

## Fragmentation and Collective Memory: Diaspora, Exile, and Identity Reconstruction among Returnees in Ilam

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### Abstract

The current article examines the collective memory and diasporic identity of Ilam returnees following their expulsion from Iraq. The primary objective is to analyze how identity is formed in response to traumatic experiences resulting from expulsion, the eight-year war, and the genocide of Feili Kurdish people. This research employs qualitative ethnographic methods, utilizing techniques such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and oral narrative recording to collect and analyze data. The results indicate that the collective memory of returnees plays a crucial role in shaping their identity as a dynamic and resilient construct. This memory is influenced by elements such as religious rituals, social networks, and oral history, and includes traumatic, nostalgic, and pragmatic narratives. Despite identity fragmentation, returnees reconstruct their identity horizontally through spaces like coffeehouses, virtual networks, and endogamous marriages. This study demonstrates that collective memory is not merely a passive narrative of the past but an instrument for resisting imposed forgetting. The identity fragmentation of returnees is a product of historical cycles of exclusion and displacement, yet this characteristic allows them to live on borders—both beyond Iran and Iraq and at their intersection. This research argues that the future politics of returnees lie not in returning to a lost homeland but in redefining borders: borders that are not geographical but flow through their narratives. This study contributes to a better understanding of the diaspora phenomenon and its impact on individual and collective identity.

**Keywords:** Collective Memory, Diaspora, Returnees, Identity, Exile, Ilam

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