

ABSTRACT

Title of the Document: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AMID CRISIS,
TRAUMA AND DISPLACEMENT: AN
ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF CHILDREN
ABDUCTED BY THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ

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Education

Education in emergencies (EiE) is a growing field within discourse on humanitarian aid, international development, and global education. It brings to the fore the challenges of educating children in crisis-contexts, a growing problem in regions around the world. Since the 1990s, increasing attention has been paid to this vulnerable population of children; however, evidence-based practice has historically been weak but improved considerably over the last decade. In this dissertation study, I aim to add to the body of literature and empirical research in the field of education in emergencies. I offer succinct problems and interventions that can enhance educational outcomes for a particular group of crisis-affected children in Iraq. Specifically, I examine the lives of five Yazidi children who had been abducted and held captive by the Islamic State before returning to their families now residing in displacement camps far from their native homeland. Using qualitative methods consistent with ethnography and case study research, I present findings garnered from the five participants that offer a window into their lived realities. As a bounded case, data collection was consolidated to Yazidi children living within a single camp in Iraq from 2016-2017. The findings suggest several

key barriers and opportunities for accessing quality education during periods of crisis. These findings are divided into three categories that reflect psychological, institutional, and cultural factors impacting the education of displaced and traumatized Yazidi children. The trends that emerge in each of these categories display important points of consideration for how educational aid is conceptualized and delivered during emergencies. The research also extrapolates on the findings to speculate broad reforms that can transform for the better how the field of EiE operates globally. Implications for research and theory include a need to advance theoretical discourse on children caught up in crisis, methods for facilitating research in active conflict zones, and uncovering opportunities for greater cross-sector holistic service provisions for children.

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DISPLACEMENT: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF
CHILDREN ABDUCTED BY THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ

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Dedication

For Bushra, and all the little girls just like her.

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In all honesty, I started out this journey by accident. As a first generation college student, I never foresaw a future as an academic or anything that might require years of course work and scholarly dedication. Yet, somehow, here I am. Looking back at my path to achieving this degree, I realize that I have been fortunate to have an incredible community of support, pushing me forward in ways both seen and unseen. My success is no doubt the product of countless individuals who have so graciously shared themselves with me.

First, I want to thank the community of women in my life. The saying that we stand on each other's shoulders is not lost on me. As early as my undergraduate days, I experienced the love and strength of the female bond. At that time, when I was struggling to pay my tuition and survive on my own, a female janitor took it upon herself to help me. She brought me lunch every day and left me with a good portion of her savings that I am sure she painfully squirreled away to support my tuition. Her name was Marilyn.

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Next I owe a great debt of gratitude to my community at the University of Maryland. As the first in my family to attend college, I have long been plagued by a sense of impostor syndrome. For much of my education, I have questioned *who am I to be here?* Yet, at Maryland I found a home. My professors truly embodied the idea that education is inclusive of all people and perspectives—and when that is the case, there can be no such thing as an impostor. We all belong. That has been one of my greatest takeaways from my time at Maryland and I attribute that to many wonderful professors and colleagues, among them: Jing Lin, Steve Klees, Nelly Stromquist, Jennifer Turner, Beth Douthirt-Cohen, and Marsha Guenzler-Stevens.

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List of Abbreviations

AQI – al-Qaeda in Iraq
CPWG – Child Protection Working Group
DDR – Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
FSA – Free Syrian Army
ICC – International Criminal Court
IDP – Internally Displaced Person
IRB – Institutional Research Board
IS – Islamic State
ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (al Sham)
KRI – Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MENA – Middle East and North Africa
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
oPt – Occupied Palestinian Territories
PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UN – United Nations
UN OCHA – United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WMDs – Weapons of Mass Destruction

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research study seeks to bring forth the voices of children caught up in crisis, particularly those reeling from the effects of violent armed conflict. It elaborates on their experiences, thoughts, and worldview as they navigate the challenging world of displacement while still healing from atrocity and warfare. The findings examine opportunities and barriers for their success, notably in the field of education, across multiple perspectives. At the core of this study is an aim to add to the literature on conflict-affected children and education in emergency contexts through rich description and profound narrative. The hope is that through a deep examination of lived experiences, we can improve aid responses in education by ensuring the linkages between policy and practice are strengthened to improve children's realities on the ground.

Globally, millions of children are affected by crisis each day. They are maimed, killed, abducted, tortured, and experience severe psychological and physical trauma. Now, more than any time in the last 20 years, children are living in areas affected by armed conflict. It is estimated that nearly 1 in 5 children presently reside in crisis-affected contexts, a number that has doubled since the end of the Cold War (Save the Children, 2019). They endure violence, fear, neglect, and an absence of essential services important for human development. Although children have a right to survival, protection, and education¹, they struggle to receive proper care and attention for their needs. Each day that they go without services vital to their development and wellbeing, their rights are obstructed, and their futures are held in jeopardy.

The international community, more specifically aid organizations and intergovernmental institutions, have recognized the plight of children but policies and programs are sometimes far

¹ U.N. Rights of the Child

from addressing the realities on the ground. The circumstances of children in crisis-affected contexts are often not well documented or understood leading to ineffective and inefficient programming. This is a challenging dilemma to resolve given that diverse conditions in crises around the world create vastly different realities. Research and assertions, therefore, are typically not applicable universally. Nonetheless, continued efforts toward deep examination of children's lived experiences will help inform and broaden support for them. Gaining windows into their unique challenges, feelings, and perspectives on the world helps to shape how aid is developed and delivered to children.

When embarking on this research, my intent was to address the issue of strengthening links between policy, practice, and children's lived realities. I aimed to more critically understand the situation of crisis-affected children to enable better aid responses. In particular, my inquiry targeted how education provided in emergency contexts affects the lives of children, and alternatively, how their realities may be in either contradiction or symbiosis with educational structures offered by the humanitarian community.

I focus on education because of its immense potential for providing both short-term and long-term care, as well as being transformational for societies. In a crisis, education helps to provide children with stability, protection, and vital assistance. It gives aid agencies direct access to children who are vulnerable to poor health and nutrition, violence, trauma, and an assortment of other issues that arise during a crisis. Education also helps to set children on a path to productive futures and ensures they have the skills and credentials they need to succeed. Lastly, education has the potential to transform societies by redirecting attitudes and values towards more inclusive and peaceful ideals. As such, this research took a "deep dive" into the lives of children and examined how their lived experiences interacted with schooling in their displaced

setting. Within the bounds of this study was an intent to examine how culture, trauma, policies, and support networks affect children and their educational experiences.

To accomplish the goals of the research, I set out to study a particular set of children in Iraq who had been subject to immense abuse and continued to be affected by conflict. The children evaluated for this study were of the Yazidi ethno-religious minority in Iraq, a population targeted by the Islamic State beginning in 2014. This particular group of children experienced some of the most severe atrocities of the conflict and consequently have had some of the greatest challenges to overcome.

I utilized research methods from the fields of ethnography and case study to collect and analyze the data. Consistent with many of the tenets of qualitative research, the children's experiences are not generalizable but still offer a valuable glimpse into the types of issues that crisis-affected children encounter. Over the course of 1.5 years, I examined the cultural, institutional, psychological, and logistical barriers to educational success as well as explored opportunities for more effective programming. Foremost, in this research I aimed to amplify the voices of children who live amidst overwhelming crisis and challenges, yet somehow, still imagine and work towards a better future.

The following outlines the contents of this research study. I begin with my rationale for selecting Iraq as the site of data collection and Yazidi children as the population under study. This is followed by a description of the problem, the purpose of the research, and a presentation of the research questions. Then, I elaborate on my methodological and theoretical considerations. Lastly, I comment on the significance, scope, and structure of the study.

Selecting a Setting: Why Iraq?

More so than in any other region of the world, children residing in the Middle East are most likely to be caught up in crisis (Save the Children, 2018). According to UNICEF (2007), over a third of all children in this region are affected by conflict, and living in a state of war is becoming the “new normal.” The extent and severity of the situation for these children drew me to conduct my research in the Middle East. More specifically, I selected Iraq as the site for data collection because similar to many other countries in the region and around the world, it represented a place caught in a protracted state of conflict. This was important to me as the investigator, not to generalize findings, but rather to produce a piece of research that could offer new avenues of inquiry across locations with contextual similarities. Additionally, personal connections in the country allowed me the comprehensive access I needed to conduct an ethnographic study.

Most children residing in Iraq today have likely never known a period of peace and stability. For almost two decades, the country has been at war, occupied, or in a state of insurgency or chaos caused by radical groups. Since birth, these children’s lives have been characterized by violence and conflict. Unfortunately, the current generation of youth is not an anomaly.

Iraq has long been entangled in cycles of conflict. The last several decades included wars with neighboring countries of Kuwait and Iran, as well as internal sectarian conflicts such as the genocide against the Kurds, insurgencies driven by radical groups, and occupation by foreign militaries. Furthermore, the escalation of conflict in 2014 linked to the takeover of territory by the Islamic State (IS) has left the country devastated and in an ongoing state of humanitarian emergency. The prior two decades of warfare had already destabilized the country, limiting government capacity to address the needs of the population. Subsequently, the sudden and abrupt

conflict with the Islamic State forced six million Iraqi citizens to flee their homes and struggle to access basic human services (Saieh & Petersohn, 2019). Millions more remained in the newly formed “caliphate” of the Islamic State where many endured a life of fear and deprivation under the violent regime.

The experiences of Iraqi citizens, whether as displaced migrants or captives of the Islamic State, has caused extreme distress. Nearly 2 million people remain internally displaced, often languishing in deteriorating camps, while 6.7 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of those in need, 3.3 million are estimated to be children (UNHCR, 2019). For many Iraqis, basic livelihoods are yet to be restored, public services have struggled to rebuild, and the psychological cost of conflict continues to inhibit the population from peaceful and sustainable redevelopment. Without appropriate and effective assistance including services like education, health, and economic and human development, cycles of conflict and poverty will continue as a generational struggle.

The trends of ongoing conflict in Iraq drew me to conduct research there. Several generations of Iraqis have now endured a life where violence has become the new normal. This context appealed to my research because of its similarity to many other places in the world where violence is so pervasive and enduring that it becomes a deeply entrenched part of culture. As an ethnographer, the context was ripe for exploration and documentation. Additionally, after decades of consistent crises, a robust humanitarian community has developed throughout the country and programming for education is widespread. Therefore, Iraq provided a rich stage for my research, where I could easily find sites where conflict-affected children were accessing education via humanitarian action.

Selecting the Population: Why the Yazidis?

Iraq is a country of immense diversity in the Middle East. For centuries, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and several religious minorities have inhabited the region. However, over time non-followers of Islam have been targeted and persecuted. The once large populations of Christians and Jews now dwindle to the size of small minorities. Most recently in 2014, the Yazidi ethno-religious community came under attack by the radical jihadist group, the Islamic State. Although the violence abated over the course of this research, Yazidis remained in a situation of distressing circumstances and displacement. Since this study sought to examine the lived experiences of children caught up in crisis, the Yazidis offered a timely and appropriate population for study.

To add context to *why* the Yazidis were selected, an elaboration of *who* the Yazidis are is warranted. The Yazidis are one of the oldest ethnic and religious communities in the Middle East. They reside primarily in the northwestern region of Iraq in the areas around Sinjar Mountain. Prior to the conflict with the Islamic State, the population numbered nearly a half million making them the second largest religious minority group in Iraq aside from Christians (Zoonen & Wirya, 2017).

Ethnically, most Yazidis consider themselves to be Kurds, though this has been a contentious topic. Most Yazidi stories are handed down in the Kurdish language. Yazidis have also been considered the “original Kurds” by many in Iraq. However, processes of Arabization beginning under Saddam Hussein in the 1970s have meant many Yazidis grew up with the influence of Arabs. A portion of the Yazidi population now speaks Arabic and does not identify much with Kurdish heritage. In addition, many Yazidis have grown frustrated and disillusioned by the Kurdish government. They have been marginalized and under-represented, leading many Yazidis to feel like an isolated ethno-religious minority with little connection to other groups in

Iraq. Instead, they maintain a tightly-knit community where marriage outside the Yazidi culture is forbidden and skepticism of both Arabs and Kurds remains high.

Yazidis have also experienced heavy persecution due to their religious beliefs. They maintain a monotheistic religion but do not have a holy book. Instead their beliefs have been conveyed through an oral tradition in the form of hymns, stories, and poetry rather than scripture. The Yazidi religion has also frequently been misinterpreted throughout history. In particular, the story of Melek Taus has led many to believe Yazidis to be devil-worshippers. Melek Taus was an angel who was tested by God. According to Yazidis, Melek Taus refused to submit to Adam because his loyalty was to God. Yazidis celebrate this act of heroism and his devotion; however, non-Yazidis have not viewed the story the same. For Muslims, the act of Melek Taus is similar to the story in the Quran in which Iblis refuses to submit to Adam, thus rejecting Allah and falling from his grace. As such, Yazidis have been accused of devil worship for centuries. This misinterpretation has been common among Muslims and Christian missionaries alike who have viewed Yazidi religious stories through their own cultural influences. Accusations of devil worship have unfortunately led to ongoing persecution and violence towards Yazidis. The targeting of this community overtime has forced them to consolidate their homeland to the areas around Sinjar Mountain, which has historically been the place that they seek refuge when under attack.

Once the Islamic State gained power and influence across Iraq and Syria, the Yazidis were among the first to be attacked. IS militants abided by a strict interpretation of the Quran and believed Yazidis to be infidels who should be eradicated. As so-called “devil-worshippers” the Yazidis were treated the worst among all IS captives. Many were killed without the opportunity to convert to Islam like other major religions were offered (e.g. Christians or Jews). Yazidis were

also enslaved and bought and sold like cattle. Their experiences have been the most atrocious at the hands of the Islamic State and by the point this research commenced, the crisis was still ongoing with several thousand still enslaved or missing.

The situation for Yazidis in Iraq has been devastating. As a community, they have been traumatized and the loss of life has been immense. International courts are yet to bring justice for the Yazidis that may help them heal from the trauma. To make matters worse, their homeland has been destroyed and redevelopment has been slow, leaving hundreds of thousands to languish in camps with few other options for the past several years.

Selecting Yazidi children to be the focus of this study enabled me to have a window into life in a conflict-affected context. It provided a glimpse of children's realities as they navigated past trauma and ongoing crisis. These children offered insights into the educational barriers and opportunities that exist for children in emergency contexts. They provided deeply rich testimony of their lived experiences throughout one of the most violent conflicts in the last several decades.

Statement of the Problem

The situation of displaced Yazidi children is distressing. Their status remains in peril as government services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities have struggled to identify, recognize, and properly address their needs. Many of these children have endured unspeakable acts of violence and continue to have their human rights violated each day that they do not receive proper care and attention.

Although children across Iraq remain in peril, Yazidi children- the focus of this research study- are among the most vulnerable. These children have endured severe abuse, especially those who were taken captive by the Islamic State. They were forced to watch family members suffer mass executions, witness their mothers repeatedly raped, and often brainwashed to believe

these tragedies were happening at “god’s will.” For years, many of these children were enslaved within IS territory and lived with an unbearable reality. Following escapes and releases, surviving children were able to return to their Yazidi families who had been displaced to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI); however, life continued to have challenges.

After undergoing severe trauma for several years, formerly captive Yazidi children have struggled to reintegrate into communities, heal from their past, and find productive and peaceful paths forward. As witnesses to daily acts of atrocity, children who fled from IS often continue to live in fear and feel constrained by their heartbreaking memories. Unable to return to their devastated homeland and residing in humanitarian camp settlements, these children have their psychological distress compounded by the challenges of accessing basic services such as education, health care, and proper nutrition. In many cases, the crisis is ongoing in the lives of Iraqi children, despite having escaped some of the most dire circumstances.

Many Yazidi children are attempting to regain normalcy in their lives by re-entering school. Education has long been considered a positive avenue for the social and intellectual development of children. In a crisis environment it serves to additionally offer access to vital services such as psychological care, nutrition, and health. The value of education provided during a crisis has gained significant traction in international aid and development discourse and is central to an emerging field known as “education in emergencies.”

In Iraq, education is being offered to most displaced and conflict-affected children. In each of the Yazidi camps, schools offer free and accredited education. However, these schools are often modeled off of pre-crisis national standards with the influence and monetary support of the international community. In many ways, the education provided may not be suitable for all children. The structure and content of education, as well as standards for teachers may be

misaligned with the needs of traumatized children trying to get back on track with life. Without a deeper examination of the context where children reside and their lived realities, it remains unclear if education is effective and achieving its full potential. In short, the problem statement is as follows: education provided during emergencies often fails to embed itself appropriately within the context. Several factors impact its effectiveness, which can only be understood through deeper examinations of culture and children's world view.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how a specific population of displaced, conflict-affected children in Iraq (Yazidis) are navigating life during an ongoing crisis and how education provided by humanitarian organizations may or may not be contributing effectively to their development and wellbeing. Specifically, this study examines the context and culture that shapes children's experiences, explores barriers and opportunities to educational success, and compares the lived realities of children to the expectations and status quo of current humanitarian aid assumptions and discourse.

