

# The Mandaean in Iraq Today: Perceptions, Stereotypes, Prejudices, and Exclusion



المنذائين في العراق اليوم: التصورات والقوالب النمطية  
والأحكام المسبقة والاستبعاد  
د. ضياء كريم علي  
جامعة الكوفة – كلية التربية المختلطة – قسم اللغة الانكليزية

البريد الإلكتروني Email : [dhiaa.kareem@uokufa.edu.iq](mailto:dhiaa.kareem@uokufa.edu.iq)

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## The Mandaean in Iraq Today: Perceptions, Stereotypes, Prejudices, and Exclusion

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Dhiaa Kareem

Department of English, University of Kufa, Najaf, Iraq

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#### الخلاصة

تعتبر الأقلية الصابئة المندائية ، المعروفة بأتباع واحدة من أقدم الديانات التوحيدية ، جزءاً مهماً من الهوية الثقافية والاجتماعية العراقية. ومع ذلك ، فقد انخفض عددهم بشكل كبير بسبب الحروب والعقوبات الدولية والطائفية والتهميش. وبالتالي ، فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو فهم تصورات المجتمع المندائي لمستقبلهم وتراثهم وثقافتهم في العراق والشتات وكذلك النظر إلى تمثيلهم في العراق والخصائص والصفات والميزات المنسوبة اليهم. تم جمع البيانات من 20 شخص مندائي داخل وخارج العراق. ولتحقيق أهداف البحث ، تم اعتماد النهج التاريخي للخطاب لتحليل الخطاب النقدي جنباً إلى جنب مع أنماط الوصول إلى الخطاب في التحليل. تظهر النتائج أنه على الرغم من أن المشاركين المندائيين أفادوا بأنهم قد تم تمثيلهم بشكل إيجابي من قبل المجتمعات الأخرى غير المندائية في العراق عندما يتعلق الأمر بمهنتهم ، وسلميتهم ، والحرف اليدوية ، ووظائف الصياغة ، إلا أنهم يتم تمثيلهم بشكل سلبي أيضاً عندما يتعلق الأمر بدينهم ومعتقدهم. فضلا عن اتهامهم بالسحر و الشعوذة. كما وتظهر النتائج أيضاً أن هناك العديد من الخصائص النمطية والتقييمية السلبية بشأن المندائيين. إلى جانب ذلك ، ساهم الافتقار إلى الوصول إلى قطاعات الدولة مثل التعليم والإعلام والسياسة في جعلهم أكثر عزلة و

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تمثيلهم اكثر سلبية . علاوة على ذلك، توصلت الدراسة الى ان الأقلية المندائية ليس لديها القدرة الى الوصول أو السيطرة على خطاب المدارس والخطاب في الجامعات لذا فلا يوجد او هناك القليل من الذكر حول ماهية المندائيين أو ما هية دينهم وتقاليدهم في المناهج الدراسية.

### Abstract

Known as the followers of one of the oldest monotheistic religions, the Sabians-Mandaean minority constitutes an important part of Iraqi cultural and social identity. However, their number has been significantly declining due to wars, international sanctions, sectarianism, and marginalization. Thus, it is the aim of this study to have an understanding of the Mandaean community's perceptions of their future, heritage, and culture in Iraq and in the diaspora as well as to look at their representation in Iraq and the characteristics, qualities, and features attributed to them. The data were collected from 20 Mandaean respondents inside and outside of Iraq. To achieve the research aims, the Discourse Historical Approach to critical discourse analysis along with the access patterns to discourse was adopted in the analysis. The results shows that although the Mandaean participants reported they have been positively constructed by other non-Mandaean communities when it comes to their profession, peace, handcrafts, and goldsmith jobs, they are also negatively constructed when it comes to their religion and their belief as well as being accused of warcraft and sorcery. The results also shows that there are many negative stereotypical and evaluative characteristics assigned to the Mandaean. Besides, the lack of access to state sectors as education, media and politics has contributed to having them more negatively represented and isolated. Mandaean minority has little or no access or control over the discourse of schools and university discourse. There is a little or no mention on who the Mandaean are or what their religion and traditions are.

