
MISSING A LOT OF THIS WORLD
Formal Education and Political Competition
in Iraq through a Yezidi Lens

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines Yezidi perceptions of access to formal education for Yezidi children and youth from the Sinjar region of Iraq, a primary homeland of the Yezidi people and an officially disputed territory between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal government of Iraq in Baghdad, between the periods of 2003–2014 and 2014 onwards. These two time frames are selected and differentiated to reflect two major events in the recent history of Sinjar – the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 and subsequent de facto control of Sinjar by the KRG, and the seizing of the area by the Islamic State (IS) group and subsequent displacement of the majority of the Yezidi community in 2014. This thesis also seeks to understand prominent Yezidi discourses around this issue and the implications for Yezidi children and youth from Sinjar, and for the Yezidi community as a whole.

This research is conducted according to a qualitative approach. The data set was obtained on the ground in Iraq through the use of in-depth semi-structured and narrative interviews conducted according to the *Responsive Interview Model* between August and December 2016. Thematic analysis was then applied to the research data. The theoretical framework of the thesis broadly follows the typologies of sovereignty, identity, and education, with more defined theoretical concepts applied which fall under one or two of these typologies. Supporting information is found in documentation released by United Nations agencies, reports from think tanks and NGOs, and published media pieces. A strong effort is made throughout to preserve the voices of the research participants, the majority of whom are themselves displaced Yezidis from Sinjar.

This work aims to illuminate a pressing but underexamined problematique that affects the lives of vulnerable people and has significant implications for the future of the nation of Iraq. Particular attention is paid to political competition between competing bodies of authority in Iraq, especially between the KRG and the federal Iraqi government. The thread of trauma as a result of the attempted genocide of the Yezidi people by IS from 2014 is observable throughout the work, as it would be through any research on this minority that either focuses on this time period or involves research participants from the community.

Keywords: Yezidi people, Iraq, education, refugees, IDPs, political competition.

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This work would not have been possible had I not been welcomed into the Yezidi community in Iraq. Very sincere gratitude is extended first to the research participants themselves, many of whom openly discussed traumatic personal events and politically sensitive topics with profound grace and a sense of pride in being able to present their stories and their truths. Great thanks also go to those who facilitated this research by connecting me to research participants, assisting with interpretation or translations, or advising me on subjects related to Yezidi history, faith, and culture.

Thanks also go to the supervisors of this work, particularly to Professor Jeremy Gould, for offering continuous support and advice over the course of the research process and for taking a genuine interest in the research topic.

The title of this work, *Missing a Lot of this World*, is taken directly from one of the research participants. This interviewee, a youth of 16 whose education had been severely disrupted by a period of captivity under IS and who was struggling to re-enter formal education at the time of the interview, spoke these poignant words in Kurdish in regard to the meaning of being unable to receive an education. I am very happy to indicate that this research participant has resumed formal study since the time of the interview, and I sincerely hope that all research participants and others who shared their difficult pathways will achieve similarly positive outcomes.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAA	American Anthropological Association
BBIED	Body-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DoE	Directorate of Education
EU	European Union
GoI	Government of Iraq
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRFAD	Iraqi Research Foundation for Analysis and Development
IS	Islamic State
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
KDP	Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê/Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KR-I	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê/Kurdish Workers Party
PUK	Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê/Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat/Democratic Union Party
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
YBŞ	Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê/Sinjar Resistance Units

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1 INTRODUCTION

*“Borders are the worst invention ever made by politicians.” – Jean-Claude Juncker,
President of the EU Commission, August 2016*

On a map displaying political boundaries, borders are typically represented cleanly. Decisive lines cut across geography, marking the edges of nation states, or of administrative regions within them. Observed in this manner, borders are static ideals. They are intangible and abstract, existing as a manifestation of social and political contracts, affirming that those within a bordered area are to be considered members of a particular social, cultural, and political community, while those beyond each silhouette are excluded from this collective.

The reality on the ground is frequently messier. There are regions where borders remain largely intangible, such as within the confines of the Schengen Area; or where the physical features of the edges of a bordered entity permit a political tidiness anomalous to most territories, such as in my home of New Zealand. However, for many peoples and communities across our world, borders are neither static, intangible, or tidy. They spring to life with indomitable vigour, demanding conformity of identity, political affiliation, social structure, and common purpose. Borders, and those with the power to draw them, can come to dictate any and all aspects of daily life.

Such is the case in regard to Iraq. This modern nation state straddles the cradle of civilization, and is today home to a diverse population of ethnicities, adhering to a multiplicity of religions (see e.g. CIA World Factbook, Iraq, 2017). Iraq has been a focal point of media attention for decades, with the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), the invasion and annexation of Kuwait and subsequent military intervention led by the United States (1990–1991), uprisings by Kurds and Shia Iraqis throughout the early 1990s, invasion by the United States and its coalition partners and the removal of Saddam Hussein and his regime (2003), the subsequent state of insurgency and unrest throughout the country, the invasion and seizure of significant territory by the ‘Islamic State’ (IS) militant group (2014), and the operation of Iraqi and Kurdish forces to expel IS and retake territory including the city of Mosul (2015–ongoing) comprising an unfortunate list of highlights which can be easily found in media archives. However,

beyond a superficial understanding of tensions between followers of Sunni or Shia Islam, or in regard to Kurdish aspirations of independence, there exists little international understanding of Iraq's demographic complexities – and the political complications this has entailed.

This thesis aspires to illuminate the contemporary Yezidi understanding of access to education and discourses surrounding this, especially involving political competition and identity recognition or repression, with a view to understanding the future of this significant but widely unfamiliar ethno-religious minority both within and beyond Iraq. Using data sourced from members of this community themselves, in addition to other relevant stakeholders, the research detailed within examines, firstly, how access to and the provision of education is perceived by the Yezidi community between the periods 2003 – 2014 and following mass displacement from the Yezidi homeland of Sinjar from 2014 onwards. Secondly, this research considers the reasons behind these perceptions, by exploring the prominent Yezidi discourses around this issue. Finally, this research offers insight into how this problematique may affect the future of Yezidis on both individual and communal levels. Prominent themes within this research include sovereignty, fragmentation or cohesion of community and identity, and political competition, in addition to an emphasis on the importance of formal education. For Iraqi Yezidis, the blurred borders of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) and the Iraqi nation state have been neither static, intangible, or tidy, and their individual and communal identities, political affiliations, social structures, and personal and common purposes and goals have been the subject of extensive manipulation. Although education is but one of many aspects of life which are problematic for the Yezidi community, it is deserving of particular attention, as access to education is, in many ways, uniquely and crucially important for the long-term survival, prosperity, and development of this demographic.

1.1 The Current Context of Iraq

As of early 2017, Iraq continues to face a number of major challenges. The United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Humanitarian Country

Team, in the *Advance Executive Summary of its Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)*, specifies approximately 11 million people in need within an approximate total population of 36 million people overall, with 15 million people living in conflict-affected areas (2016, p. 6). They further state that “the humanitarian crisis in Iraq remains one of the largest and most volatile in the world” with “the pace of displacement over the past three years [being] nearly without precedent”. Over three million Iraqis are internally displaced, one million of whom have entered KR-I, and up to 1.2 million more are expected to become displaced as a result of anticipated conflict in several areas, including Mosul, throughout 2017. They assert that “three years of continuous conflict and economic stagnation have impacted nearly every aspect of Iraqi society”, with unemployment having trebled in many communities, agricultural production having declined by 40%, and 23 hospitals and over 230 primary health facilities having been damaged or destroyed by conflict while, simultaneously, health consultations have increased eightfold. Special mention is made of challenges faced by the education sector. Schools in governorates impacted by the advance of IS from 2014 are forced to operate on a shift-based schedule of three or more sequential sessions per day in an attempt to cope with the volume of students. Despite this, almost 3.5 million Iraqi children eligible for enrolment in formal schooling attend school irregularly or not at all, “and more than 600,000 displaced children have missed an entire year of education”. In addition to these concrete, measurable difficulties, UNOCHA anticipates that “social tensions are expected to impact at least 4.7 million people” in 2017 (ibid., p. 2). An estimated \$930 million is required to respond to a target of 5.8 million highly vulnerable people – just over half of those identified as in need (ibid., p. 14). In addition to these figures and concerns, which relate to the phenomenon of internally displaced people (IDPs) from within the borders of Iraq, supporting a further 233,224 Syrian refugees in 76,233 households increases strain on Iraqi infrastructures and system.

A variety of structural inadequacies and problems weaken the integrity of the Iraqi state and affect the lives of most Iraqis. An ongoing inadequate supply of electricity forces much of the population to rely on expensive public and private generators, which are themselves often inadequate for operating devices which require voltage above a certain threshold, including air conditioners for heating and cooling – a necessity to maintain good health, rather than a comfortable luxury, during Iraq’s cold winters and scorching hot summers. In early 2017, this

situation worsened in Dohuk governorate in particular, when regional authorities disallowed the use of public generators from early morning to early afternoon each day. This also has a negative economic impact, with irrigation systems, water purification plants, and sewage treatment systems regularly out of operation. Water insecurity is another concern, especially for those living in rural areas. There are high rates of chronic diseases, especially cancer, with hospitals unable to treat many cases due to a lack of medicines, equipment, and qualified staff. One in five Iraqis between the ages of 10 and 49 is functionally illiterate – a massive and shocking development considering Iraq’s “record-low illiteracy rate for the Middle East in the 1980s”. Rural Iraqis and women are overrepresented within this figure. Social support systems are virtually non-existent, and legal systems which disadvantage women often result in women entering informal polygamous marriages to obtain a modicum of protection and social support. Ongoing environmental degradation includes increased soil salinity and desertification. Finally, although Iraq boasts the third largest oil reserves internationally, this valuable natural resource has failed to reach its full economic potential due to ongoing conflict and instability, corruption, and a dearth of investment (The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq, 2016).

Additionally, Iraq remains a conflict zone, with a variety of political entities and militias vying for power and territory across the country¹, with cities such as Baghdad, Fallujah, and Kirkuk exposed to regular suicide bomb attacks and explosions from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In 2016, 16,393 civilian deaths resulted from violence, including executions; air attacks and shelling; suicide attacks; other IEDs; and gunfire not involving execution, with perpetrators including IS; US-led coalition forces; the Iraqi government; and allied militias. Nineveh, Baghdad, and Anbar governorates recorded the highest counts of civilian deaths respectively, with Nineveh – which includes the city of Mosul, the frontlines between IS and opposing forces, and the Yezidi homeland of Sinjar – alone recording 7,422 civilian deaths. Such violence does not discriminate according to age or status. In 2016, 12% (802) of the civilians killed by violence were children, with 342 killed by air attacks and shelling and 210 executed by IS. IS has also been known to exploit children to commit acts of violence

¹ Consult Appendix 1 for an overview of actors in control of terrain within Iraq as of December 2016 (Institute for the Study of War, 15th of December 2016).

themselves. In late March 2016, a child recruit of IS detonated a body-borne improvised explosive device (BBIED), killing himself and 17 other children (Iraq Body Count, 2017).

1.1.1 An Uncertain Future

Iraq and the peoples and communities within its borders face a formidable struggle in overcoming the tragic difficulties detailed above, and will encounter further potential challenges throughout 2017 and in the years to come. Although IS is widely considered to be on the back foot, with the group's power in Iraq "splintered" and its members "outnumbered and outgunned in both Iraq and Syria", it is expected that following the recapture of Mosul by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), IS will not dissolve, but will instead revert to guerrilla campaigns that would target civilians and serve to undermine attempts to restabilize vulnerable areas (The Guardian, 24th of February 2017). Even the Mosul Offensive itself represents significant danger to civilians, with 650,000 currently trapped on the west bank of the city as the second phase of the offensive was launched in February 2017. The UN has cited dwindling fuel and food supplies, scarce drinking water, and inadequate supplies of electricity in addition to the risks inherent in any military operation. The battle is expected to continue for many months (The Guardian, 19th of February 2017).

Political tensions are also anticipated to manifest in problematic ways in 2017. Iraq is home to a complex and diverse landscape of peoples of communities that do not necessarily overlap peacefully.² Local elections are scheduled to take place in all provinces throughout Iraq in September, but in regard to Kirkuk, where local elections have not been held in 12 years due to rivalries between Turkmen, Arabs, and Kurds, Kurdish authorities have already threatened to deprive up to 500,000 displaced persons in Kirkuk from voting for their home provinces in wider Iraq if Baghdad excludes Kirkuk from the upcoming elections. Additionally, local Turkmen and Arabs have called for the demolition of new neighbourhoods, established since 2003 and dominated by Kurds (Rudaw, 20th of January 2017). Local elections have already been postponed once, after initially being scheduled to take place in April (Niqash, 22nd of September 2016), and there is concern that in governorates previously dominated by IS, a power vacuum created by the ejection of the group and the overturning of traditional

² Consult Appendix 2 for a visualization of Iraq's religious composition (Izady/Gulf 2000, 2014).

structures dominated by tribal bodies or families will allow control to be placed in the hands of militias, which are seen as more effective and “the opposite of the politicians, who cannot seem to get anything done” (Niqash, 21st of July 2016). Finally, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which has expanded the territory under its control by up to 40% in the fight against IS, is considering using areas under its control as bargaining points in a renewed push for independence from Baghdad (The Guardian, 25th of February 2017). Each of these issues, which comprise a set of examples rather than a comprehensive list of political, economic, and security-related challenges facing Iraq in the months and years to come, will negatively impact the lives and futures of vulnerable individuals and communities whose lives have already long been at the mercy of those who seek to reshape Iraq according to their own, often incompatible, agendas.

1.1.2 The Kurdish Question

Kurds constitute the most visible ethnic minority within Iraq. To understand the position of other minorities, including Yezidis, it is essential to first have an overview of Kurdish politics, relevant actors, and Kurdish aspirations of nationhood. The struggles and challenges faced by other minorities reflect those experienced by Iraqi Kurds, either through the ‘Kurdish process’ informing positions taken by other groups or through treatment of other groups by Kurds mirroring treatment of Kurds under Iraqi regimes. Further, Kurdish actions in the Sinjar region since 2003 and the Kurdish response to developments in Sinjar in and since 2014 are direct results of Kurdish territorial and cultural claims and aspirations to independence.

Together, those who are ethnically defined as “Kurds” number approximately 25 million (McDowall, 2007, p. xi), spread between Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, with small population pockets to be found scattered across the former Soviet republics, including as far afield as Vladivostok (ibid., p. 490). They are considered “marginalized geographically, politically, and economically”, but have “steadily grown in importance” since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003, and “it is difficult to imagine they will sink again into the relative obscurity” of the twentieth century (ibid., p. xi). Within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), it is common to refer to the territory simply as “Kurdistan”, especially when speaking to Iraqi

Kurds. However, beyond this area, the same land can be referred to as “Southern Kurdistan”, with the term “Kurdistan” broadly implying the region of approximately 200,000 mostly contiguous square miles where a majority Kurdish population can be found straddling the four nation states named above (ibid., p. xii & Izadi, 2015, p. 1). Kurds find commonality in claiming a shared ancestry, which is “possibly fictive”, and in a shared language, despite difference of dialects and scripts across geography, and common linguistic classifications of the different varieties of spoken and written Kurdish as “related languages” rather than strictly as dialects (McDowell, 2007, p. 3).



FIGURE 1: Map showing Kurdish populated areas across Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Armenia (The New York Times, July 2014).

The Kurds, a people without a nation, have suffered many episodes of violence and many forms of oppression and abuses of human rights at the hands of the ruling powers in the countries which they inhabit. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein began a campaign of “Arabization” in the early 1970s which continued for decades, shifting Kurds and other minorities (including the Yezidis of Sinjar) away from their traditional (especially mountainous) homelands and into collective urbanized villages (Mufti, 2004, pp. 8–9). Since 2003, Kurds and others have been steadily returning to homes and agricultural holdings formerly owned by them or their families, exacerbating pre-existing tensions among various groups (ibid., p.1). Towards the

end of the Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s, Saddam’s ‘Anfal’ operations targeted Iraqi Kurds in a genocidal campaign which killed more than 100,000 people and left thousands more homeless (ibid., p. 2). The most well-known episode of Saddam’s targeted violence against the Kurdish people involved the use of chemical weapons in the village of Halabja on the Iraqi side of the border with Iran, in which approximately 5,000 civilians died as the result of a single day of attacks. (McDowall, 2007, p. 358). In Turkey, areas inhabited by a majority Kurdish population have historically been the poorest and least developed parts of the country, and periods of military rule, during which there has been a “high level of violence, arrests, and deportations” have not been uncommon (Zubaida, 2005, p. 2). Such episodes have frequently been instigated in reaction to activities of the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, or Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), an insurgent group blacklisted by several other countries (ibid.). Further, Kurdish identity has been broadly denied under sentiments of Turkish nationalism, with bans on the use of the Kurdish language(s) observed in the past (ibid., p. 4).

Politically, the Kurds cannot be considered a unified group. Within Iraq, competition is dominated by the Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê, or Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Masoud Barzani, current president of KR-I and son of former party leader Mustafa Barzani; and the Yekîtiya Nîştimanî ya Kurdistanê or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), ostensibly led by Jalal Talabani, who served as President of Iraq from 2005 to 2014 (The Maghreb and Orient Courier, 2016). Both groups are clan-based, and can claim strong tribal support, with a division between support for the KDP found in the central and western regions of KR-I, and support for the PUK found in the east, towards Iran. In the 1990s, a civil war was fought along party lines, and many Iraqi Kurds worry that continued tension between the KDP and the PUK will escalate to violent conflict in future. Both parties control different units of the Pêşmerge or Peshmerga (literally “those who confront death”), which is often presented as a unified, ‘national’ Kurdish army in international media (ibid.).

In 2014, before IS advanced across Iraq, KR-I was hit by a different kind of crisis. Not only was the region sorely affected by a decline in global oil prices, but the KRG in particular lost significant funding from Baghdad as a form of retaliation against Kurdish moves to begin exporting oil directly to Turkey and thus bypassing the usual channel of the federal government. As a result, many salaries in the public sector, estimated to total \$800 million

per month, began to go unpaid. The KRG introduced fuel rations and other austerity measures, and violent protests have periodically erupted in urban centers across KR-I in the years since the crisis hit (Reuters, February 2016). Coupled with the influx of refugees and IDPs, in addition to financing the offensive against IS on frontlines near Kurdish territories, it is unlikely that these dire fiscal circumstances will abate soon. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, territory within Iraq under Kurdish control has expanded significantly during this time.

Crucially, it is important to note Kurdish aspirations for independence and nationhood, which has developed throughout and been shaped by the struggles detailed above. Kurds are thought to be “the largest stateless national group in the world” (Business Insider, June 2014). Throughout the twentieth century, in both Turkey and Iraq, Turks and Arabs “began to embrace an ethnic sense of identity” such that Kurds “found themselves competing against states intent on forging a new identity based upon an ethnicity they felt denied their own” (McDowell, 2007, p. 2). A pan-Kurdish identity was possibly solidified as a form of resistance to the imposition of other identities by more powerful, and more official, authorities. Although the quest for Kurdish nationhood has progressed in Iraq, with the formation of Iraqi Kurdistan as an autonomous region with its own government, border controls, and military bodies, it remains far from an independent nation. Certainly Iraq is unwilling to relinquish the water supplies and valuable petro-resources to be found within this territory (ibid., p. 7). However, President Masoud Barzani periodically asserts that a referendum on the matter will be held imminently (see e.g. BBC, July 2014; RadioFreeEurope, February 2016; K24, March 2016), and gains in territory have led some to predict that a renewed push for independence may soon be seen from the KRG (see e.g. Business Insider, 2014 & The Guardian, 25th of February 2017).

1.2 The Case of the Yezidis

The Yezidis³ constitute a distinct and significant ethno-religious minority present in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia, with a diaspora present in Europe (especially

³ Also commonly spelt ‘Yazidis’ in English or ‘Êzidî’ in Latinized Kurdish.

Germany) and the United States (Açıkyıldız, 2010, p. 33). Estimates of recent and past populations within wider Iraqi territory have varied wildly, from between 100,000 and 250,000 (Kreyenbroek, 1995, quoted in Allison, 2001, p. 26) up to over 500,000 (Açıkyıldız, 2010, p. 33) with 600,000 rounding out the highest estimates (Yazda, 2017). Scholars reach agreement that the Yezidis form a “sizeable community” of which “no reliable statistics” exist (Allison, 2001, p. 26). However, the larger of these estimates are probably more accurate, as greater attention has been paid to Yezidis following the events of August 2014 within both Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraq, and by the international community, yielding more reliable figures. The population present within Iraq constitutes the most significant concentration of Yezidis, with a number of important religious sites present within Iraqi Kurdistan. I visited Lalesh, the most significant of these sites, a number of times between 2012 and 2016, and the Sinjar region, the traditional Yezidi homeland, in 2016. Previous literature on the Yezidis beyond that cited here is scant, with the majority of writing comprised of ethnographic approaches to understanding the culture, religion, and history of the community.

In Iraq, the Yezidis have long occupied a crossroads of territory. Historically, the community has found itself under the mandates of both the Ottoman Empire and British rule (Fuccaro, 1999, p. 2), and in contemporary times they are largely caught between Iraqi and Kurdish jurisdiction. In Iraq, until 2014, they were present mostly in Dohuk (estimated population of 57,000), Sheikhan (estimated population of 50,000), and Sinjar (estimated population of 300,000, constituting the majority) with smaller but nonetheless significant pockets in Tel Kef and the twin towns of Ba'shîqe/Beḫzanê⁴ (Açıkyıldız, 2010, p. 33). Although they are primarily Kurdish-speaking, with the Kurmanji dialect prevalent, many Yezidis perceive themselves as distinct from both Kurds and Arabs. This sense of independent Yezidi identity has further crystallized since 2014. Moreover, as neither Christians, Muslims, or Jews, they are not “people of the book” (Allison, 2001, p. 26), which, along with other aspects of their religious practice, has been used to justify violence by all dominant religious groups in the region against the Yezidis in the name of religious cause (The Guardian, 11th of August 2014). In Iraq especially, they are a strictly endogamous group, forming a “discrete community among other groups” with a “religious and social structure [which] ensures a

⁴ Hereafter referred to as ‘Bashiqa’, reflecting standard Anglicized terminology.

degree of social and cultural uniformity” (Allison, 2001, p. 4). Further, Yezidi history does have notable overlaps with Kurdish history, especially in eastern Turkey, as evidenced by oral traditions describing significant historical events (ibid., p. 5).



FIGURE 2: Map showing location of Sinjar in Iraq, with relation to major Kurdish cities. Note: ‘Kurdish Region’ depicted represents areas of majority Kurdish-speaking population rather than official boundaries of Iraqi Kurdistan or extent of KRG control (PBS, August 2014).

It cannot be said that the Yezidi community has ever occupied a comfortable position of social or political empowerment. Just as the Yezidi population straddles geographical territory over which more powerful and more official actors grapple for recognition and authority, they also straddle political, social, and religious 'in-between' zones. Long persecuted as devil worshippers (Açıkyildiz, 2010, p. 28), Yezidis were again targeted when IS swept through their homeland of the Sinjar region in August 2014. The aftermath of this attack was horrific. An estimated 7,000 women and children were captured and enslaved by IS, with women subjected to mass rape and reduced to a state of sexual slavery by the group (The Guardian, 4th of August 2016). As of August 2016, two years after what UN investigators have termed a genocide which sought to “erase their identity” (The Guardian, 16th of June 2016), an estimated 3,200 women and children remain in captivity. Further, approximately 5,000 men were killed (The Guardian, 4th of August 2016) and upper estimates of the number of people displaced from Sinjar into Kurdish controlled areas immediately following the attack reach 450,000 (Al-Monitor, August 2015). Much of Sinjar has since been retaken by Kurdish (KDP) Peshmerga forces, but both returning Yezidis and those who have remained in KR-I continue to face difficulties including homelessness, malnutrition, inadequate access to medical facilities, inadequate access to education systems, and immense

psychological trauma (Yazda, 2017). In a report detailing the retaking of Sinjar, Rashid Haji, a 44 year-old Yezidi fighter states “...this is not the first time Yazidis were massacred” (Al Jazeera, 2016).

1.2.1 Education in Particular

Education in Iraq is “strictly controlled by the national Iraqi government, through the Iraqi Ministry of Education” (IRFAD, 2014). Students are channelled into career paths and higher education options according to the results of a Baccalaureate exam administered upon completion of the twelfth grade. The same system is in place in regard to formal, public education in the Kurdistan region, with education controlled and administered by the KRG, through the KRG Ministry of Education (MoE). In the cases of both ministries, education is managed at governorate level through Directorates of Education (DoEs). Officially, students in Iraq begin formal education at age six, attending six years of primary school, three years of intermediate school, and three years of secondary school. Education is compulsory to completion of the sixth grade, at which time students are permitted to ‘choose’ to further their studies according to the results of their final primary level examination (ibid.).

As previously mentioned, during the end of the twentieth century, Iraq’s education system was considered one of the best in the Middle East, with low illiteracy rates and complete gender parity in enrolment (Issa & Jamil, 2010, p. 362). This has not remained the case since 2003. Challenges facing this sector cited by the Iraqi Research Foundation for Analysis and Development (IRFAD) include: a lack of government support; a decreasing percentage of eligible students; an increasing number of children involved in labor rather than attending school; insufficient salaries for teachers and insufficient teaching materials, including textbooks; and, in regard to higher education: inadequate infrastructure and facilities; a weak link between higher education, graduates, and the labor market; and reduction in government support for students (2014). To this list can be added the immense damage inflicted upon schools and educational institutes by conflict; the influx of Syrian refugees; and the displacement of massive pockets of the Iraqi population into areas already facing fiscal and infrastructural strain (such as KR-I).

Historically, Yezidis have been a “non-literate, and even anti-literate, community”, with “reading and writing forbidden by Yezidi law to all but a particular dynasty of Sheikhs” (Allison, 2008, p. 14). It is unclear when this internal rule against literacy, and thus against attending formal schooling, was lifted, but interviewees approached during the course of this research estimated that Yezidis began attending school en masse from around the 1950s onwards.

In the Sinjar district, which – on paper – is under the administration of the Iraqi federal government, the Iraqi system of education has been accessible for decades while the provision of formal Kurdish schooling has been present since 2003. As is to be expected, the Iraqi education system is delivered in Arabic, while the Kurdish system is officially delivered in Sorani Kurdish. Although Yezidis are Kurdish-speaking, many express a preference for the Iraqi system, for reasons including the greater utility of Arabic as an academic language, perceptions of the Iraqi curriculum as of better quality than the Kurdish, and access to the University of Mosul if one completes primary and secondary level schooling with the requisite examination results under Iraqi administration. This is discussed at greater length in later sections related to research findings. However, it is important to note that the provision of both systems of education in the Sinjar district has not necessarily *improved* access to education for Sinjar’s Yezidis, due to the political manipulation inherent in compelling families to select one system above the other. This will also be a focus of later sections.

Jeffrey D. Sachs, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the Sustainable Development Goals, opens the UNESCO 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report with the assertion that “education is the most vital input for every dimension of sustainable development. Better education leads to greater prosperity, improved agriculture, better health outcomes, less violence, more gender equality, higher social capital and an improved natural environment” (p. ii). In the same report, Sachs states that “education makes people more likely to participate in political processes constructively and nonviolently,” that “better education is clearly linked to more women in political leadership,” that “an education that is provided equally, with inclusive teaching and learning materials, is a powerful preventive tool and antidote for conflict,” and that “conflict is taking an increasingly large toll on education systems” (ibid., p. 94). In a context such as Iraq, which has seen significant episodes of

violence and conflict throughout its modern history; and in regard to the Yezidi community, which has occupied a position of political, social, and economic disadvantage for generations; it is for these reasons – in addition to the unique difficulties posed by operating two competing public educational systems within one nation state – that education in particular is such a salient issue to examine, at this point in time, in conjunction with the above factors.

1.3 Research Structure and Approach

Following this introduction, which includes a brief overview of the current and future context of Iraq; the position of the Kurds socially and politically; the case of the Yezidis; a primer on the educational system(s) present on the ground and the difficulties present in schooling; and mention of the importance of examining education in regard to Yezidis and the political competition to which they are vulnerable; this thesis is structured simply.

1.3.1 Research Questions

This thesis endeavours to understand Yezidi perceptions of access to formal education for Yezidi children and youth in and from the Sinjar region since 2003, with particular regard to how and why this has been affected by political competition within Iraq. To ascertain this understanding, the following specific questions guide this research:

1. *How is access to formal education perceived by the Yezidi community for Yezidi children and youth in and from the Sinjar district, specifically during the periods between 2003 and 2014, and following the mass displacement since 2014?*

To answer this question, the educational pathways of research participants from within the Yezidi community are considered, in addition to discussions of any difficulty or problems in accessing education experienced or observed by interviewees. Those participants who are not Yezidi offer supporting insights into these issues. Further, attention is paid to which educational systems and institutions these students have had access; how this has differed between primary, secondary, and tertiary levels; and the process and experiences of transition between these levels of education. Of great use in answering this question are the responses

of a significant proportion of research participants who are Yezidi youth themselves, whose own experiences directly reflect official and unofficial educational policies.