More broadly, this study aims to contribute to global dialogues on children in armed conflict and education provided during emergency responses. Investigating the experiences of Yazidi children in Iraq is valuable for understanding nuanced challenges to progress and how aid infrastructure could better adapt to context and culture. The research in this study offers insights into the obstacles children face in accessing services like education, the role of education in their lives, and how conflict and violence continue to impact children both during and after a crisis. Although the specific findings of this study cannot be extrapolated to apply to other contexts too diverse for universal assumptions, it can offer new ways to think about children in crisis and how to more critically develop robust and effective programming to suit their needs.

Research Questions

This dissertation research explores the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of displaced, traumatized, and conflict-affected children in Iraq?
2. How does exposure to conflict and trauma impact the educational experiences of displaced children and vice versa?
3. How do traumatized and conflict-affected children engage with aid infrastructure, particularly education?

Overview of Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

According to Maxwell (2005), “the most important thing to understand about your conceptual framework is that it is primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study” (p. 39). For the purposes of this research, I aimed to study: 1) the lived realities of displaced, conflict-affected children and, and 2) how educational responses, via humanitarian action, impacted the lives of children and vice versa. Consequently, the conceptual framework for this study was garnered by examining current scholarly discourse in the fields most affected by this research: child protection in emergencies (CPiE) and education in emergencies (EiE). Since these fields have historically been heavily practitioner-driven and limited in theoretical guidance, I utilized Bronfenbrenner’s “ecological systems theory” to assist in analyzing the lived realities of children. Therefore, literature on CPiE, EiE, and ecological systems theory provided the conceptual and theoretical frameworks through which data was evaluated and considered.

In drawing on literature aimed to support children in crisis, the fields of child protection in emergencies and education in emergencies quickly emerge. These fields share similarities in that they both aim to improve the lives of children by addressing welfare concerns and advancing child rights both during and following a crisis. However, they largely differ in that child protection tends to focus on the immediate needs and imminent risks to children. Whereas,

education in emergencies addresses these same issues but goes a step further to take a long term outlook on human development and social stability. In practice, CPiE and EiE operate as relatively separate fields in humanitarian contexts but nonetheless, share many of the same goals.

Scholarly literature in the fields of CPiE and EiE is expanding quickly, particularly in the aftermath of crises caused by the Arab Spring. However, prior to this period, much of the literature and work accomplished in these fields has been less scholarly and more heavily practitioner driven. Organizations such as UNICEF and Save the Children have been developing robust portfolios of work over the past couple of decades, but only these last several years has that work been centered on evidence-based practice due to an infusion of scholarly interest. As such, a review of literature in the fields of CPiE and EiE is generally still more practical than theoretical.

In comparing the fields, several common threads and concepts can be found in the literature. These overlapping concepts help display a shared foundation of ideas. Some of the primary threads of discourse across CPiE and EiE include taking holistic approaches, building resilience, assessing the changing nature of conflict, and conducting child-centered work.

Regarding holistic approaches, nearly two decades ago, Graca Machel introduced the concept of holistic care for children in her landmark report, *UN Study on Children and Armed Conflict* (1996). In it, Machel detailed the holistic effects of war on children and called for an equally comprehensive response. Some of the effects include both physical and psychological harm, displacement, and loss of basic services to support health and wellbeing. To address these concerns, Machel argued for a cohesive response across aid sectors. A transformation would need to occur where non-holistic, fragmented approaches, owed largely to the deeply fragmented humanitarian architecture, would be remedied (Wessells, 2016). A commitment to holistic care

would require integrating the priorities of different sectors, from sanitation to health to shelter and more.

The fields of CPiE and EiE have embraced this principle, which is increasingly seen in policies and programs. In the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, there is a focus on “access and learning environment” which promotes access to learning opportunities and inter-sectoral linkages with, for example, health, water and sanitation, food aid/nutrition and shelter, to enhance security and physical, cognitive and psychological well-being (INEE, 2010). The Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2012) has one of four pillars of work dedicated to cross-sector coordination.

Another thread of discourse across CPiE and EiE has been an emphasis on building resilience, a concept linked to assessing the changing nature of conflicts. In a reflection, Niles (2007) notes, major wars of the 20th century were transforming into local and regional violence, or low-level intra-country battles, with less visibility and humanitarian access. Machel (2010) emphasizes a deep concern for changing war tactics leading to children being not only collateral damage in a conflict but often intentionally targeted. The changing nature of many conflicts around the world has pushed humanitarian aid policies towards developing “resilience” strategies to endure the dynamic circumstances of conflict. In the field of child protection, this has meant an emphasis on “war-affected children’s ability to cope with, adapt to, and navigate complex environments that are saturated with adversity” (Wessells, 2016, p. 200). In education, it refers to the capacity of educational institutions to both withstand fragility and mitigate it for future stability and peacebuilding (Tebbe, 2009).

Lastly, taking a child-centered approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. Across both fields of CPiE and EiE, this is a guiding concept. Child-

centered approaches allow for better assessments of wellbeing as well as give children more agency to reflect their needs, interests, and desires to adults. The approach gives voice to children in environments where they are often overlooked.

The literature in the fields of CPiE and EiE offer several concepts that have guided research in this study. However, as noted previously, these fields offer far more practical knowledge than theoretical. Consequently, I incorporated Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) as a method to view and analyze data. Bronfenbrenner's theory offered a framework to examine issues related to human development and the impact of context. According to Darling (2007), ecological systems theory is presented as "a theory of human development in which everything is seen as interrelated and our knowledge of development is bounded by context, culture, and history" (p. 204). Across interpretations of Bronfenbrenner's theory is an emphasis on studying contextual factors that influence how a person acts, reacts, and interacts with the world around them.

Bronfenbrenner's theory includes several spheres that influence an individual's development. These spheres include: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Each system represents either a site of interaction (e.g. school, home, family, neighborhood) or indirect influences (policies, social institutions, cultural beliefs). Investigating how a person interacts with these systems, as well as how the systems interact with each other provides the "ecology" that the theory seeks to define. The theory promotes a constant examination of both the human subject(s) and context to understand the "ecology" of the phenomenon, or rather the "adjustment between organism and environment" (Rosa and Tudge, 2013, p. 246).

Incorporating Bronfenbrenner's work into this study provided a clear theoretical framework to consider the data. The framework was also extremely well suited to ethnographic research and assisted in understanding patterns of behavior and cultural traits. Its inclusion in this study added valuable theoretical guidance that enriched the practical concepts common to the fields of CPiE and EiE. Children's experiences were evaluated for opportunities and barriers to education across systems. Ultimately, examining the research in this way helped to organize the findings in three different sections that include how children *think* about their educational world, how they *navigate* it, and how their *attitudes and values affect* it.

Brief Statement on Methodology

This qualitative research study embraced both ethnographic and case study methods. In defining a methodology, I first considered the research questions, followed by an evaluation of the practical limitations and opportunities I would have for data collection. Ultimately, I merged ethnography and case study principles since collectively, they served to effectively address my inquiry and match practical circumstances.

Since the research sought to examine the lived experiences of children, I embraced many of the methodological considerations of anthropologists and decided upon an ethnographic approach. Harry Wolcott's views on ethnography heavily influenced this research. Although a controversial figure in the world of educational ethnography, I found Wolcott to be immensely insightful and informative to this study. His work to convey the complexity of understanding culture and the realization that there are few hard and fast rules in ethnographic research, gave me the confidence to proceed. Particularly, Wolcott's (1990) views on meaning-making through iterative processes of analysis (the constant "buffeting of critical analysis") and defining the

parameters of ethnography (which are “maddeningly ambiguous”), comprehensively guided this work.

Although I took an ethnographic approach, I ultimately categorized this research as a case study. The central goal of an ethnography is to convey an analysis of cultural behavior and patterning. However, this research endeavored to accomplish that and more. The product of this study examines how children’s cultural world is embedded within humanitarian structures and foreign aid. I present the lived experiences and cultural patterning of displaced and conflict-affected Yazidi children, but with a constant consideration of how the aid community is enriching or inhibiting their lives. As such, the research was ethnographic in nature but the final presentation is that of a case study. The bounds of this case study can be defined as follows: a research study conducted within the al Ain IDP camp, examining the experiences of formerly captive Yazidi children during the period of 2016-2017.

The research setting was one of several camps set up and assisted by the humanitarian community in Iraq. It is among the initial camps established for the hundreds of thousands of Yazidis who fled the Islamic State in 2014. The exact site of the research was Al Ain camp (a pseudonym) and there were approximately 25,000-30,000 people living in it at the point of this research. The camp was comprised entirely of Yazidi families but located within the Kurdistan region of Iraq between the Muslim cities of Mosul and Duhok.

I had considerable access to al Ain camp since my work with an NGO often took me there. Via the NGO, I came to know the service providers within the camp including the school, child-friendly space, health facilities, and camp security and administration. I was familiar with high-level planning and running of the camp by both local authorities and international aid agencies. At the same time, I was able to become embedded within the Yazidi community

residing in the camp. I directed a children's program at my NGO (based in a nearby city) where case workers often met with families in the camp. I joined on many of these camp visits and several children became participants in this study. Through snowball sampling, I also gained access to several other Yazidi families. The endorsement by my local staff helped me to gain their trust and openness. Over the course of 1.5 years, my relationships with the children and their families deepened considerably. By the culmination of the study, I had become a welcome and expected presence at dinners and events.

The participants in the study were all formerly captive Yazidi children. They had endured being abducted by the Islamic State during the invasion of 2014 and were now residing within al Ain displacement camp. The children had been held captive for varying amounts of time. Some had been enslaved by the Islamic State for nearly 2-2.5 years, while others were held for only days or months. These children experienced severe violence and were witness to rape and mass atrocity. They had either escaped or were released from captivity and able to rejoin families displaced to al Ain camp; however, care for their unique and disturbing experiences was often lacking.

In total, I selected five children to be participants in this study. Initially, I began working with eleven children who fit the parameters of the case study. However, due to circumstances of trauma or logistical difficulties, I needed to narrow this number down. At the same time, the five selected children proved to offer the most robust data and rich descriptions of their experiences. As such, this research conveys data from five children which include three boys and two girls. The age range is 11-16 years old and all endured traumatic experiences due to the conflict.

Data was collected via observations, interviews, and an evaluation of relevant documents. Regarding analysis of the data, I utilized an iterative process of defining themes and creating

codes/ axial codes. Consistent with ethnographic research, I looked closely for patterns of cultural behavior. Ultimately, data was considered within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework, which helped to establish connections between cultural, institutional, and psychological factors, as well as provided a structure to present findings.

Significance

This study aims to expand literature on crisis-affected children and education. The number of children caught up in crisis worldwide continues to rise and aid agencies need to adopt more nuanced policies and programs to match their unique circumstances and effectively address their needs. Added research in this topic area will ensure education for children in emergencies is accessible, relevant, healing, and enriching to their lives.

More specifically, this study aims to add deeply qualitative research to a field that has largely relied on quantitative data. In the field of education in emergencies, policies and programs have historically focused on access and safety. Progress towards these goals has been counted numerically without deep examination of qualitative outcomes. This is common in the world of humanitarian aid and emergency response. Typically, program aims are to go broad rather than deep to ensure the largest number of people can benefit during times of crisis. However, this research seeks to expand dominant forms of measurement and assessment in the field. It takes a deep look into the lived experiences of children to understand how their realities may or may not be improved by current provisions for education in emergency contexts.

A Note on Scope

This research study was conducted within the bounds of a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq. It focused on the persecuted and traumatized Yazidi population, who had

been a primary target of the Islamic State in 2014. Data collection occurred from July 2016 to November 2017 as the crisis was still unfolding and the conflict was reaching its climax.

The children in the study had all been abducted by the Islamic State during their invasion and genocidal campaign to eradicate the Yazidis. They experienced a diversity of experiences during their time in captivity, which are elaborated in the research findings. The children each brought unique perspectives and insights to the research.

Although the child participants in this study share many similarities with crisis-affected children around the globe (displacement, trauma, dependence on aid, etc.), their experiences cannot be generalized to a larger population. Findings are not universally applicable. The intent of this research was to provide a case study that may inform new avenues of inquiry and frames of consideration when developing support for children in emergency contexts. As such, this piece of research can be characterized as providing a window into the lived realities of Yazidi children in Iraq. Through a presentation of their data and findings, I add complexity to global dialogues on children, education, and crisis.

Structure

This dissertation is organized to first provide substantial background on both context and literature related to the research, followed by an explanation of how the research was conceived, before going on to a presentation of findings and discussion. I dedicate Chapter 2 to a literature review of the two fields most relevant to this research: Education in Emergencies (EiE) and Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE). The literature review presents the development of these fields, points of contention within each, common threads of discourse, and overlapping areas of interest. The literature review is intended to convey mainstream ideas for humanitarian intervention on behalf of children. It displays the common ways the international community has

understood the challenges of conflict-affected children and methods for response. This background is helpful when later reading the findings, which attempt to expand common assumptions.

Subsequently, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research context. It conveys a brief history of Iraq to display how ethnic diversity has been used to divide the population and inflame sectarian conflict. This historical summary gives context on why and how the conflict with the Islamic State began and helps to explain how violence has become a normalized part of culture in Iraq- an effect of conflict that many child participants struggled to recognize or overcome. The context overview goes on to detail how the Islamic State became so powerful and able to sustain itself, as well as the impact they had on the Yazidi population they held captive. I conclude this section with a description of the current status of displaced Yazidis in Iraq.

Next, Chapter 4 discusses methodological considerations. I describe how I conceptualized the research and my rationale for many of the decisions made. This section conveys how I viewed the development of this ethnographic case study and the many tensions I wrestled with as it came together. It also describes the parameters of the research and concludes with a brief reflection on conducting research in conflict zones.

I use the first four chapters to establish a foundation for understanding the data I present in this study. Then I dedicate Chapters 5-8 to a presentation of the findings. When analyzing the data, I found that most themes fell into categories linked to psychological, institutional, and cultural barriers. This made sense since I was largely examining data through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework. Therefore, I organized the data as such: Chapter 5 presents an introduction to the findings by describing children's experiences of abduction, Chapter 6 conveys how children *think* about their educational world (psychological barriers and

opportunities), Chapter 7 conveys how they *navigate* their educational world (institutional barriers and opportunities), and lastly Chapter 8 conveys how their *attitudes and values affect* their educational world (cultural barriers and opportunities). These three lenses proved to encapsulate the majority of data and provide key ways to view the situation of education for Yazidi children in Iraq.

Lastly, Chapters 9 and 10 are dedicated to a discussion of the findings and concluding thoughts. The discussion first turns back for a reflection on how Bronfenbrenner's framework helps to display key areas for interventions that may improve educational success among displaced and traumatized Yazidi children. Following this section, I discuss two important recommendations valuable to address the situation in Iraq but also applicable to global conversations on children and education in emergency contexts. These recommendations include strengthening the links between EiE and CPiE both in research and in practice, and introducing more pervasive DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Rehabilitation) programming as an attempt to de-educate child soldiers and children who have been exposed to severe violence. Such de-education can be incredibly consequential to success in formal education systems. I conclude with a reflection on the research questions and how this study contributes to the field of international education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Children suffer immensely in situations of conflict, natural disasters, and other acute crises leading to an imperative to strengthen professional and humanitarian fields aimed at addressing their needs. Particularly, the fields of child protection in emergencies (CPiE) and education in emergencies (EiE) have made significant advances towards improving child rights and welfare during periods of crisis. Yet, although these fields are becoming common threads in humanitarian response, more support is needed to assist the rapidly expanding populations of distressed children around the world.

This dissertation attempts to support a call to action by adding to the dialogue on conflict-affected children and education. As such, this chapter is dedicated to reviewing literature in the fields of CPiE and EiE to display the development of interventions for children and mainstream assumptions by the aid community. The intent for addressing these fields is to provide a foundation to view findings of this study.

Overtime, the field of CPiE has grown increasingly relevant. Vast numbers of children are affected by crisis and their plight is more visible than ever. These children may become vulnerable to serious risks of violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. When they are exposed either directly or indirectly to trauma or conflict, they can suffer harm that persists across their life course, especially those who have been subjected to unimaginable suffering. Sadly, sometimes this suffering is intentional. “[Children] are not just caught in the crossfire or treated by combatants as expendable collateral damage, but often deliberately and systematically targeted” (Save the Children, 2018, p. 8). Violations against children may include being killed, maimed, raped, abducted, tortured, or being recruited into slavery or armed service. Unfortunately, the effects of these violations often go unaddressed in communities overcoming

crisis, leading to long-term, generational struggles to heal. The field of CPiE works to protect children from violations and abuse and to provide adequate care for recovery.

Reaching the goals of CPiE is a daunting task. The impact of crises on children is immense and the vast population suffering around the world is staggering. Regarding armed conflict, it is estimated that nearly one billion children live in areas impacted by this type of violence, of which 250 million are under the age of five (Global Education Cluster, 2015). Other experts claim that armed conflicts affect more than one in ten children globally (Kadir et al., 2019). While the majority reside in Asia, the Middle East is where children are most likely to live in conflict (Save the Children, 2018). These statistics rise when natural disasters and climate refugees are taken into account. The number of children living in crisis conditions has consistently risen over the last few decades and by many metrics, children are more at risk now than any time in the last 20 years.