### 1.Introduction

The Mandaean also called Sabaeans are followers of one of the oldest monotheistic religions. They speak Mandaean, a language that descends from the Aramaic language which has fallen out of use in their daily lives and only became limited to their religious ritual (Minority Rights Group International 2018). Historically, they settled in the southern regions of Iraq and Iran. In Iraq, they lived close to Tigris and the Euphrates given the significance of the water to their faith, they are from religious minorities (Gaster 1938), and they constitute an important part of Iraq's cultural and social identity. However, their population has





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been declining hugely, this is partly due to Saddam Hussein regime's wars, the 1990s International sanctions on Iraq and to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as the growing instability and increase in sectarian violence and the lack of political and social representation after the invasion (van Zoonen and Wirya 2017). So they were subjected to kidnapping, pillage and marginalization, and were accused of infidelity, witchcraft and sorcery. Perhaps it is one of the most religions around which suspicions and rumours were raised and stories and myths were woven around, such as worshipping planets and stars, taking the lives of the dying people, and worshipping a being that does not exist.

This has caused massive numbers of Mandaean to flee the country. They have been scattered to some parts of Iraq mainly Baghdad, Maysan, Basra and many migrated to the Kurdistan region of Iraq as well as worldwide. The migration of the Mandaean minority left the greatest impact on the demographic weight of this millennial religious minority, which left 90 percent of its members outside Iraq between 2003 and 2019, according to the estimation of the head of the Mandaean community in Iraq and the world, Sattar Jabbar Helou (Salloum 2019). He added that the number of Mandaean until 2005 reached 80 thousand in Iraq, but after that, it decreased and reached almost 7000 today. This is a dangerous indicator that affects the diversity that Iraqi society should have (Abullah 2016). The dispersal of the unorganized Mandaean society in the form of small groups in different foreign countries in which traditions, values, other religions and other restrictions prevail, may lead to the rupture of the Mandaean social fabric and the disappearance and extinction of many Mandaean customs and traditions.

The aim of this research is to have a better understanding of the Mandaean's perception of their heritage, exclusion and what characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to the Mandaean cultural and religious heritage by other social and religious groups in Iraq and how do Mandaean view their heritage in Iraq today? The significance of this study is twofold. First, this study will contribute to knowledge and literature about the Mandaean by highlighting the way Mandaean perceive their heritage and identify the discriminatory/exclusionary practices they undergo in their community. Second, this study will act as a springboard for other researchers to conduct similar studies or continue from where this study ends as well as researchers.

### 2.State Dysfunctionalism and Minorities

Iraq's post-2003 governmental dysfunctionalism was considered as the single most important cause in the country's cultural breakdown and degradation, owing to the legacy of dictatorship as well as the impact of

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sanctions and US occupation (Kathem and Kareem Ali 2021). In specific, the so-called Muhasasa Ta'ifia (sectarian apportionment) is based on defining citizens according to their ethnic affiliation and based on the proportion of each ethnic group within the borders of the national state. The quota system does not establish a democratic system. On the contrary, it establishes, in the best cases, with corrupt elites fighting over the status and share of each sect, a state of no peace, keeping the country between unrest, "civil war, endemic corruption, institutional weakness and the widespread alienation of the populous from the governing elite", (Dodge 2018) or more ethnic and religious fragmentations, both of which end with the systematic demolition of the nation-state.

Now, four electoral rounds have passed, and democracy, citizenship rights and national identity should have been consolidated, but the country has slipped into more sectarianism and turned into a failed state. The competition for the share of each sect of power has become an end goal, as the general public of these sects are always being mobilized by the politicians of these blocks with sectarian discourses. The nation-building approach in Iraq has focused more on creating sectarianism than on overcoming sectarian divisions. Sectarian tensions have impeded state-building processes and destabilized the country. However, the Iraqi government has not made any clear attempt to overcome these divisions and build a common national identity. Indeed, many of the measures taken so far have only led to the further fragmentation of the state.