2. *What are the prominent Yezidi discourses around this?*

While the first research question is concerned with *how* access to education is perceived by Yezidis, this second question seeks to understand contemporary Yezidi thought around *why* this may be the case. In some cases, research participants are asked to explicitly state reasons why there may be difficulties in access to or provision of education. In other cases, interviewees offered such insights through long narratives without such questions being asked of them. Consideration is paid to how political competition or political agendas have manifested in regard to education; how and why this is targeted; how this could be beneficial to political bodies; and how evolving Yezidi identity interacts with this.

3. *What are the implications of perceived difficulties in access to education and the surrounding discourses for children and youth within the Yezidi community, and for the Yezidi minority as a whole?*

This question is forward-looking, and pays attention to how the Yezidi community has addressed or responded to this issue; what mechanisms are utilized individually and collectively to ease problems of access to education; and the importance of education to the Yezidi community. In answering this question, all insights from research participants from within the Yezidi community are invaluable, but others, such as advocates for the community, offer supporting data.

1.3.2 Conceptual Overview

The next section focuses on relevant previous literature and theory according to a conceptual typology which forms the triangle of ‘sovereignty’, ‘identity’, and ‘education’. Although no single theory has a guiding hand in this thesis, there are several examined within the second section which serve to clarify and frame the research findings. In regard to sovereignty, a Foucauldian approach to authority and structures of power is taken, with a focus on the shift

from governance as primarily territorial to governance as primarily biopolitical. In this thesis, ‘sovereignty’ is considered as the highest power in government as possessed or claimed by a state or authoritative community, resulting in the actions or manners of controlling, organizing, policing, or otherwise authoritatively conducting the affairs, policy, or actions of a state, region, district, or community. It is recognized in interviews when interviewees discuss formal political bodies; when interviewees mention rules pertaining to the Yezidi community; and when interviewees mention competition between formal or informal political bodies. The term ‘political competition’ will be considered to broadly include pushing political agendas, as attempting to further a certain political agenda is necessarily a competitive act opposed to other viewpoints, groups, organizations, and objectives. Further, religious agendas will be included under political agendas for the purposes of this research. Individualistic tensions or disputes are not examples of challenges to sovereignty.

The second conceptual umbrella, ‘identity’, is the most nebulous. Here, development, cohesion, and fragmentation of identity is considered. Displacement as a result of violent conflict, and the figure of the refugee, are addressed, as are ‘othering’ and identity politics and discussions of Yezidi identity as Kurdish or not-Kurdish. Attention is paid particularly to construction and understanding of communal identity. Also relevant are individual and communal experiences of displacement, which create a very tangible fragmentation as a population flees, scatters, and seeks protection. Further, the disruptive nature of the ‘refugee’ or displaced figure is considered. This pertains specifically to the ongoing conflict in Northern Iraq from 2014, with recognition of the systematic killing and enslavement of targeted groups and the necessity of fleeing places of origin within a state to the relative safety of areas within an autonomous region governed by another body. The deep trauma of the events of August 3rd, 2014, and the ongoing effects of this event to the present day, is felt on both an individual and a collective level across the Yezidi community. In interviews, this typology is recognized when people explicitly mention leaving homelands, especially Sinjar, as a direct result of insecurity or invasion, when people discuss identity as a Yezidi or as a Kurd, and when people discuss significant internal schisms within Yezidism that have implications for the future of the wider community. It is difficult to explicitly define exclusions from this conceptual typology, as any level of communal fragmentation or fragmentation of identity even as a result of personal choice – such as an individual leaving

Iraq prior to 2014 to pursue greater economic opportunity – could be relevant to the formation of Yezidi identity or the repression of such identity through the withholding of resources by more powerful groups.

The third and final conceptual umbrella, ‘education’, is perhaps the simplest to define. In this thesis, education in emergencies is considered, as is the politicization of education. Education itself is examined through the Vygotskian lens of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Within the research data, it is considered as the formal system of schooling in Iraq, with secondary attention paid to non-formal educational activities that support formal schooling and curricula. Within the interview data collected, it is recognized when people explicitly mention a) experiences as a student, b) experiences as a teacher, or c) observations related to students and teachers within their communities. Education must fall under the above categories of the formal systems of Iraq or be directly related to supporting the above systems through non-formal activities. Excluded from ‘education’ in this research is participation in informal study or learning, which reveals motivation and attitude to education, but cannot be included within formal education here.

1.3.3 The Qualitative Research Process

The next section describes data and methodology. This thesis is centered around a qualitative research process. The primary data set consists of in-depth, mostly narrative interviews with individuals including: NGO workers, current or former Yezidi students at secondary or tertiary level, advocates for the Yezidi minority, Yezidi community leaders, Yezidi IDPs who have never entered formal schooling, Yezidi intellectuals, Yezidi teachers and school managers, and a KRG representative, totalling nearly fifteen hours of recorded data. The data collection process followed Herbert J. and Irene S. Rubin’s responsive interviewing model throughout (2005a), which emphasizes the exercise of constant reflexivity and the necessity of maintaining constant awareness of one’s emotions during interviews to better frame questions in a way that averts personal frustrations, to minimize the likelihood that interviewees will seek to avoid offering sensitive information that may be key, and to maintain distance in a manner that ensures the inevitable empathy a researcher will feel towards informants does not distort the research process (Ibid, pp. 30–2). As I was working in

close proximity to the Yezidi community throughout the research process, and was exposed to tragic personal and communal narratives, the responsive interviewing model was invaluable in maintaining objectivity.

The method of analysis selected was thematic, as described by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006, p. 6) as a flexible method “for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” that “minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail”. Thematic analysis requires that the researcher take an active approach, acknowledging that while research participants can be enabled to ‘speak’ through the research process, the research itself is strongly shaped and cultivated by the researcher with findings being carefully and considerately extracted from data sets rather than simply ‘emerging’ as phenomena existing to be discovered (ibid., p. 8). This approach recognizes the subjective nature of qualitative research through the interpretation and meaning-making it demands, and places the onus on the researcher to achieve objectivity and truthfulness through a rigorous, thoughtful, and insightful interrogation of results. In this research, analysis and discussion is conducted on both the manifest *and* latent levels, which “goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (ibid., p. 13). The coding process used during this analysis was advised by Rubin and Rubin⁵ (2005b).

1.3.4 What Next?

Findings, discussion, and a conclusion comprise the three final sections of this research. Discussion of the research results is synchronised with the theoretical and conceptual framework presented earlier in the second section before the research questions themselves are tackled. Finally, in the concluding section, a description of the worrying recent developments that occurred in Sinjar over the time of writing this thesis (the first quarter of 2017) is provided. Recommendations for further study within the highly changeable contemporary context of Iraq are also made before brief closing thoughts are offered.

⁵ Consult Appendix 3 for Data Coding Tree used.

2 A TRIANGULAR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“Yeah, you tried to kill me. But I’m not going to kill you. I will take my rights. By my words, not more. And my education.” – Interviewee 10, September 2016

The literature discussed within establishes a triangular theoretical framework between the points of *sovereignty*, *identity*, and *education*. Consideration of sovereignty begins with a Foucauldian understanding of governance and the formation of the modern nation state, before continuing with a discussion of biopolitics and sovereign authority as control of population rather than control of territory. Attention then turns to identity, beginning with an understanding of the figure of the displaced person as a challenge to the concept of sovereignty itself, before a discussion of identity politics and identity and state formation in Iraq, followed by displacement as fragmentation of identity in its own right. Finally, the triangle is constructed with consideration of education in emergencies and the value of education to displaced persons, an understanding of what constitutes education through Vygotskian theory, with a final return to authority and control with the politicization of education. These concepts are discussed in a linear fashion, but effort has made to follow a line which could be connected at beginning and end to form a triangle in which *sovereignty*, *identity*, and *education* represent the three points.

2.1 Sovereignty

2.1.1 Foucault’s Governance

In his eponymous lecture at the Collège de France on February 1st, 1978, Michel Foucault endeavoured to outline his concept of 'governmentality'. Foucault (1978, p. 87) began his overview in the sixteenth century, suggesting that during this period the question of 'government' came to the fore in regard to personal conduct, government of “souls and lives,” government of children and the “great problematic of pedagogy,” and government of state by “the prince”. Questions of the latter form of government include “how to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, and how to become the best possible governor,” leading to establishment of the concept of the

modern state (ibid., pp. 87–8). Foucault's history of governmentality is traced through Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Foucault does make use of other texts, especially La Perriere's *Le Miroir Politique*, but it is his understanding of the former that appears most useful. He first asserts that the figure of government, the prince, is transcendent of his principality and thus external to it. His link to his territory is synthetic and fragile, and so must be continually under threat from both external enemies who seek to conquer his principality and “from within by subjects who have no a priori reason to accept his rule” (ibid., p. 90). This leads Foucault to conclude that under Machiavelli's reasoning, 'the art of government' is about maintaining governance or authority and is “essentially a treatise about the prince's ability to keep his principality” (ibid.).

Foucault (1978, p. 91) explains that Machiavelli's transcendent prince is merely one of many manifestations of government. Others include governance of children by teachers, families by heads, and convents by superiors, all of which exist within the state. This 'government within government' is ensured by a downwards continuity from 'the prince', who demonstrates correct operation of a state to his subjects who then exercise similar authority within their own, smaller domains, right down to an individual level at which people “behave as they should” (ibid., p. 92). Foucault perceives this downwards transmission of principles of good governance as described by Machiavelli to be the emergence of 'police' (ibid.).

Simultaneously, an upwards continuity also exists. Foucault explains that this takes the form of “pedagogical formation” of the prince, during which the prince first learns to “govern himself, his goods and his patrimony” (ibid., p. 91). Central to these continuities is the application of economy, which is “the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family” introduced at state level, which means “exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods” (ibid., p. 92).

As such, Foucault (1978, p. 93) believes a Machiavellian understanding of principality to be largely concerned with territory. He contrasts this with La Perriere, who he claims asserts that “one governs things,” which he interprets to mean “a complex composed of men and things” such as “men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, territory with its specific qualities, climate,

irrigation, fertility” or “men in their relation to... customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking” or finally “men in their relation to... accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death”. Nonetheless, La Perriere's understanding of governance need not be in opposition to Machiavelli's, as both are concerned with 'common good' or “a state of affairs where all the subjects without exception obey the laws, accomplish the tasks expected of them, practise the trade to which they are assigned, and respect the established order so far as this order conforms to the laws imposed by God on nature and men” (ibid., p. 95).

Foucault (1978, p. 100) then progresses to what he believes to be a more modern focus of governance, which is that of population. Through the perspective of population and the emergence of statistical analyses, the model of the family was eliminated and the notion of economy recentered. Family became an internal instrument of government of population, which is “the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, vis-a-vis the government, of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it”. However, this made the problem of sovereignty “more acute than ever” with discipline “never more important or more valorized than at the moment when it became important to manage a population” (ibid., pp. 101–2). From this, we see the emergence of the framework of 'sovereignty - discipline - government' which is targeted towards the population and makes essential use of “the apparatuses of security” (ibid.).

Foucault posits that early definitions of governmentality and sovereignty have been supplanted, but that these definitions remain appropriate to issues of human power and authority over others, and are perhaps especially useful in regard to identifying hidden networks of power or 'quiet' or 'background' authority over a vulnerable, disenfranchised minority. Machiavelli's many manifestations of government and the 'family model' detailed by Foucault (1978) remain valid as reminders of the possible presence of structures of governance that may be present informally, while replication of authority articulated in the downwards continuity of sovereignty and the subsequent production of surveillance and control surely cannot be made redundant by the emergence of biopolitics (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). Likewise, La Perriere's governance which concerns “men in their relations” to, for example, wealth, customs, or misfortunes remains resonant as an articulation of the exercise

of authority over others in relation to resources, cultural habits and practices, and phenomena of all kinds (ibid., p. 93).

2.1.2 Biopolitical Authority

This leads us to the emergence of Foucault's concept of "biopolitics". Foucault (1997, p. 73) defines this as an endeavour beginning in the eighteenth century to "rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population" such as health, sanitation, birthrate, and lifespan. Didier Fassin (2001, p. 3) elucidated this concept with a discussion about undocumented foreigners, racial discrimination, and 'otherness' in France, which he asserts encompassed management of immigrant populations unprecedented in France at the time of writing. Fassin mentioned that health and illness were becoming the most legitimate grounds for undocumented foreigners to gain legal status, and so "the suffering body has imposed its own legitimacy where other grounds for recognition were increasingly brought into question" (ibid.). The 'othering' that Fassin describes was perpetrated under the mask of nationality, or the "legal definition of identity," but in practicality was towards that of the racialized body (ibid.). Fassin employs the term "biopolitics" to describe this phenomenon of the body becoming "the site of inscription for the politics of immigration" (ibid., p. 4). The undocumented foreigners that Fassin references are not recent immigrants who have entered French territory through illegal means, but are instead foreigners who have been resident in France for some time, immigrant workers recruited to serve in French industry, or those from French overseas territories, and thus may have legitimate claims to legal status. The biopolitics at stake here is regarding not who may legally enter, but who may be legitimately present, within the sovereign state.

Biopolitics and Didier Fassin's 'othering' provide clarity and depth in regard to the particular manifestations, both official and unofficial, of governance and public authority at work over different demographics in Iraq. 'Othering' is a regular and accepted phenomenon within this complex social setting, which even a cursory glance at the blurred lines of political identity present in Kurdistan reveals. Although this research is focused on displaced members of the Yezidi community, there are many other minority demographics present – Syrian Kurdish

refugees who could be either Christian or Muslim (and either Sunni or Shia); Iraqi Arab IDPs; Christian IDPs from Mosul who may identify as Assyrian but are also Iraqi citizens; Shabaks and Kakai who may or may not identify as Kurdish; or others from within this complex and nuanced geography.

The important concept of biopolitics is also central to Benjamin Muller, writing in 2004. Muller (2004, p. 50) writes with reference to the attacks of the 11th of September, 2001, which he claims were enabled by networks, multiple identities, fluid capital, and altered spatio-temporal relations made possible by the emergence of globalisation or transnationalism. The UK White Paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain* (Home Office, February 2002) is central to his article. Muller claims that states responded to the attacks with “conventional international relations themes, such as sovereignty, borders, and bounded identities” including increased border controls and passport restrictions, which was followed by the formation of ever-stronger connections between asylum-seekers and security threats within national discourses (ibid.). Muller also aligns himself with Giorgio Agamben's writing, elucidated further in regard to the refugee and sovereignty, and makes reference to Benedict Anderson, with his characterisation of the 'scandalous' nature of the refugee that highlights the fragility of modern sovereignty and the “imagined communities” in which we live (ibid., p. 51).

2.1.3 The Refugee Versus Sovereignty

Muller makes a strong argument for the refugee as key to understanding sovereign authority, stating “the very core of what can be referred to as 'refugee politics' is the very act of 'reterritorialization' that makes the refugee... at once both the representation of sovereignty's limits and a target of sovereign power” (ibid., p. 52). He asserts that such life becomes managed or administered through governmentality, which also bears a connection to Foucault's genealogy of the prison, in which “disciplinary power” is employed to correct the body (ibid.). Muller echoes Foucault himself, suggesting that the ultimate exercise of power is now power over population rather than power over territory, and derides international relations theory for failing to acknowledge this (ibid.). Muller also touches upon the privatisation of refugee accommodation in the UK. In employing private companies,

euphemistically referred to as “accommodation specialists,” the state “transfers authority to private actors” in a move that both enables and prohibits claims of responsibility as may be most convenient to governmental authority (ibid., p. 55). This is also discussed further within the *Identity* section with regard to Australia's policies towards asylum seekers. Concluding that “the “political subjectivity” of the refugee is of little interest to the state,” Muller reinforces understanding of the refugee as “little more than a biological being that requires management and discipline, either to regiment its existence within, or prevent its entrance altogether,” supporting the application of Foucault's biopolitics to the refugee and the characterisation of modern sovereign power as that which is exercised over population (ibid.).

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Giorgio Agamben (1998, p. 10) himself indicates that we have passed Foucault's “threshold of biological modernity”. Agamben asserts that the friend/enemy dichotomy is no longer as fundamental to Western politics as are the dyads of bare life/political existence, zoe/bios, or exclusion/inclusion (ibid., p. 12). He introduces the “zone of indistinction” which occurs when the state of exception starts to become the norm, with what was once 'external' appearing and existing within 'internal' space – the “state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another” (ibid., p. 28). Agamben points to a failure of what he terms the 'birth-nation link', which is no longer capable of “performing its legitimating function inside the nation-state”, which he asserts is extremely significant in regard to both immense increases in the numbers of refugees and stateless persons and to “contemporaneous institution by many European states of juridical measures allowing for the mass denaturalisation and denationalisation of large portions of their own populations” (ibid., p. 77). This signals a rupture which we have not yet begun to reconcile in the “separation of the rights of man from the rights of the citizen” (ibid., p. 78).

Giorgio Agamben (1995) asserted that the refugee embodies a crisis of the concept of human rights rather than embodying universal human rights themselves. Rights are granted by the state in relation to citizenship, and in upsetting the notion of citizenship, the refugee proves that human rights are not “sacred and inalienable” in practice. Life in a refugee or IDP camp, and status as a refugee or IDP, is a nominally temporary condition, but in reality is often extended for a prolonged period of time – in many cases a lifetime, or even beyond if refugee or IDP camps exist across generations. He also indicates that while we are experiencing a

separation of humanitarianism and politics, humanitarian organisations are gaining ever more support from international commissions and “maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight.” To Agamben, humanitarianism operates “in perfect symmetry with state power” (1998, p. 78.).

In the Kurdish setting, the notion of citizenship is already a curious one, and thus IDPs from within Iraq but beyond the border of the autonomous region of Kurdistan – or simply those who are not Kurdish, whether from the hinterlands of the Nineveh Plains or beyond – seem to fulfill Agamben's characterisation of the refugee. In fact, a valid case could be made for Agamben's rupture between 'birth' and 'nation' which “throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty” (Agamben, 1995, p. 117) simply on the Kurdish question and with studies of Kurdish identity alone. A “permanently resident mass of noncitizens” takes on rich connotations in regard to Kurdistan in general, and to the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq in particular. In the case of the Yezidis, a smaller, less powerful, and less visible minority subject to control of both the sovereign nation of Iraq and the autonomous Kurdistan region, notions of citizenship and issues related to human rights are even more complex.

2.2 Identity

2.2.1 Identity Politics

An understanding of identity politics is crucial to the Yezidi, Kurdish, and broader Iraqi contexts. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242), writing on *Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, asserts that “identity-based politics has been a source of strength, community, and international development” for marginalized groups, but that the embrace of such politics “has been in tension with dominant conceptions of social justice”. She states, “The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (ibid.). This assertion accurately reflects international attitudes to the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, which ignores both differences and conflicts between groups who identify as Kurdish, and the imposition of Kurdish identity on others, such as the Yezidis of

Iraq, who increasingly seek identification and recognition of a uniquely Yezidi identity which is not subsumed by 'Kurdishness'.

Nancy Fraser (1999, p. 25) explains identity politics as "aiming towards a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect". Fraser argues that 'recognition' of identity cannot alone provide the social justice sought by marginalized groups advocating for the right to classification on their own terms. Instead, recognition must be coupled with redistribution to be effective and emancipatory (ibid., p. 26). Fraser discusses redistribution largely in terms of material goods and resources (ibid., p. 25), which could certainly include land in terms of personal ownership, and could be extended to include territory in terms of political delineation and governance. In the case of Iraq, the KRG seeks both recognition and redistribution from the federal government and from the international community. However, the Kurdish contingent(s) simultaneously fail to recognise others and redistribute accordingly, instead subsuming and marginalizing smaller demographics. In this context, identity politics can be observed as both conflating differences as per Crenshaw, and seeking social justice as per Fraser, with a fractal hierarchy occurring according to size and power.

Antonio Gramsci (1999, p. 437) asserts that "The unity of history... is not a presupposition, but a continuously developing process" and that "identity in concrete reality determines identity of thought, and not vice versa." In this case, the development of identity politics for the Yezidi minority in Iraq can be considered as a reaction to the events, narratives, and political developments that have shaped this process. While the Kurdish demographic in Iraq seeks to assert its identity against narratives of Arab nationalism and places an ethnicity-centered definition of identity above a definition of identity that gives religion primacy, it also seeks to control identity narratives of smaller, less powerful demographics, such as the Yezidis. While the KRG endeavors to maintain narrative hegemony over the identities of minorities which reside within what this political body considers to be its rightful territory on the grounds that these minorities are 'Kurdish' due to use of Kurdish language or inclusion of aspects of 'Kurdish' culture, the Yezidi minority of Sinjar may resist this attempt at hegemonic dominance by giving primacy to the not-Kurdish aspects of its community, society, and culture. If identity in concrete reality does define identity of thought, as opposed

to the reverse, then a Yezidi identity has always been present, and has erupted as a force with which to be reckoned through the events which constitute the continuously developing process of history.

2.2.2 Identity and State Formation in Iraq

In *Ethnicity, State Formation, and Conscription in Postcolonial Iraq: The Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar*, Nelida Fuccaro (1997) acknowledges the importance of ethnicity in nation-building in this setting. Fuccaro posits that ethnicity emerged as centrally important to the development Iraqi politics in the period following independence from British control in 1932, and that “ethnic specificity emerged as a major factor in the shaping of postcolonial Iraqi society, despite the continuous attempts at enforcing a new national identity on the part of a still fragile state” (p. 559). Fuccaro illustrates her argument with regard to Yezidis from the Sinjar region and the universal forced conscription that began in 1934. Sinjari Yezidis actively resisted conscription, taking up arms against authorities, who were then “compelled to send a major military expedition to restore peace in the area” which resulted in “the imposition of martial law” (ibid.). Fuccaro states that during this time, the Yezidis of Sinjar comprised a marginalized group, with a leadership structure that did not extend influence beyond Yezidi tribes and territory. She asserts that this was a continuation of “ethnic solidarity centering on religion and tribal affiliation that did not differ substantially from those displayed by the community during the conscription campaigns undertaken by the Ottomans in the second half of the 19th century,” but that this was newly consolidated during the 1930s in a communal manner which “reconstructed their ethnic solidarities as a political, cultural, and social resource within the newly created arena of a modern national state” (ibid., p. 560).

Fuccaro (1997, p. 564–565) identified religious oral tradition and kinship and blood ties as integral to Yezidi communal identity, but also illustrates an interesting incongruity to this latter concept with the presence of non-Yezidis within Yezidi tribes, living under Yezidi communal leadership structures. These tribesmen were not considered Yezidi – an identity which can only be granted through birth, and not obtained by either marriage, conversion, or adoption – but were granted tribal membership. Differentiation occurred at the (possibly

fictitious) clan level (ibid.). Fuccaro deems Yezidi identity until the 1930s ‘pre-national’, stating that Yezidi solidarity was formed around “primordial loyalties such as kinship, religion, and group endogamy” with “maintenance of contiguous settlement within the boundaries of the mountain” reinforcing this (ibid., p. 566). Further, she asserts that relations with Sunni Kurds were strained at this time, as a result of religious differentiation, physical isolation and earlier employment of Sunni Kurds against Yezidis by the Ottomans (ibid.). Of this latter point of contention, Fuccaro considers this to have been perceived as a conflict between Yezidis and Muslims by “the average Yezidi tribesman”.

Fuccaro describes the Sinjari Yezidi community as actively (through taking up arms against authorities in response to conscription) and passively (through endogamy and blood-ties) resistant to integration in a demographically diverse nation state. Conscription, in this case, could be considered an example of biopolitical control. Further, she indicates that this community historically occupied a position of disempowerment and marginalization that Yezidi leadership did not seem to be convinced would be overcome through relinquishing this distinct identity to a new, broad, identification as ‘Iraqi’ rather than Yezidi. At this time, it appears that the Yezidi community guarded Yezidi identity fiercely, resisting modernity and the sweeping advance of nationalism to retain this intact. Nonetheless, Fuccaro herself subsumes Yezidi identity to that of an offshoot of Kurdishness, from referring to “Yazidi Kurds” in the title of her work, to affirming that Yezidis are a “Kurdish heterodox group” in the opening pages (ibid., p. 560) and insisting that “all Yazidis are Kurds and Kurdish-speakers” (ibid., p. 564). This final claim is patently incorrect, ignoring the Arabic-speaking Yezidis of Bashiqa, near Mosul, anomalous though they may be.

While Fuccaro portrays Yezidi identity as singular, fiercely guarded, and resistant to the trappings of nationalism, M. Hakam Yavuz (1998) describes Kurdish identity quite differently. Yavuz states, “being Kurdish it not a singular identity,” describing this instead as “a product of the interaction between the local and the global, between politics and economics, and the struggle for justice and humane polity” (p. 10). Yavuz cites the previously-mentioned conflict between the two dominant political parties in KR-I, the PDK and the PUK, as a struggle “over the control and definition of the Kurdish identity” (ibid., p. 11) which encompasses the ‘Kurdish ethno-nationalism’ that has grown in recent decades. In

contrast to the Yezidis, who seemed to guard their identities and defining characteristics without developing a sense of nationalism around this, Yavuz points to certain characteristics of 'Kurdishness' that have faced restriction, such as the use of the Kurmanji language in Turkey, as transforming into symbols of Kurdish national identity (ibid., p. 14). Yavuz concludes that "the difficulty of resolving Kurdish ethno-nationalism reflects the complex nature of the multiple identities of the Kurds with respect to language, regionalism, and tribal ties" (ibid., p. 16). Hanna Yousif Freij (1998, p.20–21), who writes on intra-Kurdish alliances and disputes, states that national identity amongst Kurds "is not always as salient as that of other competing primordial identities" and that family allegiance or tribal identity comes foremost, explicitly before national loyalty. Freij indicates a belief that this comes at the cost of a "cohesive national movement" (ibid., p. 33). Ironically, it could be the case that diversity amongst the Kurds has both spurred a burgeoning nationalism that has not yet obviously appeared amongst the Yezidi community, and hindered its progression to the end-goal of attaining a recognized, independent nation-state.

2.2.3 Displacement as Fragmentation

People displaced by conflict or other disruptive phenomena can fall into two categories. Those who cross borders and seek safety within a state that is not their own are considered asylum seekers or refugees, a distinction dependent upon legal recognition of a person's status according to the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly). Those who remain within the borders or their own country of origin are considered to be 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs). This research addresses those who are primarily classified as IDPs. However, although much of the literature hereafter employs the term 'refugee', the theories and concepts discussed are equally applicable to Yezidis from the Sinjar district of Iraq who are currently resident in the Kurdish region. Although they remain in their country of citizenship, they are hosted by an authority that is officially autonomous and which pushes the defined limits of its partnership with the federal government as it strives towards independence. Further, as many Yezidis reject both Kurdish nationalism and classification as Kurds, despite speaking a dialect of the Kurdish language, they are not afforded the same benefits and privileges as a 'Kurdish citizen'. Although remaining in their country of citizenship does enable certain legal protections, this relies on weak and frequently corrupt

institutions which have never functioned optimally and have been further corroded by the most recent conflict and economic difficulties affecting the area.

To address the concept of displacement necessarily entails addressing questions of citizenship, belonging, jurisdiction, and ownership. Writing in 1995, during a period in which it came to be apparent that modern conflict is less about interstate disputes and is instead characterised more by internal violence perpetrated by complex networks in which it may be difficult to distinguish actors from each other in general and combatants from civilians in particular, Giorgio Agamben (1995, p. 11) calls for a reconstruction of political philosophy from the figure of the refugee and subsequent abandonment of our current conceptualisation of political subjects. Identifying himself as writing during the context of the “inexorable decline of the nation-state” and leaning on Hannah Arendt, who proposed in 1943 that the “refugee and person without a country” is “the paradigm of a new historical consciousness,” Agamben asserts that the distinction between stateless persons and refugees is not clear (*ibid.*, pp. 114–5). Further, Agamben identifies a difference between refugees as individuals and as a mass phenomenon, and argues that organisations established to deal with refugees and states acting unilaterally have proven to be “absolutely incapable not only of resolving the problem but also of dealing with it adequately” (*ibid.*, p. 115).

The above points made by Agamben in 1995 remain unfortunately salient more than twenty years later. However, the crux of his discussion rests on what he perceives to be the 'paradox' of the refugee as representing the radical crisis of the concept of human rights rather than embodying universal human rights themselves. To Agamben, human rights and the modern nation state are inexorably linked, and “the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man prove to be completely unprotected at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterise them as rights of the citizens of a state.” For many displaced persons, their status is prolonged and may be permanent. In refugee shelters worldwide, from Domiz in Kurdistan to Dadaab in Kenya to the Beldangi complex in Nepal to the 59 official Palestinian camps across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, we witness city-building enterprises (see e.g. Refugee Republic, 2015) and the birth of new generations (see e.g. The Guardian, 1st of February 2016). Nonetheless, the conceptualisation of the 'refugee' is that of a temporary

condition leading to either naturalisation or repatriation and we lack legal and cognitive recognition of a “permanent status of man in himself” (Agamben, 1995, p. 116).

Referring to the Latin *natio*, which originally meant 'birth', Agamben calls a 'fiction' the implication that 'birth' immediately becomes 'nation' with no distinction between the two moments. He insists that the refugee “throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty” and disrupts the trinity which exists between state, nation, and territory. Agamben refers to illegal immigration into Europe at the time of writing and posits that industrialised nations are faced with “a permanently resident mass of noncitizens” (ibid., p. 117). A mere glance at dominant headlines over recent years reveals that the issues Agamben raised in 1995 certainly remain valid today.