The focus of CPiE is often on the direct impact of crisis such as displacement, violence, exploitation, and neglect; however, children also suffer indirect consequences such as poor access to important services like education. In crises, children are less likely to be in school or able to attain such things as proper sanitation, clean water, or healthcare. Research has shown that migrant children and families often face difficulties accessing health care or other support for a variety of reasons, including their legal status, fear of deportation, unfamiliarity with navigating health/aid systems, and language barriers (UNICEF, 2016). The effects of conflict typically do not end when a child is removed from direct harm but rather linger, hampering the child's ability to access the quality care and opportunities they deserve.

Loss of educational opportunity is one of the most significant consequences of a crisis. The field of EiE seeks to address this by focusing on the right to education and ensuring that

crisis circumstances do not permanently disrupt a child's educational and life success. As of 2015, over 58 million primary school aged children and 20 million secondary aged children were currently out of school due to conflict (UNESCO, 2014). According to the Overseas Development Institute (2016), refugees are five times less likely to attend school than other children, with only 25% of eligible youth enrolled in secondary school and 50% enrolled in primary. For these children, rates of completion, secondary enrollment, literacy, and even mortality are significantly worse than in other countries. Without education, children often lack opportunities for a better future but are also at a much higher risk of violence and exploitation.

Access to education throughout a crisis has shown to be a positive avenue for addressing the needs of children. Schools provide places of stability and care. Aside from formalized education, children are able to access adequate nutrition, learn about health concerns in their communities, and build resilience that will enable them to succeed in the future. "Equipped with the skills and knowledge that come with a quality education, crisis-affected children and young people are better able to seize economic opportunities and secure decent livelihood when they grow up" (ODI, 2016). In many ways, education serves as a vital outlet to addressing a child's overall welfare.

The benefits of both child protection and education in emergencies are immense. These fields serve to identify problems and assist children in some of the harshest environments worldwide. They work to address immediate needs as well as the long-term outlook of those impacted by crisis. Both fields are critically important as stand-alone bodies of research and practice but are also interrelated in many ways - the lack of education can negatively impact children's safety and wellbeing. Inversely, children still suffering from crisis are less likely to

pursue education and productive paths forward. To improve the situation of millions of children around the world, these two fields require robust attention.

The following literature review conveys an overview of the fields, “Child Protection in Emergencies” and “Education in Emergencies.” To grasp the situations of crisis-affected children, an exploration of literature across these two fields is useful. The literature serves to elaborate many of the needs emerging in crisis environments as well as inform later discussion on children’s experiences in Iraq. It provides an important foundation to understand how and what services are provided to children during times of crisis and displays the normative frame of how the aid community interacts with children in emergencies.

Child Protection in Emergencies

Development of the Field

A significant rise in global conflict has precipitated the development of a field dedicated to ensuring child protection in emergencies. Over the last few decades, local, regional, and international conflicts have been pervasive around the world. Since the end of the Cold War, Kagawa (2005) notes “there has been an increase in organized violence in the form of war, civil strife, armed conflict and political oppression” (p. 487). Particularly, the decade of the 1990s displayed a turbulent time with civil wars and regional conflicts breaking out from Sierra Leone to Liberia to genocides in Rwanda and the Balkans. These conflicts displayed violence on a massive scale and the impact on children did not go unnoticed.

Since the 1990s, the issue of war’s effects on children has been high on the international agenda. In 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted and ratified by an overwhelming number of U.N. member states. At the time, it called for greater evidence to depict clearly the situation of children in armed conflict. As a result, the Secretary General

appointed Graça Machel to pursue the task, which inevitably established the landmark report, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. The report identified several key issues exacerbating harm towards children including recruitment of child soldiers, displacement of children, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, landmines and unexploded ordnances, deteriorating health and nutrition, and poor access to education. A critical outcome of the report is that it institutionalized the international community's focus on war's impact on children through the establishment of a U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Since then, ongoing reports and publications on the topic have continued to inform the work of agencies and organizations around the world, firmly establishing the field of Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) and making visible the plight of children.

Overtime, slow but steady progress kept on and the field continued to expand. A decade after Machel's seminal report, a 10-year review was conducted only to uncover added challenges. In particular, the review noted major shifts in the nature of warfare with devastating consequences for children. Major wars of the 20th century were transforming into local and regional violence, or low-level intra-country battles, with less visibility and humanitarian access (Niles, 2007). Differentiating civilians from combatants was far less frequent and children were increasingly targeted, rather than being collateral damage as was the case previously.

“Wars have always victimized children and other non-combatants, but modern wars are exploiting, maiming and killing children more callously and more systematically than ever. Children today find themselves caught up in complex and confusing conflicts that have multiple causes and that lack clear prospects for resolution. Children are being sucked into seemingly endless endemic struggles for power and resources” (Machel, 2000, p. 3).

The original 1996 Machel report had noted deep concern for changing war tactics, with civilians, including children, increasingly becoming the targets of violence and the victims of

atrocities. The follow up study confirmed this trend continues with armed conflicts today having an even more brutal impact on children and civilians.

Despite the attention that these two reports garnered and the international support that followed, only modest improvements occurred for conflict-affected children with regards to protection issues (Wessells, 2008). Additionally, high quality data on the situation of children in armed conflict remained weak and interventions founded on somewhat shallow assumptions. By the publication of the second report, it was noted that the field's evidence-based research was still limited (Betancourt & Williams, 2008; Boothby, Strang et al., 2006; Wessells, 2006). A 2017 report from the Peace Research Institute Oslo, supported by Save the Children, noted:

“It is difficult to answer with much certainty key questions about the exact nature, scope, and scale of war's impact on children... We still do not know how many children are, and have been, killed in conflict globally, how many children are recruited as child soldiers, or how many children are sexually abused in relation to armed conflict. Nor do we have a comprehensive understanding of the many ways in which conflict indirectly impacts children... This is highly problematic given that war continues to negatively impact children -- perhaps even more so today with ongoing, very violent conflicts” (PRI, 2017, p. 4).

The momentum built in the 1990s, along with reports such as Machel's, helped to establish and grow the field of Child Protection in Emergencies. Governments, ministries, and organizations worldwide have embraced CPiE's aim to understand the plight of children and develop stronger interventions for their care. Additionally, over the last two decades evidence-based practice has increased, improving a focus on data and research-based practice.

CPiE is now commonly found in global humanitarian response. The U.N. maintains a child protection sub-cluster, which is often deployed during emergencies. Major NGOs such as Save the Children and War Child have dedicated divisions for child protection, and several international agreements such as the Safe Schools Declaration (2015) and the Global Compact

for Migration (2018) have included child welfare requirements. CPiE continues to grow in notoriety and as a field, but immense support is still needed to meet the challenges of crisis-affected children.

Risks to Children in Emergencies

Armed conflicts have led to unprecedented levels of human displacement around the world. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that currently 1 in every 122 people are displaced and half are children (UNHCR, 2015). Just recently, in 2018 more children were killed or maimed than in any other year since 2005 when the United Nations began systematically monitoring and reporting on violations against children (U.N. Security Council, 2019). A vast number more have been forced into sexual slavery, child soldiering, and numerous other abuses. The risks to children in conflict zones are high and often vary by factors of gender, age, and social status. The following elaborates on some of those risks.

During a conflict, gender creates variable threats for children. Often, girls are at significantly greater risk of sexual violence than boys. “The risks of gender-based violence are very high, if not at the hands of the armed groups that attack and frequently abduct children, then in camps for displaced people or the resultant breakdown in social order in their communities” (Wessells, 2008). In some cases, sexual abuse may be employed as a tactic of war. Rape can become a strategic method to degrade or cleanse opposing ethnic or political groups. Rape may also be used to terrorize populations into compliance, incentivize the recruitment of new militants, or entrench a common extremist ideology that women are inferior to men (Office of the Secretary General, 2017). Sex violations against young girls continue to be on the rise but boys have also become targets, such as in Afghanistan where gender-based violence occurs on a monumental scale (Wessells, 2008).

Whereas girls account for the majority of sexual abuse, boys are particularly susceptible to recruitment into armed groups, both forcibly and voluntarily. Desperate circumstances can drive children to become militants, where violence becomes normalized and many learn to kill. According to Wessells (2008), the global proliferation of deadly assault weapons like the AK-47 made affordable in fragile countries around the world, has meant arming even young children is possible. Others like Ozerdem and Podder (2011) claim that children are particularly targeted for easy retention largely due to dependence on security provided by armed groups. Sadly, the socialization of children into these systems of violence can have long term impact and lead to ongoing cycles of violence.

Beyond gender, children of low socio-economic status or young children without parents are highly vulnerable. Although all children are under threat, these children are more likely to experience violations. They are particularly at risk when parents and caretakers are too overwhelmed to provide effective care or ensure access to humanitarian support. An important primary risk includes losing access to vital services. During periods of crisis, basic services like healthcare, education, sanitation, and housing may be lost as chaos unfolds. For instance, presently most of the world's out-of-school children reside in regions affected by crisis. These children are also at the highest risk of child mortality due to poor nutrition and disease.

To track such abuses, improve accountability, and develop more robust responses, the U.N. has established the "Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)" on grave violations committed against children in times of conflict. The MRM, launched in 2005, aims to provide for the systematic gathering of accurate, timely, objective, and reliable information on six grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. The six grave violations defined by the MRM included: 1. killing and maiming of children; 2. recruitment and use of

children by armed forces and armed groups; 3. sexual violence against children; 4. attacks against schools or hospitals; 5. abduction of children; and 6. denial of humanitarian access for children.

The field of CPiE has largely organized itself around the framework established by the MRM to develop appropriate interventions during times of crisis. The Six Violations help practitioners to conduct risk assessments and monitor common threats to children. Due to the comprehensive nature of the Six Violations, child protection practitioners must often work across sectors to ensure the highest degree of care for this vulnerable population, from education to health to psychosocial support and more.

Defining “Child Protection in Emergencies”

The field of Child Protection in Emergencies (CPIE) is often sweeping and defined in broad contours. It can most generally be viewed as the mitigation and prevention of all forms of exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harm towards children. UNICEF defines it as, “certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children” (Wessells, 2016, p. 201). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines it as, “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law)” (ICRC, 1999). Such broad and sometimes nebulous definitions abound in the field of CPiE with critiques that the scope and meaning of the term “child protection” is sometimes lost in ambiguous language. Skeletal definitions of the field can obscure the development of appropriate measures of operational guidance for current challenges. The following elaborates on why tighter

definitions of CPiE have been lacking and how we can begin to understand the full scope of the field.

Child protection is an issue that transcends multiple sectors and domains. The multifaceted nature of it makes creating a definition challenging (Wessells, 2008). Historically, many humanitarian agencies have simplified the focus to examine only physical and legal protections; however, this is too limited a view to fully understand the work in CPiE. Psychological protection, ensuring future opportunities and livelihoods, and building resilience during times of disaster additionally fall under the term “child protection.” Although there are multiple aspects of the field, each is important and narrowly defining the term without consideration of all domains may inevitably limit the care needed by children.

Depending on the orientation of the organization, some may interpret child protection from the perspective of international law (e.g. Human Rights Watch). The legal basis for child protection helps ensure accountability among foreign governments and bring justice when children are violated. A prime example of legal work accomplished to better facilitate protection is the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which 196 member states have ratified. A focus on law helps to pressure governments to fulfill obligations to protect children but is not always effective when conflict makes government defunct. Additionally, limiting work in child protection to the legal sphere would fail to address many of the real time, practical needs of children such as physical security and psychological care.

Aid agencies working on the ground in humanitarian environments most commonly focus on the physical protection of children, especially during the height of conflict. Children are increasingly affected by violence targeted at schools and other places where they gather. Violence may include killing, maiming, or sexual abuse. For displaced children the threat is even

higher when they reside in transitional places (e.g. refugee/IDP camps) that lack their typical family support and community protection. Aid agencies have moved to combat this issue in multiple ways including fortifying schools with protective walls and guards, establishing restroom facilities for girls so they are not left vulnerable in fields, and creating community watch groups in refugee camps and high-risk communities. Physical protection is a foremost concern in CPiE and often frames how organizations understand the field, yet threats do not end there.

Some of the greatest risks to children are psychological and emotional. Children may need to overcome the stigma of being child soldiers or sexually assaulted. In situations of crisis, children may likely have witnessed the trauma of watching family members be killed or tortured. These emotional struggles can require significant therapy and care to be able to move forward. Aid agencies meet this need with case workers and counselors but there are typically too few to address the ongoing demands of vast amounts of crisis-affected children.

All of these areas of child protection must be integrated into a response effort for effective programming. Consequently, the field of child protection cannot be narrowly defined to only select domains but it also cannot be so broad as to run the risk of “diluting the focus of child protection and even rendering the term ‘child protection’ meaningless” (Wessells, 2008, p. 6). An appropriate definition of the field needs to holistically address the needs of children while also providing clear operational guidance to practitioners. A list of institutional and scholarly definitions is below.

Table 1.1: Definitions of Child Protection in Emergencies

Contributor	Definition
Save the Children	Child protection in emergencies is about preventing and responding to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children during times of emergency caused by natural and man-made disasters, conflict or other

	crises. Emergency situations can carry on long after the initial crisis has passed. They require effective and sustainable solutions to provide both short and long-term protection to children living in the wake of disaster and conflict. The delivery of child protection in emergencies occurs in a wide variety of locations from the immediate locality of the crisis to internally displaced people and refugee facilities. *https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/9496/pdf/what_is_child_protection.pdf
Child Protection Cluster	Child Protection in Emergencies refers to the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation of and violence against children in emergencies. An emergency is defined as “a situation where lives, physical and mental wellbeing, or development opportunities for children are threatened as a result of armed conflict, disaster or the breakdown of social or legal order, and where local capacity to cope is exceeded or inadequate.” *http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/themes/child-protection/
Child Fund Alliance	Child protection in emergencies (CPiE) is preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children in times of emergency caused by natural or manmade disasters, conflicts or other crises. CPiE involves specific activities by the child protection sector, humanitarian agencies and others supporting local capacities. *https://childfundalliance.org/our-work/strategic-priorities/child-protection-in-emergencies
UNICEF	The set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors – especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice – to support prevention and response to protection-related risks. These systems are part of social protection and extend beyond it. At the level of prevention, their aim includes supporting and strengthening families to reduce social exclusion, and to lower the risk of separation, violence and exploitation. Responsibilities are often spread across government agencies, with services delivered by local authorities, non-State providers, and community groups, making coordination between sectors and levels, including routine referral systems etc., a necessary component of effective child protection systems. *United Nations Economic and Social Council (2008), UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, E/ICEF/2008/5/Rev.1, par. 12-13.
Wessells (2008)	The mitigation and prevention of all forms of exploitation, abuse, violence, and harm towards children. (p. 5)

Lastly, a challenge to understanding the field is ensuring all children are considered in a response. Historically, many protection interventions have taken a “deficit” approach where only the most vulnerable children, those who have endured the obvious and direct impacts of crisis, receive attention. These children may entail orphans, former child soldiers, or those separated from family members. However, other children may still have invisible needs such as overcoming the trauma of losing a family member or gaining access to education and health services. Therefore, the field of child protection must work to ensure care for all children, viewing their circumstances holistically. Definitions of CPiE would do well to note this broad spectrum of beneficiaries.

Trends in Child Protection in Emergencies

According to Machel’s (1996) view, child protection should be comprehensive and address the wide-ranging needs of children as a multi-sectoral response. Her 1996 landmark report on children and armed conflict propelled the field forward and emphasized that a main tenet was to take a holistic approach to understanding and assisting children in crisis. Machel highlighted the necessity to understand the nuanced needs and experiences of children in order to develop effective responses.

However, in practice, approaches have often been fragmented. Due to the siloed architecture of humanitarian aid, workers in different fields have not always come together to address the full needs of a child. Wessells (2008) notes that “coordination... is the Achilles heel of nearly every humanitarian response” (p. 4). For instance, health professionals may struggle to understand how education may assist in improving health outcomes. Alternatively, education professionals may struggle to understand how psychosocial care may increase positive results among students. Aside from misunderstandings, sector or donor priorities may drive aid

professionals to hone in on narrow goals that neglect the comprehensive needs of children.

Lastly, practitioners may simply feel unprepared to convey integrated programming that extends beyond their expertise. Machel's initial conception of the field was far from being realized in the early years of CPiE and still many organizations struggle. However, recent trends represent a turn towards embracing a more holistic approach and striving for cross-sector support.

Beginning with the 10-year review of Machel's report and in the years following, it has been emphasized that CPiE be more vigorously integrated across all sectors. Programs to teach sanitation and hygiene in schools have assisted immensely in improving health statistics. Other programs that have provided monetary incentives for staying in school have deterred children from joining armed militias or participating in sex work for survival. The global aid architecture is slowly adapting to a more holistic approach but has far to go.

According to Wessells (2016), one helpful tool in guiding more holistic work is the "ecological systems framework" developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. CPiE professionals have looked to the principles of this framework to assess comprehensive threats and holistic opportunities as well as develop more appropriate responses. According to Wessells, research in CPiE has been increasingly guided by Bronfenbrenner's ideas. "Ecological frameworks emphasize the importance of children's social environment, which is frequently broken down into micro-, meso-, and macrosystems, with extensive interactions occurring within and across levels" (Wessells, 2016, p. 199). With this framework, children are viewed within concentric circles that examine influences at the family, community, and societal levels. Understanding the lives of children in this way assists practitioners in evaluating the effects of conflict. Children may be experiencing physical abuse from parents who are also traumatized by conflict, they may

be struggling to enroll in school due to the stigma of being a child soldier, or they may not be able to access psychosocial care in communities that do not have a tradition of it.