As a result of the Muhasasa Ta'ifia division of power among the main three blocks: Shittes, Sunnies, and Kurds, non-Muslim minorities have become vulnerable. They were excluded from decision-making positions and important, sensitive, leadership, security, and military positions in the state because they do not belong to any of the three large political blocs, which made them unable to protect themselves and their areas of presence. Although the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, many Iraqis have been subject to violence and forced to flee their homes because of their religious beliefs and they experienced waves of displacement as a result of conflict and political and religious persecution, the most recent of which came at the hands of ISIS. Instances of government-affiliated groups, criminal groups, and armed militias targeting members of religious minorities for sectarian and criminal purposes (for their presumed richness) or both.

With all that being said, in addition to the wars and the economic sanctions, the US invasion and prosecutions, the minorities population drastically decreased in Iraq. An instance of these minorities is the Sabean-Mandean. Their community has considerably decreased in





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number to few thousands. They have been targeted by Sunni and Shiites extremist militant groups accusing them of adultery, witchcraft and impurity. Accordingly, hundreds of killings and abductions were committed. Furthermore, the Mandaean, known for their traditional community occupations as being goldsmiths, silversmiths and jewellers, were significantly more frequently targeted for theft and murder than their Muslim counterparts. Their community has also been a target for the negative construction and stereotypes in different aspects of life.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Data Collection

To provide a deeper understanding of the views, experiences, beliefs and perceptions of Mandaean with regard to their future, heritage, and existence, data is collected from 20 Mandaean participants through semi-structured interviews focusing on sets of questions directed to Mandaean inside and outside Iraq. Due to the COVID-19, some interviews could not be achieved by face-to-face and were done virtually through phone calls and other call software. The data then were transcribed and categorized and put into themes for analysis as shown in the forthcoming analysis.

#### 3.2 Theoretical Framework

In this section only the first two strategies: namely: nomination and predications of Wodak (2001)'s Discourse Historical Approach which is concerned with the analysis of Self and Other representation discourse, will be used for the first part of the representational analysis. These two strategies are designed to answer the way persons, objects, phenomena/ events, processes and actions are named and referred to linguistically as well as characteristics, qualities and features attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes? These can be shown as the following:

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Nomination	discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc.</li> <li>Tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecodches (pars pro toto, totum pro parte) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Predication	discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions (positively or negatively)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(stereotypical) evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g. in the form of adjectives, oppositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/pronouns collocations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Table 1 Nominational and Predicational Strategies**



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For the second part of the analysis, Van Dijk (2013) framework of patterns of access is used to explore how the power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimized by text, actions and talks of the dominant groups and the governmental institutions. Van Dijk (2013) argues that "critical analysis of properties of access to public discourse and communication presupposes insight into more general political, sociocultural and economic aspects of dominance." He adds that power abuse entails not only the use of force and limiting a group's freedom of action, but it can also have a negative impact on people's minds. That is, dominant groups or institutions may impact the structures of text and talk in such a way that recipients' knowledge, attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies are – more or less indirectly – influenced in the dominant group's interest through special access to and control over the means of public discourse and communication.

### 4. Analysis

#### 4.1 The Representation of the 'Self'

Although Mandaean respondents reported that the Other (Muslim communities) construct the Mandaean negatively as will be seen in (section 4.2), they also see that the Other represents them positively when it comes to their manners, attitudes and professions. Thus, Mandaean are viewed as peaceful people who do not like to carry arms nor engage in any fight because this is against their religious practices and beliefs. Besides, respondents reported that they are positively constructed as being professional, sincere and trustworthy craftsmen in the profession they work in as boats and ships manufacturing and agricultural tools making as well as being very well-known and professional goldsmiths. Thus, people trust them with their profession and prefer them on other non- Mandaean craftsmen.

Relevant social actors	Nominational realisations	Predicational realization
The Self	We, us, Sabeaa, Mandaean	Peaceful, loved, trustworthy, honest, sincere, skilled goldsmiths, skilled in blacksmithing. They do not carry weapons

*Table 2: Self- Positive Nominational and Predicational Strategie*

#### 4.2 The Representation of the 'Other'

Writing about how people are named or referred to in a discriminatory discourse involves the use of categorization devices that serve to mark people as being either in-group or out-group (Blackledge, 2005, p. 21). The basic form of discriminating against persons or a group of persons is by “naming them derogatorily, debasingly or vituperatively”





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(Reisigl and Wodak 2005). Choosing one name over another involves an exclusion or inclusion from other categories (Richardson, 2007a, p. 49), in doing so the namer could have an interest or a purpose that could be political, social or psychological (Reisigl and Wodak, 2005, p. 4).