Bülent Diken (2004, p. 84) expands on Agamben's articulation of the refugee, who he suggests fails to occupy “one pure and distinct position” and thus is a threat to the “image of order”. He also acknowledges the ideological contradiction inherent in the exclusion of the refugee from any exercise of legal power while simultaneously remaining absolutely subject to law and under strict regulation and control in all domains of life (ibid.). Illustrating this point, Diken demonstrates a similar uncanny prescience to Agamben – while Agamben seemed to predict the recent 'crisis of migration in Europe', Diken discusses Dutch politician Hilbran Nawyn, who was minister for asylum affairs at the time of writing and who called for foreigners who had acquired Dutch citizenship to be denationalised and denaturalised if they commit crimes and sent back to their 'home' countries (ibid.). Such citizenship-stripping is again a dominant theme of policy debate today.

Diken continues his eerie refugee meteorology with reference to Woomera, an isolated detention centre in rural Australia, in which a detainee with whom he spoke expressed disbelief about such a place existing in Australia, because “things like that don't happen [there]” (ibid., p. 86). This asylum-seeker turned detainee thought they must be in another country, and Diken argues that, in many senses, Woomera *is* another country, or “a frustrating zone of indistinction between inside (law) and outside (unlaw), a space in which the link between localisation and order breaks down, a space that can materialise only when exception becomes the rule” (ibid.). Since Diken's writing in 2004, Australia has moved to a literal

progression of this conceptualisation, establishing Australian-run offshore detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, further materializing the 'state of exception' (see e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2015). For Diken, this forms part of a deliberate strategy of non-integration, during which asylum-seekers are kept in a state of purgatory which embodies Agamben's concept of 'bare life' in which refugees exist and survive in their own right, not as parts in any system.

Bülent Diken's discussion of outsourced detention centers provides possible insights to issues of responsibility and ownership. Certainly, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) does not employ any private corporation to run refugee or IDP camps in Kurdistan. However, it is interesting to consider the implications of ownership and responsibility over IDP camps in which Yezidis are resident. To whom do they 'belong'? From whom has 'permission' been granted for their establishment and continuity? Of what advantage or disadvantage are the presence of the camps, or of the displaced population in camp and non-camp settings overall, to governing bodies? Which, if any, governing bodies shoulder responsibility for displaced populations, and to what extent? Bülent Diken asserts that the detention center can also overlap with the function of a refugee or IDP camp – or, as in Australia, replace it in entirety. Diken asserts that asylum-seekers are sent to these places for one of three reasons: 1) clarification of identities, travel routes, or when applications for refugee status are refused, 2) mandatory detention, which takes place when the overarching perception of the refugee is that of one who is disingenuous or undeserving, and is also intended to act as a deterrent, or 3) for committing a crime, which may include the trespass of rules arbitrarily defined and measured by camp staff. Diken states that in such places, the prevailing atmosphere is one of violence, and that police are typically present (Diken, 2004, p. 94). Additionally, Diken mentions a “fluidity of identities” that tends to be present within the camp setting. This resonates with the educational focus of this research, which pays particular attention to the experiences of and challenges faced by youth in accessing secondary and tertiary level education, who already occupy what is regarded as a 'fluid' age in many contexts.

2.2.4 A Challenge to Bare Life

Where Diken built on Agamben's concepts, Patricia Owens (2009, pp. 567–9) takes a more critical approach, challenging what she perceives as Agamben's supplantation of Hannah Arendt's primacy within Refugee Studies and arguing that his reduction of refugees to 'bare life' is going "too far". Owens accepts his inclusion of bare life in modern politics in the "totalitarian camps of the twentieth century" (ibid., p. 574) but rejects his affiliation between (refugee) internment camps and extermination camps, drawing on a distinction previously made by Arendt, in which internment camps can be defended with "appeals to instrumentality" even when 'eliminating' individuals and groups, but extermination camps differ in kind as well as intensity in their anti-utilitarian attempts to eradicate human dignity itself (ibid., p. 575). Owens seems to support Arendt's claim that "there is no such thing as in-born human dignity separate from the concrete laws and institutions that are created to uphold certain rights" and asserts as problematic the 'paradox' that stateless persons, refugees, and those without citizenship are most in need of inalienable human rights but are also least able to claim them (ibid., pp. 576–7). Whereas Agamben argues that the refugee condition strips one to 'bare life' or bare humanity, Owens argues, via Arendt, that the refugee condition – if truly detached from "the institution of the community" – strips one of humanity entirely (ibid.).

Owens (2009, 577–8) uses the phenomenon of refugee lip-sewing to illustrate her point, referring to a case in January 2002 in Woomera, the very same Australian detention centre mentioned by Diken, in which over sixty asylum-seekers sutured their lips together in protest at perceived arbitrary detention. For Owens, this action both exposes and commits violence that "can form the basis of a new politics" if it garners enough attention and enters into discourse with sufficient force (ibid.). Such political acts found political domains which exist beyond human life and which are based on the "transcendence of bare life, not its celebration" (ibid.). Owens argues that lip-sewing demonstrates an effort to grant each other rights while simultaneously fighting perceived efforts of a sovereign state to deny rights, or even "rights to have rights", such as the right to education (ibid.).

2.3 Education

2.3.1 Education in Emergencies

Issues of sovereignty are also relevant to the right to education, to the definition of educational needs, and to how and why governmental structures facilitate, enable, or obstruct efforts to access education. The context of Iraq, with its shifting internal borders, complex array of actors, and weak institutions enables the manifestation of political competition in the educational sector in a manner deeply disadvantageous to the public – especially to demographics who are disempowered socially, politically, and financially. An emergency scenario such as the development of events from 2014 to the present day extends this opportunity, and can be compounded by the disregard of the humanitarian sector toward education in emergencies.

Mechanisms have been developed in an attempt to protect and facilitate the right to education for vulnerable persons. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirms that “everyone has the right to education.” The 1951 Refugee Convention insists that no distinction be made between refugees and nationals with regard to education, and the fourth of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning,” which in 2015 extended the previous Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of achieving universal primary education. Life as a displaced person should not preclude education, and quality education may be one of the most valuable tools for post-conflict development.

Within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) supports efforts to provide education in camps and to establish extra school shifts for displaced students in non-camp settings, providing books and promising to pay teachers' salaries, and sometimes integrating displaced children into operational local schools when conditions permit (Associated Press, 26th of October 2015). UNICEF and large international non-governmental organizations have also been working in camps, especially in Dohuk⁶

⁶ Also commonly spelt ‘Duhok’ or ‘Dahuk’ in English.

governorate, since the influx of Syrian refugees began in 2012 (UNICEF, 2013). At government level, resources are increasingly funnelled into combatting ongoing security concerns, and teachers in the employ of the KRG often do not receive their salaries on time, or even at all (Associated Press, 26th of October 2015). NGOs are better equipped to directly focus on education, but also struggle with limited financial and material resources as well as teacher retention.

The position of the education sector in Iraq is in line with global trends and statistics regarding refugee education. In her comprehensive 2011 overview published by UNHCR, *Refugee Education: A Global Review*, Sarah Dryden-Peterson (UNHCR, 2011, p. 6) states that “Access to education for refugees is limited and uneven across regions and settings of displacement, particularly... at secondary levels”, with secondary enrollment only reaching 36% for refugees worldwide. Further, the education refugee children do receive is often of low quality, with insufficient focus on learning (ibid., pp. 5–6). Since 2000, refugee education has come under the umbrella of 'education in emergencies', which includes IDPs, as well as other vulnerable populations. In conjunction with the UNHCR, Dryden-Peterson lists eight urgent challenges to education for displaced persons. The second of these is the “limited access to post-primary education for refugees in both camp and urban settings” which “has immense economic and social consequences, for both individuals and societies” (ibid., p. 48). Despite the recognition of the need for post-primary education, there remains “skepticism” about prioritizing the provision of this in 'emergency' contexts with limited resources when universal primary education is not achieved and “post-primary opportunities are more expensive and difficult to coordinate” (ibid.).

Nonetheless, funds and resources allocated to post-primary education are increasing, in line with greater recognition that education at this level yields economic returns for both the individual and wider society, encourages individuals and families to invest time and effort in completing primary-level education, enhances civic participation and quality of life, strengthens the cycle of providing high-quality future teaching, and gives young people “a voice” (ibid., pp. 49–50). Dryden-Peterson acknowledges that “higher education plays a critical role for individual refugees and for societies in terms of leadership in protracted settings and in post-conflict reconstruction” recommending that the UNHCR “explore

partnerships that augment these opportunities” (ibid., p. 53). She asserts that educational opportunities are of very high priority to refugee families and communities themselves, with “refugee mothers, fathers, and children the world over” believing that education is “the key to the future”, providing stability, hope, and the possibility of peaceful outcomes in the face of uncertainties (ibid., p. 8). However, the reality on the ground for displaced youth is that education, especially at secondary level, is not necessarily taken for granted, as touched upon above. The following literature is explored with a view to understanding education in regard to displacement.

2.3.2 The Value of Education for Displaced Persons

Lazarina Topuzova and Elizabeth Lock (2013) present valuable practical information from a study of community service learning in Kakuma camp, Kenya. Topuzova and Lock's work is conducted in a setting of displacement where primary and secondary education programmes are present, but there are few initiatives offering higher education for camp residents (Topuzova & Lock, 2013, p. 307). The authors point to the UNICEF definition of basic needs, which does not include higher education, and claim that educational programmes within camps continue to be seen as “emergency and temporary measures” despite the majority of refugees remaining in camps for prolonged periods of more than five years (ibid., p. 308). They assert that a developmental approach is crucial for education in settings of displacement, and that an emergency approach is simply not sufficient (ibid., p. 309).

Topuzova and Lock cite numerous studies (2013, pp. 309–10) which espouse the importance of education for displaced children and youth as “providing meaning and stability in the life of refugees and a protective factor amid the uncertainty of the camp environment”, in “increasing the refugee community’s ability to understand and cope with life in protracted refugee situations”, and “as a way to prevent recurrence of violence” which can “foster healing and a peaceful future”. Topuzova and Lock also quote Dryden-Peterson (2011) in asserting the main challenges for refugee education as those of access, quality, protection capacity, and coordination and resources (ibid.) and the UNHCR who additionally cite infrastructure, low availability of teachers, and lack of learning materials as problematic (ibid., p. 311).

After implementing and evaluating a post-secondary course in Community Development in Kakuma, the authors measured growth in areas of leadership, empowerment, respect from the community, community impact, bridge-building, and networking (Topuzova & Lock, 2013, pp. 319–21). They consider the course a success in its aim of looking beyond emergency relief framework and utilising a more developmental approach to education within the camp, which could also be extended to non-camp and informal settlements. They assert that a “developmental approach to refugee education acknowledges the potential of education to contribute to developing human resources as well as processes that will lead to long-term wellbeing and positive impact in students' communities” (ibid., p. 322).

Topuzova and Lock's (2013) description of post-secondary community service learning in Kakuma camp in Kenya is written with regard to what constitutes 'basic needs' and in an attempt to sway approaches to education in refugee and IDP camps from those of 'emergency response' to developmental, as the temporary nature which characterises perception of such camps is often not a reality, with the majority of the world's refugees living in camps for prolonged periods of more than five years (Topuzova & Lock 2013, p. 308). However, Topuzova and Lock point out that within Kakuma, secondary level educational initiatives are present (ibid., p. 307). For Syrian refugees especially in camps in Kurdistan, this does not appear to be the case (see SSSR 2015). Indeed, there appears to be a dearth of literature and research focused on secondary level initiatives and secondary school-aged children and youth resident in refugee and IDP camps in general. Even within the UDHR, only elementary education is deemed compulsory, and the Millennium Development Goals targeted the achievement of universal primary education. The recently implemented Sustainable Development Goals do specify that by 2030 all boys and girls should “complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education”, so we may be witnessing the beginning of an intensified focus on secondary level learning. Nonetheless, secondary school-aged children and youth occupy an age bracket that is by definition 'in between' and may continue to be highly vulnerable in 'emergency' settings, such as refugee or IDP camps, with their educational opportunities sacrificed towards other ends. With such a struggle to achieve consensus on the importance of secondary level education, the implications for tertiary education in setting of displacement are even more dire.

2.3.3 Formal Education as Defined by CHAT

Gordon Wells and Guy Claxton introduce their volume *Learning for Life in the 21st Century: Sociocultural Perspectives on the Future of Education* (2002) by reminding us that we do not live in stable times. They suggest that if schools were once able to 'sift' young people to "take their various places in the prevailing society," this is no longer a viable function of education, and that instead we should look for a more 'radical' concept of education which could emerge from cultural trauma. They advocate that we look to the future for our ideas, by asking what world today's youth will inhabit, and with what they need to be equipped to negotiate it, and also to theory, where we may gain a greater understanding of mind and spirit, how these grow, and what we now understand of learning and development that the "original architects of school did not" (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 1). Wells and Claxton explain that they do not conceive of education simply as the "transmission of specific bodies of knowledge and skills," but about more as "the development of a mind to learn" which occurs less through formal instruction and more through adopting "habits of mind" from elders and others around them, and the reconstruction of such resources, with or without guidance, to "meet their own and society's current and future concerns" (ibid., p. 2). As such, Wells and Claxton advocate Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the theoretical framework through which we can best understand education.

CHAT was developed by Russian psychologist and educator Lev Vygotsky. It is a theory of human development which views "human societies and their individual members as mutually constitutive." Within CHAT, cultures shape the development of individuals and their minds, which shape culture in return. Through collaboration, which may take the form of work, play, or problem solving, people implement ideas, words, and other tools which reflect sets of cultural values and beliefs that have been both constructed and refined by previous generations. Younger or less experienced members of society learn habits and attitudes not only from teachers, but also from friends, relatives, or colleagues who may be more experienced, and are thus inducted into "ways of knowing." As new challenges arise, previous techniques and tools are refined through collaboration to find the best solutions, which are then appropriated by others in future and shared within society and culture as a whole (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 3).

Tools, which may be physical or 'meaning-making' (such as language), as well as participation, are key features of CHAT. CHAT emphasises the appropriation of such tools as well as participatory development of them, leading to a continually refined cultural inheritance that is passed from generation to generation. Thus, teaching and learning can take place under any and all circumstances where there are interactions between people, and are not restricted to the classroom or the school day (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 4). Nonetheless, despite the emphasis on collaboration and participation, CHAT recognises that parties in any given activity may not share the same goals, or even the same beliefs and values. A degree of overlap is necessary for collaboration to occur, and willingness to understand the views of others is also important, but CHAT ascribes value to difference and disagreement. Indeed, such “new and even antithetical ideas and suggestions” may even be essential to progress beyond past patterns of thought and action, and the transformation of previously successful ideas is necessary to form “adequate responses to novel predicaments” (ibid., p. 5). The 'meaningful, collaborative activity' of CHAT is no guarantee of agreement and conformity, and the voicing and consideration of “alternative ideas, experiences and opinions” may even be required for all participants to gain genuine understanding (ibid., p. 7).

CHAT entails a degree of cultural relativism. Wells and Gordon (2002, p.6) assert that education is unlike, for example, the motor industry, and “no one optimal 'technology of teaching'... can be mandated worldwide.” In regard to curricula and other manifestations of educational decision-making, consideration of local contexts and needs and concerns of students and their communities is essential. Wells and Gordon are careful to point out that CHAT does not and would not attempt to offer a “uniform answer” to any questions about goals of education and how these should be met. Further, CHAT recognises diversity and the different identities which may be present in classrooms or other settings, as well as “differences in the futures that students can envisage for themselves, and, hence, in the kinds of learning trajectories they wish to follow” (ibid., p. 9). This fluidity is helpful in understanding education in the Yezidi, Kurdish, and Iraqi contexts.

CHAT is also a valuable resource with regard to understanding education in relation to governance, as it both acknowledges potential differentiation of goals and discusses consequences of disagreement and difference. Within the CHAT framework, opposing views

and beliefs are seen as beneficial to learning and progress, and, ideally, oppositional points of departure within a network will be utilised in a manner that leads to an harmonious conclusion of new skills and knowledge through collaboration. However, it is also possible to observe and describe struggles of power that are not truly harmonious through the CHAT framework. For example, if reluctant collaboration occurs, this could lead to the development of new skills and knowledge that is not satisfactory for all parties involved, in turn leading to asymmetries of power.

2.3.4 Education Politicized

The teaching and learning without deliberate intention or conscious awareness in CHAT allows us to consider both formal and non-formal education. This is explained by Colin Brock, writing in Julia Paulson's *Education, Conflict, and Development* (2011). Brock (2011, p. 19) identifies formal education as a cursory experience for most of the world's population, whereas both non-formal and informal education are life-long. The difference between the latter two forms of education is that non-formal “assumes some degree of organisation” but informal is involuntary (ibid.). According to these definitions, CHAT encompasses all three types of education Brock discusses. Brock further elucidates tensions present in education and which may be particularly pertinent to displaced populations. He asserts that conflict is both endemic and inherent in policy-making and in the implementation of education, largely due to the political control of (especially formal) education. This is apparent in such things as language of instruction or pupil selection (ibid., p. 20).

Economic interests may also be a source of tension, as attempts are often made to steer the provision of education to provide supplies of workers and expertise (Brock, 2011 p. 21). In some cases, education can even be blamed for perceived national failures, such as was directed towards public schools in the United States after the USSR succeeded in winning the race to put both a satellite and a man in space (ibid., p. 22). Brock also identifies the “government unease” towards universities and the intellectual class around the world, which has led to the persecution of professors, teachers, and students in some instances and to more subtle attempts to control the research outputs of universities in others (ibid., p. 23). In regard to violent conflict, Brock acknowledges that war is massively detrimental to

education, but asserts that this is not exclusively so – pointing to instances in which women have, in times of war, gained access to skills and knowledge previously reserved for men, and to conflict incentivising the propulsion of technologies and related areas of study, such as computer science (ibid., p. 28). Tensions such as those discussed above give rise to the 'education questions' discussed by Susan L. Robertson (2010):

1. Who is taught what, how, by whom, where, when; for what stated purpose and with what justifications; under what (school/university classroom) circumstances and what conditions; and with what results?
2. How, and by whom, and at what scale are these things problematised, determined, coordinated, governed, administered and managed?
3. In whose interests are these practices and politics carried out? What is the scope of 'education' and what are its relations with other sectors of the state, other scalar units and national society?
4. What are the individual, private, public, collective, and community outcomes of education?

Robertson (2010, pp. 21–2) explains that question one relates to the differential learning opportunities and experiences of formal and non-formal education, questions two and three broadly address governance, and question four encompasses the production of identity, advantage or disadvantage, and inclusion or exclusion. Robertson is largely addressing the issue of 'spatialisation' in her writing, and asserts that within education spaces, at the levels of systems, schools, classrooms, and groups, we see “particular geometries of power at work” with the consequence that “lives to be lived in the future are shaped by this projected and deep penetration of the social relations of production onto education space” (ibid., p. 24). Robertson prompts us to examine the physical setting of education with consideration to ‘the education questions’ above, which are inextricably linked to underlying tensions as elucidated by Brock, and which are relevant to understanding the role of political competition as it affects access to education for Yazidis in Iraq.

2.3.5 Manipulation of Education in Iraq

In an article titled *The changing role of education in the Iraqi disputed territories: assimilation, segregation and indoctrination*, Kelsey Shanks has written very recently on changes within the Iraqi education system since 2003 including the reactions of educational policy to national fragility and conflict. Shanks (2016, p. 422) opens her article by boldly asserting “The structural organisation and management of education often reflects the way in which diversity is viewed by the state, and demonstrates how minority groups are treated by wider society,” a consequence of this being the appropriation of formal education to achieve “political and ideological goals”. Shanks suggests that as education can reproduce dominant language and culture and teach narratives of history, religion, and geographic interpretations, it can be used to both deny and affirm identity and thus “offers a perfect mechanism for state assimilation projects” (ibid.).

Shanks writes largely in reference to Kirkuk, which, although not home to a Yezidi population, is subject to the same status of the Yezidi homeland of Sinjar as officially contested by the KRG and the federal government of Iraq under Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution. Shanks calls the process of resolving the disputed territories “stalled” and considers the dispute to be drawn along ethnic lines (ibid., p. 425). She asserts that this has “caused groups to fear marginalisation should administrative power fall to another community,” a problem heightened by the presence of a vast array of actors and groups, many of whom are armed. As a result, this has led to heightened tensions over language, culture, and minority rights which have shaped construction and reconstruction of the education sector since 2003 (ibid.). This has resulted in education being used to achieve two less than neutral ends: cultural reproduction and the demonstration of territorial presence.

Shanks (2016, p. 426) describes the familiar issues of education falling victim to a setting of conflict, such as poorly-qualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and undeveloped curriculum “which affect all education provision regardless of ethnic affiliation”. However, she also indicates that these issues, within a setting experiencing “wider territorial competition,” have together “created an environment in which ethnic groups

are able to compare the level of support for their community with that of others” which “has resulted in competition for resources... and perceiving capacity gaps in terms of deliberate attacks on their community” (ibid.).

Shanks mentions the Yezidi homeland of Sinjar only briefly, and touches upon Yezidi perceptions of the provision of education prior to 2014. She states that minority communities report the use of education to achieve nationalist purposes, and refers to Nineveh in particular, where “ethnic minorities perceive the opening of Kurdish language schools as a predatory act by the KRG, suggesting that the KRG education programme strives to ‘eliminate other cultures and languages’ in order to achieve the illusion of ethnic dominance on the ground” (ibid., p. 427). She continues, announcing KRG plans to open 14 Kurdish schools in Sinjar in 2013, “an initiative [which] has been created under the premise of alleviating overcrowding in the Kurdish language schools in the region” but which minority groups reject, instead asserting that “they are being forced to send their children to Kurdish language schools despite speaking Arabic in the home” (ibid.). She refers to anecdotal evidence which reports coercion or imprisonment for Yezidi and Shabak parents who resisted sending their children to ‘Kurdish language schools’, which she considers to qualify the provision of education as “contributing to ethnic cleansing” (Ibid). However, Shanks’ description of Kurdish schools along linguistic lines (rather than according to the governmental system of which they are part) is problematic, given that Sinjari Yezidis speak Kurmanji Kurdish as their mother tongue.

3 PEOPLE, COMMUNITY, AND NARRATIVE DATA

“I want my story to be told.” – Interviewee 9, August 2016

The methodology of this research integrates a number of techniques to best suit the research questions, participants, relationship of the researcher to the community, and setting; and to effectively, ethically, and objectively progress through the research phases. The data collected consists of 21 in-depth, narrative or semi-structured interviews, from a range of stakeholders concerned with issues affecting the Yezidi community. The majority of the interviewees are themselves Yezidi. The table included in the subsection *Participants* clarifies the roles of each interviewee.

Interviews were conducted using the responsive interview model, adopted from Herbert and Irene Rubin (2005a, p. 21), who offer a comprehensive overview of interviewing rationales and techniques, during which they question the existence of 'truth' that is independent of human perception, asking whether findings of research “represent some objective truth, the understanding of the researcher, the various understandings of those being researched, or some combination” of these things. Rubin and Rubin recommend that researchers within the social sciences take what they term a 'naturalist-interpretive' paradigm, in which “the researchers themselves become the data-gathering instrument whose skills in listening, observing, and understanding are crucial” (ibid.). This should be supplemented by 'interpretive-constructionist theory', which asserts that “how people view an object or event and the meaning that they attribute to it is what is important” (ibid., p. 27). Such an approach allows researchers the space to assume that individual interpretations of observation will vary, and that people bring “distinct lenses” which mean that “multiple and even conflicting versions of the same event or object can be true at the same time” (ibid.). As the research includes a focus on the nature of power and authority, which often entails covert or obscure social and political structures, such an approach is useful to reveal networks, hierarchies, or intentions that do not operate transparently or openly.

Each interview began with a semi-structured approach, which Lioness Ayres (2008b, p. 810) defines as “a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a

series of predetermined but open-ended questions”. However, over half of the interviews took a narrative direction, eliciting a story “through which individuals express their understandings of events and experiences” (Mishler, quoted in Ulrike, Tiplady, & Wall, 2014, p. 399). The narratives that emerged during the course of the interviews enriched both the interview experience itself and the data collected. As narrative interviews can use either a semi-structured or an unstructured format, with no detail or information deemed irrelevant over the course of the interview, this development was complementary to the research process (Ayres, 2008a, p. 545).

Each interviewee was guaranteed anonymity in any work or publication using the data collected, and interviews were conducted with sensitivity. Ethical guidelines for this research were developed from the American Anthropological Association’s *Principles of Professional Responsibility* (2012) and conform to principles determined by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2009).

3.1 Research Using the Responsive Interview Model

In qualitative research, Rubin and Rubin (2005a, p. 30) recommend the use of 'the responsive interviewing model'. In addition to utilizing critical theory and recognizing the practical needs of conducting interviews, this model relies heavily on the interpretive constructionist approach described above. Rubin and Rubin emphasize that this model also recognizes that “the interviewer and interviewee are both human beings, not recording machines, and that they form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer” (ibid.). According to this model, depth of understanding is prioritized more highly than breadth, and flexibility of research design is necessary (ibid.).

Although this research is not focused directly on the communal Yezidi experience of targeted violence, which has been called genocide by the UN (The Guardian, 16th of June 2016), questions regarding a timeline that encompasses the IS attack on Sinjar from August 2014 or probing into changed circumstances since this time necessarily evoke consideration of this traumatic series of events. Rubin and Rubin recommend maintaining constant awareness of

one's emotions during the interviews themselves to better frame questions in a way that averts personal frustrations; to minimize the likelihood that interviewees will seek to avoid offering sensitive information that may be key to the research; and to maintain distance in a manner that ensures the inevitable empathy a researcher will feel towards informants does not distort the research process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005a, p. 32). Many interviewees divulged their own stories of fleeing Sinjar on or following August 3rd, 2014, and revealed details about family members and friends who were killed or captured during this time. In one case, an interviewee had himself experienced a period of captivity under IS in Mosul. The responsive interview model supported me in a healthy emotional awareness and distance when listening and responding to these stories, without disengaging from the interviewee in a manner which could have seemed insensitive and either brought the interviews to an early close or left interviewees feeling exploited or retraumatized.

In regard to designing interviews, Rubin and Rubin state that a successful interview that elicits experiences and pursues depth may take several iterations (ibid., p. 37). They recommend conducting pilot interviews, which was not possible over the course of this research. However, as the researcher was embedded with the community throughout the research process, it was possible to approach many interviewees well in advance of the interview, to explain the objectives of the research and introduce and adapt interview themes. In this way, it was possible, to a certain extent, to allow for the interview design to be “tolerant of mistakes and facilitate the correction of false steps” (ibid.). This supports the overall goal of interpretive constructionist research, which “is to find out how the conversational partners understand what they have seen, heard, or experienced” by eliciting “examples, narratives, histories, stories, and explanations” (ibid.).

In *The Art of Fieldwork*, Harry Wolcott emphasizes the role of “sound human judgement” in the forms of “ordinary courtesy” and “common sense” when conducting research in the field (Wolcott, 2005, p. 79). In regard to interviews, Wolcott offers ten key points of which to be mindful to become a more effective interviewer. These imperatives are: 1) recognize listening as an active and creative role, 2) talk less, listen more, 3) make questions short and to the point, 4) plan interviews around a few big issues, 5) as soon as possible after an interview, write it up, 6) anticipate and discuss the level of formality you plan for the interview, 7) see

how long you can hold off before you develop a questionnaire or a tightly structured interview schedule, 8) invite informants to help you become a better researcher, 9) search for patterns in responses, and 10) do not become so committed to the qualitative dimensions of responses that you fail to count and measure those aspects that need to be counted and measured (ibid., pp. 104–10). All of these points are valid and valuable, but points two, four, seven, and nine resonated highly throughout this research process, and encouraged the emergences of narrative stories within many of the interviews.

Finally, crucial to this research was rapport between myself and the interviewees. In his classic *The Ethnographic Interview*, James Spradley (1979, p. 45) defines rapport as “a harmonious relationship between ethnographer and informant” which “can exist in the absence of fondness and affection”. He asserts that the process of establishing rapport during interviews goes through four phases: apprehension, exploration, cooperation, and participation. Apprehension is explained as the nervous uncertainty which is experienced by both experienced and novice researchers when commencing the interview process. According to Spradley, apprehension is unavoidable, but being aware of it can help the researcher to understand, accept, and move through this stage (ibid., pp. 45–6). In instances where it was possible to discuss the research with interviewees in advance of the interview, this step of building rapport was easier to overcome. Next, exploration quickly follows apprehension. In this stage, both researcher and informant are getting to know each other through “listening, observing, and testing” (ibid., p. 46). Spradley encourages the use of repeated explanations, restatement of informants' speech, and asking for 'use' rather than 'meaning' during this stage (ibid., pp. 46–7). The third stage, cooperation, refers to a development in the process from which mutual trust is felt between the interviewer and the informant. The informant may spontaneously correct the researcher, offer personal information, and ask questions during this stage (ibid., p. 47). The vast majority of interviews conducted for this research entered the ‘cooperation’ stage easily. Finally, participation may be reached. This is a stage which Spradley states comes after a lengthy period of time, so it is unlikely to occur during a first or single interview with an informant. This stage is characterized by the recognition and acceptance by the informant of the role of ‘teaching’ the interviewer through which informants actually become “participant observers in their own cultural scene” and the interviewer’s role adjusts to helping “informant/participant-observers record what they know”

(*ibid.*, p. 48). A small minority of interviews for this research could be considered to have entered this stage.

