed that around 70% of respondents did not feel adequately represented politically. The phrase 'our voice is not heard' was repeated in interviews, especially among Yazidis and Mandaeans. This reflects the absence of institutional recognition policies (Taylor) and leads to weakened social cohesion and undermined trust in institutions (OECD).

The researcher believes that political integration is the weakest link, and without it, cultural assimilation remains superficial. The solution requires political engineering that ensures genuine participation, rather than merely moral rhetoric.

4. Religion and rituals:

The results of the research showed that the level of religious ritual practice remained high (70–80%) even in conditions of displacement. Meanwhile, interviews revealed that rituals, especially among the Yazidis, have become a repository of identity, in which women play a pivotal role by transmitting heritage, stories and songs. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner), this can be interpreted as the construction of a defensive identity that reproduces the "us/them" boundary.

The researcher believes that although rituals represent a symbolic shield that protects the group from dissolution, they may deepen ethnic boundaries if they are not accompanied by safe bridges of interaction in the public sphere.

5. Social relationships and trust

The quantitative research results showed that the Shabak have relatively broader social networks, while the Mandaean experience a clear state of contraction. Trust in institutions also recorded low levels. The interviews confirmed that Shabak youth feel subtle discrimination, while the Mandaeans express themselves by saying: 'We are invisible.' This can be explained by weak institutional trust and the contraction of cross-cutting networks, which hinders cohesion and reproduces ethnic fragmentation [5], [16].

Trust is not built on good intentions alone, but through institutional mechanisms that include transparency, equal opportunities, and effective complaint channels.

General conclusion: the model of incomplete integration

An integrative reading reveals that Iraqi minorities have achieved a remarkable level of cultural assimilation, particularly in terms of language and education, but that this progress has not been reflected to the same extent in structural and political integration. Religious rituals and family ties have served as mechanisms for resilience and identity protection, but at the same time have contributed to the reproduction of ethnic boundaries.

To understand this situation more deeply, a comparison with some Arab countries can be useful. In Lebanon, studies have shown that sectarian and ethnic minorities often achieve cultural and linguistic assimilation, but the absence of effective recognition policies places them in a position of subordination, leading to superficial integration that does not translate into political equality [12]. In Morocco, studies on the Amazigh have revealed that the official school system has contributed to establishing Arabic as the common language, but it has not secured institutional recognition that would guarantee the full integration of the Amazigh into political and social structures [13].

These comparative experiences confirm that what is known as 'incomplete integration' is a recurring pattern in the Arab region, where cultural integration is achieved through education and language, but remains fragile due to the absence of institutional recognition and representation policies. In the Iraqi case, this model is clearly evident in three areas:

- a. Cultural assimilation (largely achieved).
- b. Institutional recognition and political representation (the missing link).
- c. Bridging social capital (insufficient).

When the second and third elements are lacking, the result is 'incomplete integration' limited to symbolic participation without structural equality.

Recommendations and proposed policies

- a. Multilingual education can contribute to the integration of minority languages in Iraqi schools, as in the Moroccan experience, by reducing symbolic violence [2].

- b. To reform political representation, guaranteed seats and consultation mechanisms could be adopted, similar to some Lebanese experiences, to ensure the presence of minorities in institutions [20].
- c. Creating equitable employment opportunities and implementing clear policies that prevent discrimination and guarantee minorities fair opportunities beyond quotas.
- d. Strengthening community ties through shared service programmes that contribute to strengthening cross-group social capital [5].
- e. Preserving rituals and collective memory by providing safe spaces for religious and cultural practices and ensuring the preservation of linguistic and symbolic diversity [14], [17], [18].

Our comparison shows that the Iraqi model is not separate from broader Arab patterns, but its specificity lies in the impact of armed conflicts and the weakness of the central state, making it more urgent than ever to move beyond 'incomplete integration.'

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation, analysis and interpretation of research findings

Section One: Presentation of General Findings

Here, we will attempt to present a comprehensive and focused picture of the findings of the research in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects, revealing the basic patterns of cultural assimilation and social integration among Iraqi minorities.

First: Language and identity

The results show that the majority of the sample use Arabic in their daily lives (65–70%), with a noticeable decline in the use of their mother tongues in public. It was observed that this process contributed to enhancing interaction with the majority, but at the same time posed a threat to the identity of the groups.

This result shows that there is a process of high linguistic assimilation, accompanied by a weak preservation of the original linguistic identity.

Second: At the level of education and employment opportunities

The results of the research showed that minorities have acceptable educational opportunities (55% access to university education), but these opportunities do not translate into fair employment integration, with 60% reporting that they feel discriminated against in employment and the labour market.

This result illustrates the existence of relative educational integration coupled with institutional discrimination in the labour market.

Third: At the level of political participation

The majority of participants (70%) confirmed that their group does not enjoy adequate political representation and that their voice has no influence in the political process.

This result shows us that political integration is the weakest link in the integration process of Iraqi minorities.

Fourth: Religious and cultural practices

Most respondents (70–80%) reported that they practise their religious rituals regularly despite displacement and difficult circumstances. Women play a particularly prominent role in transmitting heritage and protecting religious identity.

This result shows that religion and rituals constitute a symbolic mechanism of resistance against marginalisation and cultural assimilation.