Taking an ecological systems approach works to define obstacles facing a child, be it physical abuse/injury, psychological trauma, cultural limitations, or institutional challenges, and create more effective programming. Such an evaluative framework explores the complexity of a child's experience and embraces Machel's imperative to provide holistic care. The ecological approach helps the practitioner to "move beyond the reductionist, individual emphasis that is inherent in pathology-focused frameworks. In contrast to strictly curative approaches, they encourage practitioners to reduce the preventable risks to children in war zones, thereby strengthening prevention" (Wessells, 2016, p. 200)².

A natural outcome of the ecological approach is establishing measures of resilience, often in the form of institutional policies. Instead of simply examining the effects of conflict and establishing solutions, practitioners of CPiE are encouraged to prevent and/or mitigate further harm through resilience-oriented approaches. Efforts at resilience have been a major new development in the last several years of CPiE work.

Building 'resilience' means to increase crisis-affected children's ability to cope and adapt to adverse situations that may arise. Masten & Narayan (2012) define it as, "the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development" (p. 231). A child may not be currently traumatized by violence but have circumstances where they are at high-risk for future violations to occur. In these instances, children need tools and structures to help them navigate paths forward. This may include interventions like disaster risk reduction (DRR) learning programs, establishing monitoring tools

² A more detailed explanation of ecological systems theory is provided in the methodology as a primary theoretical framework for this study.

and feedback loops that incorporate the voices of children, or strengthening laws that protect child rights. Resilience approaches also embrace the agency of a child. Coupling resilience programming with existing measures to address past and current violations occurring against children, improves overall welfare.

Ongoing Challenges in Child Protection in Emergencies

The field of child protection continues to develop and has produced robust responses over the years. Millions of children worldwide have benefited from child protection work and principles, particularly that of the U.N.'s child protection sub-cluster, which works to address threats to children in all U.N. led humanitarian responses. However, an assortment of obstacles continues to limit the field. Such obstacles include limited research, low contextual understandings, non-holistic approaches, and ineffective cross-sector collaboration.

Humanitarian programs, be it for livelihoods, education, protection, or other, are often designed based on practitioner expertise rather than empirical research. According to Ager et al. (2011), "In the context of humanitarian emergencies assessment is, in principle, a key process in the identification of risks faced by children... In practice, however, humanitarian response frequently proceeds on the basis of limited or piecemeal assessment efforts" (p. 1044). This has commonly been the case since research in crisis environments is logistically challenging and contains a multitude of safety concerns. In referring to research on crisis-affected children, Wessells (2016) notes, "Overall, there is a paucity of empirical evidence regarding which interventions were effective, much less their comparative effectiveness or their cost effectiveness or scalability" (p. 202). Wessells goes on to note that few studies have enabled causal attribution or broad generalization to national populations, with few exceptions (Betancourt et al., 2010,

Boothby et al., 2006). Without a strong evidence base, work in child protection will continue with ad hoc responses, likely limited in effectiveness.

Fortunately, in the last few years we have started to see a turn toward strengthening policy and practice through empirical research. Much of this effort has been the push of the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), a global forum for coordination and collaboration on child protection in humanitarian settings. The group includes an array of stakeholders including NGOs, UN agencies, academics, and other partners working towards a shared objective to develop effective and accountable child protection responses during emergencies. In 2012, the CPWG published the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action with a follow up in 2016 called the Child Protection in Emergencies Handbook. These guidance documents were developed in an effort to link policy and practice, informed by a strong evidence base. Although the field has shifted in a positive direction, embracing the value of empirical research, much work is still to be done.

Other limiting factors of the field, such as the lack of contextual understandings and non-holistic approaches, have created ongoing challenges. Historically, Western humanitarian intervention models have been pervasive in crisis response. For instance, diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and how to best manage it, has often not fit well within local contexts and sometimes disregarded or marginalized local and indigenous knowledge. In the case of the recent conflict in Iraq, the need for psychological care was sometimes perceived as weakness, leaving a stigma on those who sought care. As such, programs need to be adapted to local norms and cultural sensitivities. Ager et al. (2011) emphasize: “Although there is growing consensus across humanitarian agencies about the child protection responses to be deployed in emergencies, shaping these to the local context is viewed as crucial” (p. 1046). Harkening back

to the imperative for deeper research, such work could bring to light nuances valuable for increasing the effectiveness of interventions through contextual knowledge.

Regarding holistic approaches, child protection practitioners responding to a crisis need to work across sectors to ensure a full range of care are provided. Children often need access to nutrition, healthcare, sanitation, education, and an assortment of other basic needs.

Unfortunately, the current humanitarian aid architecture makes this approach challenging.

Presently, the U.N. responds to humanitarian crises through a series of “clusters” intended to increase efficiency of a response. There are eleven clusters including: health, logistics, nutrition, protection, shelter, water/sanitation/hygiene, camp coordination, early recovery, education, emergency communications, and food security. Each of these clusters is comprised of UN agencies, NGOs, INGOs, government ministries, and other stakeholders working in the same sector to coordinate an effective and comprehensive response. Unfortunately, work across clusters/sectors is not pervasive. This can be due to lack of confidence to engage other sectors, donor priorities limiting the scope of work, poor outlets of communications, competition among sectors, or even the fast-paced nature of crisis response. Not uncommonly, “turf struggles” hamper coordination (Wessells, 2008) and inter-sectoral approaches are difficult at the field level. Yet, to ensure all the needs of children are met, cross-collaboration is necessary.

Although the challenges in child protection are complex, they can be met. Decades of reflections on the field have yielded key insights on how to move forward. Linking research, policy, and practice will enrich CPiE and benefit millions of children impacted by crisis.

Education in Emergencies

Introduction to the field

In most any context, education has long been considered a crucial element of childhood development. It improves cognitive and social abilities as well as conveys cultural values and societal expectations. Education is thought to be a key step towards future livelihoods and work.

In a crisis, education has the added benefit of providing access to vital services and a safe space for recovery and care. It is a lifeline for children that may restore needed routine and regularity during unpredictable and troubled times. In emergencies, quality education is important for providing both life-saving and life-sustaining aid. In these contexts, it is not only a valuable step towards achieving future success but also an important avenue for children to receive immediate physical, psychological, and cognitive care. In short, education provided during emergencies offers an array of benefits that extend beyond the right to learn. The education cluster working group (2008) sums up the value of education in humanitarian response:

“At all times children’s enjoyment of their right to education brings multitude benefits, in terms of personal, social and cognitive development. In times of emergency, education can help minimize disruption to children’s ongoing emotional and social development by giving them a secure environment in which to interact with their peers and adults; an environment in which children can be children, provided with psychological support and a sense of normality in an otherwise chaotic world” (p. 1).

The realization of education’s key role in humanitarian action has led to the establishment of the field, “Education in Emergencies” (EiE). Overtime, this field has become an important thread in international development and humanitarian discourse, particularly in the current era of refugee crises and pervasive protracted conflicts. EiE largely focuses on restoring education in the aftermath of crisis (in refugee camps or restabilized communities) but dually gives attention to ensuring schooling can continue amidst disaster in areas that are still under

threat. In particular, protecting education during active or ongoing conflicts has been an immense obstacle. As a result, children remain out of school or can only access substandard education.

The impact of conflict on education may have several features. The sudden onset of crisis can cause severe disruptions to schooling, buildings can be damaged or overtaken by armed groups, and children may be forced to flee with families from unsafe communities. To illuminate this issue, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) estimates that from 2013-2017, more than 1,500 schools and universities in Yemen were damaged or destroyed by airstrikes and fighting, and schools in Syria experienced at least 650 incidents of attacks on education or military use of schools (GCPEA, 2018).

Conflicts may also compound fragility by exacerbating the effects of poverty, as was the case in South Sudan where over 2.2 million children remained out of school as of 2017, and in some parts of the country over 75% of primary-aged girls continued to be absent from education (UNESCO, 2018). Around the world, shocks and fragility are diminishing educational gains and driving the rate of out-of-school children exceptionally high compared to pre-crisis conditions.

To display the magnitude of challenges in EiE, providing universal access to education means it must be made available for nearly 75 million children residing in countries facing war, violence, and significant political instability (Nicholai et al., 2016). This number increases as natural disasters amass additional displacements. Children living in crisis environments account for a disproportionate amount of those who remain out-of-school globally. For instance, conflict-affected countries host just 20% of the world's eligible primary-school-age children but account for 50% of out-of-school children at the primary level worldwide (UNESCO, 2015b).

Table 1.2: Percentage of out of school children and young people globally, and in countries affected by crisis

	Global Average (%)	Average of Emergency Countries (%)
Primary	8.9	20.0
Lower Secondary	15.9	29.3
Upper Secondary	36.3	43.8

(Source: UNICEF, 2018)

Table 1.3: Number of out-of-school children (OOSC) in the world and in countries affected by crisis

	Estimated # of OOSC in emergency countries (in millions)	Total # of OOSC in the world (in millions)	Estimated share of OOSC in emergency countries
Pre primary (one year before primary only)	15.3	39.7	39%
Primary	32.9	63.3	52%
Lower Secondary	23.7	61.1	39%
Upper Secondary	32.3	138.5	23%
Total	104.2	302.7	34%

(Source: UNICEF, 2018)

Keeping children in school so that they may take advantage of the wide array of benefits education can offer is key to achieving the goals of EiE. Presently, millions of students remain without education in crisis affected settings, leaving them little access to important avenues of care. The field of EiE continues to address these struggles. Although EiE has become

mainstream in development discourse, it is still somewhat marginal in global programming for international development and humanitarian response.

Development of the Field

The term “education in emergencies” is relatively new in the lexicon of international development and education. Both operationally and in terms of research and evidence, the field is young, gaining the most notable global attention in the last decade (Nicholai & Hine, 2015). The following offers a brief overview of EiE’s development, primarily examining its roots in the 1990s, establishment of international frameworks/networks of cooperation, and the more recent impact of the Arab Spring and subsequent refugee crisis.

For some, it could be argued that the origins of education in emergencies go as far back as the establishment of UNHCR and UNWRA in the mid-twentieth century. However, armed conflicts throughout the 1990s, from the Balkans to East Africa, truly began to display the impact of crises on education (Kagawa, 2005). As the world transitioned from a bi-polar to multi-polar world in the post-Cold War era, the 1990s saw several conflicts with ethnic dimensions, which led to the suffering and displacement of millions of children whose lives were severely disrupted and education abruptly terminated (Crisp et al., 2001).

At the time, the concept of “education as a humanitarian response” gained uptake in the international community (Retamal & Aedo-Richmond, 1998). Education was recognized for its capacity to provide life-saving care to crisis-affected children. It was cited as the “fourth pillar,” or a “central pillar,” of humanitarian response, alongside the pillars of nourishment, shelter and health services (Machel, 2001: 2; Norwegian Refugee Council et. al., 1999: 26; Midttun, 2000: 3–4). The decade of the 1990s saw the emergence of a field dedicated to prioritizing education during periods of crisis. During that time, EiE successfully shifted from fringe to mainstream

educational discourse although core principles and definitions of the field were still garnering consensus.

By the turn of the millennium, education in emergencies began to find firmer ground in the global development agenda with increased international commitments and cooperation. Following the Education for All (EFA) conference in Dakar, Senegal, education ministers from around the world pledged to “meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities, and instability” (World Education Forum, 2000, p. 9). The resulting *Dakar Framework for Action* (2000) highlighted the deprivation of educational opportunity due to emergency situations as a major barrier to achieving EFA goals (Kagawa, 2005). In a follow-up consultation to Dakar, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was conceived with governance by UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and other leading NGOs. The momentum from the 1990s to the early 2000s produced concrete efforts to bring agreement on concepts and principles of EiE, while expanding its reach in global educational discourse and programming. Over the next two decades the field would develop a growing body of research and practice, receiving heightened attention following uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that generated mass displacements and a global refugee crisis.

Since 2011, the Arab Spring has driven countries, particularly Syria, into widespread violence and unrest. As of 2015, more than 12 million Syrians remained displaced with half estimated to be children under the age of eighteen (UNHCR, 2017). The daunting numbers from Syria are reflective of global statistics, where over 68 million people are considered forcibly displaced, with children under 18 representing 52% of the population (UNHCR, 2017). The Syrian crisis has put unprecedented numbers of children in peril and left many without access to educational services, among other basic needs.

In 2015, as a partial response to the Syrian crisis, the Oslo Summit on Education for Development opened a dialogue on mobilizing governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society, and academia to establish support for education in emergencies. In the Chair's Declaration, it was noted that, "the number of children and youth out of school due to conflicts, disasters, displacements and epidemics is increasing at a chilling speed" (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, p.1). The declaration put forth an imperative that to meet our global education goals we must work to close the financing gap between available domestic resources and the total funding needed, at a cost of 39 billion U.S. dollars annually.

Just months after the Oslo Summit, the U.N. convened the Sustainable Development Summit affirming global commitments to education. Among the targets of SDG 4, EiE links directly to Target 5 to eliminate disparities in education and ensure equal access for vulnerable children, and Indicator 4.5.1 to analyze parity in conflict-affected contexts. In 2016, a global fund to support education in emergencies³ was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit, in an effort to eliminate educational funding gaps during humanitarian crises.

In the last two decades, the field of EiE has become common discourse in educational development, garnering increased attention and support since 2015. It has been considered essential for meeting our global goals, from Education for All to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, understandings of the field and common frameworks of action have been fluid and at times contentious. The following elaborates on tensions in the field, with insights given on core characteristics and principles. Definitions are provided from a variety of sources.

³ Education Cannot Wait is a global fund to transform the delivery of education in emergencies. ECW was established during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 by international humanitarian and development aid actors, along with public and private donors, to help reposition education as a priority on the humanitarian agenda.

Defining “Education in Emergencies”

The question of what constitutes “education in emergencies” has consistently been troubled within international discourse on education, development, and crisis response. Tensions and critiques on how to conceptualize the field have emerged as disparate research on education in conflict zones, areas impacted by natural disasters, or other fragile contexts have coalesced into a unified field. The nuances of these various crisis environments add significant complexity to defining EiE, beginning with the inquiry, *what constitutes an “emergency?”*.

According to Kagawa (2005), scholars have envisaged education in emergencies to encompass a wide array of contexts. Kagawa provides a robust description of emergencies by consolidating the works of prominent scholars in the field. Referencing Obura (2003), it is stated that “emergencies” are generally considered in two broad categories: “natural disasters” (hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.) and “human-made disasters” (war, genocide, violent extremism). Pigozzi (1999) and Williams (2006) add that persistent poverty, large populations of street children, and health epidemics such as HIV/AIDS create situations of chronic emergencies or “silent emergencies.” In these contexts, the source of an emergency is often the collapse of financial or government systems pivotal for the welfare of society.

The combination of multiple crises creates what Nicholai (2003) terms a “complex emergency.” The impact of such compounded crises cannot be neglected. “Based on emergency education projects around the world undertaken by Save the Children, Nicholai (2003) states that the majority of the countries in which emergency education takes place are at risk from both conflict and natural disaster” (Kagawa, 2005, p. 492).

What constitutes an emergency runs the gamut of natural disasters to violence, warfare, and unmet human needs. Chand et al. (2003) cast a wider net stating that an emergency is any “disaster situation or event, which ‘overwhelms local capacity’ and leads to a request for external assistance” (p. 224). Defining the term has its challenges, particularly because in practice it is often difficult to distinguish between different types of crises (i.e. complex emergencies). Generally, it can be assumed the field of education in emergencies applies to communities that have experienced unexpected, severe, and rapid onset of an array of different crises.

To further complicate our understanding of emergencies is the stage in which a crisis has progressed. This is often pivotal in defining appropriate interventions and seeking various financing modalities. For instance, a conflict may endure ongoing violence, a regime change, a phase of reconstruction and rehabilitation, or result in becoming a failed state. In the instance that a community regains a sense of stability and enters into a phase of rebuilding, it could be argued that emergency education no longer applies. However, the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action (2000) emphasizes the need to support populations still severely affected by conflict, disaster, and instability. Referring to the work of Sinclair, it is stated: “According to this view, educational initiatives during the post-conflict reconstruction are also understood as part of emergency education” (Kagawa, 2005, p. 494). This perspective elicits a provocative question in the field of EiE: *When does crisis response give way to reconstruction/development and what does this mean for education?*

For decades, humanitarian aid and international development programming have operated in separate spheres. The former concerns itself with providing life-saving aid, while the latter arguably does the same, but with an aim at long-term social stability and prosperity. For countries that have experienced acute crises within historical contexts of economic and political

fragility, humanitarian and development spheres may operate in the same space and time, but with limited strategy for an integrated response and transition from short to long-term assistance. To counter this issue, an acknowledgement has grown that relief and development are not discrete processes, but rather development is the fundamental process that includes long periods of crisis and recovery (Talbot, 2013). This idea links to a concept known as the humanitarian-development continuum.