3.1.1 Semi-Structured and Narrative Interviews

As previously mentioned, each interview was planned using a semi-structured framework. A short list of predetermined, open-ended questions was written around themes determined by the background of the interviewee and the type of information they would be best-positioned to provide. For example, when interviewing young Yezidis who have not yet completed their educational pathways, more enquiries would be made as to where and when they went to school or university, and under which governmental system they studied. When interviewing older community leaders, greater reflection on perceived political competition between the KRG and the government of Iraq from their perspective was sought.

As such, I began each interview in control of the direction and flow of the interview. Interviewees provided short answers, usually in relation to their occupations or role or status in regard to the Yezidi community. In ten cases, interviews progressed and concluded along these lines, without a narrative emerging within the interview. It is important to note that although semi-structured interviews are guided by the researcher, “who has more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews... there is no fixed range of responses to each question [in contrast to structure interviews or questionnaires]” (Ayres, 2008b, p. 810). Semi-structured interviews can include questions which elicit short, concrete answers, or they may seek more narrative information, in addition to using “a variety of probes that elicit further information or build rapport through the researcher’s use of active listening skills.” (*ibid.*). In either case, whether taking a more narrative direction or not, “the development of rich, relevant data rests on the interviewer’s ability to understand, interpret, and respond to the verbal and nonverbal information provided by the informant” (*ibid.*, p. 811).

In contrast to interviews that followed the semi-structured framework, interviews that took a narrative direction provided “informants with many opportunities to select and order events themselves rather than to put events into a preordained structure” (Ayres, 2008b, p. 545). In

these cases, as described by Ayres, both the content and the structure of the story “contains implied meanings that are as important to understanding the narrative as the overt meanings” (ibid.). Without a ‘preordained’ structure, the order in which interviewees relayed events, the points upon which they placed emphasis, and the unsolicited insights they offered in regard to the bodies of authority under which they were subject often became important features of the data. During these interviews, “any event or interpretation can contribute to the meaning of the story” (ibid.). This is not to claim that all facets of information which were revealed to the interviewer were either relevant or necessary in regard to the research questions. Indeed, in some of the longer interviews, tangents did emerge, which, while interesting or engaging, were considered off-topic after analysis. Instead, it could be so that such tangential storylines exposed or reinforced attitudes towards or interpretations of the more obscured and clouded themes, such as more subtle manifestations of political competition; or simply acted to enable interviewees to weave their stories in a manner that allowed return to more crucial data later in the interview in a way that would not have been possible if I had insisted upon following a more rigid interview structure. With some interviewees, narratives emerged relatively unprompted. Indeed, in the cases of interviewees 4, 11, and 14, the interviews proceeded with very little effort on my part, as I merely needed to offer the occasional signal to indicate that I was following the story, or to ask a simple “Why?” for the interviewee to move on to the next long and detailed stage.

Thomas Ulrike, Lucy Tiplady and Kate Wall (2014) offer insight into the use of narrative interviews from an educator’s perspective in their article *Stories of practitioner enquiry: using narrative interviews to explore teachers’ perspectives of learning to learn*. This paper illustrates how narrative interviews themselves “supported a meaningful and ethical exchange between the teachers and researchers” (p. 397) and facilitated construction of the research process. In regard to this thesis, I believe similar development occurred. During or after a number of the narrative interviews, interviewees expressed appreciation of being able to tell their stories and relive significant moments – either positive or negative – with a focus on education. While some interviewees had previously discussed the violence, captivity, and displacement experienced individually and communally by Yezidis with journalists and other researchers, none had been asked to relate this to education, which, as detailed in regard to the findings from the research data, they considered to be of crucial importance to the

community. Interviewee 11, a high school graduate, aged 19, who had endured a difficult educational pathway through the Kurdish system that was traumatically disrupted by following August 2014, stated:

Actually it was very difficult time for me to do that, during the study, during the exams. So when you talked to me, and I talked to you, I felt all those moments. And when I told you that I finished the exams, again I felt a big happiness inside myself, so I am very thankful of you, because you made me to remember all those memories until that day that I finished the exams and received the marks.

I believe that many interviewees felt they played a meaningful and constructive part in shaping this thesis overall and the research process itself. Further, especially as the narratives involved reconsidering harrowing and highly traumatic events, offering control to the interviewees by listening to their stories “to create genuine collaboration” allowed for participation in the research to become an empowering act (ibid., p. 399). Additionally, although “unique, highly contextual” stories were extended to the researcher, “cross-narrative themes emerged” which revealed an unexpected depth and consistency within the data collected (ibid., p. 397).

Ulrike et al. describe this process by referencing Chase (2003) who suggests that such stories only emerge if the researcher is able to “shift the weight of responsibility to the other in such a way that he or she willingly embraces it” (ibid., p. 399). As mentioned, many of the interviewees who participated in the research process for this thesis did so with great ease. They also acknowledge that any interview, narrative or otherwise, presents “just one possible version of events” (Rapley, 2001 in ibid., p. 399) but that in empowering interviewees to discuss what is “relevant and important to them” enables the researcher to have “greater confidence in the validity of the findings” (ibid., p. 400).

3.1.2 Interview Themes

Rubin and Rubin state that “you need to translate your research puzzle into one or several main questions that your interviewees can answer more easily based on their experiences” (2005b, p. 152). This concept was key when drafting brief sketches of themes to be explored during interviews, and placed the onus on me to pose these themes in a manner that was

clearest and most comfortable to the interviewees. In some cases, this was made slightly more difficult by the necessity of conducting interviews through translators, for whom English is a second language. In other cases, the age and educational level of the interviewee needed to be taken into account. Nonetheless, all interviewees were able to offer information on the themes with which they were presented. The themes that were explored during the interviews are detailed below, in relation to the research questions. In addition to each theme, examples of questions that were asked are stated, and an indication is given as to which interviewees were targeted for this data. During the more narrative interviews, answers to examples of specific questions presented below typically emerged unprompted, while such questions were asked more overtly during the interviews that consistently followed a semi-structured framework.

Research question one: How is access to formal education perceived by the Yezidi community for Yezidi children and youth in and from the Sinjar district, specifically during the periods between 2003 and 2014, and following the mass displacement since 2014?

Interviewees were asked to explain when they went to school, in which village or district their school was located, under which curriculum (Kurdish or Iraqi) they studied, and to describe the transitions between primary and secondary levels and secondary and tertiary levels (as relevant). Interviewees were also asked to briefly detail the same information in regard to any brothers or sisters they might have. Further, interviewees were asked questions designed to reveal the quality of education to which they had access, including whether schools had sufficient resources (books, educational materials, electricity, bathroom facilities, furniture), the ratio of students to teachers, and how experienced they understood their teachers to have been. This was asked in relation to the two time periods detailed in the research question. Yezidi youth who are completing or have recently completed educational pathways were targeted with this theme. A similar theme was presented to teachers and educational administrators who participated in this research. In addition to questions along the same lines as described above, teachers and administrators were asked how and why they attained their specific positions of employment. These interviewees were also asked about the consistency of salary payments from either the KRQ or GoI as relevant. Yezidi youth and teachers and educational administrators were also asked to describe emergent mechanisms of support for formal education that had been employed since (or before) 2014, such as

non-formal classes in camp settings established by NGOs. These interviewees were also asked why they perceived resource-related issues to be ongoing, and under whose responsibility these issues fell. All interviewees were asked for insights into how access to and provision of education has been disrupted since 2014, and what progress has been made since then for the Yezidi community, either in settings of displacement within the Kurdistan region or in areas of return in the Sinjar district.

Research question two: What are the prominent Yezidi discourses around this?

Yezidi youth and teachers and educational administrators were asked whether they noticed any overtly political material included within either curriculum. In many instances, this elicited a response which included detailing compulsory religious education, which was regarded politically. Yezidi youth, community leaders, and teachers and educational administrators were all asked to explain why individuals or families chose one educational system (Kurdish or Iraqi) over the other, and what, if any, consequences or ramifications this had in their lives beyond their future educational opportunities. Community leaders and teachers and educational administrators were asked about how affiliation with political parties or organizations that were regarded as having a political agenda affected careers and employment within the educational sector, while the KRG representative who participated in the research was asked to describe the attitude of the KRG towards education both before and since 2014. Finally, Yezidi youth, teachers and educational administrators, and community leaders were asked to speculate about why difficulties in regard to accessing education seemed to affect the Yezidi community more severely than other demographics.

Research question three: What are the implications of perceived difficulties in access to education and the surrounding discourses for children and youth within the Yezidi community, and for the Yezidi minority as a whole?

All interviewees were asked to give their opinion regarding the importance of education to the Yezidi community. This was the only question that was uniformly asked of *all* participants, and in the case of the more narrative interviews, special attention was paid to ensuring that this question in particular was answered. Further, some interviewees who had

not yet completed their educational pathways were asked to explain the importance of education to themselves in particular, and some interviewees were asked to speculate on the consequences for the Yezidi community of limited or restricted access to education extending into the future. Interviews with all members of the Yezidi community, including youth, teachers and educational administrators, advocates, and others, touched upon the future of the Yezidi community in Iraq. In some cases, this theme was introduced in regard to the future of the interviewee specifically, or of their family. In other cases, interviewees were asked to consider the future of the community. When interviewees offered a negative perspective on the future of the community, or the future of the community in either Iraq or the Sinjar district, they were asked to consider what would have to change for their outlook to be different. Targeted interviewees, such as those who had played a leadership or activist role within the Yezidi community, or interviewees who were not Yezidi, were asked about mechanisms of resistance to political oppression or discrimination employed by the community. In other cases, this theme emerged naturally, especially in regard to discussion about a particular secondary-level school system designed to ease transition between the Iraqi and Kurdish curricula at secondary to tertiary level.

3.2 Participants

Table 1 on the following page introduces the interviewees and indicates the structure of the interview (narrative or not); age of the interviewee where relevant; the interviewee's place of origin; their role in regard to this research and to the Yezidi community; details of their experiences in the educational sector; status of having graduated primary, secondary, or tertiary level formal education where relevant; the educational system(s) in which they have participated; and whether or not they are themselves Yezidis. Following the table, a more detailed explanation of each field noted is offered.

TABLE 1: Breakdown of Research Participants

Interview Number	Interview Structure	Age	From	Role	Details of Educational Experience	Graduated			System
						Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
1	S-S	N/A	USA	Member of Yezidi-focused NGO	N/A	N/A			N/A
2	S-S	22	Hardan, Sinjar	High school graduate	- primary school in Hardan (Sinjar) - secondary school in Borek (Sinjar)	Y	Y	N	Iraqi
3	Narrative	N/A	USA	Director of Yezidi-focused NGO	N/A	N/A			N/A
4	Narrative	N/A	Rabea, Sinjar	Informally regarded as community leader	- graduated University of Mosul (Iraq) - taught in Borek (Sinjar)	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi
5	Narrative	22	Sinjar City, Sinjar	Aspiring student, never entered formal education	- studied by correspondence - sat examinations in Mosul (Iraq)	N	N	N	Non-formal
6	S-S	N/A	Sebaye, Sinjar	Yezidi poet	- graduated University of Mosul	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi
7	S-S	21	Borek, Sinjar	High school graduate, entering university abroad	- primary and secondary in Borek (Sinjar) - accepted to university in Europe at time of interview	Y	Y	N	Iraqi
8	S-S	20	Borek, Sinjar	High school graduate	- primary and secondary in Borek (Sinjar)	Y	Y	N	Iraqi
9	S-S	26	Hardan, Sinjar	Student, University of Dohuk	- primary school in Hardan (Sinjar) - secondary school in Borek (Sinjar) - entered University of Mosul (Iraq) - attending University of Dohuk (KR-I)	Y	Y	N	Iraqi Kurdish
10	Narrative	N/A	Khanasor, Sinjar	Teacher and Yezidi activist	- primary teacher in Khanasor (Sinjar) - teacher in ta'akhi school, Shariya (KR-I)	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi Kurdish ta'akhi
11	Narrative	29	Dugure, Sinjar	Recent university graduate	- primary school in Dugure (Sinjar) - secondary school in Rabea (Sinjar) - high school in Sinjar City (Sinjar) - graduated University of Tikrit (Iraq)	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi
12	Narrative	24	Khanasor, Sinjar	Recent university graduate	- primary in Syria & Khanasor (Sinjar) - entered University of Mosul (Iraq) - graduated University of Dohuk (KR-I)	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi Kurdish
13	S-S	N/A	Sinune, Sinjar	Teacher	- graduated University of Zahko (KR-I) - primary teacher in Hardan (Sinjar) - teacher in ta'akhi school, Khanke (KR-I)	Y	Y	Y	Kurdish ta'akhi
14	Narrative	19	Dugure, Sinjar	High school graduate	- primary in Dugure (Sinjar) and Bajid Barava (KR-I) - secondary in Dugure (Sinjar) and Ba'adre and Duhok (KR-I)	Y	Y	N	Kurdish
15	Narrative	N/A	Khanasor, Sinjar	School Manager	- graduated University of Mosul (Iraq) - manager of ta'akhi in Sinuni 2013 (Sinjar) - manager of all ta'akhi in KR-I 2014	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi ta'akhi
16	Narrative	N/A	Khanasor, Sinjar	Teacher	- teacher in ta'akhi school in Sinuni (Sinjar) - teacher in ta'akhi school in Khanke (KR-I)	Y	Y	Y	Kurdish ta'akhi
17	S-S	24	Hardan, Sinjar	University student	- primary school in Hardan (Sinjar) - secondary school in Borek (Sinjar) - entered University of Mosul (Iraq) - attending University of Dohuk (KR-I)	Y	Y	N	Iraqi Kurdish
18	S-S	N/A	N/A for anonymity	KRG representative, Department of Foreign Relations	N/A	N/A			N/A
19	Narrative	25	Dohula, Sinjar	Former head of LNGO	- primary and secondary in Dohula (Sinjar) - graduated University of Mosul (Iraq)	Y	Y	Y	Iraqi
20	S-S	16	Hardan, Sinjar	Aspiring high school student	- primary school in Hardan (Sinjar) - ISIS captive for nearly one year - attempting to attend Iraqi-administered high school in IDP camp, KRI	Y	N	N	Iraqi
21	Narrative	N/A	Sharia, Nineveh (KR-I)	Teacher	- primary and secondary in Sharia and Duhok (KR-I) - graduated University of Duhok (KR-I) - teacher in ta'akhi school in Sharia (KR-I)	Y	Y	Y	Kurdish ta'akhi

Interview number: in addition to acting as the main reference points for quotes or data throughout this thesis, the interview numbers are color-coded to indicate the interviewee's status as Yezidi or non-Yezidi. Only three interviewees, indicated by the blue boxes, are not members of the Yezidi community.

Interview structure: this field simply indicates whether the interview took a narrative direction or remained semi-structured throughout.

Age: This is included as applicable, and is mostly restricted to Yezidi youth who are completing or who have recently completed their educational pathways. In other cases, such as for teachers or community leaders, their ages do not serve to clarify data in regard to the time periods (2003–2014 and 2014 to the present day) identified in the research questions.

Point of origin: This field, labelled ‘from’, demonstrates that most participants are from a diverse range of locations within the Sinjar region. Additionally, the final interviewee comes from a traditionally Yezidi area within the KRG-controlled area of the Nineveh Plains. Only one interviewee’s point of origin is not indicated. This is to protect the anonymity of the KRG representative who participated in the research.

Role: This is described according to the main point(s) for which the participant was approached for this research. In some cases, youth who are current or recent students are also employed either formally or informally, but their occupations are not relevant to this study.

Details of Educational Experience: This field indicates where and how each interviewee has been involved in the educational sector, as relevant. In some cases, time is also indicated in this period. However, many interviewees could not indicate the exact years during which they attended primary or secondary school, so approximations were given in the interviews themselves. These details were also included for older interviewees, such as the community leader and the poet, as, though their own educational pathways are beyond the scope of this research, such information can provide contextual clarity. Here, differentiation is made in regard to locations within KR-I, within the contested Sinjar region, and within areas strictly under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi federal government.

Details of Graduation: As relevant, this field indicates whether a participant has graduated primary, secondary, and tertiary level formal education. Note that an ‘N’ for ‘no’ here could either mean that: a) the participant has not yet entered a level of education due to age, as in the case of Interviewee 20, b) the participant is enrolled in secondary or tertiary level education but has not yet completed this, or c) the participant has completed the previous level of schooling but not yet entered the next.

Educational System: This field, labelled ‘System’, indicates whether the interviewee was involved in either the Kurdish or Iraqi systems for schooling or as an educator or educational administrator. Some participants have been involved in both systems. In these cases, the systems are listed to reflect the chronological order of the participants’ experiences. A third system, *ta’akhi*,⁷ is also listed here. This is a secondary-level bridging program designed to facilitate transfer between the Iraqi and Kurdish systems of education. This important system is detailed later in the sections identifying and discussing the findings of this research.

Further details may be of interest but are beyond the scope of this research. In particular, gender is not included in this table. This is deliberately excluded in consideration of the anonymity of research participants, of whom four are female. It is important to note that provision of and access to education for Yezidis through the lens of gender certainly constitutes an important area of future study, but that this is not a focus of this thesis. Such research would need to consider the challenges of access to education unique to women and girls from social and cultural perspectives, the scope of which is simply beyond the limitations of this current work.

3.2.1 Accessibility and Relationships

Over the course of collecting data for this research, I could be considered to have been embedded within the Yezidi community. I worked in an official capacity for a Yezidi-focused NGO in Duhok, within KR-I. As such, I was well-received by almost all participants listed above, and access to potential interviewees within the Yezidi demographic was greatly enabled. In some cases, I was able to identify and approach key informants individually through my work, after casually discussing this research. In other cases, interviewees were suggested to me, and introductions were made through colleagues, visitors to the NGO’s office, or acquaintances of such parties.

However, this position also limited my access to other key informants. As indicated, only one representative of the KRG agreed to participate in this research. As the NGO for which I

⁷ *Ta’akhi* is an Arabic word which literally translates to ‘brotherhood’.

worked advocated for the minority Yezidi community, it was sometimes regarded (or accused of) following a political agenda by official political bodies within Iraq – especially by the KRG or dominant Kurdish political parties, but also members of the Iraqi federal government on occasion. During this work, I also participated in a professional capacity in multilateral meetings between the Directorate of Education (DoE) of Duhok (Kurdish), the DoE of Nineveh (Iraqi), UN agencies, and other NGOs. Hence, it was not viable for me to approach members of such bodies as an independent researcher, distinct from my role within the aforementioned NGO, especially considering the political angles of this study. Doing so would have made myself vulnerable to restrictions regarding residency within KR-I and could have severely jeopardized the operational capacity of the NGO for which I worked. I considered the practical risks in regard to my residency status and the ethical implications in regard to the work of the NGO, and determined that it was not possible to attempt to pursue inquiry with such individuals.

3.2.2 Limitations, Reliability, and Motivations

The primary limitations of this research and the reliability of the data and findings is inherent to the above details of accessibility. Without being able to consult and involve a more diverse and potentially opposed set of interviewees, and hear the ‘other side(s)’ of the story, it is possible that the data and findings which have emerged from this research process lack objectivity. Nonetheless, with an understanding of this limitation, one can consider the findings of this research as legitimate *through the lens of Yezidi perception*. All three research questions seek to understand the Yezidi perspective. The first research question considers how Yezidis perceive access to and the provision of formal education. The second question considers *why* these perceptions exist by exploring prominent discourses around this issue from within the Yezidi community. The final research question, which focuses on individual futures and the future of the Yezidi minority as a whole, takes into strong consideration personal, subjective opinions on and reactions to recent and current events and situations within Iraq. Although these questions seek to understand subjective perceptions, the answers may have profound, tangible implications for the future of Iraq. If, as a result of communal trauma, political disempowerment, repression of identity, or restricted access to resources and opportunities, individuals or families within the Yezidi community *perceive* their futures to be

brighter beyond the borders of Iraq, they will act accordingly, and influence demographics and political decisions within Iraq in a concrete manner.

This research took place from July to December 2016, during which time I was based in Duhok, within the Kurdistan region, officially working for a Yezidi-focused NGO. Prior to this time, I spent many years living and working in KR-I. I developed an appreciation of the complexities of the Iraqi setting and the process of nation-building I witnessed in regard to both KR-I and wider Iraq. I was not especially involved with the Yezidi community prior to 2016 and do not consider myself to be a ‘Yezidi advocate’. Despite the Yezidi-centric lens of this research, there is no agenda behind it other than that of revealing and discussing an existing, understudied problematique as objectively as possible within the guidelines of academic rigour and the scientific method.

When studying an issue that involves a campaign of genocide, horrific violence, enslavement, and destruction, it is not reasonable or humane to expect oneself to reject or disregard feelings of empathy and compassion which emerge. When considering political acts that exacerbate rather than relieve suffering, it is not reasonable to expect oneself not to feel anger, despair, or frustration. However, it is necessary to consider, discuss, and present the research which emerges objectively and academically. It is reasonable to expect oneself to uphold the validity of one’s work – and, for the interviewees who invested time, energy, and emotion into constructing this research, this is an ethical imperative on the part of the researcher as well.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines are a critical aspect of all scientific research. Working directly with vulnerable populations and members of such populations who have experienced immense suffering requires sensitivity and rigorous adherence to an ethical framework. This research abides by the seven tenets listed by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in their *Principles of Professional Responsibility*. The AAA reminds readers that these principles address general circumstances, but that individuals “must be willing to make

carefully considered ethical choices and be prepared to make clear the assumptions, facts and considerations on which those choices are based” (AAA, 2012). Here again, reflexivity is crucial to good practice.

The first of the AAA's principles is to 'do no harm'. This includes both harm to dignity and harm to bodily and material well-being. Over the course of this research it was necessary to consider this principle in many instances, including when interviewees were disclosing narratives around traumatic events and when approaching viable participants. The second principle is to 'be open and honest about your work'. I made clear the intended and possible future usage of the data I collected and guaranteed anonymity to all informants. A majority of informants indicated that they were happy for their names to be published with the research, but this is unnecessary and does not add to the research findings. Further, as the research includes a political focus, there could be negative consequences for interviewees if their participation were revealed to political bodies in Iraq. Although this is unlikely, it is nonetheless a risk to be avoided. Two participants did emphasize they expected very high levels of anonymity throughout the process. Presentation of identifying details was discussed with both of them during the interviews, and their wishes are followed throughout. The third principle is to 'obtain informed consent and necessary permissions'. When using interpreters, I had confidence that the third party was accurately expressing and conveying information between myself and the interviewees. The fourth principle is 'weigh competing ethical obligations due collaborators and affected parties'. This was considered in regard to approaching members of political parties and government agencies for this research, and the principle of 'do no harm' was in mind when deciding not to approach such persons. The fifth AAA principle is to 'make your results accessible'. To adhere to this principle, the offer of sending this completed thesis to interviewees was made. The sixth principle is to 'protect and preserve your records'. The research data has been stored in a manner which protects both the data itself and the identities of the interviewees. The seventh and final principle is to 'maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships'. While this principle indicates a necessary distance between the researcher and the research participants, it also implies acting and communicating in a manner which does not make the interviewee feel like an 'object of study'. In some cases, interviews took place within the homes of the interviewees, according

to their wishes. I acted according to local expectations of polite and respectful guests, and accepted tea and to share meals when appropriate.

The guidelines of the AAA were selected according to the depth of the guidelines offered. However, it is important to note that this research also abides by the principles determined by the *Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity* (2009, pp. 5–13), which insists a researcher 1) respects the autonomy of research subjects through voluntary participation and informed consent, 2) avoids causing mental, financial, or social harm to research participants, and 3) endeavors to protect the privacy of research participants and the data collected from them.

3.3.1 Working with Minors

Only one research participant, Interviewee 20, was below the age of majority. This interviewee was aged 16 years at the time of the interview, and had directly experienced a period of captivity under IS following August 2014. At the time of the interview, Interviewee 20 was attempting to enrol in an Iraqi-administered secondary school within one of the IDP camps in KR-I, but was facing difficulties in regard to the age limit for the applicable grade. Despite his recent personal history, the interviewee seemed at ease around unfamiliar persons, and spoke to me on many occasions before being approached in regard to this research. Interviewee 20 indicated no reservations in regard to taking part in an interview, and seemed motivated to discuss education as a step towards building futures for those youth who remain in captivity. Interviewee 20 stated, “I only wish that those who return from captivity will have a future and be welcome in the schools again, so that they don’t lose their future.”

Interview themes, the purpose of the research, the guarantee of anonymity, the right to decline to answer any questions, and the right to access the results of the research were explained to all participants before interviews commenced. As Interviewee 20 was the youngest of all interviewees, special care was taken to ensure understanding of these points. However, the age of Interviewee 20 was not so young that these concepts presented difficulty. Special care was also taken to ensure that the interview was conducted with an interpreter with whom Interviewee 20 felt comfort and trust.

In their article *The Ethics of Social Research with Children: An Overview*, Virginia Morrow and Martin Richards refer to social research guidelines of different organizations. The British Psychological Society encourages consent obtained from parents or those acting 'in loco parentis' for all research participants under sixteen years of age (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 93). However, this seeking of permission from adult 'gatekeepers' is still problematic, implying that "children are to a large extent seen as their parents' property, devoid of the right to say no to research" (ibid., p. 94). Morrow and Richards also refer to Lansdown (1994) who presents two interesting perspectives on the nature of vulnerability in relation to childhood. The first suggests children are "inherently vulnerable because of their physical weakness, and their lack of knowledge and experience, which renders them dependent upon the adults around them" while the second is a structural vulnerability which is due to "their total lack of political and economic power and their lack of civil rights" (Lansdown, 1994, in Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 97). To Lansdown, this is the result of a culture which does not listen to children (ibid.). In this regard, children's participation in research, providing the researcher can confidently affirm informed consent, may be an empowering act in the case of refugee and IDP children and youth. Unfortunately, no clear-cut guidelines exist which guarantee consent is truly 'informed'. The literature heavily underscores the importance of ethical practices with regard to children, but does not concretely explain what forms this may take. The responsibility falls on the researcher's shoulders.

3.4 Thematic Analysis

The data obtained for this research was subjected to thematic analysis, as described by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 5–6) assert that "thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" and "is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail".

Importantly, Braun and Clarke discourage the researcher from taking a 'passive' approach, whereby themes are described simply as 'emerging' or as 'discovered'. Further, they assert

that qualitative analysis, even if flexible and tailored to individual research or data sets, does not purely “give voice” to the participants. Instead, the researcher plays a strong, active role in selecting data extracts, forming data sets, and analysing manifest or latent themes and information within the data to answer research questions and explore a problematique. “What is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognise them as decisions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8). Further, thematic analysis works well with Rubin and Rubin’s responsive interview model (2005b), as “there needs to be an ongoing reflexive dialogue on the part of the researcher” as analysis is conducted to consistently and accurately identify and convey more latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9).

A ‘theme’ is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10) as that which “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set”. There is no limit or rigidity to the ‘size’ of a theme or pattern, either in regard to space within a data item or across the data set. There is no requirement that a theme be present in a certain proportion of one’s data set, although it is ideal that a theme occurs in a number of instances. Such is also the case in regard to the space or detail in which a theme appears within a data item. In data recorded from one interview, a theme may receive significant attention, whereas in another interview, it may only appear briefly. (ibid.). As this research is exploring an area to which little attention has been paid academically to date, I seek to provide a rich thematic description of the whole data set, consisting of 21 interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 11) assert that in conducting analysis in this regard, “some depth and complexity is necessarily lost... but a rich overall description is maintained. As such, the researcher seeks to present a ‘theoretical’ thematic analysis, through which the data is coded according to concepts and typologies outlined in earlier sections to answer the research questions. This analysis also focuses primarily on the semantic level, in which “the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data” and the analytic process proceeds from description – through which data have been organised and summarised to present patterns – to interpretation, “where there is an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (ibid., p. 13). Nonetheless, as this research includes a focus on authority, and interviews were conducted with participants who were evidently nervous or cautious about ‘naming names’ or

making explicit statements about those bodies of authority to which they are subject, some level of latent interpretation is necessitated. The steps of conducting thematic analysis begin from seeking and noticing patterns and issues within the data, and ends with reporting of these themes (ibid., p. 15). Again, this process is reflexive, and involves moving back and forth between data and writing rather than following a linear progression. (ibid., p. 16).

3.4.1 Coding Approach

The coding guide from Rubin and Rubin's responsive interview model was followed. Following Rubin and Rubin's approach, coding is the second step of analysis, after transcripts are prepared, and concepts, themes, and events are found, refined, and elaborated (2005b, p. 2). After coding, the researcher can "compare concepts and themes across the interviews or combine separate events to formulate a description of the setting" to "seek to answer [the] research question in ways that allow [the researcher] to draw broader theoretical conclusions" (ibid.). Rubin and Rubin's coding approach endeavours to break data items down into recognisable data units. Each data unit could be very long, totalling several pages of transcribed interview data, or quite short, such as the length of a single phrases. A single data unit could be found in the answer to one question, or it could encompass a number of follow-up questions as well. Further, data units can be 'interlaced' with each other. Thus, a single paragraph or non-narrative answer to a question could, simultaneously, be comprised of one data unit in totality, as well as smaller data units within this, each of which could be complete within themselves or continuations of data units found in adjacent paragraphs of interview answers (ibid., p. 3).