Historically, there has been many negative representational references to the Sabaa-Mandaean starting from the basic naming of **Suba** (Subbi) which had for a long time been constructed to acquire a very negative connotation and become associated with ‘infidelity’, ‘najasa (impurity)’ by other Muslim social groups (Sunnis and Shiites) in Iraq. Such negative constructions have directly affected Mandaean lifestyle and their relationship with the community around them. These derogatory attributions could be "sufficient to perform racist or ethnicist slurs on their own, as they connotatively convey disparaging, insulting meanings, without any other attributive qualification." (Reisigl and Wodak, 2005).

Being categorized and labeled as **najis** in a Muslim majority country means being socially excluded in so many ways in life. Not eating food or drinking with them, not shaking hands at public and private events and occasions, or using the daily necessities that they use, or hardly finding a barber to have their hair cut or not finding someone to serve them in café's, are frequent examples of what Mandaean are going through on the daily basis as many respondents mentioned. Such practices have even made Mandaean more isolated and they have become very careful in who they trust or who they want to be friends with selecting their relationship with people to avoid problems. This explains their closeness toward the rest of the surrounding communities, and the disclosure of their religion to others on various occasions or during community activities, which led to the production of incorrect knowledge and misunderstanding about the Mandaean religion or rituals. The isolation and concealment of the Mandaean religion, traditions and identities in the school, military and the workplace fearing the consequences of being identified and discriminated became additional reasons for the lack of knowledge of local communities about them along with the government's failure to educate the community about who the Mandaean are . This has led to even more negative representations and accusations directed at them.

As a result of ignorance and lack of knowledge of the Mandaean religion, and the fact that Mandaean is a non-missionary religion and forbids marriage from outside the religion, the Mandaean have been associated with negative constructions that are not related to the Sabian religion but such construction was an accumulation of years of



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misunderstanding. Many people hold false stereotypes about Mandaean, accusing them of worshiping planets and stars or of suffocating dead animals to eat. These misconceptions have put many Mandaean at risk, violence and persecution over time. Furthermore, the Mandaean have been linked to the witchcraft, black magic and sorcery, thus there have been many fake Facebook pages that were named after Sabea- Mandaean who were trying to achieve personal gains using what is already negatively constructed in minds of many Iraqis and non-Iraqis about the Mandaean by posting pictures of Sabean clergymen in their profile and some of their religious practices. This has raised the resentment of the Mandaean sect who prohibit magic in their law, and desert everyone who works on such magical practices.



Figure 1 Fake Mandaean Facebook Profile



Figure 2 Fake Facebook Account on Mandaean

The above two fake Facebook accounts (The Suba Magician Karam Al-zaman) and (The Mandaean lower magician Abo Salwan) beside many other accounts which have been reported by the respondents. The description of the first fake account was "Bringing the beloved to marriage, sexual arousal, and blind obedience, incest magic, gay magic, magic for weakness" and the second profile description says "The lower magician, Abu Silwan Al-Sabi'i, for lower works, bringing the beloved,





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stirring up, accepting, obeying, returning, marrying, agreeing with the family, strong love, absolute love, and holding the tongue."

As a result of the abuses and attacks on the Mandaean minority, many were forced to resort to doing things that were not part of their customs, traditions or religious belief in order to get along with and please the surrounding communities and as a way of not being distinct in the society, e.g. Mandaean women wear hijab in conservative cities in the middle and south Iraq. Also, given the state's weakness in implementing the law and the lack of political representation for minorities in parliament that can defend their rights, many were forced to participate in and follow the customs and traditions of the Iraqi tribes, attend their community events and pay some fees like the rest of the tribe members so that the tribe protect them and defend them in case they encounter any risks or getting involved in social problems. Also, majority of Mandaean used names of Islamic and Arabic nature have been assigned by the Mandaean families to their new born kids as Hussein, Mohammed, Ali, Jabbar, Omar whereas each individual Mandaean should have his own Aramaic Mandaean name.