Fifth: Social relations and trust

The results show that minorities' relations with other groups vary; the Shabak reported broader relations (50%) compared to the Mandaeans (25%). Trust in government institutions remains low (45% reported no trust).

This result shows that limited social capital and weak institutional trust hinder full integration.

General conclusion:

The results reveal a pattern of incomplete integration, where cultural assimilation (language and education) has been achieved but without sufficient structural or political integration, while groups use symbolic tools (religion, internal ties) as a means of survival.

Section II: Discussion of research findings

First: Cultural assimilation according to Gordon (1964)

The results of the research showed that Iraqi minorities achieved a high degree of cultural assimilation through language and education, which is consistent with Milton Gordon's classic model of assimilation stages. However, integration did not develop to the level of structural assimilation, as minorities continued to suffer from gaps in political representation and employment opportunities.

This result indicates that cultural assimilation alone is not sufficient to achieve full integration. In the Iraqi context, it can be said that the state and society adopt 'functional assimilation' that gives minorities opportunities in education, but this does not translate into structural equality, leading to 'incomplete integration' that reproduces marginalisation.

Second: Symbolic violence according to Bourdieu (1991)

The results of the interviews showed that minorities (especially Mandaeans and Yazidis) face indirect discrimination, manifested in their 'invisibility' or lack of recognition in state institutions and the labour market. This is consistent with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, whereby domination is exercised through standards that appear natural (such as the dominant language or official religion) but marginalise minorities.

It is clear to us that imposing Arabic as the sole language of education and work is a form of symbolic violence, because it imposes the standards of the majority as the natural norm and excludes linguistic and cultural diversity. This reinforces minorities' feelings of alienation even when they are culturally integrated.

Third: Defensive social identity according to Tajfel and Turner (1979)

The results of interviews with members of the Yazidi sample showed that religious rituals have become a mechanism of resilience in the face of attempts at assimilation. This is consistent with Tajfel & Turner's theory of social identity, whereby marginalised groups develop a defensive collective identity to protect themselves from marginalisation.

This finding shows us that Iraqi minorities – especially the Yazidis – have adopted a strategy of 'identity reproduction' as a mechanism of resistance, which means that integration can only be achieved if it is accompanied by genuine recognition of diversity. Defensive identity, despite its protective power, may deepen ethnic boundaries if it is not matched by fair inclusion policies.

Fourth: Social capital, according to Putnam (2000) and Portes (1998)

The results of the interviews showed that there is a difference in social networks: the Shabaks possessed relatively bridging social capital, while the Mandaeanes relied more on bonding capital within their group. This difference explains the disparity in opportunities for social integration.

I interpret this result to mean that the predominance of bonding capital over bridging capital among some minorities means that the group closes in on itself in search of security but pays the price of weak social and political participation. Therefore, strengthening bridging capital is a prerequisite for overcoming isolation and building national cohesion.

Fifth: Taylor's policies of recognition (1994)

Quantitative and qualitative results have shown that the absence of institutional recognition of minority rights weakens their integration, even if some forms of cultural assimilation have been achieved. This is consistent with Charles Taylor's argument about the necessity of recognition policies for cultural and social justice.

The researcher believes that the absence of recognition policies in Iraq – such as guaranteed parliamentary seats, support for minority language education, and protection of religious practices – leaves minorities in a state of formal integration that does not affect the essence of equality. Therefore, any integration project should start from the recognition of diversity as a value rather than a burden.

Synthesis

The discussion shows that Iraqi minorities are caught between successful cultural assimilation and failed structural and political integration. Language and education have provided tools for openness, but the absence of institutional recognition and the persistence of symbolic violence have reproduced marginalisation.

Defensive identity and religious rituals have given minorities resilience, but at the same time, they have reinforced ethnic boundaries. This means that integration in Iraq remains incomplete unless it is supported by policies of recognition and the building of bridging social capital.

We can therefore say that Iraqi society is in a state of suspended integration: minorities have integrated linguistically and culturally, but the state has not fully opened the doors to political and economic participation. This fragile situation threatens to increase tensions unless it is addressed through institutional interventions that take cultural and social justice into account.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This research highlights the sociology of cultural assimilation and social integration of Iraqi ethnic groups, showing that while tangible levels of cultural assimilation have been achieved—such as through language and education—structural and political integration remains insufficient, with marginalization in the labor market, weak political representation, and lack of official recognition limiting equitable integration. Additionally, minorities resort to symbolic mechanisms, such as religious practices and defensive identity, to protect themselves from assimilation, reflecting resilience but potentially reinforcing ethnic boundaries. **Implication :** The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive integration based on recognition and social justice, with recommendations in the fields of education, politics, economics, culture, and social development to bridge the gaps between minorities and the broader society. Practical recommendations include incorporating minority languages into school curricula, allocating parliamentary seats for minorities, enforcing anti-discrimination laws, and fostering initiatives to build trust and reduce stereotypes among ethnic groups. **Limitation :** The research does not fully capture the complexities of integration for all Iraqi minorities, as it primarily focuses on the sociological aspects without addressing all political, economic, and cultural barriers comprehensively. **Future Research :** Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of integration programs on social stability, examine how policies affect minority identity and political participation, and evaluate the effectiveness of proposed educational and economic initiatives in creating opportunities for minorities.

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