The codes used during analysis of the interview data sets were organized into a 'Data Coding Tree'. This can be found attached to this thesis as Appendix III. I found it useful to conceive of the themes identified within the data as three main branches on a tree, under the headings: 1) *Education*, 2) *Violence, Displacement, and Captivity*, and 3) *Governance*. Within each main branch of the coding tree, broad themes are identified, with more precise concepts included as smaller branches under these themes. For example, under the *Education* branch, 'access to education' is included as a main sub-branch, with the code *A2E*. Under this sub-branch, access to primary, secondary, and tertiary level education is included, with the

labels *A2EP*, *A2ES*, and *A2ET* respectively. Under each of these smaller branches, this theme is refined further, with positive or negative experiences of access to each of these levels of education coded as, for example, *A2EP+* and *A2EP-*. In this manner, it became simpler to search each data item for a sub-branch throughout the analytical process, which would reveal nuances and finer details of the theme at the same time. In most cases, data was sufficiently detailed to allow for coding according to the more refined codes assigned to ‘lower’ branches on the coding tree. In some instances, the same code can be found on more than one branch of the coding tree. These labels are thus repeated within the coding tree, as signified. This demonstrates conceptual overlaps, but does not indicate any kind of ‘double coding’ took place or that any ‘double emphasis’ was placed on these themes.

Development of the coding tree was ongoing throughout data analysis. More than once, a new ‘sub-branch’ of the tree was identified and it became necessary to return to previously-coded interviews to verify its presence (or otherwise). Some codes, especially those under the *Governance* branch of the tree, indicate a latent rather than semantic theme. For example, *KRG policy or action affecting Yezidis (KRGYEZ)* would rarely be spoken about according to such terms by research participants. Instead, the interviewee might refer to the “dominant political party” or use other, more abstract or subtle terminology. Further, in codes which indicate positive or negative opinions, interpretation of the participant’s meaning as either positive or negative was necessarily open to the subjective interpretation of the researcher. As such, the thematic analysis conducted was not entirely semantic.

4 A, B, C, DAESH⁸: FINDINGS FROM DATA

“If you are with Kurdish parties, you have to study Kurdish schools. It’s not your choice.”
– Interviewee 8, August 2016

The findings detailed and explored subsequently are presented according to the following structure. Each finding is introduced, then is explored in greater depth according to different aspects or relevant sub-themes, and selected data extracts are provided to demonstrate and support the findings. Most data extracts provided are from Yezidi participants.⁹ Finally, any data which contradicts the finding is discussed, with examples given as relevant. After all main findings are detailed, a summary is presented, with other points of interest identified within the data set mentioned.

4.1 Education 2003 – 2014 and 2014 On: Restricted, Limited, Controlled

Between 2003 – 2014, de facto control of the KRG over Sinjar resulted in both Kurdish and Iraqi primary and secondary schools operating on the ground. However, the Yezidi community broadly felt that families frequently had no real choice in regard to which school their children would attend. Increased diversity amongst the school systems did not result in the perception of greater freedom of choice for either students or their families. After 2014, many Yezidis have been forced to rely solely on the provision of education available within camp settings. As previously mentioned, the quality of education for displaced persons is regarded as very low.

Of 21 interviewees, the educational pathways of 11 can be considered relevant (see Table 1). Of these, only one interviewee had never had access to formal education at all. Five had successfully entered tertiary level education. Of these five, all had entered tertiary studies within the Iraqi system. Two had graduated under the same system, while three had transferred to the Kurdish system. Four participants had completed secondary level studies,

⁸ *Daesh* is the Arabic language acronym for the IS group. This section title is taken from an anecdote told by Interviewee 19, in which a child attending a non-formal class suggested the letter ‘D’ should stand for Daesh during an English language alphabet exercise.

⁹ Data extracts are edited to preserve anonymity or, in very few cases, to clarify meaning. In most instances, English language errors are untouched to best preserve the voices of interviewees.

but not progressed to tertiary level in Iraq. Three of these participants had studied under the Iraqi system, and one had studied under the Kurdish. One student, Interviewee 20, had completed primary level studies but not progressed to secondary level at the time of the interview.

17 of 21 interviewees commented on access to education for Yezidi children and youth in Sinjar between 2003 and 2014. Only two participants spoke of this in solely positive terms – Interviewee 6, an older Yezidi poet, and Interviewee 20, who was the youngest participant in this research. Interviewee 20, who notably gave details and data in less depth than other participants, spoke of this in contrast to the issues this participant faced at the time of the interview. Five participants spoke of access to education for Yezidis during this timeframe in both positive and negative terms, and ten participants spoke of this in negative terms only.

All 21 interviewees discussed access to education for Yezidi children and youth in and from Sinjar since 2014. No participant spoke of education during this time in purely positive terms, and only six spoke of this in both positive and negative terms. The remaining 15 interviewees indicated they held only negative perceptions of this issue.

4.1.1 Resources

A common theme around negative perceptions of access to education both before and after 2014 is the issue of resources. Before 2014, this is described in terms of individual or family resources, such as financial capacity to afford to send children to school and transportation options. More commonly, resources are discussed in regard to the schools themselves. Interviewees commented on an absence of teaching staff in schools in Sinjar, and inadequate material needs, such as textbooks, furniture, and electricity. After 2014, these issues are stressed more severely. Families are described as having less financial capacity than before, and schools for displaced students, especially in camp settings, are described as facing a severe shortage of teaching staff, classroom space, and materials.

Family resources before 2014 as described by Interviewee 11: “Sometimes between exam I were going also to help my family. Taking care of little sheep. What you call

it, the lamb? From the primary school. In the whole primary school. In the six year of the primary school. My life it was like that.”

School resources before 2014 as described by Interviewee 7: “The schools, they were opened like sometimes... three, four months, without books. [The electricity was] not good. It’s for three hours, two or three hours.”

Family resources since 2014 as described by Interviewee 10: “Many of the students left the schools. Many of them were working for their families, to support them. Others lost their families during flee. So nobody’s could take care of them. They need support.”

School resources since 2014 as described by Interviewee 6: “In camps it’s very difficult. There’s many, many students, and not enough rooms, and not enough teachers. I know in some camps, they divided the day into four parts, so there is four shift for the school. And it’s not enough for them. So it’s very, very hard.”

4.1.2 Educational Policies

Another common theme throughout the negative perception of access to education since 2014 is that of educational policy. Many interviewees specifically identified the response of government authorities to increasingly unmet educational needs as inadequate. Interviewee 12 in particular expressed frustration that more than two years after the Yezidi exodus from Sinjar, authorities in the Kurdistan region have failed to adequately provide for significant numbers of students, especially those living in camps. Psychological harm is mentioned alongside the disruption to education, in addition to the claim that the futures of such students have been destroyed. Interviewee 12 questioned the motivation of the KRG in this area, asserting that initial claims of inadequate government resources were understandable, but that the length of time that has elapsed since displacement from Sinjar has allowed for a response that is yet to be seen.

However, perceptions of access to education for Yezidis both between 2003 and 2014 and since 2014 are not exclusively negative. Before 2014, some interviewees indicated that there was no issue in this regard, or that access or provision was adequate or unhindered. Since 2014, positive perception centers around two very specific issues. The first of these was the opening of branches of Iraqi universities, especially the University of Mosul, within KR-I. The second positive aspect hinges on a secondary level system whereby high school students who have studied under the Iraqi system can complete their secondary level education within the Kurdish system, thus granting them eligibility to attend Kurdish universities with (theoretically) equal access to students coming from Kurdistan. Each of these points are discussed in greater depth in regard to transitions to tertiary studies.

4.1.3 Politicized Education

Finally, it is important to note the prevalence with which interviewees indicated they believed political competition or political agendas to be behind the provision – or lack thereof – of education to those in and from Sinjar. Eight interviewees, including two non-Yezidi advocates for the community, a Yezidi community leader, three students, and two teachers discussed this at length. The non-Yezidi advocates affirmed that “competing narratives of Iraq” are pushed in different educational systems, and that any Sinjari Yezidi who received a salary from the KRG would be threatened with the loss of this income if they resisted sending their children to Kurdish schools. To best preserve and most directly convey the Yezidi voices in regard to this sensitive topic, selected data extracts are provided for the other relevant interviewees:

Interviewee 4: “Then, after 2003, after Saddam was gone, when the Kurdish parties controlled Shingal, they controlled everything, even the education there. They were trying to tell the people to join the Kurdish schools. Sometimes, if you are a member in [Kurdistan Democratic Party] for example, and you have a son or a daughter, a kid, they were forcing you to send them to the Kurdish curriculum. Kurdish schools. If you don’t do so, they will cut your salaries, and they would fire you from the party. This is reality. Those people, who they are members in a Kurdish party, they were sending their kids to the Kurdish schools. Unfortunately, the Kurdish government,

were using the same schools that had been built in Saddam's time, they were using for the Arabic curriculum. They were shifting with them, different shifts. The same schools, for example, the Arabic curriculum schools, teachers, students, they would come for example from 8, morning, until like 12, then the other shift. The Kurdish they would start in the same school, same classes, from 1 to 5, for example."

Interviewee 7: "I think because Iraq is in a war time, it's war in everywhere in Iraq, except Kurdistan, so many people, they are now living in Kurdistan, and it's... they were in Arabic schools, so I think if they choose Kurdish education here, the government will help them more."

Interviewee 10: "Many of them, who deserved to be like a doctors, engineers, lawyers, they could not get that, because they were not from Kurdistan. And the same thing for Mosul. We were the victim of some... a political problems between two sides. That was the problem. I don't know the reason behind that, but I guess they want to announce something. They want to improve themselves, maybe, in that part of Iraq, to be belongs to them. Like if Shingal should be with Kurdistan, then they must have all the elements of having Shingal as a part of Kurdistan. So the education is one of the main things they should start with. So the ones who were with them, working with them as teachers, in official places... I heard that they forced them to send their children to the Kurdish schools."

Interviewee 13: "It's the nature of the society here. They want... they don't want people to develop, because if they develop, the other guys will fall. So they don't want to lose their chairs. It's been a long time they've been sitting on their chairs."

Interviewee 14: "Actually, when they come, they made propaganda that Kurdish would be good for you, but like my studying in Kurdish, and also my brother, he is now in Germany also he studied, our choice was because my, it was political, because my sister was taking a salary of 50 thousand dinar from Kurdish, so they were obliging them to send the sisters and brothers and if they have children to the Kurdish

schools. Although the Arabic were better, and they are more strong than the Kurdish one.”

Interviewee 21: “You know, the dominant political party, they choose the headmasters for each school. And you know, the headmaster of each school, is a sample of that dominant party. So it means he can affect on each student, each single teacher, and tell them ‘you’ll be like this or not’. Or I will kick you out. For example, even if there was a perfect headmaster, not from the dominant party, he’s not gonna be the headmaster. Because he’s not according to the policy.”

Only a single participant contradicted the idea that some families in Sinjar have been compelled to send their children to Kurdish rather than to Iraqi schools. Interviewee 6 mentioned personally knowing people who work with the KRG but send their children to federal Iraqi schools.

4.2 Difficult Transitions at Tertiary Level

Although a majority of participants spoke negatively of access to and the provision of education at all levels in terms of resources, prioritization by either the KRG or the government of Iraq, and politicization of education, most participants reported a ‘relatively’ easy pathway from primary to secondary level. The transition between these two levels was not described as a roadblock by any participant other than Interviewee 20, who had missed a significant period of schooling after enduring captivity by IS and thus sought to re-enter formal education at grade seven but struggled with an age restriction, and Interviewee 5, who had endured a particularly problematic situation throughout childhood involving bureaucratic procedures around paperwork and identification and had thus never been admitted to formal schooling. Although these issues are very serious, and could be understood as violations of human rights and the rights of the child, both experiences are outliers within this data set.

However, significant difficulties can be observed at the point of transition between secondary and tertiary level education, and in regard to transitioning between the Kurdish and federal

Iraqi formal education systems either from secondary to tertiary level or during tertiary level education. Ten interviewees described access to tertiary level education as difficult or constrained, with six interviewees emphasizing the difficulty of transferring between the two systems in particular. Two interviewees offered significant data on the structural placement system for tertiary level study in negative terms. One interviewee asserted difficulties of access in regard to resources, but did not describe accessing tertiary level study as difficult *per se*.

Of the 21 participants, five did not mention tertiary level education in noteworthy detail. Of these five, one is below age and is focused on completing secondary level studies. Another two had completed secondary school, one of whom did not wish to study further within Iraq and had been admitted to undergraduate level in a foreign university at the time of the interview, with the other having completed secondary schooling under the Kurdish system and awaiting results of university admission. The remaining two participants who did not provide data on this are teachers who spoke of tertiary level studies only in regard to the *ta'akhi* school system, which is examined in depth later.

4.2.1 Personal Observations of Disruption to Tertiary Studies

During the years leading up to 2014, Yezidis from Sinjar experienced increasing levels of ethnically or religiously targeted violence, especially in and around the city of Mosul in Nineveh. Interviewee 9, who had just started tertiary study, fled the city in 2012 along with an estimated 2,500 Yezidi students. This represented a significant obstacle to attaining tertiary level qualifications for the Yezidi community, to which different responses can be observed. Interviewee 11 selected a university in the south of Iraq where the Yezidi minority is not well-known, which caused heightened worry amongst this interviewee's family members.

Following the IS takeover of the city in 2014, this problem was compounded further. Interviewee 2 had just completed secondary level studies and was about to enter the University of Mosul to study medicine. Notably, this participant graduated seventh in Iraq in their final high school year of 2013–2014, but had not, at the time of the interview, gained

access to either a Kurdish or Iraqi educational institution, opting instead to pursue emigration options to the United States. This interviewee also reported observations of similarly-aged students whose educational pathways were disrupted after fleeing the area, describing such students as caught “in between.”

Heartbreakingly, Interviewee 5, who had never accessed formal schooling, was close to finally realizing this possibility in 2014. This interviewee, whose unusually difficult circumstances regarding identification papers are described above, had been pursuing study informally and was able to sit examinations to grant high school level qualifications. However, this interviewee reported “losing everything” due to the advance of IS.

4.2.2. Transfer

Six interviewees spoke at length about the difficulties of transferring between the Kurdish and federal Iraqi educational systems at tertiary level. This issue was first described by Interviewee 1, an American working for a Yezidi-focused NGO in KR-I with previous background and experience in the educational sector in Kurdistan, and is described in greater depth by Interviewee 4, widely regarded as a Yezidi community leader. Interviewee 4 explains the pre-existing difficulties for Yezidi youth accessing tertiary institutions throughout Iraq, before touching upon the necessity for aspiring students to become politically affiliated with the KRG, and then entering the issue of lowering the placement for students transferring from the Iraqi system:

Interviewee 4: “When a student graduate from high schools, from the Arabic one,¹⁰ he has to apply for the universities that belong to the central government. They have no right directly to compete with the students here in KRG, to get a seat in one of the universities here, in Erbil, Duhok, Sulaymaniyah. So when they were accepting, in one of the universities in Baghdad, in Tikrit, in different places, it was very, very dangerous, for the Yezidi students to go there. To study. So they were just skipping

¹⁰ Participants frequently referred to the educational system of federal Iraq as the ‘Arabic’ system when speaking in English, as this is the language of instruction or as an easy differential adjective to the ‘Kurdish’ system.

one year, of studying, then the next year, they were applying, trying to find a seat here in KRG. Through some of the centers, like Lalesh Center,¹¹ some of the joined the groups in between the KRG and between the, like the local government in Shingal, so even if they find one, they have to lower their college... they accepted. They been accepted. So it's not like the States, it's not like New Zealand, it's not like European education... it's crazy. So people, they have high marks, usually they are applying for colleges that graduate doctors, pharmacists, stuff like that. Then after the second, maybe, the second level is the engineers and the third one is the college of sciences, the fourth one is education. So, if you are a student and you apply for a university through the central government, and you are accepted in the college of engineering for example, and you skip a year, and then the second one you apply to get a seat in the KRG universities, they will move you lower down from the engineering college to college of science, for example, or the college of education.”

Interviewee 8, who had transferred between the two systems at tertiary level, perceived this lowering of placement to be conducted along ethno-religious lines, explicitly stating that Yezidi students are deliberately given lower placements than Muslim students. Two other interviewees, 9 and 12, report needing to rely on influence and connections, explained through the term *wasta*,¹² to gain access to Kurdish universities after studying within the Iraqi federal system. Interviewee 9 spent two years attempting to enter university before “finding *wasta*”, and laments the plight of friends who have been less successful in this endeavor.

Interviewee 11, who is mentioned above in regard to choosing to study at a university to the south of Iraq to avoid the targeted violence in Mosul, did eventually gain access to the selected university despite family protestations – and despite multiple attempts to access an institution in KR-I first:

Interviewee 11: I tried to come here, in Duhok, I get approval from the Ministry of

¹¹ A sort of ‘Yezidi Outreach’ branch of the KRG, named after the most sacred Yezidi holy site.

¹² *Wasta* is an Arabic word used throughout the Middle East. Although consideration of this term, which could be translated as power, influence, or status in English, provokes thought of nepotism, this term is absent this negative connotation in the Iraqi context. *Wasta* is wielded openly, often with pride, and perhaps even as a right.

Education from Baghdad, but when I came here, I just needed the signature of the dean. He refused, he said that we have no place. I tried with him many times, I told him I cannot go to [to the south], I am the only Yezidi there, you know about the situation there. He refused, and there was no way to make him accept me. The next year, I went to Sulaymaniyah, also I asked to study there. I think you know that there is... they are moving Yezidi people together. It... the Lalesh Center was working in it. But the problem is that they don't let you go to the section, your college, for example, I... they accepted I should study medicine in [the southern university], but when they moved my name here they told me that... engineer of electricity [a lower-ranked discipline]. But I refused it. A year after that, it was not moving. The most difficult thing there... They were not respecting me. For example, I stayed there nearly two weeks or twenty days, something like that, I was always in the waiting room, wherever the dean heard that the secretary was saying that Yezidi boy is here, he always was saying that I have a meeting, something like that, and I was close to the door. There was no meeting. They were not respecting me and I offended always. After that I took my paper and come back. He was saying go to [the south], another city. Just the... he was saying that we have no place here. The year after that, also, I tried to go to Erbil. I told my family I want to go to [the south], but they refused, they said me try to go to Erbil. I went to Erbil, they also refused, therefore I told my family that I will go if you accept or not. I must go. But after that, they saw me insisted.”

4.2.2 System

Finally, the structural placement system operational within both the Kurdish and federal Iraqi education systems, in which students are channelled into career paths and higher education options according to the results of official examinations conducted in a student's final year of secondary school and described by IRFAD (2014) as “strictly controlled”, were described as problematic by two non-Yezidi participants. Interviewee 3 was the outgoing Country Director of a Yezidi-focused NGO at the time of the interview, and is also an outspoken advocate of Yezidi rights, who stated:

Interviewee 3: “So in Iraq, you don't study what you want to study. You have a field

chosen for you based on how well you perform in your final examination in high school. And if you... all fields of study are hierarchized, according to prestige, and the most prestigious require the highest scores to get into. It really doesn't correspond to people's abilities or intelligence, and definitely not to their interests. It's a really weird system. And it's a really unfortunate system. Let's say... first of all, it's really foolish, and it's completely absurd and ridiculous that you would put something like history down at the bottom, like it doesn't matter. So you want all your history books just to be written by the people that scored the lowest in high school? So the people that underperform, you want them to be in charge of writing your people's history. It would make more sense to have smart people in every field. Let people choose their interests. But no, everybody who scores well, they gotta be a doctor."

This feature of the education system was also notably condemned by the KRG representative who participated in this research:

Interviewee 18: "I think that's not a good way of running a country, but that is true throughout the Middle East, that they do this. In Turkey, it's very much that same system. Probably, I would say, even more so. That your points... each department and school has a certain point system, and depending on how many points you get, you can go to different schools and study in different departments. It's not uncommon in the Middle East. I think that it's stupid. It's a different philosophy."

Interviewee 15, a Yezidi teacher, who expressed great pride in the ethics of hard work this person saw exhibited by many Yezidi students, felt that both admission to university and manipulation of grades and achievement at this level was blatantly corrupted along ethno-religious lines with preferential treatment given to Muslim students. This observation was also supported by Interviewee 9, a student at the University of Dohuk, who reported hearing cases of students being assigned grades without examination simply according to the whims of teaching staff. Interviewee 9 believed that in such cases, systemic discrimination against Yezidis harmed the grades of Yezidi students.

4.2.3 Easy Access

Only one participant spoke positively about access to tertiary level education for Yezidis from Sinjar since 2014, in regard to the establishment of a branch of the University of Mosul, continuing to operate under the Iraqi Ministry of Education, within KR-I:

Interviewee 6: “It was difficult for them, but I think they solve it, and they... they continue education. Even the university of Mosul, they removed from there, because there is no Mosul anymore, they removed the professor and the teachers, they removed the university of Mosul to Duhok. So, most of them, they continue their education now, in Duhok.”

4.3 The Role of the *Ta’akhi* Schools

The *ta’akhi* schools are the implementation of the only form of ‘bridging’ system that exists, in any official capacity, to facilitate the transition of students who have studied under the Iraqi federal curriculum up to high school into Kurdish public universities with equal access to Kurdistan students. Research participants were unable to offer a conclusive answer as to when the system was established, with interviewees citing speculative dates between 2008 to 2012. However, it is clear that the system was established by the KRG in the Sinjar region, and that the number of *ta’akhi* schools were slowly increasing up to 2014. No *ta’akhi* schools were operational for the 2014–2015 academic year. During the 2015–2016 academic year, three *ta’akhi* schools were opened in Zakho, Khanke, Shariya within KR-I, with 1,400 students in attendance.

Ten of 21 interviewees mentioned the *ta’akhi schools*, and some interviews, especially those conducted with *ta’akhi* teachers, revolved around this topic. Four interviewees were themselves teachers within the *ta’akhi* system. Of these, three teachers were from Sinjar originally, and two had taught in the system before 2014. The fourth teacher is a Yezidi from the Sheikhan region in KR-I who had taught within the Kurdish system but had not participated in *ta’akhi* schools prior to the mass displacement of Yezidis from Sinjar. A fifth

interviewee was the manager of the three *ta'akhi* schools in Kurdistan. Notably, all interviewees who mentioned this system spoke of it positively, emphasizing the importance of the system to the educational pathways and future success of its students and its role in strengthening the Yezidi community (especially in regard to the mass trauma experienced by the events of 2014 onwards). Some interviewees also spoke of the *ta'akhi* system in direct relation to political competition and the advantages it offers to the KRG.

Interviewee 13, a *ta'akhi* teacher with prior experience within the system in the Sinjar region, described the first establishment of the *ta'akhi* system prior to 2014 as a Yezidi-lead initiative. This interviewee also talked about the lack of resources granted to the *ta'akhi* schools after the 2015 re-opening of the system in the Kurdistan region. Specific mention is made of a lack of furniture for the first month of classes, with students either standing for lessons or bringing chairs from outside the school when possible. Nonetheless, the opening of the *ta'akhi* schools was very widely supported by the Yezidi community, even as the schools remain under-resourced. This interviewee described a group of students who self-organised into a collective they called 'The Future' who aimed to source necessary materials for teaching and study within the *ta'akhi* schools:

Interviewee 13: "They went to Shingal, and after Shingal been liberated, went to the ta'akhi schools there, brought some of the books. They were on the ground. They picked them up. The group, they were looking for the students who have finished high school, they were taking books from them."

4.3.1 Pathways to Success

Interviewee 3 had spent a year directing a Yezidi-focused NGO based in Duhok, KR-I, at the time of the interview. During this year of work, the NGO had played a significant role in restarting the three *ta'akhi* schools mentioned for the 2015-2016 academic year. This interviewee emphasized the high rate of success among the *ta'akhi* students; a common theme of discussion for those participants who mentioned the system, while also speaking about how the system allows students to enter more prestigious fields of study and become more highly-regarded professionals in the future. In regard to the work of the NGO in helping

to open the *ta'akhi* schools, Interviewee 3 stated “I think a lot of people in the community believed that that was our biggest accomplishment.” Interviewee 3 continued, discussing the benefit to the community of enabling students to access prestigious fields of study.

Interestingly, this interviewee named becoming a judge as virtually impossible for a member of the Yezidi community, stating “There are people that use the title judge, which is *hakem*, so you've got '*hakem* so-and-so', but apparently they don't ever really judge in the courts, because the Muslim people will not accept to be judged by a Yezidi person.”

This interviewee also offered insight to the psychological impact of the *ta'akhi* schools on the displaced Yezidi community, explicitly mentioning the schools as a source of dignity, excitement, and joy for students. “It was like these students were so happy to be part of something, and to be able to reclaim their future, even though they're living in a camp.”

Other interviewees emphasized the high success rates of the *ta'akhi* students:

Interviewee 4: “I think in spite of they studied only four months, started from 21st of November 2015, ended in 20th of April. They did very well. They were the best. Two schools, one of them was second in the whole KRG, and the other one was the third. 1,018 students managed to succeed from the first try. That's a big number, actually, for the first try. And over 100 students got marks over 90%. So they did very well.”

Interviewee 13: “Ta'akhi was the top school concerning the result in all Kurdistan. The percentage that succeed in the literary track was 99.5, and in the scientific, 94.1.”

Finally, Interviewee 21, the *ta'akhi* teacher from the Sheikhan district, took a pessimistic perspective of this system becoming more widespread within KR-I and allowing for more Sinjari Yezidis to become highly educated and professionally successful:

Interviewee 21: “Kurds don't want school to be good. You know why? Because if you have a lot of doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, thinkers, philosophers, everything, technicians... they need jobs. Even in government sector, or private sector. And they are not powerful in both. So these people, educated, they will do what? A movement.

They will make change. They will make reformation. So they want this community to be oppressed, to be neglected, not educated. It's a big problem for us.”

4.3.2 Strengthening the Community

The *ta'akhi* schools also play an immensely important role in strengthening the fragmented, traumatized Yezidi community, and have come to be regarded as a sign that the community will endure through the genocide it has experienced and through the political oppression and disempowerment many people feel they currently experience and will continue to face in future.

Interviewee 10 is a teacher within the *ta'akhi* system who discussed at length the importance of the schools in this regard:

Interviewee 10: “Before *ta'akhi*, I am talking about our students, Yezidi students, first when *ta'akhi* were opened, they didn't know even if they would get that rights or the second chance to do the exams. So that affected them. Many of them were very clever. But their situation, circumstance of their life, was too hard, so many of them came to me, said that they want to postpone some of the material to the second chance. I told them I even don't know if you will get that chance. So they do their exams by forcing themselves, because they didn't know if they will get that. Those students, we saw that they were changed by time. Many times, they came to us, they would say that I have to leave the school. I have to help my family. I have to work to support them. They need me today. And I cannot complete my education. Many of them were coming and say that all of my family are still with the ISIS. Others came and said that I lost my whole family. My friends. Many things were there. But there was something in their eyes. There was something in themselves, want to get educated. So we tried to focus on those who really want to be in the school. There were groups. So each classroom, we tried to send some of them to go there, to make other students like this.”

For this teacher, a Yezidi from Sinjar, working within the *ta'akhi* schools was a personally healing and strengthening experience also. This participant mentioned both bringing students

together throughout the year to discuss and process their experiences and the high marks the students achieved at the end of the year as “a reward for all of us.”

This sentiment is echoed by Interviewee 21. This participant is a Yezidi from the Sheikhan district in KR-I. Teaching in a *ta'akhi* school made this participant feel closer to the Sinjari Yezidi community:

Interviewee 21: “It was such a nice feeling for me to teach student who were not from my area, and have different accent. We are somehow different in some aspect. However, they are Yezidi. I felt I’m very fine with them, and they respect me highly. I see the first day when I went to the room of the teachers and the headmaster and teachers, there were only couple of chairs and a little table... you can’t say a table. Because it was made by someone, a kind of table. Everything was very simple. We thought this will not happen. But then we made it to happen, and made it into a real school. It was a real school. Students were very perfect, they were taking our advice, they took all our advice, instruction, they were very good listener and taking everything into consideration. While we were giving advice, we were focusing how Yezidi, have been persecuted long time ago, and up to this time, up to these years.”

This interviewee also described the *ta'akhi* experience as a way for the Yezidi community to resist the effects of the events of 2014 and ensure into the future:

Interviewee 13: “And I told them... you have to be clever. You know why? You, because you have to ask yourself, why you are attending high school here? Have you asked yourself, where are your friends? Are your friends all here? Were your friends from Shingal? Everyone is from everywhere. It’s a good chance to look with everybody from different part of Shingal, but still a sad occasion. When you get high marks, you go to college. And sometimes, when they are burnt out, they have no energy, I was telling them... you know we are living in tents. We have no cars. We have not enough healthy food for our children, no power, conditions are terrible. So try to study well. To work hard. To go to college and change this condition. I told them, for the sake of those boys and girls who are now persecuted by ISIS, sexually,

killed, or sold like slaves and stuff like this, for this sake we have to do our best. And you have to do your best as well, to get good marks, because this is the only thing you can do for them. This is the thing in your life you can feel safe. They will know that there's a generation that the Yezidi people are not died. The Yezidi people are still alive. When I told them, many of the students were crying, because most of them have sister or brother or relative, friends, so on, or at least because they are Yezidi, and persecuted, they were starting to cry. They felt very sad. I told them that twice. When they graduated, and got good marks, the students made a party for us, in September. I told them I appreciate you very well, because you take one of my wishes, and you made one of my wishes to come true, which is to get good marks, and to revenge from ISIS. By this, to revenge for those girls and boys who were killed by ISIS, and their bodies are sold, their blood and their bones everywhere, taken by those animals. At that moment I felt I did a great job. We motivated our students in many ways.”