Furthermore, since the majority of Mandaean live in the central and southern provinces in Iraq, which are Shiites majority, in periods of major religious occasions such as the month of Muharram and the forty days, the Mandaean participate, in such events and serve visitors coming from the southern governorates and heading to Karbala for the purpose of commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, peace be upon him, either voluntarily as a kind of respect or because of their feeling of embarrassment for not taking part as well as avoid being negatively represented by the surrounding communities for not participating in their religious rituals. In addition to this, they deserted their clothing and wear the Arabic costumes as well as speaking the language of the majority.

### 5.Mandaean and Media Access

Van Dijk (2013) argues that "one major element in the discursive reproduction of power and dominance is the very access to discourse and communicative events". Until recently, the Mandaean have no preferential access to public discourse and communication as media or education. Minorities' access to the media is a necessary prerequisite for their social inclusion in public definition about their situation (Van Dijk 2013). Their lack of access to the media is one of the most visible manifestations of other ethnic majority symbolic domination. As a result, having the majority dominate the news media has significant implications for news production, source access, and the overall viewpoint of news discourse.



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Who may speak or write to whom, about what, when, and in what context, or who may participate is totally controlled by the pre 2003 Ba'ath party regime official TV channel. Iraq's media landscape was forever changed after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Isakhan 2008). This has seen Iraq shift from having only a handful of state media outlets that acted as propaganda machines to a large number of Iraqi-owned radio stations, newspapers and television channels. The vast majority of Iraq's new television stations, radio stations, and newspapers were founded by Iraq's seemingly endless political parties, religious sects, and/or ethno-sectarian groups, each vying for support and legitimacy in the country's transition from despotic rule to democracy (Isakhan 2008, Al-Rawi 2012).

For the Mandaean, nothing has changed after 2003, access to media was not given to them, their voice was absent, or their religion for the general public remained undefined, and it was only in the last few years when they were given a limited access to some Iraqi official channel started giving reports about the Mandaean and their rituals and to a number of meetings with Mandaean priests and prominent people in the Mandaean sect to talk about religion, its nature and customs. Madaeans are generally quoted on 'soft' and less 'risky' topics. No criticism to the government policies and actions. Even when Mandaean have access, they speak for a short time that does not exceed a few minutes and often the meeting takes place when there is a Mandaean religious occasions to talk about their occasion and their rituals without delving into their difficulties, challenges and threats Madaeans are exposed to, and their words often comes in harmony with what the general views of the channels and in harmony with the general vision that Iraq is a country religions and peaceful coexistence. According to Jancsary, Höllerer et al. (2016) power can be seen in non-discourse presences as well. In absences, it is frequently even more clearly formed. Power is not only exercised directly, but also indirectly by creating non-issues and prohibiting some topics from even entering public discourse, according to scholars of power and dominance.

With the spread of social media platforms, Madaeans inside and outside Iraq have become using these platforms to gather and communicate with each other and share their news in different countries as well as promote their traditions, rituals, and religion. These platforms are not restricted to the Mandaean but many non-Madaeans have joined to these groups. There are also many Mandaean activists and academics who write about the Mandaeanism in addition to the local and





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international funders' contributions to preserving heritage and documenting the Mandaean heritage.

### 6. Mandaean Language and the Danger of Extinction

Listed as a UNESCO World's endangered languages the Sabeian-Mandaean language faces the danger of disappearing and today it is considered by all standards as a threatened language with extinction and being classified by UNESCO as Critically endangered as shown in table 3 (The Guardian 2016). Only some 6,000 to 7,000 of the 30,000 to 60,000 Mandaean who resided in Iraq in the 1990s are estimated to have remained in Iraq after 2003; the number of them who speak Mandaic is substantially few (Moseley 2010). It is only spoken by no more than 300 people (The Guardian 2016).

Name in English	Number of speakers	Degree of endangerment
Mandaic	300	Critically endangered

Table 3 Mandaean language degree of endangeredness according to UNESCO

According to Al-Saadi (2008), clergymen constitute approximately 40% of the total number of those speaking the Mandaean, due to the fact that the Mandaean religious rituals are carried out in the Mandaean language. It has become primarily a ritual language. Mandaean people do not speak the Mandaean language in their homes, nor even among themselves when they meet. The language adopted by them is called "Rattan" and it is not purely Mandaic, but rather a mixture of classical Mandaic, Persian and Arabic.