Uniquely, education has the potential to dually meet the vital needs of crisis-affected children, while also laying the groundwork for future social stability. Children may receive nutritional benefits and psychosocial care in the early stages of a crisis response while themes of community reconciliation or human capital may drive EiE strategies in later stages. The recognition of education as a key opportunity for transition in the humanitarian-development continuum therefore adds to the value of education in emergencies. Understanding education as a conduit of this transformation, means looking beyond the ameliorative effects of re-establishing senses of normalcy and care to viewing education provided during periods of crisis as also transformative, giving rise to future stability and reduced vulnerabilities. Increasingly, literature has linked emergency education as vital to reconstruction and development programs (Pigozzi, 1999; Chand et al. 2003; Buchert, 2013).

Conceptualizing the field of education in emergencies has historically been complicated by several factors, including understanding what events constitute an emergency, at what stage is an emergency resolved, and what are the priorities and aims of education given the multiple variants of the previous factors? Yet, overtime consensus has developed on core principles and defining features of the field, situating EiE as a credible sub-topic in broader international

education discourse. To gain a sense of definitional nuance, a variety of institutional and scholarly definitions of EiE are provided.

Table 1.4: Definitions of Education in Emergencies

Institutional	Definitions
INEE (Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, 2010)	Quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational, higher and adult education. Education in emergencies provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives.
Save the Children (Alkhalidi Bashir, A. et al., 2018, p. 6)	[The] provision of uninterrupted, high-quality learning opportunities for children affected by humanitarian crises. It is about making sure children can learn regardless of who they are, where they live or what is happening around them.
UNHCR (Crisp et al., 2001, p. 4)	The term “emergency education” is used at inter-agency level to refer to education in situations where children lack access to their national education systems, due to man-made crises or natural disasters.
Global Education Cluster (Education Cluster Coordinator Handbook, 2010, p. 290)	The provision of quality education opportunities that meet the physical, protection, psychosocial, developmental and cognitive needs of children affected by emergencies, which can be both life sustaining and life-saving.
Scholarly	Definitions
Sinclair (2001, p. 4)	The term “education in emergencies” increasingly serves as shorthand for schooling and other organised studies, together with “normalising” structured activities, arranged for and with children, young people and adults whose lives have been disrupted by conflict and major natural disasters.

Kirk (2006, p. 1)	Education in emergencies refers to a broad range of educational activities – formal and non-formal – which are life-saving and life-sustaining and, therefore, critical for children, youth and their families in times of crisis. Crisis situations include natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and floods, as well as man-made conflicts.
Chand et al. (2003, p. 224)	Emergency education is concerned with education during and after complex humanitarian emergencies (for instance, long term displacement of refugees), rapid educational responses during crises (which is the traditional understanding of the term ‘emergency’), and post-crisis educational reconstruction. Common to the three types of educational action is the context: emergency education deals with situations in which conflicts or disasters have ‘destabilised, disorganised or destroyed’ the education system.
Nicholai & Triplehorn (2003, p. 2-3)	Emergency education programmes take place ‘in situations where children lack access to their national and community education systems due to occurrence of complex emergencies or natural disasters’. They are situations, which overwhelm ‘the capacity of a society to cope by using its resources alone’

Trends in Education in Emergencies

Beginning in 2011, the Arab Spring helped to elicit more robust attention for education in emergencies. Mass displacements caused by political upheaval and its subsequent violence was widely covered in global media and stirred new actors and actions in the field of EiE. An array of new initiatives were established and new trends have begun to emerge. Some of those trends include a focus on conflict-sensitive education, socio-emotional learning/psycho-social support, accelerated education, and the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals.

Due to EiE’s roots in humanitarian aid, “do no harm” principles are often the starting point when implementing activities. Since Mary B. Anderson first coined the phrase for purposes

of humanitarian guidance in the 1990s, it has grown to have universal acceptance in the aid community, generally ensuring the integrity and non-politicized nature of humanitarian work. The field of EiE largely embraces these principles through the widespread promotion of ‘*Conflict Sensitive Education*’ (CSE). According to the INEE:

“Conflict sensitive education (CSE) means ‘understanding the context in which the education policy/programme takes place, analyzing the two-way interaction between the context and the education policy/programme, and acting to minimize negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of education policies and programming on conflict, within an organization’s given priorities’ (adapted from Conflict Sensitivity Consortium)” (www.ineesite.org, 2019)

Part of what CSE aims to address is the dialectical relationship between education and conflict. Given the ideological power of education, features of schooling such as access, content, and instruction may be manipulated by governing agencies to convey discrimination, stereotypes, or other fuel for social tensions. CSE is intended to be a first phase response in developing educational programming in the aftermath of conflict. It is meant to ensure local hostilities are not exacerbated through offering unfair access or promoting abuse of marginalized groups through textbooks or teaching. In the same vein as the humanitarian principles, CSE seeks to offer educational services without deepening the crisis it is intended to address.

Beyond CSE, a popular new trend has been the incorporation of social emotional learning (SEL) and psycho-social support (PSS) into EiE programs. The two terms are often mistakenly used interchangeably but actually hold some nuanced differences. According to the INEE (2018), “PSS aims to help individuals recover after a crisis has disrupted their lives, and to enhance their ability to bounce back and return to normality after experiencing adverse events” (p.9). Alternatively, SEL is “a process of acquiring social and emotional values, attitudes,

competencies, knowledge, and skills that are essential for learning, being effective, well-being, and success in life (p.10).

Both fields aim to help individuals learn to cope and react positively in society, however, SEL represents a specific line of programming under the PSS umbrella (INEE, 2018). PSS can be viewed as a comprehensive response measure that helps individuals to heal from a crisis, whereas SEL works to develop a specific set of skills important for navigating present and future circumstances. Therefore, PSS tends to focus on both the past and future, while SEL generally serves as the forward thinking measure in a PSS intervention.

Incorporating SEL/PSS into educational programs has been increasingly popular over the years. According to Frisoli et al. (2019), “Education programs that feature social-emotional learning interventions...have the potential for large-scale impact in fragile and humanitarian contexts” (p. 1). The short and long term outcomes associated with SEL includes improvements in school enrollment, attendance, and academic success, as well as positive social behavior and health (FHI 360, 2019). As such, SEL/PSS interventions are becoming mainstream in EiE programs.

Another important trend, “accelerated education,” is working to dramatically expand the numbers of children completing their formal education. Ensuring children succeed in school as well as have access to future education/work opportunities have commonly been a pillar of EiE strategies. However, institutional and logistical barriers can prevent this from occurring in crisis-affected contexts. Making certain children gain the credentials they need to move forward by completing primary and secondary education is one of the greatest challenges of the field. Consequently, accelerated education programs have been developed and implemented by a number of agencies from the World Bank to USAID. The term can be defined as follows:

“An accelerated education program (AEP) is a flexible age-appropriate program that promotes access to education in an accelerated time-frame for disadvantaged groups, over-age out-of- school children and youth who missed out or had their education interrupted due to poverty, marginalisation, conflict and crisis. The goal of AEP is to provide learners with equivalent certified competencies for basic education and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity” (www.ineesite.org, 2019)

According to the INEE states, “With each missed school year, there is greater risk that [children] will be unable to return to formal education...Responding to the needs of these learners has increasingly led governments and agencies to provide more flexible forms of education such as accelerated education" (INEE, 2019). Establishing avenues for previously out-of-school children to catch up to peers is essential in environments where educational instability is pervasive. AEPs are an emerging but quickly growing trend in the field of education in emergencies.

Lastly, the establishment of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has brought new attention to the topic of providing education during periods of crisis and established new momentum for research and reporting in the field. In the lead up to the post-2015 agenda, much discussion arose on what was left out of previous educational goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or Education for All (EFA). Both sets of global commitments had shortcomings that the SDGs had potential to remedy. Talbot (2013) noted, “The education component of a future post-MDG global development agenda needs to be comprehensively worded, allowing for the inclusion of all population groups, all situations and all sub-sectors of education systems” (p. 3). Nicholai et al. (2016) stated, “Following the failure to reach the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals on education, the world must do better in the SDG era. There is a new window of opportunity” (p. 11). In a sense, the

SDGs have the opportunity to get right what its predecessors missed. In 2015, it was envisaged (and eventually conceived) the new agenda could promote greater inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable populations, expand priorities beyond primary education, and link the previously disparate MDGs and EFA goals.

Among the critiques of earlier educational agendas was the lack of attention provided to crisis-affected contexts. EFA noted the value of EiE following Dakar but the more general MDGs left out a focus entirely. However, with the establishment of Agenda 2030, EiE was not only referenced in the targets of SDG 4 but an emphasis on vulnerable populations, including those in crisis situations, set the tone for the entirety of the development agenda. As such, when asking what does EiE mean for achieving sustainable development and more concretely, the SDGs, the answer is two-fold: 1. EiE's direct contribution to SDG 4, and 2. EiE's more ancillary support of all SDGs through its potential to transform communities and pave paths for peace, stability, and growth, particularly in the world's most fragile regions.

Following adoption of the SDGs, it became necessary to ensure strong data reporting and evidence-based practice. As such, EiE has seen a dramatic increase in research over the last several years. Burde et al. (2017) note there is a “demand among international funders for rigorous empirical research in order to determine ‘what works’ to achieve program outcomes” (p. 621). The need for stronger data and deeper research is slowly shifting EiE work from a practitioner driven field to one with a growing body of scholarship.

The field of EiE has remained fluid since its inception in the early 1990s with priorities and programs spanning a wide range of ideas; however, trends have emerged overtime and are exceedingly evidence based. Currently, in the post-2015 era, the SDGs have driven (in particular) monetary and research support for the field. This robust enthusiasm has assisted in

developing several new threads of work and scholarly discourse, including, conflict sensitive education, social-emotional learning/ psycho-social support, and accelerated education. The field is growing to address the comprehensive needs of children with programs grounded in empirical and theoretical research. Given the expansion and nature of conflicts around the world, this trend will no doubt continue.

Ongoing Challenges to Education in Emergencies

Although education in emergencies has seen rapid expansion in the last decade, ongoing challenges continue to vex the field. EiE has made significant progress in bringing attention to the importance of education for crisis-affected children but several gaps in services remain. Additionally, a handful of conceptual questions are still troubling. Some of these challenges include the lack of support for higher education, policy dilemmas and the politicization of schooling, and inadequate global funding.

The provision of higher education during an emergency is often entirely overlooked. Aid agencies have tended to prioritize what is often considered compulsory schooling around the world. In most countries this includes primary education and quite often secondary as well. Talbot (2013) notes, “One of the most vexed problems in education in emergencies has been an over-emphasis on access to primary education” (p. 10). According to Dryden-Peterson and Giles (2010), “While there remain many unaddressed issues related to the provision of quality education for refugees at primary and secondary levels, the issue of higher education for refugees is virtually unexplored in both scholarship and policy” (p. 3).

Higher education has typically been left out of humanitarian response despite its inclusion in international agreements and frameworks. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that recognizing the right to education includes, “mak[ing] higher education

accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means” (Dryden Peterson and Giles, 2010). More recently, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals included higher education as a target of SDG 4, stating signatory countries should, “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (United Nations, 2015, p. 21).

Although higher education continues to be devalued in humanitarian response, it remains an incredibly powerful avenue for transformational change and future stability. It can give greater voice to displaced populations and be both a means to empowerment and empowering itself. Eventually, it can create an educated segment of society capable of returning home to rebuild communities should refugees and IDPs have the opportunity to repatriate (Dryden-Peterson and Giles, 2010). When refugees and IDPs stay in host communities, higher education can help them adapt themselves to new surroundings and better integrate and become self-reliant (Zeus, 2011).

Higher education in emergencies has become especially important given the growing periods of time that displaced youth spend in camps. Camps are intended to be temporary facilities but the average length of time one lives in a camp ranges from 12-17 years (Dryden-Peterson and Giles, 2010; Zeus, 2011). As a result, this leads to “a whole generation who have been ‘born and raised in the artificial environment of a refugee camp’” (Zeus, 2011, 257). These youth have few avenues for educational attainment outside of camp services but their futures remain important and the field of EiE could work to more inclusively address this concern.

Another challenge to EiE are unresolved policy questions and the positioning of education in conflict-affected contexts. Chris Talbot, founder of the INEE, details these concerns in a working paper for Norrag (2013). Regarding the positioning of education, he claims that EiE

takes place in institutional contexts that are unlike those found in stable, peaceful settings. There may be a militarization or “securitization” of education when a state’s armed forces take responsibility for education. This is not an uncommon occurrence because of the desire of the state (or its opponents) to control the transmission of knowledge. EiE practitioners must navigate these complex contexts and “An increasingly worrying trend is for education to be drawn into and viewed as a tool of wider counter-terrorism...geopolitical strategies of rich nations, which seek to ‘win hearts and minds’ by providing education to children” (p. 8). Therefore, locals may see U.N. or NGO sponsored education as having specific political or security agendas, possibly in direct contradiction to current national authorities. At times, this has elicited attacks on education, poor enrollment and attendance, and tensions at multiple institutional levels between aid agencies and governments.

Talbot (2013) goes on to discuss the numerous policy dilemmas that inhibit the field. He states a need for “much greater investment in finding solutions to crucial educational policy dilemmas that arise during conflict” (p. 9). These dilemmas include issues like teacher supply, teacher support, compensation for educational staff, certification of achievements, and gender dimensions in EiE. These concerns are commonplace and deserve much greater attention in discourse on solutions in EiE.

Lastly, monetary support for education in emergencies remains a daunting challenge. Despite the establishment of a global fund called “Education Cannot Wait” (ECW), the field of EiE remains severely underfunded. ECW was founded at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and intended to address the growing population of displaced children without access to quality education. Prior to 2016, global expenditures for education as a humanitarian response fluctuated between 1-2%. Following the establishment of ECW, budgets have likely increased

but not by much. To date, ECW has only reached 1.3 million children and has a goal of reaching 9 million by 2021 (ECW, 2019). Although it displays a commitment to making progress, these numbers are far from reaching the nearly 63 million primary aged and 61 million early secondary aged children not attending school in crisis-contexts.

Overlapping Areas of Interest (CPiE & EiE)

The fields of CPiE and EiE have developed separately with differing aims and objectives; however, maintain common broad principles for assisting children. These fields each have divergent strategies and goals. CPiE tends to focus on the immediate needs of a child. The field aims to ensure physical and psychological protection during chaotic times. Alternatively, EiE takes a longer-term outlook. This field seeks to provide immediate care but with an ultimate goal of life advancement and success via education. However, although there are clearly defined features that distinguish CPiE and EiE, they promote similar concepts. For instance, each field takes a child-centered approach. Both fields also tend to work across various aid sectors (e.g. education for health and wellbeing, child protection as a consideration within nutrition and food). At the core of these fields is a commitment to protecting and advancing child rights to ensure peace and stability for generations to come.

Overtime, within each of these fields, similar threads of discourse have emerged. In a comparison of literature in CPiE and EiE, certain common ideas have become pervasive. Such ideas include holistic approaches, developing resilience, and increasing evidence-based practice.

The first common thread of discourse has been to take holistic approaches when providing care for children. This has been emphasized by Graca Machel in her landmark reports on children (1996, 2001). It is also an important concept promoted by the INEE (2010b). In crisis environments, conveying multi-faceted assistance contributes to efficiency in contexts where

time and resources may be severely constrained. Such holistic care may entail providing nutrition and educational needs simultaneously, or other comprehensive approaches. Overtime, there has been an increasing push to address aid in such a manner. Cross-sector approaches are emphasized during crisis response.

The concept of “resilience” also increasingly finds its place within the fields of CPiE and EiE as well. Resilience typically refers to ensuring the goals of each field may continue to progress despite rapidly changing circumstances. In education, it means that schools, teachers, personnel, and students can access quality education even in the midst of conflict and disaster. In CPiE, it means children will have the capacity to cope with the circumstances around them to mitigate their own harm and recognize/avoid threats when possible. Practitioners in CPiE and EiE have come to take positive measures to advance resilience in their fields through policy and program initiatives.

Lastly, CPiE and EiE display an increased commitment to evidence-based practice and contextually relevant program design. In each field there has been a recognition of the challenges of diverse environments and the limitations of universal approaches. As such, growing research in the form of case studies has enabled greater understanding of the nuanced obstacles and opportunities in each field. This work continues to deepen.

In summary, the fields of CPiE and EiE have advanced progress for children immensely. The fields differ significantly in priorities and application but core principles align. These fields tend to impact the lives of crisis-affected children the most (within the world of humanitarian aid) and the description of each helps to lay a foundation for viewing the findings of this study.

Chapter 3: Context Overview

This chapter provides historical and contemporary background for the country of Iraq, where the study took place. An elaboration of these topics is important to understand the context where data was collected and research participants reside. Particularly in an ethnographic study, a “deep dive” into historic and current circumstances is useful for gaining a comprehensive frame to view the research.

In an ethnography, it is important to understand research participants’ perceptions of identity, social community, and place in the world. As such, investigating the historical dimensions of how they see themselves can sometimes be of value. Especially in Iraq, where identity is often created by communal histories of struggle and oppression, it is important to have a grasp of the past. Collective memory feeds collective identity, which contributes to the construction of culture. Marshall (1994) notes, “all histories-- whether oral or written-- are cultural products that represent particular positioned points of view” (p. 972). Marshall goes on to emphasize that any history is “culturally constructed.” I do not disagree, but to be clear, the history provided in this overview is not an anthropological history, detailed by the community under study, but rather a review of scholarly literature intended to illuminate some of the findings.