4.3.3 Advantage to the KRG

When explaining the *ta'akhi* system, Interviewee 4, the community leader, described it in a way that expresses mutual benefit to the KRG and to the Sinjar Yezidi community. To the KRG, this interviewee described increasing the perception that the KRG cares about the Yezidi community and increasing the volume of qualified potential employees for the Kurdish government as advantages. In regard to the latter point, the interviewee described as ‘clever’ the tactic of allowing the Iraqi government to fund the education of students until the final year of secondary school. “They pay for the teachers, for the buildings, for the stationeries, for the curriculums, for the... different things. So the central government, they were paying everything until the last year. And in the last year, the Kurdish government, they are saying ‘Oh, we opened the *ta'akhi* schools for the Yezidi people,’ so they can join, then they will take them to their universities, after graduation they will use them as their employees. So I think they were smart in this way.”

At the time of the interview, Interviewee 15 was the manager of the three *ta'akhi* schools operating within KR-I. However, this participant speculated that to continue operation of the schools, this would need to be presented as at KRG-lead initiative rather than a Yezidi-lead

initiative, mentioning the Lalesh Center or another KDP-operated mechanism as ways for the KRG to operationalize this. This interviewee was even willing to personally relinquish the position of school manager to ensure continuity of the system.

Interviewee 15: “The manager of Lalesh [Center], he say, [interviewee name], he don’t work for PDK. For that I think if I stayed as manager, Lalesh will don’t work for open any these schools. I think that. For that I say to him I will go, and I say to manager in Shingal, give me vacation, permission, I don’t... I said to him I cannot teach next year. For that, important thing for me, opening ta’akhi. If I become the manager of ta’akhi, I think he will don’t open. For that I say I leave. Quit.”

Speaking broadly about the *ta’akhi* schools pre-2014, Interviewee 15 speculated that the KRG was reluctant to open the schools in the first instance as these schools remain somewhat connected to Iraqi federal education through the Arabic language, and may not be considered sufficiently Kurdish, quoting representatives of the Directorate of Education in Duhok as expressing the desire the Yezidis from Sinjar become educated in Kurdish.

Finally, Interviewee 21, a Yezidi born and raised within KR-I, also offered insights in regard to the effects of political competition and political agendas on the provision of this system.

Interviewee 21: “We were not telling our student to be supporter for kind of politician or policy. Here’s the problem. Last year, we didn’t have time to make students to collect in the playground, and give them instruction and raise the flag. This made one of the problem. We didn’t have time for such kind of things. Because we were very late! We have only five month left. And we have no holidays. Even the regular holiday in the Kurdish school, we didn’t have. Because we have to finish the curriculum. In Yezidi feast, and Christmas also one day, and in Nawruz, and in Yezidi Easter also again. Only these four five days. We don’t have time to make kind of activity for something to show that we are student, also to praise our politician, stuff like this. They were pissed off about this thing. So, the school, I mean... let me tell you something else. I was teaching at Domiz. The teacher was always on Saturday collecting all the students, and raising the flag, and saying the national anthem. And

talking, you know, about the political situation, about the peshmerga, about the army, about the president, you know he's doing great job, like this... blah blah blah, stuff like this. And he's forgetting about the process of education.

And this is... the headmasters are usually have meeting with the dominant political, politicians, and tell them what to talk about. How to speak. Talk about the policy. Talk about the front lines. Talk about the role of former political men. So... and you know, students are naive. They believe in this. They believe... yes, because teachers are seen, same as our fathers, so we believe in them. If we don't separate the policy from the education, from teaching, schools for a short time will be something useless.”

4.4 On the Future of the Yezidi Community

Without fail, all Yezidi participants emphasized the importance of education to their community. Many described becoming educated as the only viable method for Yezidis to resist political oppression and discrimination, and to be able to advocate for their community to achieve safety, prosperity, and development in future. Of the non-Yezidi participants, the two who could be described as in positions of advocating for the community reinforced this sentiment. The KRG representative who participated in the research emphasized the importance of education both to the KRG and do all peoples under Kurdish jurisdiction. Further, a number of participants described a formative Yezidi identity, with five asserting that they do not accept ‘Kurdishness’ or self-identify as Kurdish. Other aspects of Yezidi cohesion or Yezidi fragmentation were also discussed. Finally, many participants discussed the future – either in regard to themselves individually, their families, or of the Yezidi community as a whole. The future of the Sinjar region also emerged as an important topic.

4.4.1 The Importance of Education

Of all findings and sub-findings within this data, the importance of education to the Yezidi community was the most clearly and consistently expressed. Not a single research participant considered education to be a non-issue for Yezidis from Sinjar. Some interviewees did

indicate that while education was vitally important, other issues such as security or financial or material resources were also crucial. However, many interviewees went as far as to say that education is the *most important* issue the Yezidi community faces today.

Interviewees discussed the importance of education for Yezidis to have the capacity to reach out to the international community. Yezidis, especially from Sinjar, have faced a number of episodes of targeted violence throughout their history. A common theme emerging from the community today is that the latest of these episodes, the genocidal campaign conducted by IS from 2014, is different, in that this time, the world can hear about what has happened to Yezidi people. Further, some interviewees indicated that as Yezidis are a small, relatively unknown, disempowered minority, education is important for their own development and communal sustainability.

Interviewee 4: “Even those people that are not educated, illiterate people, they are still encouraging their kids to go to join the schools. Even those people in the mountain, you know, they are fighting now. I visited them many times, they are asking for schools, for their kids. Yes. Education is the most important thing for the Yezidi people. And they can be more strong, can give a better message to the international community, better understanding, and better knowledge.”

Interviewee 10: “Not only the Yezidi minority, or community, all over the world, any community cannot go for a while without education. The same thing for the Yezidi community. If we talk about before, the Yezidi faced same situation as happened these days. We know for 74 times they faced the genocides. This time was different. Why, because we had a lot of those who can write down everything’s happened. So if we came for a while, at history, people... if people’s reading about the history, about what’s happened nowadays, they will know what’s happened to the Yezidis. Which is different than before. If the education ended in this level, in the Yezidi minority, that’s mean we are ended. We are finished. We don’t care about what’s happened to us, our tribe, we’ve lost our homes, many been killed, kidnapped, like... everything’s we faced. But if you came here we insisted on the education.”

Interviewee 13: “The most important thing is teaching, or education. We lost everything except the education, so if we lost this, we would end. We cannot be developed by fighting, by force. We are a group of people who are not a lot. The most important thing is education for the Yezidis.”

Interviewee 14: “Education is the only way for Yezidis to survive.”

Interviewee 16: “Everybody knows from the Yezidi that the teaching or education is the best thing, and is most important thing for the Yezidi. To be developed. We are a minority group, a small group of people, so this is one of the best things to be developed. By education.”

Interviewee 21: “We want our children, our, this generation, and any other generation that come, to be educated. At least to read about what happened to us, and to be aware. And we should not give trust to anyone, especially people who are our neighbours, who traitored us, who are doing the story. And they can read what’s going on. What’s happened. Yes, and to communicate with the other societies, European, American societies.”

Interviewee 1, a member of a Yezidi-focused NGO, discussed the importance of education for the Yezidi community with regard to needing continued access to the Iraqi federal curriculum taught in the Arabic language. This interviewee explained that access to curricula and higher education in Arabic provides access to “a bigger world” and a greater kind of fluency than can be obtained through studies in Kurdish.

Interviewee 5 had a particular interest in the importance of formal education for Yezidi women. This interviewee described women in Arab communities as more heavily restricted in regard to pursuing education than women in Yezidi communities, but explained that due to the proximity of the societies, Yezidi women self-restricted out of fear of repercussions. This interviewee stated, “I want to teach all the women in future how to... to do something... and to in future... to make a good community. Because if the mother get education, she will make a beautiful family, a clever family.”

Interviewee 8 spoke of education in regard to accessing future opportunities and rebuilding lives after the crisis of displacement experienced since 2014, stating that education is the “most important thing” for Yezidis to pursue, and that “without education, the opportunities will be zero.”

Interviewee 19, who briefly led a education-focused NGO providing non-formal education to displaced Yezidis until this was shut down by the KRG provided evidence from this teaching experience to demonstrate how important Yezidi students consider education to be, even under difficult circumstances:

Interviewee 19: “It’s the most important thing now. Yes. I think. Because as I teacher, when I was in school, among students, I see them, even though their situation, family situation, nobody is supporting them, they are going hard situations, but they still doing well at school. This is example that they want to be educated. In morning, they come to school, and evening going to work, and he’s a teenager.”

Finally, Interviewee 20, the youngest of all research participants, offered perhaps the most poignant answer to the question of the importance of education to Sinjari Yezidis:

Interviewee 20: “Whoever doesn’t have proper education, he’s missing a lot of this world.”

4.4.2 Yezidi Cohesion or Yezidi Fragmentation

The events of 2014 have had a formative impact on the Yezidi community. Whether a united, cohesive Yezidi body emerges in years to come, or the trauma and subsequent scattering of this staunchly endogamous community has splintered the minority beyond repair remains to be seen. Nonetheless, many research participants offered their thoughts, opinions, and observations on Yezidi identity and recent or anticipated changes. Interviewee 1, speaking from an outside perspective, described a ‘generation gap’ between youth and older Sinjari Yazidis that can be observed through differences in dress, manner of speech, perceptions of the Yezidi caste system, the importance of remaining in Sinjar, political understandings of the

future of Iraq, and in joining the YBŞ¹³ “which is a very different focus from traditional Yezidi culture”. This interviewee asserted that “since 2014 you’re going to witness the reinvention of the Yezidi community.”

Interviewee 5, who is especially interested in the future of Yezidi women, spoke of the chance to effect change within the community by affording women greater opportunities in future “I want to study law, in future, to help women and children, and specially refugees, in the future, and I want to teach women how to be strong. Especially in Middle East. Because here, men in Middle East, men controlling women. So I want them to get their freedom, and to study, and to do many things, because if they give a way to a woman, she can be perfect. She can be great. She will do great things.”

Interviewee 10 offered a perspective in stark contrast to the despair and hopelessness commonly and understandably expressed by other displaced Yezidis, in which the events of 2014 can be seen as an opportunity for the community to grow stronger. “This events [of 2014], was... they came to erase the Yezidi minority, but they failed. But if we talking about from another side, there were positive things, also. Like we can found something which is different than past. And as a Yezidi, we should stood up again. This events, makes us more powerful than before. Make us insist to do something bigger than our last dreams.”

Interestingly, the three research participants (Interviewees 10, 13, and 21) who had the most optimistic views on the future of the Yezidi community were all teachers who spoke of their experiences teaching Yezidi youth as sources of inspiration and hope for the future. These participants emphasized the resilience of Yezidi youth and the dedication to pursuing studies they observed as extremely positive for the future of the community.

Five research participants (Interviewees 7, 11, 13, 15, and 19) explicitly rejected the label of ‘Yezidi Kurd’ and explained that they do not self-identify as Kurdish, with Interviewee 19 asserting a desire for an unspecified degree of independence from both Iraq and KR-I:

¹³ The Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê or Sinjar Resistance Units, a Yezidi militia operating since 2014 as an offshoot of the PKK.

Interviewee 19: “Because Yezidis, they’re not concerned, of course... they’re concerned Yezidi Kurds. And to the world, they say “Yezidi Kurds”. But we’re not. We want to be separated from Kurdistan. Or want to be separated from Iraq. To get our rights. Because since history we didn’t get any of our rights from not Kurdistan or Iraq. So that they don’t want us to be well educated I think. Because the only way people can be understandable, and to develop himself, by education.”

Interviewee 15 made reference to Yezidi identity in the difficulties faced in opening the previously-described *ta’akhi* schools, and continued at this moment to talk about the mayor of the Sinjar region, a Yezidi who is himself a member of the PDK and broadly distrusted by the community.

Interviewee 15: “But many people say, why [Interviewee 15] don’t say the government is good? The PDK is good? The Yezidi is Kurdish? And some people say why Hassan say [a Yezidi-lead NGO] opening this school? I think for this, the Yezidi don’t have force, because everything by the government, and the government choose some people help government. For that, I think, maybe now, the mayor of Shingal, Yezidi. But the mayor, I’m sure the mayor of Shingal, cannot drink tea if he don’t ask permission. And other people PDK. I’m sure for that.”

Interviewee 15 also mentioned the exodus of Yezidis from Iraq, especially to Germany. Six research participants indicated that they have immediate family members in Germany. Nine participants explained that if they had the opportunity to resettle – either in Europe or the US – they would never return to Iraq in future. This was expressed very strongly. Interviewee 15 was proud of the Yezidi commitment to peace despite the violence experienced from 2014, and spoke of this with reference to recent terror attacks in Europe that many have blamed on the influx of refugees. “Yezidi is good people. Now, about one hundred thousand Yezidi living in Germany. But no anyone Yezidi killed Germany people. No anyone Yezidi go bomb. We, after ISIS coming, we was poor people, but after ISIS coming, everyone don’t have anything. Everyone [lost] his car, his house, everything.”

When asked about whether the Sinjari Yezidi community would vote to join the autonomous Kurdistan region now or before 2014, as was the intention through Article 140 of the most recent iteration of the Iraqi constitution, the research participant employed by the KRG answered diplomatically, but indicated the KRG approach to this matter:

Interviewee 18: “I mean, I don’t know. Nobody knows. Nobody knows what would have happened. There wasn’t a referendum, and there’s no way of having actual data on who lived there. But I think that both... that, at least Kurdistan suspected that these areas would be Kurdish. Shingal is not a terribly profitable place to own. There’s nothing there. There’s some farmland, but it’s not like there was a huge amount of oil underneath it, or anything. But they do see it as being historically Kurdish, and want to... feel that they have a mandate to administer it. I mean, who knows where people would have voted.”

Finally, Interviewee 19, when discussing the many episodes of target violence against the Yezidi community, described this with mournful confusion. “Since history, Yezidi people are... persecuted. And even though we are... under persecution, when we want our rights, they stop us. For what, we don’t know. Just like... like someone, you prevent him to do something, but he doesn’t know. He tries to understand, he doesn’t know.”

4.4.3 In Sinjar; In Iraq

The Sinjari Yezidi community currently lives in a state of limbo. More than two years after the attacks of August 3rd, 2014, hundreds of thousands of people remain in IDP camps living in substandard conditions with no certainty as to the future. The status of the Sinjar region is key to this. Without security, and perhaps without a degree of political control, many are reluctant to consider returning to their homeland.

Interviewee 1 discussed this with regard to education, describing the understanding within the Yezidi community that becoming educated beyond primary school level is imperative to obtaining employment and following prosperous and prestigious career paths in future. “Your

life choices are pretty limited. So the return of people to Sinjar is definitely a target to access the education. If those schools aren't open, people are not going to go back.”

Interviewee 3 brought up the deep distrust felt by the community towards more powerful actors within Iraq, with particular reference to the KRG and peshmerga and their withdrawal on August 3rd:

Interviewee 3: “In order to feel hope in their future, in the country, Yezidi’s number one concern is security. They have to know that they’ll be safe in the future. And security in Sinjar isn’t just about beefing up some kind of a security force, like the peshmerga. The peshmerga were stronger than the IS jihadists, but they ran away without a fight. They didn’t stay. They didn’t defend even a single day. So the real issue isn’t just about... it’s not just about security, it’s about politics. And Yezidis need a political solution. They need more of a say in their own affairs. Yezidis weren’t in control of the security that was in charge of protecting their area. There were a number of Yezidis in those institutions, in the local security, in the peshmerga, in the PDK party, but the heads of those entities were Muslims. And many were not Muslims from Sinjar. So the Sinjari people weren’t really their constituency.”

This was supported by other research participants, revealing a deep distrust and insecurity felt by the Yezidi community. Interviewee 6 mentioned the proximity of the southern area of Sinjar to areas which remained under IS control at the time of the interview, and the doubt felt by Yezidis that their community could rely on any guarantees of protection from other parties. Interviewee 8 suggested that the KRG is deliberately obstructing the return of Yezidis to Sinjar through withholding or delaying the provision of services and restricting the flow of materials permitted through checkpoints to prevent the “rise” of a strong Yezidi community in the area.

Sadly, much of this distrust is coagulating along sectarian lines, with some Yezidis convinced that they cannot live side by side with the Muslim community, due especially to the claims of IS that their actions and policies are sanctioned by the Koran:

Interviewee 14: “Actually, all of us, we wanted to be back. We are forced to go because we don’t feel trust. If in future, we get international protection, like Armenia, we should come back. But if not... if Iraq not like this, those people in Iraq, we know that they are betraying us. I am sure that if ISIS come now, there is a village here, behind the house of mir, I am sure that all of those will be on ISIS side, and they will take our women, and take all of us, and take our honour. And I am sure that more than three quarters of Duhok would be with ISIS. And we are sure that those these, and we fear of that, and because of that I will never come back to Iraq.”

Interviewee 15: “I think now, every Yezidi, more Yezidi want go out. For everyone. We must go everything. Because anything ISIS do... ISIS... ISIS do is found in Koran. I’m sure of that. And now, say everything, everything ISIS do, found in Koran. For that, more Yezidi want go out.”

As mentioned, half of the Yezidi research participants expressed that if they had the opportunity to leave Iraq, either to pursue higher education, better job opportunities, or others they would not come back. This was commonly expressed with great despair and sorrow.

Interviewee 5: “Yes. I want to get it. I want to get education. I want to continue to go to school, but in Iraq, I lost my chance. I cannot study in Iraq, never.”

Interviewee 9: “I really don’t see a future for myself, and I have no hope in returning back and living here.”

Interviewee 11: “My future, I don’t see any future in Iraq. I just want to leave here. I don’t know how it may look like, but what I see, I cannot live here like a free person, or in safe. Therefore I see that I must leave Iraq.”

Interviewee 14: “I don’t know. I need... I don’t know, but I wish to go to Germany, because my brothers are there, I wish to join them. I will be respectful, and most of Yezidis, if they open the same way to the sea, although it is dangerous, but the Yezidi, you know, if the way of sea opened again, we will never hesitate in going.”

Interviewee 15: “Many Yezidi now say I want to go out, no for me, but for my children. Many people say that. My father, every time say, you must stay here, but my father say I want everyone go out. I will stay here, but for helping the pupil. The studying. But if I say no anyone help me, I will go. And I think, the almost of the Yezidis, they want go out.”

Interviewee 16: “We saw the Iraqi Iranian war, and the Iraq get war, and then the Saddam’s fall, then this wars, we are living in wars most of the time. We don’t want our children to live in wars. It’s hard to stop the wars here, because there are many religious, ethnic, and also the, it’s Islamic place, because they have, when they are thinking about the others, it’s so hard to live here without wars. After Saddam’s fallen, Al Qaeda came to the Mosul, and the Yezidis can’t go to the Mosul. After that, the ISIS came, and you saw what they did to the Yezidis. It’s hard to survive. We want to leave because it’s been two years, living in small tents, and the live here is so hard. Nobody is taking care of them. Nobody is doing anything. Nobody is helping. The life inside the camps, you saw how it’s difficult. And you don’t know when this is going to end. Maybe, it’s possible that you’re gonna stay here for ten years.”

Interviewee 17: “But after Shingal, after 2014, we now we don’t trust in the future. Because of what happened for us.”

However, Interviewee 10 spoke of leaving Iraq to become more highly qualified, then returning to fight for the Yezidi community through humanitarian or legal actions. “If I go out, to US, I would continue with NGOs. Humanitarian. To study there... if we go to there to get more power, to know more about, to be more powerful, so when we get back, we can get our rights back, by our thoughts and our different style. Not with the weapons, of course. It’s... if it’s up to me, I think it will be a period of time. I think. This is our land, as theirs. They tried to take it from us. Yeah. We will give them for a period of time. And then take it back.”

Finally, Interviewee 18, the KRG representative, offered an extremely interesting perspective, from admitting to understanding the distrust towards the KRG as a result of the withdrawal of the peshmerga to the intentions of the KRG towards Sinjar and the likelihood of international intervention to protect the Yazidi community:

Interviewee 18: “A lot of anger and hurt. Distrust, yeah. I mean, of course. They [the peshmerga] abandoned that territory, and there was a genocide as a result. So as I understand, President Barzani has said, has referenced a province or governorate of Shingal, and letting them run their own affairs there. Politics are nasty, nasty in Kurdistan, and I think that this - this is my opinion - I think that the presence of people like Mahamar is probably not positive... The mayor. The mayor of Shingal. Who is not elected. Probably not too positive. But... in the short term, it’s just because of the anger. You know, there are other issues there, with trying to maintain control, maintain some semblance of stability. I’m sure the political calculation is not just that they want to give some guy a political post. I’m sure there are other reasons that they want to put somebody like that there. But, you know... it’s... I don’t know, it’s very hard to say. I think that Shingal as a part of Kurdistan would prosper much better than if it were part of Iraq, certainly. If what they’re worried about is protection, the Shi’a militias don’t protect other Muslims, let alone Yazidis. So I think they’d be better off as part of Kurdistan. And that’s the sentiment in the government, too. What shape that takes is up in the air. We’re still fighting a war. It’s always a big mistake to try to predict and advocate for certain positions positions before the ground is even clear. I think that Shingal as part of Kurdistan, whether it’s part of Iraq or an independent country, or both... are better options than being part of Iraq. And that’s the choice. People talk a lot about, “Oh, well we need international forces to come and protect us.” Well, that’s not going to happen. Not in a million fucking years, are international countries going to send their militaries to come protect Yazidis in Shingal. It’s just not going to happen.”

4.5 Summary of Findings

From the 21 interviews conducted from August to December 2016, four significant findings have emerged: 1) the Yezidi perception of the provision of education from 2003 to 2014 and from 2014 onwards as highly politicized, under-resourced and under-prioritized in government policy, 2) the difficulty of accessing tertiary level education for Sinjar Yezidi youth either because of episodes of ethno-religiously targeted violence prohibiting access to the University of Mosul before 2014, the frustrations of transferring between the Iraqi federal and Kurdish education systems, or roadblocks inherent within the education system itself, 3) the role of the *ta'akhi* schools in easing some of these issues of access and in providing a venue of psychosocial healing and communal purpose, and 4) perceptions on individual and communal futures for Yezidis with regard to education, coherent or fragmented Yezidi identity, and the politics and security of Sinjar itself.

In the following section, these findings are discussed with regard to previous literature and the theoretical framework of this thesis with a view to answering the research questions.

5 IMPLICATIONS AND ANSWERS

“When it changed, we were afraid to remember, to mention that. So as a kid, we were surprised, actually. How do things suddenly change? What for?” – Interviewee 19, November 2016

In this section, discussion of the findings of this research is presented in two ways. First, the findings are discussed with regard to the triangular theoretical framework established earlier in this thesis. Second, the research questions themselves are revisited and answers to these questions are offered.

5.1 Conceptual Consistencies and Irregularities

The established triangular theoretical framework is grouped here according to three typologies: 1) *Sovereignty*, which focuses on Foucault’s definitions of governance, geopolitical and biopolitical authority, and the figure of the refugee versus established sovereignty; 2) *Identity*, which focuses on identity politics, identity and state formation in Iraq, displacement as fragmentation, and challenges to Giorgio Agamben’s conception of ‘bare life’; and 3) *Education*, which focuses on education in emergencies and the value of education for displaced communities, Vygotsky’s CHAT theory of education, the politicization of education, and the manipulation of education in Iraq. Necessarily, some overlap occurs between these three typologies, and education in particular is mainstreamed throughout.

5.1.1 Sovereignty

A Foucauldian take on governance is centered around the concept of authority or control, and is “essentially a treatise about the prince’s ability to keep his principality” (Foucault, 1978, p. 90). This control is exercised and replicated through a downwards hierarchy in which the central figure of government, ‘the prince’, demonstrates correct operation of a state to its subjects who then imitate and reproduce this authority in smaller units – including the community, the temple, the family, or the school (ibid., p. 93). This approach to governance is

broadly concerned with territory. However, Foucault (1997, p. 73) also introduces a modernized approach to governance, which is broadly concerned with population, and the issues inherent to managing groups of people such as health, sanitation, birthrate, and lifespan, as opposed to the more classical geopolitics of the prince. Through a modern, biopolitical understanding of governance, demographics acquire legitimacy through their relationships to these challenges, as elucidated by Didier Fassin in regard to his discussion about undocumented foreigners, racial discrimination, and ‘otherness’ in France, through which the suffering of undocumented foreigners as a result of illness became the most legitimate grounds for such people to acquire legality of presence (2001, p. 3).

Both classical geopolitics and more modern biopolitics are relevant to the Yezidi community in 2017. In Iraq, territoriality remains very much central to legitimacy of power and government. While the KRG continues to cite sovereign independence as the ultimate goal of the Kurdish population, Yezidis are beginning to call for more definitive territorial borders around their homelands and are starting to establish mechanisms to develop this, such as the formation of an informal militia from 2007. However, biopolitics are also very much at play. In regard to education, the Sinjari Yezidi community has expressed opposition to the politicization of formal education, and to the push of external political agendas – such as that of Kurdish nationalism – through the provision of education. Further, the allocation of resources both to the community before 2014 and to those displaced from Sinjar since 2014 represents a critical issue.

The ‘legitimacy of suffering’ as described by Fassin can clearly be seen through the reaction of the international community to the atrocities endured by Yezidis at the hands of IS, and through the KRG response to this new attention granted to a formerly unknown minority. Yezidi refugees have been prioritized for resettlement in Germany, Canada (Vice News Canada, February 2017) and Australia (SBS, December 2016), and again took the spotlight as victims persecuted once more by the first manifestation of US President Trump’s travel ban targeting citizens of certain Muslim-majority nations (The New Yorker, January 2017). The KRG has repeatedly approached Nadia Murad, the UN Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors and Human Trafficking and a Yezidi woman from the village of Kocho in Sinjar, and those working on the ground with her in Iraq, with the request that she use her

recognition to call for greater material and ideological support from the international community for the KRG (anonymous personal communications, October 2016). Further, the KRG publicly condemned Canada's plans to resettle Yazidis in particular, releasing a public statement in November 2016 stating "Yazidis are [sic] indigenous minority and [the Kurdish regional government] is against any organized attempt to mass migrate members of its community," and that "Prime Minister Barzani thinks the aid and support should be delivered to them in their country" (CBC, November 2016).

This condemnation of mass resettlement of Sinjar's Yazidis presents an interesting perspective with regard to the figure of the refugee as a challenge to sovereignty. Rather than the refugee challenging sovereignty in the country of asylum, the departure of Yazidis from Iraq and from the Kurdistan region in particular appears to be seen by the KRG as a challenge to its own authority over those populations it deems Kurdish and thus to its own sovereign ambitions. As IDPs hosted within the official borders of Iraqi Kurdistan, Sinjar's Yazidi community is politically disempowered and struggles to achieve autonomy or self-determination. This community is included only insofar as such inclusion is beneficial to more powerful actors. The KRG includes the Yazidi community at its convenience, such as when establishing claims to the legitimacy of its control over the Sinjar region, but does not deem them worthy of protection from genocide, as evidenced by the withdrawal of the peshmerga forces from Sinjar mountain on August 3rd, 2014. As such, the Yazidis of Sinjar are subjected to both geopolitical and biopolitical controls by other actors, especially the KRG, and are simultaneously constructing a nascent claim to geo- and biopolitical authority of their own.

Education has a strong role to play. The question of educational provision and access may be foremost a biopolitical one, in that the governmental actor who establishes the strongest educational pathways for individual Yazidis will gain legitimacy amongst the population as a result. However, as evidenced by the research findings, there is strong resentment from within the Yazidi community towards the politicization of education and the manipulation and coercion experienced by families in 'choosing' one system above the other. Further, Yazidis regard education as insufficiently prioritized especially by the KRG, as shown in discussion by interviewees about the allocation of educational resources and weak or

prohibitive educational policies. This is compounded by the difficulties of accessing tertiary level education or transferring between the federal Iraqi and Kurdish systems at this level in particular.

However, the Yezidi community appears to regard education and ‘becoming educated’ as a powerful tool to wield in establishing its own capacities of political empowerment and self-determination. Education has been a re-unifying factor for the community since 2014, especially through the *ta’akhi* school system, in which Yezidis, mostly from Sinjar, have been teaching at classroom level and implementing managerially. Yezidis who are not from Sinjar, such as Interviewee 21, have cited involvement in this system as bringing them closer to their Sinjari “brothers and sisters”. Nonetheless, it is worrying that the limited degree of Yezidi control of this system must be relinquished to the KRG to ensure its continuity, as evidenced by Interviewee 15.