There are many reasons that led to have Mandaean language as being endangered and the decrease of using it among Mandaean over time. Because of the wars, killings, displacement and persecution they were subjected to throughout history, Mandaean began to avoid speaking their language in public so as not to be identified and thus put at risk of danger and racism. By time, the use of Mandaean language then moved to be used only in their houses. This situation continued and their language gradually lost its speakers, in addition to the fact that the majority of the society speaks Arabic, the official language of the country. Previously, Mandaean language was limited to domestic interaction, and then over time the language began to die, which affected its transfer from one generation to another and became limited to religious rituals only.

### 7. The Mandaean in the Iraqi Curriculum

With regards to the patterns of access to the educational and scholarly discourse, Mandaean minority have little or no access or control over the discourse of schools and university discourse. There is a little or



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no mention on who the Mandaean are or what their religion and traditions are. They are absolutely absent from the schools' textbooks. Denying the access of the Mandaean or suppressing them in the textbooks does not only exclude them and directly influence their life, heritage, culture and keep their culture and contribution to their extinction but the ignorance of the majority about the Mandaean will help in spreading the myths, stereotypes and rumors which eventually will effect the peaceful existence and their presence in Iraq.

It is worth noting that the official religion in Iraq is Islam, which means that every aspect of the state is linked to the Islamic religion, which is considered the state's religion. Therefore, the rest of the religions, including Mandaean, are not taught in schools, but rather are limited to teaching the subject of the Islamic religion. Respondents state that many Mandaean memorize verses and quotes from the holy Quran and know about Islam more than they know about their religion. Minorities in Iraq have no or little access to the scholarly discourse and the ethnic research is mostly carried out by majority researchers or under their supervision which is typically reproduce the same and majority unchallenging discourse about minorities' stereotypes.

After years of attempts by minorities and stakeholders and those interested in this regard, information and texts in 2011 regarding Iraqi minorities such as Sabean Mandaean, Yazidis, Christians and Shabaks were finally included in the Iraqi curricula in some preparatory and intermediate classes. Although it was included, but these information were very little and they were in few lines. As can be seen in the Sixth grade primary (2019 4<sup>th</sup> Edition) in Figure 1 which says "Sabeaa: this component is one of the ancient religious sects in Iraqi society, and their area of residence was concentrated mostly in the governorates of central and southern Iraq near the rivers, due to their importance in their religious beliefs, and they have an important role in building and defending the homeland."



زي صابني

٧- **الصابئة:** يعد هذا المكون من الطوائف الدينية القديمة في المجتمع العراقي، وتركزت منطقة سكنهم في الاغلب في محافظات وسط العراق وجنوبه بالقرب من الانهار، وذلك لاهميتها في معتقداتهم الدينية، ولهم دور مهم في بناء الوطن والدفاع عنه.

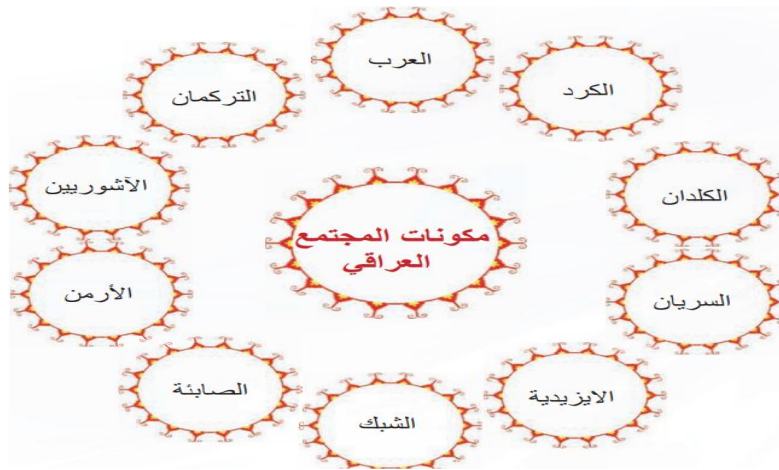
Figure 1 Extract on from Iraqi Textbook



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In the fifth edition of the fifth year primary classes it described the Iraqi components as shown in figure 2 preceded by the following: "Do you know, dear student...Our Iraqi society consists of several components, namely Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syriacs, Armenians, Yazidis, Shabaks and Sabbaths), but one of these components has rights and duties towards the homeland and society represented by belonging, cooperation and loyalty"