My process of understanding the historical memory of my researched community involved a desk review of Iraqi history in advance of the project. This foundation provided a reference point to understand some of the perspectives elaborated in interviews and conversations with participants, especially those connected with inter-group dynamics and ethnic violence. Much of that desk review is provided here along with information on recent events including the development of the Islamic State and the genocidal campaign they undertook in

western Iraq. The timeline and overview of events immediately preceding this research assists in giving background to issues of trauma that consistently came up throughout the course of the study.

The context overview begins as far back as the period before inception of the state to establish how sectarian violence has grown overtime. It goes on to describe the development of the Islamic State's "caliphate" and their injustices against ethno-religious minorities. Lastly, it concludes with the current status of the Yazidi community in Iraq.

Iraq: Melting Pot of the Middle East

Iraq has long been considered the "melting pot" of the Middle East. As the once great empire of Mesopotamia, several civilizations and peoples have settled there. In the centuries since, Iraq has fluctuated between periods of peace and violence. At times, its diverse population has come together, unified by nationalism rather than allegiances to ethnic or religious bonds. In other periods, it has been characterized by immense sectarianism and discrimination.

Most recently, in the last 20 years Iraq's political field has seen a resurgence of overtly sectarian rhetoric, provoking violence across the country. Many ethno-religious groups in Iraq have come into tension as the country continues to lack political, economic, and social stability. The tensions have resulted in growing discrimination, rollbacks of rights, and regional violence/armed warfare by a growing number of paramilitary groups. Presently, sectarianism in Iraq is pervasive, enabled by its historically diverse population. However, such violent trends and rampant discrimination have not always been the case.

Some have argued that imperialist powers laid the groundwork for ongoing conflict and violence (Tripp, 2002). Nearly a century ago in the aftermath of the first World War, the modern borders of Iraq were defined by the Sykes-Picot agreement, which partitioned the fallen Ottoman

empire into various spheres of influence awarded to colonial European powers. Iraq ultimately fell under British control. This has led to a stock argument that, similar to Africa, Iraq and other Middle Eastern nation-states are an “artificial” creation with arbitrary borders and lacking in national identities. It is hypothesized that within these borders, groups show allegiance far more to ethnic or religiously affiliated groups than their national governments (Bali, 2016). This has indeed been the case at times in Iraq but the country has also shown periods of unity and nationalism.

Some scholars like Zubaida (2012) reject the argument that Sykes-Picot set Iraq on a path of internal destruction. Zubaida claims, all nation-states are historical creations in one way or another and “artificial” borders do not necessarily precipitate conflict. Davis (2005) emphasizes that following the Ottoman collapse, Iraq actually emerged with a strong nationalist movement based on cultural pluralism. According to Davis, In the years just after Sykes-Picot, Iraqis became unified against imperial rule. They revolted against the British installed monarchy and their support of what was known as a “Pan-Arabist” state. Pan-Arabism in the Iraq context meant a buttressing of Sunni Arab power, a troublesome notion for such a diverse state.

Many Iraqis rejected the sectarianism of British rule and began a movement based on cultural pluralism and Iraqi nationalism. “Sunni and Shiite Arabs joined forces, praying in each other’s mosques and celebrating together their respective holidays. Iraqi Muslims went to the houses of Christians and Jews... and insisted that they join protest marches and demonstrations because they were Iraqi citizens like everyone else” (p. 231). The unity of the diverse Iraqi population was exemplified in the broad political coalition that developed, encompassing all ethnic groups, including, Iraq’s Sunni and Shiite Arabs, Kurds, Jews, Christians, Armenians, and other minorities. This nationalist movement sought to expel the idea that Iraq was a place only

for Sunni Muslims, an idea supported by the British installed Hashemite government. Under opposition to colonial powers, much of Iraq became united.

Once the British eventually relinquished control of the country, Iraq experienced a period characterized by cultural pluralism and the growth of a nascent civil society. Although Iraqi Nationalists were still in political competition with moderate Pan-Arabists, measures to promote sectarian divides were largely ineffective. “Efforts by sectarian elements during the electoral campaign-- particularly those from the Baath Party, which was first formed in Iraq in 1952-- to separate Arab nationalists from Iraqi nationalists were unsuccessful, and the electoral coalition retained its cohesion” (Davis, 2005, p. 233). The leadership of Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim who lead the country following the overthrow of the British until his execution by the Baath party, helped usher in national unity across ethno-religious differences. Unfortunately, the death of Qasim gave way to a highly oppressive and authoritarian government under the Baathist regime.

Rise of the Baath Party and Sectarian Divide

The Baath party officially came to power in early 1963 ushering in a decades long campaign to strengthen the influence of Sunni Muslims in Iraq and diminish all other ethnic and religious groups. The early brutality of the regime’s National Guard militia and fast efforts to roll back many of the social reforms of Qasim and other nationalists, foreshadowed the extensive human rights abuses that would characterize the Baathist rule for decades to come. Central to the Baathist strategies for control was an effort to unravel national unity and enflame ethnic tensions to their advantage.

The quick rise of Saddam Hussein among Baathists brought on worsening violence and destructive policies. Hussein gained notoriety in 1968 following the overthrow of the party’s

original leadership. Looking to gain strength, the new Baath party gathered and hung a group of Iraqi Jews in Liberation Square in downtown Baghdad to intimidate the populace (Davis, 2005). Violence became exacerbated when Hussein began executing opposition party members and eventually ousted his colleague Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr to seize the presidency in 1979. The reign of Saddam Hussein would set in motion years of conflict in Iraq resulting from his divisive strategies of control and efforts at the re-emergence of a Pan-Arab state. The rising cost of oil at the time, giving way to unprecedented economic growth, also contributed to the popularity of the Baath party, cementing Hussein's leadership of the country.

In the first decade of Saddam Hussein's rule, he would reignite the Pan-Arab agenda to legitimize and support the power of his Sunni Muslim government. The ethnic divisions he inflamed during his presidency resulted in deeply discriminatory practices and a re-shaping of Iraqi society along ethno-religious lines. These divisive tactics have continued to have disastrous effects on the country and arguably provoked much of the violence seen in recent years.

Over the course of several decades, the Baath party initiated multiple attempts to justify and spread Sunni Muslim rule. Just a year after Hussein took power, his government would attempt to invade neighboring Shia dominant Iran, which proved to be a calamitous decision resulting in international embarrassment for Iraq. Subsequently, in the late 1980s, the Baath party would initiate what was known as the "Al Anfal campaign" to eradicate the large population of Kurds residing in the country's northern provinces. In what has been deemed genocide by several countries including Sweden, Norway, South Korea, and the United Kingdom, upwards of 180,000 Kurds were systematically killed with over a million displaced. Under Hussein's leadership, national security forces also forcibly relocated many of Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities such as the Yazidis, Chabaks, and Assyrians.

Hussein's actions were intended to "Arabize" the country. The process of "Arabization" aimed to eliminate ethno-religious groups beyond Sunni Muslims, either through killing as seen with the Kurds, or displacement, largely occurring in the Shia dominant areas of eastern/southern Iraq and among the non-Muslim minorities in western Iraq. Eventually, the genocide of the Kurds ended after National Guard forces had wiped out nearly 90% of Kurdish villages (Johns, ND), but Arabization policies largely continued until Hussein's death in 2003. This philosophy of rule would thrive in the Baath regime, ingraining discrimination and hatred among the population for generations to come.

Another lasting effect of the Baath party's attempts at "Arabization" and ensuing discrimination included inculcating party doctrine into the education of children. From the 1970s onwards, teachers, like all civil servants, were obliged to join the political party and were subjected to ideological tests and surveillance (De Santisteban, 2005). Schools were used, particularly the teaching of history, geography, and literature, to impose Baathist ideas. Watenpaugh et al. (2003) note that even universities became complicit in the motives of the Baath regime stating, "a pattern of systematic abuses and corruption of higher education and scholarly research by the state apparatus" became the norm.

Possibly the most striking effort at the Baath party's influence on education is the "Project for the Rewriting of History" (*Mashru Iadat Kitabat al Tarikh*) lead directly by Saddam Hussein rather than a typical political appointee or education ministry official. The project intended to "reclaim Iraqi heritage from colonial interpretation [but] actually sought to expunge any record of the strides made by Iraqi nationalists toward civil society before Baathist rule" (Davis, 2003). Davis claims that Saddam not only began the process of rewriting history but also began to believe the rhetoric, "namely, that he was a semi-deity foreordained to lead a Pan-Arab

state, and that Iraq's military was invincible" (Davis, 2005, p. 235). Under the Baath regime, the state began to take charge of culture, by "fiercely repressing alternative sources and instituting its own cultural centers, media, and institutions" (Zubaida, 2012, p. 335). Violent Baathist ideas began to permeate society, once again helping to fuel sectarian divisions within the country.

Significant effort was launched by Saddam Hussein and the Baath party to inflame ethno-religious tensions throughout their decades long rule, but violence did not end with the removal of Hussein and the Baathists from power in April 2003. According to the Iraqi scholar, Eric Davis (2005):

"A widespread insurgency was planned by the Baathist regime prior to its overthrow. Knowing that the Iraqi army would be unable to confront U.S. military superiority, Saddam's regime organized a resistance movement that would fight American forces after the invasion. Large caches of arms and money were planted throughout Iraq, especially in the rural towns and villages of the Sunni-Arab Triangle. These resources were to be used in escalating attacks on American military units intended to sap the U.S. forces' resolve and oust them from Iraq" (p. 236).

The desperate actions of the Baathists left a violent legacy in Iraq. Many Iraqis, even those opposed to Saddam Hussein and the Baath party, joined in arms with former Baath loyalists to unite against foreign intervention and the presence of the U.S. military. The anti-colonial philosophy quickly spread beyond Iraq and foreign radicals from neighboring countries crossed porous borders to join the cause. These anti-imperialists turned Islamist militants helped to widen the insurgency's social and political base (Davis, 2005) and created a foundation for the more recent rise of the Islamic State (IS). Adding to the insurgency was the economic pains Iraqi citizens felt after the national army was dissolved by the U.S. in 2003. Suddenly unemployed, many sold arms to insurgents or joined the fight as "guns for hire" in order to feed their families. As a result, the violence of the Baath regime and Saddam Hussein gave way to additional

violence as foreign influence and economic instability created a tinderbox for more warfare--circumstances radical jihad groups would soon capitalize upon.

Iraqi history as far back as the country's inception in the early 20th century has been plagued by sectarian violence. Although some periods, particularly that of Qasim's rule, displayed a move towards cultural pluralism and a rise in civil society, Iraq has more often than not been manipulated by political elites who have attempted to inflame ethno-religious tensions to their advantage. Iraq is a highly diverse country with significant ethnic and religious diversity, yet although many of these peoples lived in harmony for centuries, politics and power have corrupted relative peace. The divisive strategies of the Baath party and social, economic, and political instability pervasive during the occupation of U.S. forces, ultimately created ripe ground for radicalization of the country's youth and growth of jihadist groups that would inevitably instigate one of the most violent conflicts in recent memory.

Emergence of the Islamic State

The development of jihadist groups in Iraq resulted from a number of factors linked to the country's own instability, international intervention, and spillover from other regional conflicts. For years, Iraq had endured divisive politics that encouraged extreme violence towards segments of the population. The internal turmoil continued to mount as the government grew increasingly brutal and authoritarian. Eventually, international threats, including the invasion and occupation by U.S. forces, would further destabilize the country. For the better part of a decade, U.S. forces deployed harsh tactics on local combatants and failed to support a swift and effective democratic transition. Finally, the Arab Spring and subsequent war in Syria left the entire region vulnerable to increased violence, atrocity, and economic, social, and political fragility.

This series of events created rich circumstances for non-state actors to mobilize new communities of ideas, particularly those steeped in Salafism and Jihadism. The delicate context allowed for the proliferation of terror networks in Iraq and beyond. The following elaborates on how these circumstances developed over the last twenty years to nurture the establishment of the Islamic State. Key events such as the U.S. occupation and war in Syria are discussed.

The U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Iraq

By the early 2000s, the Baathist party in Iraq faced an unpredictable future. Internally, sectarian politics were wearing on a population that had endured the severe brutality of Saddam Hussein's secret police and sprawling military apparatus for decades. Externally, international threats began bearing down on the country as the U.S. "War on Terror" was picking up momentum. In Spring of 2003, the U.S. military invaded Iraq on the disputed grounds the country harbored weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). For several weeks, major combat operations were undertaken until most of the Iraqi army had been subdued and Saddam Hussein forced to flee.

In the months and years immediately following the fall of Saddam Hussein and the Baathist regime, an insurgency began to grow inadvertently fostered by U.S. policy in Iraq. The U.S. government had established the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), a transitional government intended to provide a bridge between the Baathists and an anticipated democratically elected civilian government. The CPA was led primarily by Paul Bremer, an American diplomat who assumed the title of "President of Iraq" until the CPA was dissolved in 2004. The actions of the CPA and subsequent occupation by U.S. military forces would help to build a violent insurgency in Iraq, aimed at rejecting foreign interference, that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Islamic State and growth of other jihadist groups. According to Davis

(2005), “Ironically, many decisions taken by the former Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) after the invasion in March 2003 helped strengthen the insurgency and inadvertently created serious obstacles to a democratic transition” (p. 237).

After the CPA assumed control, it quickly became apparent that the U.S. government did not have a well thought-out plan for a post-Baathist Iraq, exacerbating anti-American and anti-Western sentiment. The U.S. military failed to prevent looting in Baghdad or protect cultural sites such as the National Library or Iraq Museum (Davis, 2005). While it failed to protect the homes and heritage of many Iraqis, U.S. forces did secure the Republican Palace and Ministry of Oil, a message interpreted negatively by many locals, who would later support the insurgency. In addition, the CPA quickly dissolved the Iraqi army, which put nearly 400,000 troops out of work immediately (Davis, 2005). With few options for livelihood support in the devastated economy, many former troops turned to soldiering for insurgent groups to support themselves or their families. The infusion of these soldiers into the insurgency, alongside the many Iraqis that came to feel alienated by foreign interference, offered a robust population for jihadists to recruit from.

The CPA was dissolved in 2004 once a new Iraqi-led government could be established. However, although U.S. diplomats and military personnel no longer held administrative authority, U.S. forces continued to occupy the country. In some ways the military offered stability during the transition but in many ways, it was a problematic presence that would only increase local animosity. One of the most alarming situations to occur during the U.S. occupation were the atrocious human rights abuses occurring at Abu Ghraib prison just west of Baghdad. Largely condemned by the international community on the basis of the Geneva Convention, the events at Abu Ghraib constituted gross violations of human dignity and created outrage among many Iraqi citizens. Beyond prison abuses, the U.S. has been accused of indiscriminate killings

of civilians and use of incendiary weapons such as napalm and other gases (Khawaja, 2012). Local reactions to the military presence grew increasingly harsh.

Over the course of the eight-year occupation from 2003-2011, the actions of the U.S. typically served to buttress the insurgency rather than subdue it. The invasion of the country, which was often seen by locals as unnecessary foreign intervention, a lack of attention to establishing economic and social stability during the transition, and the atrocious actions of the U.S. military all assisted in building a growing movement to dismiss the newly installed government, reject Western interference, and join up with insurgent groups that would eventually turn jihadist.

Leading much of the insurgency was a group known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). In the years just after Saddam Hussein was removed from power and U.S. forces took up occupation of the country, AQI was established. Led by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, it was partially a response to the U.S. occupation and would later branch into a splinter group known as the Islamic State (IS). According to Stern (2016), "Ironically, it was the invasion of Iraq that pushed Zarqawi into an alliance with bin Laden and led to al-Qaeda's enduring presence in Iraq, and ultimately, the rise of ISIL" (p. 193). At AQI's inception in 2004, the country was in disarray with foreigners, Westerners no less, controlling the government. Lawlessness was prevalent in many parts of the country, including the border regions that allowed foreign militants to pour in. By the early 2000s, the circumstances in Iraq were ripe for the development of terror groups and AQI capitalized on the instability. Soon after, the Islamic State would split from AQI to pursue a similar ideology but with different tactics. By 2013, the Islamic State would emerge as a formidable force in the region, even against the advanced national militaries of the U.S., Iraq, and Syria.

Regional Conflict and Spillover from Syria

Contributing to the instability in Iraq that helped form the Islamic State was the effects of the Arab Spring and conflict in Syria. Beginning in 2011, the Middle East and North Africa experienced successive protests that ultimately toppled governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and left several other countries, in particular Syria, as fragile states. Although Iraq escaped the Arab Spring with a government intact and limited protests, the instability and violence in Syria would inevitably spill into the country, creating circumstances that the founders of the Islamic State and other terror groups would come to exploit.