5.1.2 Identity

Perhaps in line with the thoughts of Interviewee 10, the Yezidi community faces a crucial developmental point in the immediate aftermath of the events of 2014. The research findings indicate that we may witness the emergence of a cohesive Yezidi identity, unified in the way personally exemplified by Interviewee 21 in which geographical differences between Sinjari and Sheikhani Yezidis vanish or become less distinct as a result of a communal ‘coming together’ to support the displaced population. However, the practical realization of this faces challenging circumstances in which the Yezidi population is increasingly scattered, as individuals and families flee Iraq and seek resettlement in Turkey, Europe, North America, and Australia. For this strictly endogamous community, this may be an ominous portent, unless rules regarding marriage outside of Yezidi tribal lines and rules regarding conversion to the faith or adoption of the ethno-religious traditions are relaxed.

Nancy Fraser (1999, p. 25) presents a positive interpretation of identity politics, in which this aims “towards a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect”. Fraser’s understanding of identity politics represents the ideal scenario in regard to an emergent Yezidi identity in which

individuals are free to identify as Kurdish or not, without restriction or condemnation either by Kurdish political bodies or by actors internal to the Yezidi community. However, according to Fraser, this is only a possibility if redistribution of resources also takes place (ibid., p. 26). For Sinjari Yezidis, this would come in the form of territory in terms of political authority and governance, and perhaps in a form of recognized sovereignty. This would also include other material resources, such as water and electricity, and resources strictly related to service provision, such as health facilities and educational institutions. It is not enough that these resources are provided, although this would be a significant and positive step for the wellbeing of the community. Instead, it is necessary that these resources are provided and distributed in a manner free of political agenda and obligation, and with a degree of self-determination and autonomy which includes the acceptance of Yezidis as decision-making stakeholders in issues which affect the Yezidi community.

Nelida Fuccaro is one of the leading writers contributing to what is still sparse academic literature on Yezidis. Earlier in this thesis (see pp. 34–6), Fuccaro’s examination of the ‘Yazidi Kurds’ with reference to forced conscription in the Sinjar region in the postcolonial period is presented in regard to the role of ethnicity in state formation. Fuccaro (1997) identified religious oral tradition (p. 564) and kinship and blood ties (p. 565) as integral to Yezidi communal identity, and considered this ‘pre-national’, stating that Yezidi solidarity was formed around “primordial loyalties such as kinship, religion, and group endogamy” with “maintenance of contiguous settlement within the boundaries of the mountain” reinforcing this (ibid., p. 566). It appears that these factors contributing to solidarity have not changed, but that we are nonetheless witnessing the growth of a burgeoning Yezidi national identity. In this case, perhaps it is simply recognition of the need to have a framework of governance, both geopolitical and biopolitical, which was previously missing from the equation. For the Sinjari Yezidis, recognition of this need has resulted from the lack of protection afforded to the minority by other, more powerful actors, and the political manipulation and coercion which has accompanied societal infrastructure, including education. Indeed, such “primordial identities” have not hampered the emergence of Kurdish nationalism, as described by Hanna Yousif Freij (1998, p. 20), although Freij does describe these tribal and family loyalties as a hindrance to a fully cohesive nationalism.

This recent insistence on a separate and recognized Yezidi identity challenges Kurdish attempts to maintain hegemonic narrative control of the identities of peoples which reside within territories the KRG considers to be rightfully Kurdish. While a Yezidi identity must have always existed, according to Gramsci (1999, p. 437), its eruption as a point of resistance against the Kurdish narrative as a result of the factors discussed above is a deliberate attempt to both influence the narrative development of history in general and to resist Kurdish hegemony in particular. While Sinjari Yezidis do practice expressions of ‘Kurdishness’, particularly through the use of Kurdish language, there are also undeniably ‘not-Kurdish’ aspects to their culture and society, such as the practices and traditions of a distinct, inaccessible religion. Yezidi identity must have always existed due to the latter. Kurdish bodies seek to subsume this identity due to the former. Sinjari Yezidis have begun to resist this dominance as a mechanism to protect and sustain themselves through greater recognition and visibility, as the imposition of Kurdish identity is convenient not to the Yezidis, but to the Kurds, who extend only insufficient and incomplete inclusion that leaves Yezidis without the full Kurdish protection of which they were promised but not delivered in 2014.

In 2017, the Yezidi community is certainly fragmented through the phenomenon of displacement. Families have been separated between Iraq and countries of refuge, and the community as a whole, which places great cultural importance on the land of the Sinjar region and the mountain within, has been disconnected from this aspect of its traditional heritage. Further, owing to the status of hundreds of thousands of Yezidis as refugees abroad or as IDPs within Iraq, especially within KR-I, displaced Yezidis are both Hannah Arendt’s “person without a country” and confirmation of Giorgio Agamben’s blurred distinction between stateless persons and refugees (Agamben, 1995, pp. 114–5). Today, we can take this further. Even if the Sinjar region were to become viable for mass return of those displaced since 2014, the Sinjari Yezidis would still be stateless persons “without a country” in a certain sense. Prior to 2014, it seems that many members of this community were content to accept classification as Kurdish, and Interviewee 4 in particular described the hope felt en masse after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003 and the immediate de facto control of Sinjar by the KRG. There is no possibility that the Sinjari Yezidi community would return to this state of passive contentment post-2014. The violence, displacement, and captivity endured by the community at the hands of IS and the absence of previously-promised

protection by the peshmerga has forced a political consciousness on the Yezidis of Sinjar. Many people now believe the only viable option for a return to the region is a political solution in which the community has either international protection mechanisms in place or a degree of official political autonomy and self-determination guaranteed under a legal framework (or perhaps even a combination of these things). As such, Yezidis have been ideologically as well as physically displaced. The sense of safety and security may have been shattered at the hands of IS, but it cannot be reinstated at the hands of any actor other than Yezidis themselves. In this sense, the Yezidi community perceives their human rights to be non-existent without the rights of the citizen, in line with Agamben's reluctant admission that these remain intertwined. Certainly, displaced Yezidis in KR-I fail to occupy one "pure and distinct position" as described by Bülent Diken (2004, p. 84) in his description of the figure of the refugee, and they are a great threat to the Kurdish "image of order" which the KRG strives to project.

Displaced Sinjari Yezidis also seem to refuse classification of 'bare life' as per Agamben's description, and are more in alignment with the thoughts of Patricia Owens (2009, p. 575), with the IDP camps within Kurdistan operating with a degree of instrumentality. Many Yezidis speculate that it is advantageous to the KRG to deter mass return to the Sinjar region, to the extent that some consider the only checkpoint through which it is possible to exit KR-I and enter Sinjar to be operational as an informal economic blockade to Sinjari Yezidis (Human Rights Watch, December 2016). Thus, the presence of Yezidi IDPs in KR-I, and the establishment of IDP camps in which they reside, do not serve the "anti-utilitarian purpose" which Owens ascribes to Agamben in his classification. Further, the resistance exhibited by Yezidis themselves shrugs off any attempt to classify the displaced population as living as 'bare life'. Despite the massive trauma experienced by the community, Yezidis have rallied to support each other in voluntary and professional capacities, with the establishment of NGOs to advocate for the community and to deliver humanitarian aid, and with a refusal to refrain from condemning the KRG for the withdrawal of the peshmerga forces in August 2014 and for insisting to classify the community as 'Kurdish'. However harrowing the circumstances which have lead to this may be, the Yezidi community has been inspired to become a more powerful political force rather than to accept meek defeat.

As previously discussed, the findings of this research indicate that education is a strong factor in the movement towards Yezidi cohesion. Interviewees indicated that by becoming highly educated, individuals within the Yezidi community are better able to become powerful political forces and that the community will, as a whole, be less susceptible to the political will of other actors.

5.1.3 Education

Education for displaced individuals and communities is critical today, and, as evidenced by the research findings, is critical for the displaced Yezidi community of Sinjar. Sarah Dryden-Peterson's 2011 overview published by UNHCR, *Refugee Education: A Global Review* identified startling quantitative and qualitative gaps in the provision of especially post-primary formal education for refugees across the globe (UNHCR, 2011, p. 5–6). Challenges include “limited access to post-primary education for refugees in both camp and urban settings” which “has immense economic and social consequences, for both individuals and societies” (ibid., p. 48). Dryden asserts that primary-level education is simply not sufficient for displaced persons, and points to the completion of post-primary formal education as having a diversity of benefits, such as the enhancement of civic participation and quality of life, the strengthening of the cycle of providing high-quality future teaching, and in giving young people “a voice” (ibid., pp. 49–50). Dryden-Peterson acknowledges that “higher education plays a critical role for individual refugees and for societies in terms of leadership in protracted settings and in post-conflict reconstruction” (ibid., p. 53). This is consistent with the findings of this research, in which research participants pointed to the need for formal education for those within the displaced Yezidi community to realize individual futures and to sustain the community itself long-term, as well as to protect the community in future by granting youth the skills and capacity to express themselves legally and politically within Iraq and to the international community. The importance of education to the Yezidi community as described so thoroughly by the interviewees is also very much in line with Dryden-Peterson's claims. She asserts that educational opportunities are of very high priority to refugee families and communities themselves, with “refugee mothers, fathers, and children the world over” believing that education is “the key to the future”, providing

stability, hope, and the possibility of peaceful outcomes in the face of uncertainties (ibid., p. 8).

In this thesis, education is defined by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as described by Lev Vygotsky through Gordon Wells and Guy Claxton (2002). Wells and Claxton state that in development of educational theory and policy, it is imperative that we look toward the future for our ideas, by asking what world today's youth will inhabit and with what they need to be equipped to negotiate it. When examining this through the lens of the Sinjari Yezidis, the importance of the *ta'akhi* system becomes apparent. Practically speaking, Yezidi youth in Iraq will continue to inhabit a world dominated by political competition between the KRG and the federal Iraqi government. Especially as pertains to the Sinjar region, through which youth have accessed both the University of Mosul in Nineveh governorate and the Kurdish public universities according to both feasibility of access and personal safety and security, the *ta'akhi* system is crucial to allow youth to optimize their tertiary-level educational opportunities. At present, this system is 'one-way', and takes youth educated under the Iraqi federal curriculum up to the final year of high school then prepares them for eligibility to Kurdish institutions with equal access to Kurdistani students. Between 2003 and 2014, more Kurdish schools were established in Sinjar. As such, to allow youth the best opportunities and freedom of choice, it could become necessary for this system to also accommodate Kurdish-educated students within the Iraqi federal education system from secondary to tertiary level.

CHAT is a theory of human development which views "human societies and their individual members as mutually constitutive" (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 3). CHAT encompasses both formal education and what is explicitly taught within, as well as the learning that takes place outside or around this system, and is intergenerational in this regard. For example, younger or less experienced members of society learn habits and attitudes and are thus inducted into "ways of knowing" by teachers, colleagues, and other more experienced actors around them. The description of the *ta'akhi* schools as offered by the teachers who participated in this research asserts that these schools are invaluable not only for the formal education they provide and the easing of mechanisms of accessibility between the two competing educational systems, but also as a setting of psychosocial healing for a traumatized

communities. Interviewees who worked as *ta'akhi* teachers described supporting students to complete their schooling through the process of addressing and moving beyond personal trauma. These teachers also described deliberately moving students into classroom settings to create the most beneficial balance of more and less traumatized students for the benefit of the whole community.

The manifestation of politics in formal education is explained by Colin Brock (2011). Brock indicates that we should expect conflict and competition to be inherent aspects of formal education and in the policy-making that establishes such systems, as education is politically controlled by state actors or others in similar positions of governance. Brock (2011, p. 20) mentions language of instruction and pupil selection in particular, both of which can be seen as problematic in the settings of Sinjar's Yezidi community. The Kurdish language, which is naturally the language of instruction in Kurdish schools, is also the first language of Yezidis from Sinjar. However, many Sinjari Yezidis have preferred to become educated under the Arabic language, as this is perceived to be both more useful professionally and more expressive than Kurdish. This is a point of contention in asserting the 'Kurdishness' of this community. Pupil selection is also important. Neither system excludes students at primary or secondary level. Rather, pupils are obliged to attend especially the Kurdish schools, as a result of coercion of families through the control of (especially financial) resources. Exclusion can be seen when transitioning from secondary to tertiary level, in that Sinjari Yezidis do not have equal access to Kurdish educational institutions with Kurdistani students. This has significant implications for the social mobility and professional capacities of Yezidi youth. Automatic disqualification of this demographic from the highest-ranked areas of study means that the number of professionals in prestigious and well-paid occupations will decline in future, thus also limiting the capacity of whole community to provide for itself economically and perhaps to advocate for itself politically. Education in Iraq produces both social mobility, and certain kinds of professionals, as well as political empowerment. It may be the case that the KRG is "uneasy", to use Brock's term, about the prospect of a strong intellectual class amongst the Sinjari Yezidi population (*ibid.*, p. 23).

Kelsey Shanks (2016) has written most recently on the specific topic of education in the disputed territories of Iraq. Although Shanks writes mostly in relation to Kirkuk, which is not

a Yezidi homeland, her description of formal education used as a tool to achieve ‘political and ideological goals’ (p. 422) is consistent with findings of this research. Interviewees mentioned the use of curricula to further narratives of especially Kurdish history and identity, in addition to the requirements of Ministries of Education that teachers and schoolmasters instruct students on certain aspects of government policy and activity, including the frontlines of the conflict against IS. Teachers and those with insights into formal education also mentioned the use of symbols of nationalism in formal education, such as the raising of the flag and praise of certain figures of leadership. Further, interviewees regarded the growing spread of Kurdish schools on the ground in Sinjar leading up to 2014 as the demonstration of “territorial presence” and Kurdish control in the area. Shanks also described issues of education in settings of conflicts or conflict-related emergencies common to other regions and countries, such as poorly-qualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and undeveloped curriculum (ibid., p. 426), all of which were mentioned by participants in this research. She also asserted that within a setting experiencing “wider territorial competition” this “created an environment in which ethnic groups are able to compare the level of support for their community with that of others” which “has resulted in competition for resources... and perceiving capacity gaps in terms of deliberate attacks on their community” (ibid.), which was expressed by research participants.

The findings of this research are also in line with the brief mention of the Yezidi community Shanks made in her writing, which described her understanding of the Yezidi perception of education prior to 2014. Referencing Nineveh in particular, the governorate in which Sinjar is included, she states that minority communities report the use of education to achieve nationalist purposes, and that “ethnic minorities perceive the opening of Kurdish language schools as a predatory act by the KRG, suggesting that the KRG education programme strives to ‘eliminate other cultures and languages’ in order to achieve the illusion of ethnic dominance on the ground” (ibid., p. 427). However, it appears that her description of resistance to growing Kurdish territoriality through the imposition of Kurdish language in schools may be inapplicable to the situation of Sinjari Yezidi. Although language is an issue, with Sinjari Yezidis historically preferring federal Iraqi schools partly because of the perceived utility and expression of the Arabic language, Sinjari Yezidis who participated in this research did not express any active resistance to receiving formal education in Kurdish,

except as it pertained to transferring between the systems at high levels. Instead, if resistance to Kurdish language, which is also the native language of the Yezidis of Sinjar, is present, this may be applicable only as a form of resistance to the imposition of Kurdish identity. It may be such that the acceptance of Kurdish as a language of instruction is more important to Kurdish governmental actors than resistance to it is to the Yezidi community. Here, the use of language in schools cannot be considered in quite the same problematic way as it is in, for example, Turkey, where the Kurdish population was disallowed from receiving instruction in their native tongue. Further, Shanks referred to anecdotal evidence in which minority Yezidi and Shabak parents were imprisoned for refusing to send their children to Kurdish schools. No such evidence was found in the course of this research.¹⁴ Although the political manipulation around access to resources should not be minimized in any way, no participants mentioned imprisonment as a consequence for refusing Kurdish schooling. However, Shanks refers to the Shabak community, whereas this research focuses on on the Yezidi minority.

Finally, let us consider the ‘education questions’ posited by Susan L. Robertson (2010). Yezidis of Sinjar are formally taught curricula by mechanisms under control of competing governmental structures, which includes politicized material and agendas, in under-resourced classrooms both pre- and post-2014. This is coordinated at ‘national’ levels (insofar as the autonomous Kurdistan region can be considered as such). It seems to be the case that the interests of the Yezidi community itself are not foremost in the provision of education, and that these practices and policies are carried out to further the agendas of actors who are competing politically. Education produces social mobility, prestige, economic security, and political empowerment in Iraq, but many interviewees reported low opinions of the quality of education to which they have access at all levels. For the Yezidi community, access to formal education is vital not only to ensure individual futures and opportunities, but also to protect and sustain the community as a whole in future. This has the potential to shape Iraqi politics and state development in the years to come.

¹⁴ Although imprisonment was not reported by research participants as a consequence for not selecting Kurdish educational pathways, I did observe arbitrary detention and intimidation of Yezidis by official security forces during the course of this research. One incident involved the arrest of minors for displaying a banner of a Yezidi-focused NGO during a graduation party. Another involved the threat of imprisonment and physical harm to the family members of Yezidi youth who were planning an event to memorialize the victims of August 3rd, 2014, and those who remain in captivity more than two years on.

5.2 Answering the Research Questions

This thesis has sought to answer three research questions.

5.2.1 The Perception of Access to Formal Education

How is access to formal education perceived by the Yezidi community for Yezidi children and youth in and from the Sinjar district, specifically during the periods between 2003 and 2014, and following the mass displacement since 2014?

Access to formal education is perceived by the Yezidi community to be problematic. Between 2003 and 2014, from the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq to the sweeping advance of IS in Nineveh governorate and over the Sinjar region in particular, the KRG appears to have endeavored to consolidate its claims to the Yezidi homeland of Sinjar by extending the formal system of Kurdish education at primary and secondary level through the area. Rather than allowing students and families choice, with the freedom to decide between attending the Kurdish system or the federal Iraqi system, Yezidis report coercion and the threat of withheld resources from the KRG in regard to families reluctant to enrol their children in formal Kurdish schooling.

While some students and families did select the Kurdish system, the federal Iraqi system seems to have remained a preference to most, with the Yezidi participants in this research reporting that the many believed the federal Iraqi curricula to be of higher quality and instruction in the Arabic language to be of greater utility on individual and collective levels. Further, access to education under both systems during this time is perceived to have been problematic in regard to resources. Some participants reported material struggles in relation to their own (or their family's own) levels of financial security. This can be seen in reports of primary school-aged children working to support their families, especially in agricultural practices, and in reports of participants who struggled to attend formal education at a variety of levels due to the necessity of walking long distances (often in harsh weather conditions) to attend class. Resources were also problematic at the level of schools themselves. Yezidis

report the resource allocation to schools as insufficient in material terms, with furniture, water, electricity, or textbooks lacking, and in qualitative terms, with inexperienced or frequently absent teaching staff.

In the years leading up to 2014, access to tertiary level education came to be perceived as both increasingly difficult and physically dangerous, due to the increasing number of targeted attacks on Yazidis in and around Mosul. With the University of Mosul being the tertiary institution of choice for most students from Sinjar at this time, the inability of students to access their studies there safely, securely, and peacefully represented a significant issue. Some Yazidis endeavored to find ways around this issue by attempting to enrol in Kurdish institutions or by braving the unknown territory of Iraqi universities further afield – a difficulty for many families to accept in a culture where it is not common for youth to relocate away from families at this age or for the purpose of undergraduate study.

The Yazidi community does not perceive access to education for Yazidi children and youth in and from the Sinjar region to have been solely negative during the period 2003 to 2014. Despite the issues described above, it appears that most students and youth did attend formal schooling during this time, with only one research participant having been unable to access this entirely. Further, the establishment of the *ta'akhi* system from (possibly as early as) 2008 was very positively regarded. This system allows high school students who have completed their schooling up to the final grade level within the federal Iraqi system to complete their final year of secondary school in the Arabic language but under the Kurdish curriculum, and facilitates equal access for graduates of *ta'akhi* schools to public universities within the Kurdish system on an equal level with Kurdistan students.

Since 2014, the situation for the Yazidi community of Sinjar has become increasingly dire. This has affected the Yazidi perception of access to education for children and youth from Sinjar in a number of ways. First, access to education at all levels, especially under the federal Iraqi system, has become more difficult for displaced children and youth. The influx of IDPs into the Kurdistan region coupled with strains on economy and security of KR-I has left pockets of the displaced population only able to access schools of inadequate capacity to accommodate everybody, or without access to federal Iraqi schools at all. This is especially

the case in non-camp settlements. Further, many families lost the entirety of their wealth and possessions when fleeing the Sinjar region in 2014, and resources for schools in camps, non-camp settlements, and urban areas have declined in comparison to pre-2014 levels.

Since 2014, difficulties for secondary and tertiary level students have been exacerbated. Some secondary school students who experienced disruptions to their schooling, such as Interviewee 20, now find themselves regarded as ‘too old’ to re-enter school at the appropriate grade level. Others, such as Interviewee 14, struggled to gain acceptance to Kurdish institutions, possibly due to systemic discrimination against Yezidis or to insufficient *wasta*. Students who were due to enter tertiary level study or who had entered Iraqi universities but did not graduate before 2014 faced dramatic challenges since 2014 in KR-I. Officially, students who have graduated under the federal Iraqi system at secondary level are only eligible to attend Kurdish institutions to study lower-ranked disciplines than those for which they had previously been eligible. This problem has been alleviated somewhat by the reestablishment of an outreach branch of the University of Mosul in Dohuk governorate. Some students did manage to gain access to Kurdish institutions under satisfactory criteria, but this necessitated a high level of persistence and the capacity to call on personal resources, including social networks. As a result of these difficulties at secondary and tertiary level, many Yezidi youth are reluctant to attempt to pursue their studies in Iraq. Although education is not the only factor drawing Yezidis away from Iraq as asylum seekers, it is a motivating force.

Nonetheless, despite these concerns, the Yezidi community of Sinjar values education highly. Access to education is perceived to be key to the future of individuals and to the future of the Yezidi community. Especially in regard to realising a safe, secure, peaceful, and empowered future in Iraq, Yezidis perceive education to be of great importance, and, using Iraqi terminology, could be considered a pathway to *wasta*. A number of research participants spoke of their desire to both pursue formal education themselves and to see members of their community to do the same in fierce terms, and compared their minds and education levels to the weaponry and physical domination wielded by other actors.

Further, Yezidis perceive access to *ta'akhi* schools to be immensely valuable, especially post-2014. This is not only because these schools alleviate difficulties in attending tertiary institutions in KR-I. Rather, the schools themselves are described as venues of healing for a traumatized community that bring together Yezidis from Sinjar and from the Sheikhan area in helping the community come together and recover from the tragic – and still ongoing – violence and attempted extermination at the hands of IS.

The Yezidi perception of access to formal education for children and youth in and from the Sinjar district is problematic and fraught with obstacles and difficulties. However, access to formal education is perceived to be absolutely vital for the peace, security, and wellbeing of Yezidi individuals and of the Yezidi community.

5.2.2 The Surrounding Discourses

What are the prominent Yezidi discourses around this?

The primary discourse around the Yezidi perceptions of access to education for children and youth from the Sinjar area is that of political competition. Yezidis do not seem to believe that the provision of formal education from political actors is neutral, benevolent, or free of implicit or explicit political agendas. Arguably, no system of education provided by any state actor is without agenda or a degree of self-interest. Formal education does produce citizenry according to the interests of the state. Nonetheless, the Yezidi discourses around access to education for children and youth from the Sinjar region are fraught with the suspicion that political interests are malevolent.

In line with the claims of Kelsey Shanks (2016, p. 426), the Yezidi community believes that resource allocation to Yezidi-populated areas is inadequate or below the standards of areas dominated by other ethnic or religious groups due to political interests, the motivations of political actors, and a subsequent disregard of the interests of the Yezidi minority. Although participants described Sinjar as an historically neglected area, there was a general mood of hope and optimism for the future following the removal of Saddam Hussein that was not met

either by the federal Iraqi government, of which Sinjar is officially under the jurisdiction, or by the KRG, which has maintained de facto control of the region since this time.

Further, there is strong resentment within the Yezidi community towards perceived Kurdish attempts to gain territorial legitimacy in Sinjar through the extension of the Kurdish education system. As the spread of Kurdish schools came with what many believe to be ‘strings attached’, and the choices and preferences of Yezidi families do not appear to have been respected by the KRG, bitterness has brewed at this attempt to ‘Kurdify’ the area through a degree of manipulation and coercion rather than through attempts to genuinely improve the living conditions and opportunities of the Sinjari Yezidis. Many seem to believe that the KRG simply does not want a highly educated, professionally empowered, and prestigious Yezidi population with capacity for strong critical thought and independent leadership (i.e. not managed through Kurdish political parties or mechanisms determined by the KRG or any other actor) on its hands.

This suspicion does extend to the *ta’akhi* schools. For example, research participants described the system as advantageous to the KRG, in that the costs of educating each student are borne by the government in Baghdad up until the final year of high school. The KRG then prepares twelfth grade students for entry into Kurdish tertiary institutions at minimal cost. However, in this case, the arrangement is mutually beneficial to both the KRG and the Yezidi community. This does appear to be at odds with the belief of many that the KRG does not want to see Yezidis well-educated. However, the *ta’akhi* schools are not widespread or mainstream, and are certainly not established in sufficient quantity to accommodate the needs of the Yezidi community, with only a handful of schools operational in Sinjar before 2014, and only three having opened for the displaced community in KR-I from the 2015–2016 academic year onwards. Additionally, the suspicion of the Yezidi community as to the intentions of the KRG and Kurdish reluctance to allow Yezidi control of the minority population or its mechanisms and institutions appears confirmed by the headmaster’s mournful description of the necessity to cede leadership of the three *ta’akhi* schools to a KRG-operated government outreach branch.

Encompassing the issue of access to education is a growing Yezidi sense of unification in spite of the physical scattering of the Yezidi population. Whether or not this is accepted as a form of emerging nationalism or political identity, the position of Yezidis as first, foremost, and only Yezidi is crystallizing. Although some research participants claimed Kurdish roots and heritage, others rejected this entirely, suggesting the opposite – that Kurds were themselves Yezidi at one stage in their history, or that the Yezidi minority precedes that of the Kurds of Iraq. Rejection of Kurdishness has become more vocal and more adamant since 2014. Yezidis are now claiming the right to access education, in addition to other rights of the community, with vigour and to serve Yezidi interests above those of any other. Many are willing to leave Iraq to access the safety, security, and opportunities they do not see as viable possibilities in-country, even within the comparatively stable Kurdish region. However, Yezidis still claim the right to the territory and homeland of Sinjar. For a people who conform to rules of endogamy, adhere to a system of faith that is notoriously inaccessible for those not born into the community, and to whom Sinjar mountain is regarded, in some senses, as sacred land, it is unlikely that this claim will dissipate in future. It may be such that the Yezidi community never attains the level of political authority necessary to influence policy, military action, the drawing of borders, or other aspects of the geopolitical (and biopolitical) landscape in Iraq. Alternatively, the community may organize sufficiently and resist social and political oppression beyond a point where Yezidi voices can be quietened by Iraqi or Kurdish political actors. The Yezidi minority has received significant and previously unseen levels of international attention and recognition following the events of August 2014, in part due to the campaign of former IS captive and recently-appointed UN Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking Nadia Murad, her objective to bring the perpetrators of genocide against Yezidis to international justice in partnership with renowned human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, and all members of the Yezidi community who have offered their time, energy, and stories to the multitude of journalists, researchers, film-makers, and others who have investigated the circumstances of this minority.

The Yezidi community is deeply and collectively traumatized by the acts of genocide perpetrated against its people by IS in and since 2014. While suspicion of KRG interests in the Sinjar region before 2014 is apparent, this has been severely exacerbated in the last two and a half years as a result of the sudden withdrawal of peshmerga forces on the morning of

August 3rd, 2014, and other policies and actions taken by Kurdish forces since this time, such as the establishment of an unannounced economic blockade at the only checkpoint allowing access between KR-I and the Sinjar region. This suspicion colors the provision of services and allocation of resources to the Yezidi community in any sector, including education.

Further, many Yezidis simply do not see a future for themselves or for their families in Iraq post-2014. Tens of thousands of Yezidis have already fled over land and sea to claim asylum in Europe, and many others express desire or intention to do the same. Some are exploring options for resettlement through immigration mechanisms and initiatives offered by Canada, Australia, or the US. For Yezidi youth, the option to pursue high quality tertiary level education is certainly not the only pull factor in this decision, but it is significant.

Finally, as described in answer to the first research question, many Yezidis perceive access to education as key to personal and communal success and security. The discourse around *attaining* education or *being* educated is one of empowerment. Education is regarded as a tool to share the Yezidi story, or one's own personal narrative, with the world, and as a tool to claim rights and wield influence within Iraq, and thus can be considered a way of attaining greater *wasta*. Those who are highly educated are respected within the Yezidi community, with the Arabic term *ustadh* or *ustez*, meaning 'professor', commonly employed to address community leaders or intellectuals. As Yezidi identity evolves, it is unlikely to be those who command militias who emerge as the foremost community leaders, even if the community develops stronger militant factions. Rather, it is probable that well-educated individuals who can command language, articulate policies, and convince minds will come to the fore.

5.2.3 Implications for Children, Youth, and the Yezidi Minority

What are the implications of perceived difficulties in access to education and the surrounding discourses for children and youth within the Yezidi community, and for the Yezidi minority as a whole?