**Figure 2**  
**Components**  
**of the Iraqi**  
**people**

### 8.The Mandaean in the Diaspora

As a result of murder, kidnapping, displacement, forced conversion of religion, and other means of eradication only small numbers of Mandaean are left in Iraq today. They faced great hardships and tribulations that led to their fragmentation into small scattered groups living in different cities in Iraq and in the diaspora. Their distribution is unprecedented to the extent that it is the case that one family lives in four continents where, as described by Al-Saadi (2010) "Eid in 20 countries" when they want to celebrate their Eid because they are dispersed around the world, so we could see fathers in one country and sons/daughters in another, which makes it difficult for them to meet and to be reunited again. The children began to learn the language, customs, and culture of the new country, and some of them start to abandon the language, customs, and traditions of the mother country, and the new generation of young people began to mock and ridicule the customs and traditions of their fathers and grandfathers. According to some respondents, children of families who live far away from each other do not have a lingua franca language where they can communicate but each one speaks a different language and resort to use their sign language instead.

Furthermore, in light of this dispersion over different countries and being far from each other and looking at the scarcity of Mandaean



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clergymen, it has become difficult to provide clergymen to teach the costumes, religious practices, and rituals for the Mandaean in the diaspora. There are also difficulties in obtaining approvals from the countries hosting them to practice their rituals and the difficulty in securing sufficient funds from the countries they are living in to build Mandies (worshiping places) near rivers that are essential to their religious practices. Besides, with the absence of the running water that is essential for their religion the rivers proximity as well as the cold weather conditions make it impossible for the Mandaean to maintain their religious practice. And above all, they are not a single entity who live in one community and one city that make it difficult for them to gather and celebrate. Thus many have resorted to celebrate virtually.

Furthermore, the Mandaean religion is not a missionary and is closed within its groups as it forbids accepting the entry of new individuals of different religions to mix with its members and it bans interreligious marriage. This is another factor that could threaten their existence adding to the previously mentioned challenges as there are no new members joining this closed society and increasing their number and the only way of having their number increased has become limited to their intermarriage and interbreeding among their community. Besides, knowing that they are scattered around the world, it could be another challenge for the young to find their partners. It is certain and in this case that the total number is in a state of decline with time instead of being in a state of increase and growth.

Equally important, what makes the Mandaean return to Iraqi more challenging even when the situation gets better, according to the respondents, is that there are generations of Mandaean born in the diaspora who do not share any a language or cultural, social, religious identities or a memory with the people in Iraq but they have been raised and taught according to the host county's culture, traditions and costumes. Thus, the longer they stay in the diaspora, the stronger their roots become, and the more difficult it is for them to return.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to gain a knowledge of how the Mandaean community in Iraq and the diaspora perceives their heritage, culture, and future. It also seeks to examine how they are portrayed in Iraq and the attributes that are given to them. The results showed that although the Mandaean participants reported they have been positively constructed by other non-Mandaean community when it comes to their profession, peace, handcrafts, and goldsmith jobs, but they are also negatively constructed when it comes to their religion and their belief as





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well as being accused of Warcraft and sorcery. Such construction has largely contributed to their isolation and disintegration with the society to avoid being identified and outcast. Furthermore, it has been shown that Mandaean have no preferential access to public discourse and communication as media and even when they are interviewed they speak on soft and less risky topics and they do not challenge or criticize the government policy. Similarly, Mandaeanism has no access to the Iraqi ministry of Education curricula. Neither the Mandaean religion nor their language or tradition have been introduced in the classroom which leave the society know nothing about them apart from the widespread negative construction and stereotypes. It was only recently the Ministry of Education started introducing basic concepts about them.

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