The conflict in Syria initially began with non-sectarian protests against the government, but overtime transformed into ethno-religious warfare in many parts of the country that helped nurture the establishment of jihadist/terrorist groups. In 2011, a group of teenage boys had joined growing Arab Spring protests in the country -- protests intended to remove corrupt authoritarian leadership. A swift and violence crack down on the boys and other protesters quickly unraveled into a wide-scale civil war between the government, led by Bashar al Assad, and a rebel group called the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which aimed to overthrow Assad and install democratic reforms. While initially the conflict was non-sectarian in nature, divisions began to form among the population since government leaders, including the president, were of the minority Alawi (Shia) sect, while most of Syria's population were of Sunni Muslim decent. Over the course of Syria's civil war, several paramilitary and jihadist groups developed. The paramilitary groups remained non-sectarian in nature with a goal of fighting corruption and overthrowing the country's leadership. At the same time, jihadist groups developed and played on ethno-religious

divides to recruit a robust following. The civil war in Syria had become conflicts within conflicts with multiple layers of complexity.

One of the primary jihadist groups to come to power in Syria was Jabhat al-Nusra (hereby al-Nusra), founded in 2012. al-Nusra shared al-Qaeda's ideology and swore allegiance to AQI. Once the Islamic State broke off from AQI in 2013, it attempted to partner with al-Nusra to concentrate power across both Iraq and Syria. Al-Nusra ultimately declined at the behest of AQI, which in many ways had become a competing force to the Islamic State in Iraq. Nonetheless, IS was able to garner support from many young Syrians disenchanted by their country's conflict and ready to embrace the paradigm shift that jihadist ideology provided. According to al-Tamimi (2014), "the vast majority of ISIS fighters in the rank and file, however, are Syrian nationals" (p. 6). The infusion of Syrians into IS helped grow the group immensely and was geographically advantageous for the swath of land IS wanted to start their caliphate, or in other words a state of Islam that would transcend current national borders.

By June 2014, the Islamic State was able to capture the city of Mosul in Iraq with over a million inhabitants. Just two months later IS captured the Syrian city of Raqqa to establish the beginnings of their caliphate. Much of this land in northeastern Syria and western Iraq was largely lawless due to the multiple factions fighting in Syria and poor governance and rebuilding in Iraq. The fragility of Iraq and Syria inevitably gave way to a vast portion of land being consumed by the Islamic State and governed by its radical ideologies.

The Islamic State and New Strategies of Jihadism

In just a few short years, the Islamic State grew to be one of the most widespread and successful jihadist networks in the world. It garnered massive media attention and governed a plot of land larger than some countries. The group had vast influence and a growing international

following. Yet, the Islamic State was just one among many with regards to jihadist networks. So how did they achieve such success? What set them apart from other groups, and what were the nuances of their ideology and way of life? Answering these questions helps to explain the experiences of many victims living under IS rule.

Born out of al-Qaeda, the Islamic State maintained similar ideology to its predecessor and other Salafi jihadist ideologues. These groups promoted the establishment of a caliphate ruled by Sharia (Islamic) law, rejected the West, and largely did not recognize national governments or borders. Like all Salafi jihadist ideology, the Islamic State promoted strict acceptance of sacred texts in their literal form, which included absolute adherence to Sharia law, extreme forms of violence as punishment, and execution of all non-believers of the Islamic faith. What differed between IS and other groups was, for the most part, not its ideology, but rather its pace of growth and strategies of organization and governance. Kousary (2014) notes: “IS is an offshoot of al-Qaeda and its falling out with al-Qaeda was not because of ideological but tactical difference” (p. 1).

The rise of IS was rapid and its geographic growth unprecedented in recent history. Such success can be attributed, in part, to capitalizing on circumstances of instability in the region, but is also a result of its efforts towards fiscal sustainability and public outreach. The efforts of IS to organize a massive state apparatus quickly and efficiently differed from other jihadist groups, which often focused more on legitimizing their ideology and conducting attacks on the West. Prioritizing development and financing of the state over punishment of the West was a key factor in the rise of the Islamic State’s prominence over several years. According to Luay al-Khatteeb, ISIS's financial needs go beyond underwriting terror, as "it's a huge financial package to support

8 million people—which is now the size of the population living in territories under ISIS control” (Di Giovanni, 2014).

In regard to fiscal sustainability, the Islamic State developed multiple avenues of economic growth to support their caliphate. Whereas the global al-Qaeda network largely depended on contributions and in many ways “fundraised” for their cause, IS managed to sustain their organization through key economic channels, mostly criminal in nature. According to Stern (2016):

“ISIL quickly became the richest terrorist organization in the world, worth an estimated \$2 billion by mid-2014. Unlike al-Qaeda and many other terrorist groups, which rely on external sources of funding... much of ISIL’s revenue was generated internally from taxes on local populations, looting, the sale of antiquities, and oil smuggling. By June 2015, U.S. officials ranked extortion as ISIL’s primary source of income” (p. 195).

The Islamic State took over resource rich areas in Iraq and Syria. By 2014, IS was earning around a million dollars per day from oil production alone (Stern, 2016). Largely sold on the black market, the revenue provided a boost to the developing state. Similarly, the Taliban in Afghanistan took control of the opium trade to build financial support; however, in global trade oil produces significantly greater revenue than opium. IS also diversified their economic activity to include human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, and sales of antiquities.

The abduction and ransoming of western hostages, including journalists, aid workers, and military or defense contractors, produced several million dollars in revenue for the Islamic State. Although exact numbers cannot be accounted for, David Cohen, U.S. Treasury’s Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence from 2011-2015, estimates IS raised around \$20 million through ransoms (Stern, 2016). Although countries like the U.S. and U.K. have

policies forbidding negotiating with terrorists, many European countries do not. The same is true for private individuals.

Aside from ransoming western hostages, IS ransomed local women they had trafficked as sex slaves. By August of 2014, IS had advanced into a region of western Iraq, largely inhabited by the Yazidi religious minority. They conducted a genocidal campaign against the Yazidis, killing men and older women, and abducting thousands of younger women into a sex trafficking operation. The girls were sold or given primarily to IS militants, who could sell them back to their Yazidi families and communities if they desired. It is estimated that up to 7,000 girls and women were taken (Stern, 2016).

In accordance with the Islamic State's interpretation of Sharia law, premarital sex with Yazidis was not forbidden unlike premarital sex with Muslim women, which is strictly prohibited. Yazidis were considered slaves and of a class similar to livestock or cattle. "One of ISIL's essays on sexual slavery, 'The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour,' explains that polytheist and pagan women can and should be enslaved" (Stern, 2016, p. 195). Along with many of these women, prepubescent children were also abducted to work as domestic laborers, as leverage for IS fighters to keep Yazidi women obedient, and sometimes as sex slaves as well. It is unclear how much revenue IS was able to produce from the human trafficking of Yazidis but it became a well-known feature of IS rule.

Lastly, IS looted and sold cultural artifacts from the areas they invaded. It is estimated that IS controlled more than one-third of Iraq's 12,000 historical sites selling artifacts dating from 9,000 B.C. to 1,000 A.D. through intermediaries to collectors and dealers around the world. It is possible that IS was able to raise hundreds of millions of dollars through the sales of antiquities. In a Newsweek article, Di Giovanni notes, "Ancient objects may be the most

lucrative things to sell, but ISIS is not picky; it is also happy to sell stolen wheat, barley, rice, livestock—even people” (Di Giovanni, 2014).

The Islamic State proved quite successful in finding diverse and lucrative avenues for wealth. Through illegal sales of oil, ancient artifacts, and a human trafficking trade, among other sources of funding, IS gained the financial resources it needed to advance its state. However, financing the state was only one critical piece of successful governance. IS also needed to build widespread support.

To subdue resistance in communities overtaken by the Islamic State, a comprehensive effort was launched to win over the hearts and minds of locals, or at least lull them into complacency. They accomplished this by establishing robust social services, political institutions, a pervasive media campaign, and a sense of law and order that had long been absent since the U.S. occupation began. The Islamic State quickly set-up a sprawling state apparatus that could give attention to local needs despite the ongoing wars in Iraq and Syria.

In some ways, the Islamic State was creating a welfare state and increasing local dependence on their generosity and resources. According to Al-Tamimi (2014), one of the many outreach efforts included distribution of bread. “Whenever ISIS has moved to expel rival factions from a locality... ISIS administrators have subsequently lowered the price of bread to co-opt any locals who display sympathies for a rival faction” (p. 11). IS even went so far as to distribute ration cards for food and other supplies. Health care, education, and other social services were established and made available to the public as well.

The Islamic State was able to establish strong political and social institutions through the immense income of their criminal activities. Revenue from such things as illegal oil sales and ransoms were fueling the development of the state and creation of critical institutions for any

society. IS established various ministries to care for health, economic development, media, and more. The group was an intricately designed, robust, and well-funded system of governance for much of their rule. Although services like health and economic development are incredibly valuable for social stability, IS gave extra attention to one ministry, which was seen as critical for their long-term survival: education.

To ensure the longevity of the Islamic State, the group invested significant efforts to build an education system that could indoctrinate a new generation of children into their ideology. IS set up schools and trained teachers. Curricula were developed and textbooks printed. Before IS was overthrown, Stern (2016) noted, “ISIL is clearly hoping to stay in the communities it occupies. For example, it indoctrinates children and their teachers by crafting extremist curricula intended to secure its popularity among the next generation of citizens” (p. 199). In general, IS curricula consisted of rote memorization of the Quran (Islam’s holy book) and math or science exercises that typically offered violent scenarios where students needed to apply standard logic. Unlike some radical groups, IS even encouraged girls to go to school, though in segregated spaces after primary school (age 10-11) (Tamimi, 2014).

The social and political institutions IS set up helped to create a sense of order during a turbulent time. For years, U.S. occupation and the ongoing insurgency left Iraq unstable and the arrival of IS, in many ways, established a new way forward. As such, even some Iraqis who did not share the ideology espoused by the Islamic State came to support their governance. For others, although they condemned the violence of IS and jihadist views, they became complacent to their rule. IS was providing jobs, income, and food security. A worker in Raqqa described life under IS, “as a way of life, people got used to it. It is not our life, all the violence and fighting and death, but they got rid of the tyranny of the Arab rulers” (Stern, 2016, p. 199).

For many, the Islamic State was creating an ideal paradise, with strong public services and social welfare guided by Sharia law. For others, it was a break from the violence and corruption of previous governments in Iraq. With ample funding, the Islamic State was able to rapidly establish a sprawling caliphate and maintain relative order over the vast population it ruled. Many were active supporters, others were complacent, and an immense number of Iraqis remained opposed to IS but were helpless to change their circumstances under the violent regime.

The Islamic State came to prominence in 2013 and maintained a growing caliphate until coalition forces were able to claim victory in 2017 and retake the full territory by 2018. Their methods of control and governance truly set them apart from other jihadist groups. Whereas al-Qaeda and other followers of Salafism/Jihadism developed out of a distaste for the West with a primary goal of attacking non-Muslim societies, the Islamic State centered goals on establishing a caliphate that could grow to dominate the rest of the world.

The Islamic State's Genocide of the Yazidis

The Yazidi ethno-religious minority in Iraq has often been a target of violence. For centuries, successive Islamic regimes have persecuted the Yazidis for their religious practices and non-adherence to Islam. The Yazidi religion has commonly been misinterpreted with a view among Muslims that they are “devil-worshippers.” According to a report submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council (2016), “Misunderstandings of Yazidism have underpinned cycles of persecution of this community... There has been widespread discrimination against the Yazidis throughout modern history” (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, p. 6). Consequently, as far back as the Ottoman rule, multiple campaigns to

convert or eliminate Yazidis were conducted, which involved forced conversions, massacres, enslavement, and destruction of communities (Yazda, 2016).

The Yazidis continued to be marginalized and persecuted in the modern state of Iraq and suffered under the Baathist regime's efforts of Arabization as well as endured sporadic attacks during the U.S. occupation and Iraqi insurgency. During the process of Arabization, many Yazidis were forcibly removed from their lands, which were later given to Arabs, and consolidated in "collectives" or towns along Sinjar mountain. When the U.S. occupation began, many Yazidis were employed by U.S. troops as translators and cultural consultants. Their affiliation with the West soon brought ire from local Muslims and those opposed to foreign intervention. Attacks became exceedingly common. Although the Yazidis have experienced a long history of discrimination and violence, none compared to the destruction and genocidal campaign of the Islamic State in 2014.

The Yazidi homeland, known as Sinjar (Shingal in Kurdish), also has strategic geographic importance. It lies in the northwest of Iraq along the Syrian border and is comprised of various Arabic and Kurdish speaking localities. As such, when the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was established as a semi-autonomous zone and declared a safe haven shortly after brutal attacks by Saddam Hussein in the 1990s, a land dispute for Sinjar between the Iraqi national government in Baghdad and the KRI government in Erbil ensued. The land ultimately fell under formal control of the government in Baghdad but the KRI took on de facto governance of the region. The land would remain disputed for years but relatively peaceful with the issue playing out at administrative levels of government rather than military action. In 2014, the land also came to be significant to the Islamic State. IS had overtaken the cities of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq, including many of the surrounding areas. To unite their caliphate geographically,

the entire region of Sinjar (located between the cities) would need to be taken and Yazidi inhabitants eradicated.

Consequently, in the early morning hours of August 3, 2014, IS fighters invaded Sinjar. Arriving from both Syria and Mosul, they seized towns and villages throughout the region in a coordinated attack. Previously, the Kurdish military, known as the “Peshmerga”, had patrolled and protected the area. However, all units were mysteriously called back to the Kurdish capital of Erbil just before IS arrived. Human rights advocates have called for an inquiry into the troop withdrawal that allowed thousands of Yazidis to be massacred; however, one is yet to occur. According to a report by the U.N. Human Rights Council (2016), “As they moved into Sinjar, ISIS fighters faced little or no resistance. Many of the Peshmerga reportedly withdrew in the face of the ISIS advance, leaving much of the Sinjar region defenceless” (p. 6). The withdrawal of military troops has left a legacy of distrust among many Yazidis towards Muslim Kurds.

With an absence of a well-armed opposing force such as the Peshmerga, IS militants focused on capturing Yazidis and progressing their genocidal campaign. Blocking roads throughout the region and systematically advancing on towns and villages, IS soon had full control of Sinjar. Since the initial attacks took place in the early hours of the morning while most people were asleep, news of the attacks spread slowly and many Yazidis were not able to escape. Some of the ones who did flee largely left for Mount Sinjar, a small mountain resembling a high plateau that had historically provided protection during the centuries that Yazidis inhabited the land. It is estimated that 40,000-50,000 people found refuge on the mountain with no other avenues of escape (Webb, 2018). “A humanitarian crisis quickly unfolded as ISIS trapped tens of thousands of Yazidi men, women, and children in temperatures rising above 50 degrees Celsius and prevented them from accessing water, food or medical care” (U.N. Human Rights Council,

2016, p. 7). Hundreds of Yazidis would die besieged on Mount Sinjar until allies in Syria were able to open a corridor from Syria to the mountain, allowing thousands to walk to safety.

Meanwhile, ISIS fighters captured and killed Yazidis trapped in their communities. Within 72 hours of the initial attacks, almost all Yazidi towns and villages had been emptied (U.N. Human Rights Council, 2016). Some of the population had been able to flee to neighboring Kurdistan but many were rounded up by IS militants and either killed and left in mass graves or sent to consolidation centers to await their fate.

The Islamic State quickly began implementing a systematic genocidal campaign. Men were separated from women and children. In some instances, the men were executed immediately, often in front of other Yazidi prisoners to subdue any unrest. Other men were sent to labor camps, never to be heard from again. Women and children were taken to temporary holding sites, often an event hall or school. Most older women were eventually killed, while younger women were forced to be domestic laborers or sex slaves for IS militants. The fate of children was diverse. Some were adopted by Muslim families and forced to convert to Islam, some were trained to be IS militants, and many were held with their enslaved mothers as leverage to ensure their obedience. According to the U.N. Human Rights Council (2016):

“In the process of capture and transfer, hundreds of ISIS fighters operating across a vast territory in the Sinjar region systematically separated Yazidis into three distinct groups: men and boys aged approximately 12 and above; women and children; and later, drawn from the pool of male children who had remained with the women, boys aged seven and above. Each group suffered distinct and systematic violations, sanctioned under ISIS’s ideological framework (p. 8).”

The attacks on August 3rd were devastating for the Yazidi community. Over 400,000 people were displaced (Yazda, 2016). An estimated 12,000 people were killed (Yazda, 2017) and approximately 7,000 women and girls abducted into slavery (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2019). The

violence against the Yazidi community has been declared genocide by multiple country governments and the United Nations. “In 2016, the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry determined that ISIS’ violence against the Yazidis constitutes a case of genocide, defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (Webb, 2018, p. 9). The U.S. government officially asserted the same judgment, concurring with the European parliament and the Council of Europe’s reviews.

Current Status of the Yazidi Community in Iraq

The Yazidi community continues to struggle in the aftermath of genocide and displacement. Most remain in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), several thousand are still missing, and many former captives of the Islamic State have returned in dire need of psychological counseling and other support. Over the five years since IS invaded Sinjar, little progress has been made in helping this community to rebuild.

Within a year of the initial attacks by the Islamic State, the northern part of Sinjar was liberated by the coalition forces. By 2017, much of the southern region had been liberated, and by 2018 the last vestiges of IS control had been declared eliminated. However, liberation of the Yazidi homeland has unfortunately not elicited a mass return of the population. Security concerns, land mines, demolished infrastructure, and a political blockade of resources have limited the hopes of many to return. Consequently, hundreds of thousands continue to languish in camps located in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) (UNHABITAT, 2015).