The implications for Yezidi children and youth, and for the Yezidi minority as a whole, are broadly twofold and contradictory. First, the reported and perceived difficulties in access to

education limit educational pathways and subsequent professional opportunities for individuals at the current time and looking into the future short- and medium-term. This could have the effects of reducing social mobility within the community, producing fewer highly skilled, well-regarded, and well-paid professionals, and of communal disempowerment by reducing individual capacities to politically advocate and strategize. It also maintains the necessity for individuals and family units to focus on keeping a standard of living which is sufficient for survival, but does not enable growth or development.

However, the second implication suggests that this need not be the case. While educational pathways are increasingly difficult for Yezidi children and youth, education itself is extremely highly regarded by the community and is prioritized by families and at the community level. Teachers, such as Interviewee 21, will volunteer their time and efforts to teach displaced Yezidi children and youth. Here, the term ‘volunteer’ is deliberately used and carries a literal sense – *ta’akhi* school teachers are sporadically paid at best, and often entirely unsalaried. While the Yezidi minority maintains a belief in the value of education, it also strives fiercely to support it through such work, and through the efforts such as those of Interviewee 19, who established an NGO to provide non-formal education to children in camp settings. At the same time, this community engagement, in addition to shared trauma and tragedy, seems to have inspired the community to begin to claim an identity that is first and solely Yezidi, to construct this identity at least partially through obtaining education, and to look toward the future to consider ways to achieve the safety, security, prosperity, and empowerment of the Yezidi people.

This emergent Yezidi identity is not without complication. While it can be considered positive that the community is formulating a message of refusal to permit another episode of targeted violence in the future, and is seeking to engage politically within Iraq in a manner that aspires for Yezidi voices to be heard, it is doing so in a setting where political developments and the carving out of territory do not tend to happen peacefully. The formation of a Yezidi militia from 2007 could be considered, within this context, to be in line with the armament and organization of other minorities and groups (RadioFreeEurope, 2007). However, this adds to the already complex landscape of armed actors and groups who do not shy away from employing violence to achieve their ambitions. It is heartening that research

participants spoke of claiming Yezidi rights peacefully, through dialogue, legal mechanisms, and diplomatic engagement. It is also understandable that the community seeks tangible means to protect itself considering that the events of August 2014 demonstrate that reliance on other actors is not sufficient to realise security for the Yezidis of Sinjar.

While difficulties in accessing education restrict the possibilities for children, youth, and the community as a whole, the high regard for the value of education and communal support to teaching and learning establishes a platform for growth and development individually and collectively in spite of this. There are many dark and tragic moments in Yezidi history, and many worrying factors – including political and ethno-religious suspicion and distrust of Kurds and Muslims on behalf of the Yezidi community, and actions and policies on behalf of political actors in Iraq towards the Yezidi community that either directly harm the community or inadequately address its needs – to consider today. However, despite this complicated position and the numerous difficulties that could lie ahead obstructing the way to a safe Sinjar, an inclusive political landscape, and a peaceful Iraq, the Yezidi regard for education and the fierce intentions of Yezidis to use learning to better the circumstances of their communities offers a genuinely hopeful glimmer for the Yezidi children and youth of Sinjar.

6 CONCLUSION

“Other people didn’t respect our shape, that’s why they didn’t accept or respect our mind, also.” – Interviewee 17, September 2016

This thesis endeavors to reveal a pressing and under-examined problematique in a manner that clarifies issues in a complex setting with regard to the broadly disempowered Yezidi minority. Issues of sovereignty, governance, political identity, fragmentation, geopolitics and biopolitics, and nation-building processes are considered through the common thread of and through the lens of Yezidi perspective. This concluding section first describes the most recent developments in Sinjar, Iraq, since I began writing in late February 2017. Recommendations for further study are then made, before final concluding thoughts close this research.

6.1 Recent Developments in Sinjar

In early March, 2017, fighting again erupted in the Sinjar region. In this instance, the conflict was not a clash involving IS. Rather, these most recent events were centered around the town of Khanasor, located to the north of the mountain and liberated from IS since 2015. The violence involved Rojava Peshmerga forces operating under the command of the KDP who engaged with the YBŞ, leading to casualties on both sides (Rudaw, 9th of March 2017). Multiple sources indicate that both sides claim the other fired the first shots (The Washington Post, 21st of March 2017; Rudaw, 9th of March 2017; Kurdish Question, 9th of March 2017). The clashes have been described as “the culmination of years of intra-Kurdish disputes over regional influence” (Kurdish Question, 9th of March 2017) and as “fierce infighting” which “threatens to set back efforts to recapture more land and rebuild areas reduced to rubble” (The Washington Post, 21st of March 2017).

This most recent development is a significant deterrent to those Yezidi families seeking to return to the Sinjar region. In response to the clashes, thousands of previously-returned families fled again, with some seeking safety atop Sinjar Mountain, in a haunting echo of the pathways individuals and families took in August 2014 (ibid.). The Washington Post quotes a Yezidi religious leader who asserts “We feel like a toy in the hands of the politicians...

Yazidis are wounded and still bleeding. We still have our sisters and daughters and wives in the hands of Islamic State, but now this,” and “We are vulnerable and in a weak position, so whoever gives us a piece of bread, a house, a weapon – people will take it... Our leaders have sold themselves for money. We have been betrayed” (ibid.). The same article illustrates the growing resentment towards political competition that places the interest of Yezidi civilians at the bottom of any list of priorities for those groups in positions of power, quoting graffiti found on Sinjar mountain which reads “Yazidism unites us, the parties divide us” (ibid.). Worryingly, there is also indication that the clashes could be part of a long-term strategy rather than a spontaneous eruption of tensions, as “the peshmerga — riding atop bulldozers — created large earthen barriers between the two sides, and soldiers restricted traffic along the road” with the PKK-affiliated YBŞ also reportedly building defenses (ibid.).

Uprooting the PKK from Sinjar is both problematic and not of universal interest to competing authorities in Iraq. First, there is acceptance of PKK forces and of the YBŞ within the Sinjari Yezidi community due to the protection and humanitarian aid delivered to fleeing Yezidis from August 2014, and for the role the PKK has played in fighting IS, especially on the western side of the district. Secondly, the federal government of Iraq seems to consider the PKK presence in the area to “provide a counterbalance to Kurdistan’s ruling party [the KDP]” with Baghdad apparently paying the salaries of YBŞ fighters until 2016 (ibid.). The PUK, in opposition to the KDP, has also provided support to the PKK (Kurdish Question, 9th of March 2017). The PKK has stated that it will leave the area when it is satisfied that Yezidi civilians no longer require its protection (The Washington Post, 21st of March 2017).

The reverberations of this development have already been felt beyond Sinjar. On March 4th, in Erbil, over 30 people were detained at a public demonstration protesting these events, a move condemned by Human Rights Watch (Rudaw, 17th of March 2017). Further, the clashes have reportedly acted as confirmation of ongoing insecurity for UN actors who wish to implement stabilizing activities in the area, such as the re-establishment of electricity and water supplies (ibid.). It is deeply disappointing that the area is still considered too insecure to conduct such vital work despite liberation from IS in 2015 and no IS or terrorism-related incidents reported in the liberated areas since they were retaken.

Megan Connelly, writing for *Kurdish Question*, posits four implications emergent from this clash: 1) an escalation in tensions between the federal government of Iraq and the KDP, 2) difficulties for the PUK to maintain its quiet support of the PKK due to increased pressure from the KDP, 3) PKK weakness despite their intentions to “fight until the last drop of blood” for Sinjar, and 4) the necessity for the US to reconsider its strategy against IS due to the shifting focuses between groups it previously counted on to act in a uniform (if not unified) manner against IS (*Kurdish Question*, 9th of March 2017). None of these implications seem to allow any possibility for the Yezidi community in its current position to exercise any degree of self-determination in the future of its homeland of Sinjar.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Study

This thesis is limited by its focus on Yezidi perspectives. Such an approach could be regarded as giving voice to a community who does not otherwise have a strong platform of expression. Although Yezidi stories, narratives, and experiences are receiving international attention in regard to the events and subsequent displacement of August 2014, with an especially strong focus on (particularly female) experiences of captivity under IS, other pressing concerns, such as education, do not receive the same level of scrutiny. In this sense, the focus on Yezidi views provides unique and genuine insights into an aspect of life crucial to individual and community development and to state-level processes of peace, recovery, and growth within the nation of Iraq.

However, much more is needed in this area. First, it would be of immense value to examine the *ta'akhi* system across a long-term, or at least multi-year, project. This would allow for stronger empirical mapping of educational pathways for Yezidi youth and for researchers and observers to more thoroughly evaluate the merits of this system. Further, the findings of such research could influence the development of the *ta'akhi* system itself and of its continued role as a bridging mechanism between levels and systems, especially if a pedagogical approach is taken.

Second, a more in-depth examination of the process of Yezidi identity-building would allow for insights into the development of this community at a pivotal moment in its history. Such a study could be useful in the contexts of understanding reactions to and recovery from mass trauma and displacement, and could inform peace- and community-building processes in other settings. Further depth of knowledge is also needed on the Yezidi community itself. Research and study on the internal actors effecting change within this community, especially in regard to new directions in political maneuvering and the development of religious rules in reaction to changes within the community, would provide insights on the development of leadership structures and religious frameworks. Such research could be conducted from anthropological or sociological approaches or from the approaches of political science or religious studies.

The context of Iraq is extremely rich in regard to political competition, nation-building, security studies, and the interactions of diverse demographics of peoples from numerous social, political, religious, economic, or other perspectives. Developments occur swiftly and, unless within narratives of interest to the international community and to media in particular – such as the retaking of the city of Mosul from IS occupation beginning in October 2016 and ongoing until to this day – occur largely unknown to those beyond the region or without a niche interest. The country merits significant academic attention for the expansion of understanding and greater depth of knowledge it can offer in such areas, and to facilitate the best opportunities for policy formation and peace or nation-building agreements between certain parties, such as the KRG and the federal government in Baghdad or between various heavily armed formal or informal militias, in future. It would be ideal for such research to be conducted by Iraqis themselves, especially if these researchers could be representatives of minority or IDP communities. This research could be conducted from within strong academic institutions inside Iraq or in partnership or coordination with universities or research institutes beyond the nation's borders.

Finally, the educational sector in Iraq desperately needs more support and attention. As mentioned earlier in this research, educational standards and outputs have declined rather than increased during the twenty-first century. In addition to greater material resources and educational policy that does not discriminate according to ethnicity, religion, gender, or other

social factors, and is inclusive of the diverse range of Iraqi children, youth, and adults seeking to continue education, strong pedagogical support and support to develop curricula and systems of teaching and learning is immediately required. It is one thing to call for access to formal education for children and youth struggling to pursue or complete educational pathways. It is another to demand high quality education and for effective teaching and learning to take place within the classroom. Not only do the people of Iraq deserve unimpeded access to quality formal education, it is imperative for the development and future of the nation that work begin to cement this possibility.

6.3 Closing Thoughts

This thesis has examined the Yezidi perceptions of access to education since 2003, discussed the primary discourses around this issue, and explored implications for Yezidi children, youth, and the broader community. The research was knowingly conducted through a Yezidi lens and data was collected from a majority of Yezidi participants, through 21 in-depth semi-structured and narrative interviews. The ‘Yezidi-focus’ of this research can be considered both a limitation and an advantage. While the issue of access to education in particular would be more empirically conclusive through a study which tests access itself rather than perceptions of access (ideally through the educational pathways of a much larger research sample with comparisons between ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic groups) examining the *perceptions* of this by directly approaching members of the community themselves allows for a genuine and revealing examination of how this issue is considered by a community which has been disempowered historically and has not had an international voice until very recently.

As anticipated, the Yezidi community considers formal education in general to be under-resourced, and many individuals and families have also struggled with personal financial means when pursuing education. The resourcing of formal education, and the provision of education itself, is regarded as highly politicized and without the best interests of children, youth, and the Yezidi community in consideration. Implementation of educational policies in Sinjar are perceived to have been conducted as has been most advantageous to

political authorities, especially the KDP, and is considered by some to be one aspect of legitimizing territorial claims to the disputed area.

Yezidi youth have encountered difficulties in accessing formal education especially at tertiary level. This has been a result of a lack of tertiary institutions in Sinjar, increased personal danger associated with attending the University of Mosul before 2014, and the obstacles of transferring between the federal Iraqi system of education and the Kurdish system of education especially following the mass displacement of 2014. While there are some mechanisms in place to relieve this difficulty, namely the establishment of a branch of the University of Mosul operating in KR-I and the *ta'akhi* schools for secondary students seeking to transition into the Kurdish system at tertiary level, these are currently insufficient, as they simply do not have the capacity to cover all students and youth who need to utilize such means to realize their educational goals. Further, the *ta'akhi* schools in particular do not have a guaranteed future in KR-I, with advocates for the system struggling to open them each year and interviewees describing the necessity of allowing the KRG sufficient control and ownership over this system to ensure its longevity.

The *ta'akhi* schools provide benefits beyond increased educational access and outputs for Yezidi youth. They also seem to have acted as venues of healing for the community following the traumatizing events of 2014, and have further acted to bring together Yezidis from Sinjar and from Sheikhan. The Yezidi community itself does appear to be socially and ideologically unifying through the evolution of Yezidi identity as separate and distinct from other groups in Iraq even while the community is increasingly physically fragmented due to displacement and mass emigration. Further, there appears to be a growing sense that the Yezidi community must have a degree of political self-determination and authority in Sinjar.

Education is described as extremely important to the community by all Yezidi participants in this research, and by those others who can be considered advocates for the community. This represents a significant change from the aversion to literacy held by the community up until less than one century ago. Education is no longer perceived as a tool of oppression or as a cultural threat. Rather, the importance of education goes beyond ensuring personal success and future prosperity, and instead is regarded as a vital tool to construct identity and

empowerment and to ensure the continuity of the Yezidi people in future. It is heartening to see education, as opposed to armament or military action, so fiercely described by research participants who hope to see their community articulately and convincingly self-advocate for rights and political powers in future.

The Yezidi community is subjected to both geopolitical and biopolitical controls by actors who only include the Yezidi people as and when is convenient or advantageous to themselves. To some extent, the Yezidi people are considered a resource upon which to be drawn or to be relocated, manipulated, and controlled as best suits the purposes of more powerful groups. However, evolving and emergent Yezidi identity in and of itself presents an obstacle to this control. We could be witnessing a crucial developmental point for the Yezidi community, from which a kind of Yezidi nationalism could emerge, influencing the nation-building processes ongoing in Iraq since postcolonial times. It is doubtful that such processes will be peaceful, as has already been evidenced by the most recent developments in Sinjar in March 2017.

In an ideal scenario, the Yezidi community would realize a degree of self-governance and self-determination with the Sinjar region in a manner compatible to both the KRG and the federal government in Iraq, allowing freedoms of movement, expression, and development, in addition to the implementation of positive economic and social policies by or between these actors. Simultaneously, relevant government branches of the KRG and the Baghdad government would consider an educational partnership between for the betterment of all peoples and communities of Iraq, and to the nation of Iraq itself. However, Iraq is not a context for 'ideal scenarios'. It is a deeply complex and troubled setting, with a vast web of disputes, suspicions, and interests at play. It is this my hope that the sentiments expressed by participants during the course of this research are achieved, and that the Yezidi community does access and attain a high level of formal education which facilitates the emergence of a powerful, articulate, strategic, and diplomatic Yezidi voice (or voices) in future, allowing this community and others to resolve disputes and settle tensions and conflicts through dialogue and the engagement of policy and development rather than through military conflict and the engagement of arms.

The Yazidis were not destroyed by IS in 2014. The desire of Yazidi individuals and the broader community to self-improve and self-empower through study and learning has not been quelled by the multiple obstacles to accessing formal education. Whether or not the Yazidi community is ultimately exploited by and vulnerable to ongoing political competition in Iraq remains to be seen – but it is possible we are now witnessing the germination of a Yazidi identity that successfully resists both physical and political attacks in future.

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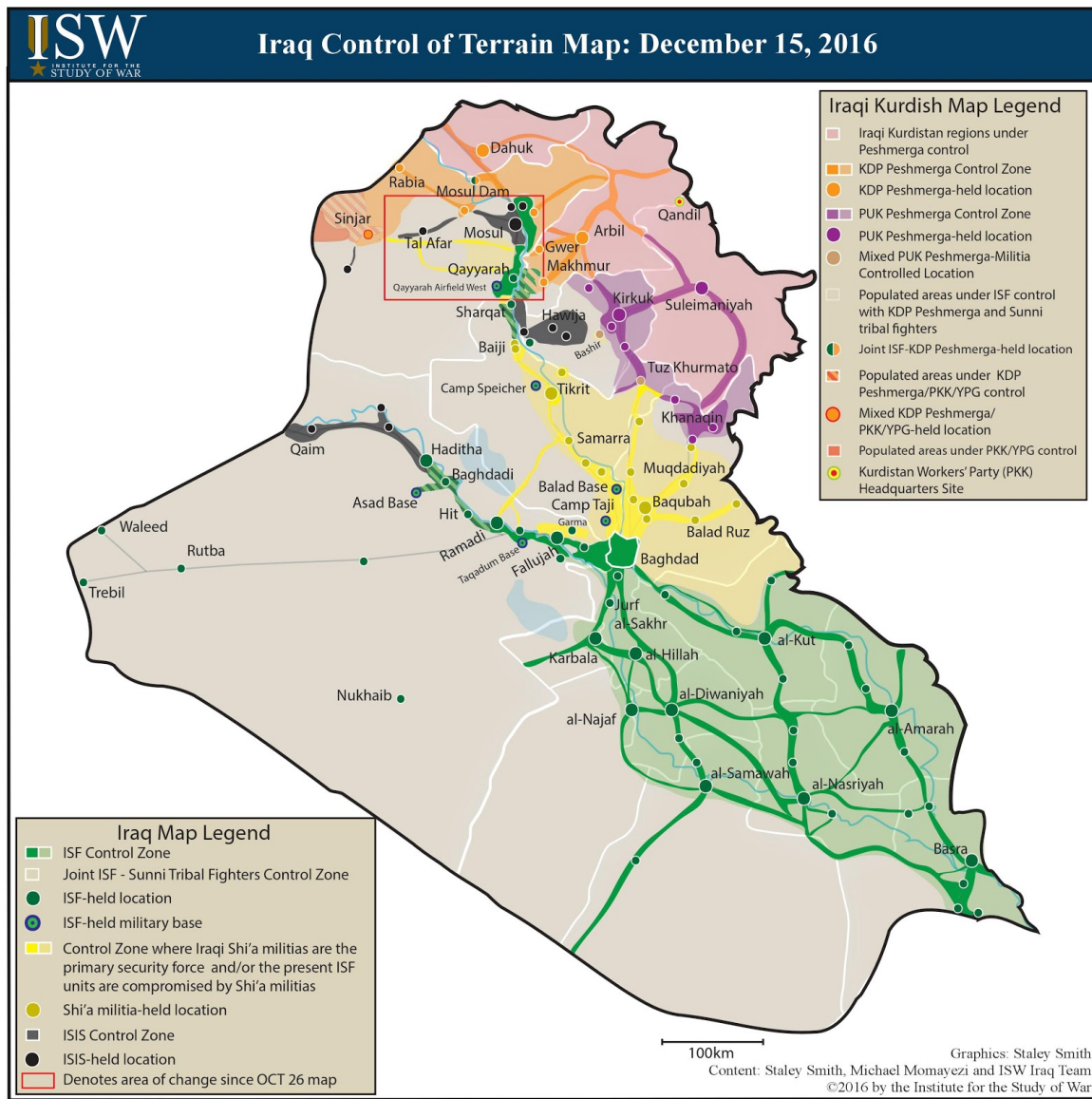
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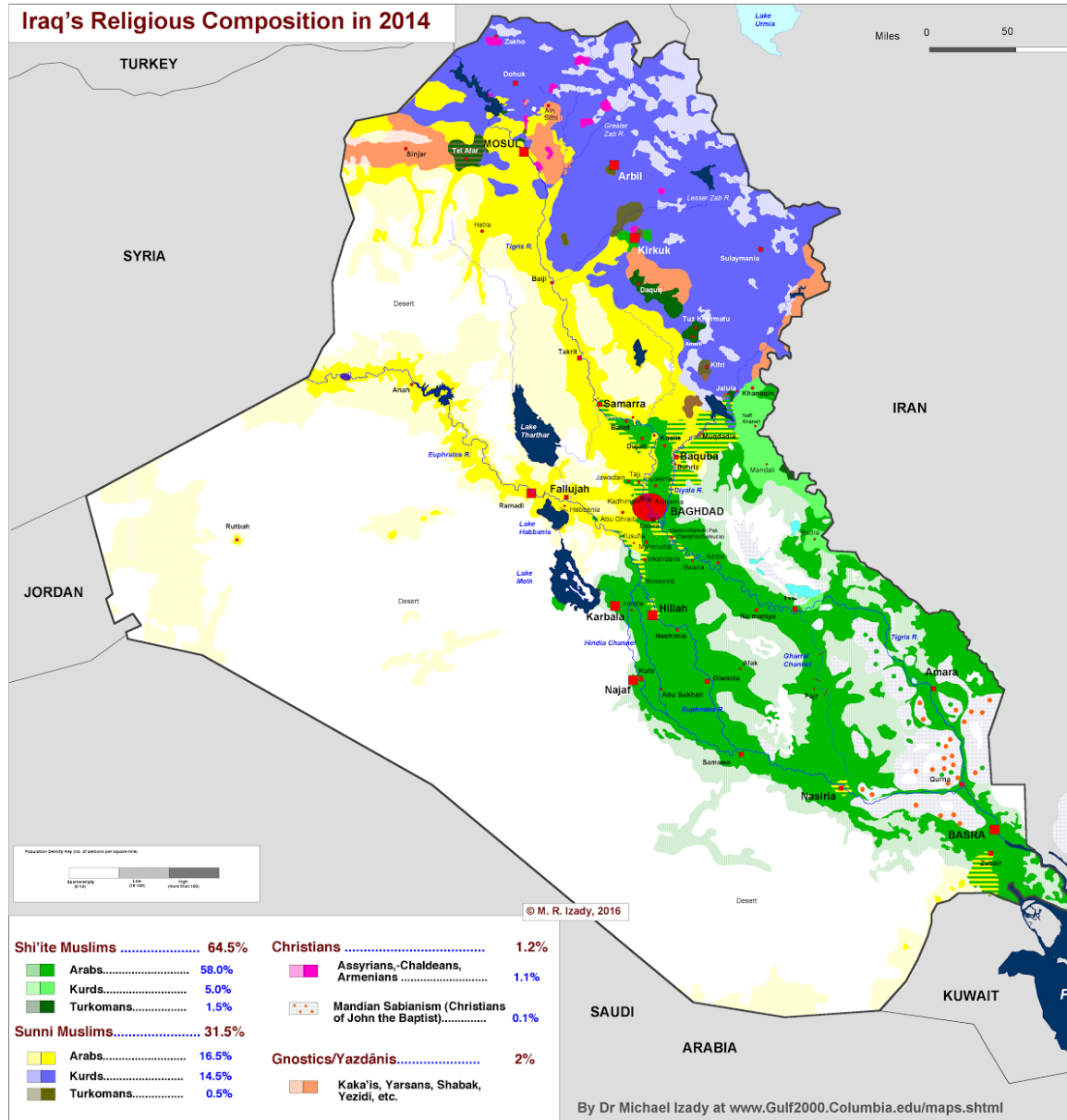
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ANNEX 1: Iraq Control of Terrain Map, December 15, 2016



ANNEX 2: Map showing Iraq's religious composition, 2014



ANNEX 3: Data Coding Tree

EDUCATION

- Access to education: A2E
 - Access to primary education: A2EP
 - Positive experience of access to primary education: A2EP+
 - Negative experience of access to primary education: A2EP-
 - Access to secondary education: A2ES
 - Positive experience of access to secondary education: A2ES+
 - Negative experience of access to secondary education: A2ES-
 - Access to tertiary education: A2ET
 - Positive experience of access to tertiary education: A2ET+
 - Negative experience of access to tertiary education: A2ET-
 - Access to education before 2003: A2E<2003
 - Access to education between 2003 and 2014: A2E03-14
 - Access to education after 2014: A2E>2014
- Experience as a student: STU
 - Experience as a student under Iraqi federal education system: STUIRQ
 - Experience as a student under KRG education system: STUKRI
 - Experience as a student under private system: STUPRI
 - Experience as a student under non-formal or self-study system: STUXED
- Iraqi federal education system: EDIRQ
 - *Appointing teachers under Iraqi federal education system: EDIRQAPP
- Kurdistan Region education system: EDKRI
 - *Appointing teachers under KRG education system: EDKRIAPP
- Resources for education: R4E
 - Education well-resourced: R4E+
 - Education poorly-resourced: R4E-
- Quality of education: QOE
 - Quality of education positively regarded: QOE+
 - Quality of education negatively regarded: QOE-
- *Education affected by political competition: EPC
 - *Education positively affected by political competition: EPC+
 - *Education negatively affected by political competition: EPC-
- Experience as an educator: TEACH
 - Experience as an educator under Iraqi federal system: TEACHIRQ
 - Experience as an educator under KRG system: TEACHKRI
 - Experience as an educator in a non-formal system: TEACHNF
- Non-formal educational activity or programming: NFED
- Support system for formal education: SUP4ED
- Attitude towards education: EDATT
 - Positive attitude towards education: EDATT+

- Negative attitude towards education: EDATT-
- Neutral attitude towards education: EDATT0
- *Education system or infrastructure affected by conflict: CONXED
- *Education disrupted by conflict: CRVIOLED
- *Yezidi-lead educational activity or system: YEZTEACH
 - *Yezidi involvement in leading educational activity or system positively regarded: YEZTEACH+
 - *Yezidi involvement in leading educational activity or system negatively regarded: YEZTEACH-

VIOLENCE, DISPLACEMENT, & CAPTIVITY

- Displacement occurred 2014: DISP2014
 - Displacement for interviewee occurred 2014: DISP2014I
 - Displacement for family occurred 2014: DISP2014F
- Displacement occurred before 2014: DISP<2014
 - Displacement for interviewee occurred before 2014: DISP<2014I
 - Displacement for family occurred before 2014: DISP<2014F
- Displaced and living in camp setting: CAMP
- Displaced and living in non-camp setting: NCAMP
- Experience of captivity: CAPX
 - Individual experienced captivity: CAPXI
 - Family experienced captivity: CAPXF
 - General communal experience of captivity: CAPXC
- Experience of conflict-related violence: CRVIOL
 - Individual suffered conflict-related violence: CRVIOLI
 - Family suffered conflict-related violence: CRVIOLF
 - Witnessed conflict-related violence: CRVIOLW
 - General communal experience of conflict-related violence: CRVIOLXC
- *Education system or infrastructure affected by conflict: CONXED
- *Education disrupted by conflict: CRVIOLED

GOVERNANCE

- Iraqi federal government policy or action: GOIACT
 - Iraqi federal government policy or action affecting Yezidis: GOIYEZ
 - Iraqi federal government policy or action positively affecting Yezidis: GOIYEZ+
 - Iraqi federal government policy or action negatively affecting Yezidis: GOIYEZ-
- Kurdistan Regional Government policy or action: KRGACT
 - KRG policy or action affecting Yezidis: KRGYEZ
 - KRG policy or action positively affecting Yezidis: KRGYEZ+
 - KRG policy or action negatively affecting Yezidis: KRGYEZ-

- Other political entity policy or action: OTHACT
 - Other political entity policy or action affecting Yezidis: OTHYEZ
 - Other political entity policy or action positively affecting Yezidis: OTHYEZ+
 - Other political entity policy or action negatively affecting Yezidis: OTHYEZ-
- Political competition between Iraqi federal government and KRG: KXIPC
 - Territory contested between Iraqi federal government and KRG: KXIPC140
- *Education affected by political competition: EPC
 - *Education positively affected by political competition: EPC+
 - *Education negatively affected by political competition: EPC-
- Yezidi self-governance: YEZGOV
- Yezidi resistance to political entities: YEZRESIST
- Yezidi involvement with non-Yezidi focused political entities: YEZPOL
- Yezidi community affected by political competition: YEZPC
- Future of Yezidis in Iraq: YEZTIME
 - Future of Yezidis in Iraq positively regarded: YEZTIME+
 - Future of Yezidis in Iraq negatively regarded: YEZTIME-
- Education-specific policy or other political action: EDPOL
 - Education-specific policy or other political action positively affecting access: EDPOL+
 - Education-specific policy or other political action negatively affecting access: EDPOL-
 - *Appointing teachers under Iraqi federal education system: EDIRQAPP
 - *Appointing teachers under Kurdistan Region education system: EDKRIAPP
- *Yezidi-lead educational activity or system: YEZTEACH
 - *Yezidi involvement in leading educational activity or system positively regarded: YEZTEACH+
 - *Yezidi involvement in leading educational activity or system negatively regarded: YEZTEACH-
- Comparison of Yezidis to other minorities: YEZMIN
 - Positive comparison of Yezidis to other minorities: YEZMIN+
 - Negative comparison of Yezidis to other minorities: YEZMIN-
- Mention of identity politics: IDPOL
 - Affirming Yezidi identity as Kurdish: YEZIDKURD
 - Negating Yezidi identity as Kurdish: YEZXIDKURD

* These code lines are relevant to two branches of the data coding tree, and are thus repeated.