The few who have returned to Sinjar have little access to humanitarian support and vital resources due to a political blockade maintained by the KRI. The region of Sinjar remains disputed land between the Kurds in the north of the country and government in Baghdad. Even among the Kurds, disputes over which Kurdish political party should have the greatest influence

has grown problematic. Consequently, a blockade has been put in place to halt any re-development that could lead to a mass return of Yazidis before control is established by one party or another. Additionally, several militias and paramilitary groups now patrol the area and engage in a constant power struggle.

The majority of Yazidis continue to reside in camps set-up in the KRI and largely administered with the support of international aid agencies. Approximately 300,000 people continue to live in these temporary settings, more than five years after the crisis began (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2019). They are exposed to extreme weather conditions, deteriorating infrastructure, and lessening support from aid agencies for healthcare, education, and other vital social services. The camp population continues to be large, signaling no sign of return or rebuilding of the Yazidi homeland.

Perhaps one of the most significant impacts on the Yazidis has been the psychological toll of the conflict. Over the course of the last few years, thousands of Yazidis who were held captive by IS have returned. The women endured consistent rape, while children were often forced to watch them be harmed or brainwashed into becoming violent militants. Additionally, much of the Yazidi community is still recovering from the events of August 3, 2014. Without proper attention to psychological rehabilitation, it will be challenging for much of the community to move forward. “Waning prospects for a way out have led to a sharp increase in suicides, PTSD, behaviour disorders, and acute depression. There is a high incidence of suicidal ideation among Yazidis in the 15-25 age group. Young people are losing hope for their future.” (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2019).

Chapter 4 Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore how exposure to crisis, trauma, and displacement impacted the educational experiences of war-affected children in Iraq. The study examined how the crisis brought on by the Islamic State in 2014 affected how children navigate and perceive education as well as the impact it was having on their lives. Particularly, the study focused on the Yazidi population, who had been abducted, abused, and enslaved by the Islamic State. For many children, this included prolonged periods of harm and violent atrocity at a pervasive scale. Their experiences of enduring severe physical and psychological abuse, returning to families who continued to be displaced from their homeland, and navigating complex cultural and institutional barriers, is documented in this study. The nuances of their experiences help to shed light on better methods to serve war-affected children and improve the educational landscape brought on by crisis.

In this chapter I discuss the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. I begin by providing my rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and why ultimately, I merged ethnography and case study methods to pursue my research questions. In the following sections I elaborate on the details of data collection and analysis, including site-specific information, participant details, instruments, coding, etc. I conclude with a reflection on the challenges and ethics of research in humanitarian contexts and active conflict zones.

Research Design and Methodology

Data on children in conflict zones has been woefully neglected over the past several decades. In recent years, agencies like UN OCHA or UNHCR have done well to begin to document the numbers of displaced children and assess their needs quantitatively. However, deeper analysis of the lived experiences of children and how the current humanitarian system

serves real needs and desires is yet to flourish. As such, quantitative methods reign supreme in conflict and humanitarian contexts with much room for qualitative studies to add to the existing knowledge base.

One might ask, why have aid agencies largely pursued a quantitative approach rather than embracing the richness of qualitative studies? There are several reasons-- some related to the historic dominance of the quantitative paradigm but more so the significant logistical challenges that exist in humanitarian/conflict-affected contexts. Survey exercises and quantitative analysis have proven to fit more easily within circumstances constrained by participants' mobility and ongoing tracking difficulties typical of refugees and IDPs. Additionally, an outlook of prolonged safety and stability in these areas is generally impossible to come by. Consequently, researchers cannot be guaranteed personal security if they need to stay an extensive period of time to conduct qualitative research. Lastly, there is a question of efficiency in conflict-affected contexts that cannot be ignored. In places where aid decisions often mean life or death and resources are limited, research tends to focus on maximizing the number of people assisted rather than increasing the quality of that assistance.

Understanding the constraints of aid agencies, I set out to offer a deeper analysis of their work, particularly in the field of education. My intent was to interrogate the experiences of children, documenting both their long term and everyday struggles, to begin to evaluate how current support structures, including humanitarian infrastructure, family relationships, and cultural foundations/ideas, are truly serving their needs. I wanted to "get beyond initial conceptions and generate or revise conceptual frameworks" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 4). Qualitative research offered the most suitable avenue for achieving this. Since my aim was to take a naturalistic approach, where data would be rich and holistic, with strong potential for revealing

complexity through “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973), I selected qualitative inquiry as my research paradigm. Within the vast field of qualitative work, I employed an ethnographic approach, resulting in what I deem to be an ethnographic case study. These methods served to illuminate the lived reality of traumatized and conflict-affected children in Iraq and ultimately opened new avenues of inquiry for better serving their needs.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of displaced, traumatized, and conflict-affected children in Iraq?
2. How does exposure to conflict and trauma impact the educational experiences of displaced children and vice versa?
3. How do traumatized and conflict-affected children engage with aid infrastructure, particularly education?

Ethnographic Research

Rooted in anthropology, ethnography has the aim of examining shared patterns within a culture-sharing group. Ethnographers study the meaning of behaviors and interactions to produce an insider account that presents symbolism, meaning, and power within the community examined. As Hammersley states, “The task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices, of the people in these settings. The aim is to ‘get inside’ the way each group of people sees the world” (Reeves et al., 2008, p. 512). As a method, ethnography is an incredibly insightful tool to cast attention on trends and issues that may otherwise go unnoticed by outsiders -- particularly those who wield power or dominance over the group being studied.

Taking this into account, I utilized an ethnographic approach to studying conflict-affected children in Iraq. *I want to make certain to express that this study is not an ethnography but rather a case study that used ethnographic principles.* Agar (1980) considers ethnography both a process and outcome of research. It is a way of studying a group as well as a product of research.

Wolcott (1990) echoes this idea, claiming “ethnographic” can be a descriptor even when research fails to meet the rigors of ethnography. As such, it is entirely possible to develop a study that is ethnographic in nature but ultimately the final product may not be characterized by the term “ethnography.” This has been the case for my research in Iraq.

There are several reasons why I do not categorize this study fully as an ethnography. According to Wolcott (1990), an essential feature to developing a good ethnography is an aim to make sense of human behavior and cultural patterning. However, the aim of my research extended beyond a commitment to cultural understanding. My intent was to examine culture, but to also situate it within the humanitarian and educational spheres where I typically operate as an aid professional. I wanted to understand the “cultural landscape” of conflict-affected children in Iraq and reflect on how culture and current aid structures interact to either succeed or fail them. In effect, my intent was to develop an emic perspective, then synthesize the data and filter it through my own etic point of view. This is a common procedure across ethnographies; however, my research differed in the final outcome. Instead of a resulting “cultural interpretation” (Creswell, 2013) consistent with ethnography, I endeavored to examine how the culture of the Iraqi children in my study interacted with the status quo and standard operating procedures of humanitarian aid. Consequently, I did not view my research as singularly ethnography but rather a case study with an ethnographic orientation.

Additionally, logistical issues would have barred me from pursuing ethnography in its traditional conceptualization. To truly achieve an ethnographic study, a researcher must participate in “extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day to day lives of the people” (Creswell, 2013, p. 90). Although this study took place over the course of 1.5 years in Iraq, a time period usually

sufficient to meet ethnographic standards, I conducted the research while directing an NGO and spending significant portions of my time engaging with foreign aid professionals. I was fully immersed in the culture of humanitarian aid and less so the culture of the children I sought to study. These are often very different worlds.

Lastly, I struggled with the idea that I could take a fully “emic” perspective, defined as taking on the participants’ views or gaining an insider perspective (Creswell, 2013). Spindler and Spindler (1987) note the most important feature of ethnography is just that, to gain the “native’s point of view” (p. 20). However, given that an important defining characteristic of my study population was the trauma that they had endured, it was challenging to understand the world through their eyes or predict cultural patterning without having a “trauma lens.” This lens, in my opinion, could only be gained through experience. Although a good ethnographer can learn about and interpret culture even when they do not share the same histories or experiences, I argue that “learning” trauma is different than learning the typical norms and values that define culture. Trauma is a way of seeing the world that is not learned or cognitive but rather embodied and affective.

My view on this is similar to Rosaldo’s (1993) conclusions about how his positionality limited him from fully understanding a phenomenon. After the accidental death of his wife while researching the headhunting practices of the Ilongot tribe, Rosaldo began to understand headhunting differently. Following his wife’s death, he was able to see it as a response to intense grief and rage following the loss of a close relative. “Rosaldo’s revised insights into this initially impenetrable cultural practice reveal how personal history... can affect positioning as a researcher and subsequent repositioning” (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 117). Rosaldo (1993) notes, “nothing in my own experience equipped me even to imagine the anger possible in bereavement

until after Michelle Rosaldo's death... Only then was I in a position to grasp the force of what Ilongots had repeatedly told me" (p. 19). Consequently, in this study I do not claim to be an absolute insider. Due to their trauma, the way that participants saw the world was not one I would be able to grasp given my own life history and positionality. Nonetheless, I utilized methods of ethnographic inquiry and sought to understand and interpret the cultural landscape of the children in my study to the greatest extent possible.

Although there were many reasons why I did not pursue pure ethnographic research, I still found several advantages to utilizing an ethnographic approach. Foremost, the research questions were well suited to this method. Seeking to understand the lived experiences of children and how they engaged with the world around them are typical goals of ethnography. During fieldwork, I set out to first explore the world conflict-affected children had to navigate, including opportunities and barriers, and the cultural attributes contributing to their present circumstances. As a western aid professional, it was essential to immerse myself in their world in order to understand life from their perspectives. Principles of ethnography, such as cultural interpretation and reflexivity, helped to guide data collection and analysis. Essentially, I utilized an ethnographic approach to define the culture and lived realities of children in my study. Subsequently, I analyzed that data within the realm of humanitarian aid and educational infrastructure to contemplate better ways of addressing child needs.

Aside from seeking to understand the culture that children were navigating, I also found an ethnographic approach to be the most ethical research method for the circumstances. Initially, I pondered a more straight forward case study, one that would not require the exhausting reflexivity and documentation of an ethnography. However, it rapidly became apparent that working with conflict-affected children often entailed sensitizing the study to their trauma and

having a constant awareness of how my research may produce further harm. The stakes were simply too high to jeopardize these children by selecting a more “invasive” method, one that may have involved surveys, questionnaires, or a research structure unhealthy for children ill-prepared for it. Some might argue that ethnography is actually the most “invasive” research method, I very well might be one of them. However, its invasiveness typically goes unnoticed by the participant(s), which can be especially useful when working with traumatized populations.

In my decision to utilize ethnographic methods, I turn to Harry Wolcott, who has consistently addressed the questions, what makes a good ethnography and what makes a study ethnographic?. Wolcott contends that the process of ethnography is a way of seeing and interpreting the world. Ethnographic methods have the task of creating cultural abstraction and engaging in “interpretation” over “explanation” (Wolcott, 1990). I saw this approach as vital to my research and took comfort in Wolcott’s claim that ethnography can be “maddeningly ambiguous” (p.48). I adhered to his ideas that taking an “ethnographic approach” is not an abandonment of the method, but rather a way to enrich other forms of research.

Defining “Culture” in Ethnography

At the core of this study, is an attempt to establish a cultural interpretation of the world in which traumatized and conflict-affected children live. Consistent with all ethnographic research, interrogating how culture is conceptualized by the study population was central to both data collection and analysis. The process of defining culture should go beyond recounting events to render a theory of cultural behavior (Wolcott, 1990). It moves past descriptiveness and recognizes that “facts cannot speak for themselves” (p. 49). With this perspective, I conducted my ethnographic study. The following elaborates on how I considered the term “culture” and what elements I ultimately sought out to examine.

When creating a “cultural portrait” (Creswell, 2013), a researcher might consider looking for patterns expressed through language, ideas, beliefs, material activities, or how they behave in a group. Essentially, in defining “culture” (I expressly use little “c” here), a researcher is looking for patterns of social organization. To begin to document the world where my research participants lived, I found useful the following guidance on culture.

Wolcott (1987) claims, as an abstract concept, anthropologists infer culture from people’s talk, behavior and tools. “To commit to ethnography traditionally has meant to commit to looking at, and attempting to make sense of, human social behavior in terms of cultural patterning” (Wolcott, 1990, p. 48). Goodenough (1976) similarly offers the following:

“The culture of any society is made up of the concepts, beliefs, and principles of action and organization that an ethnographer has found could be attributed successfully to the members of that society in the context of his dealings with them” (p.5)

In ethnography, defining culture is a multi-step process that goes beyond the simple illustration of events and actions. Advancing this notion, Wolcott (1990) warns against “descriptiveness-gone-awry” (p. 49). In following ethnographic principles, a researcher must seek to make meaning of culture and not merely describe it. Getting to a theory of “cultural behavior” is the objective.

According to the work of Anderson-Levitt (2006), culture as meaning-making has several key aspects: interpretation of experience, understanding meaningful behaviors, constructing a commonality of ideas, and discerning dynamics of power. Regarding the interpretation of experience, there may be explicit or tacit knowledge conveyed. In the case of Iraqi children, one might state explicitly the importance of helping out the family. More tacitly, a researcher might garner cultural beliefs on what is considered “boys’ work” or “girls’ work” simply through

observation. Cultural values and attitudes can be garnered through the interpretation of experience, particularly when a researcher is attentive to both obvious and obscure information.

Understanding meaningful behaviors (e.g. how children act formally with some adults but not others, or switching from Kurdish to Arabic language in certain circumstances) and discerning dynamics of power (e.g. how wearing military fatigues might bring respect to boys), help to construct a commonality of ideas or “shared culture” among research participants. Each participant brings similar but often varied ideas and beliefs about culture. As an ethnographer, the goal is to present the accumulation of these ideas to construct a “cultural interpretation.” Rosaldo (1993) states, “All ethnographers begin -and end- their work with a focus on...patterns and traits that lumped together, constitute a people’s culture” (p.21). In seeking to understand these patterns in my research, I relied on my own discerning eye as well as reflected on the data with my local translator who provided additional insights and clarity.

In the course of this research, I sought to interpret and document the shared-culture of traumatized conflict-affected children in Iraq. I kept field notes on our conversations, their interactions with family and community, and how they cared for themselves among an array of other daily and weekly actions. I used social constructivism as my interpretive framework, questioning how participants created subjective meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Since meanings are negotiated socially and historically (Creswell, 2009), I documented how children formed ideas through their interactions with others. Through ethnographic methods and a social constructivist framework, I examined the shared culture of my research participants, which I later used to contemplate how the international education and aid system might better serve them.

Case Study Research

Ethnography may have provided the guideposts for how to gather and analyze data, but ultimately the product of my research is a case study. When determining a methodology, I considered my intent and desired result in order to select an appropriate method and approach. After reviewing the goals for my study, I decided that a case study was most suitable to answer the research questions. According to Creswell (2013):

“The entire culture-sharing group in ethnography may be considered a case, but the intent in ethnography is to determine how the culture works rather than to either develop an in-depth understanding of a single case or explore an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (p.97)

Since the goals of my research entailed exploring how education impacted the lived realities of conflict-affected children in Iraq, I viewed the work as a case study - a piece of research that would illuminate the stories of a particular group of children living in a single space and time. I adhered to Creswell’s (2013) idea that a case could illustrate a particular issue. The goal of understanding how the culture works was essential to understand children’s lived realities; however, ultimately, I sought to compare how those lived realities fit with current education and aid architecture. As such, this study followed most closely the parameters of an exploratory case study.

In seeking to define the methods for my case study research, I looked to three seminal figures in the field: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. According to Yin (1994), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Yin’s views on case study research provided insights on how phenomenon and environment are intricately connected; however, I found my ideas more aligned with that of Merriam and Stake.

Adopting a social constructivist view, both Merriam and Stake take a deeper more interpretivist approach. Yazan (2015) does a critical review of these scholars and finds Merriam and Stake aligned in notions of meaning-making, layered reality, and knowledge construction. Yazan promotes their commitment to understanding “multiple interpretations of reality” and sums up a central point to both scholars’ research perspectives: “Therefore, espousing this philosophical assumption, the primary interest of qualitative researchers is to understand the meaning or knowledge constructed by people... what really intrigues qualitative researchers is the way people make sense of their world and their experiences” (p. 137).

Given the ethnographic orientation of my study, Merriam and Stake offered fitting guidance to the data I had hoped to uncover and analyze. Particularly, I adhered to Merriam’s definition of a case study as, “an intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). I also incorporated Stake’s perspective that qualitative case studies be “holistic, empirical, interpretive, and empathic” (Yazan, 2015, p. 139). Yazan offers an explanation of these terms:

“Holistic means that researchers should consider the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its contexts which is similar to the inseparable link Yin alludes to while defining the case. Empirical means that researchers base the study on their observations in the field. Interpretive means that researchers rest upon their intuition and see research basically as a researcher- subject interaction, which is compatible with the constructivist epistemology. Lastly, empathic means that researchers reflect the vicarious experiences of the subjects in an emic perspective” (2015, p. 139).

Equipped with guidance from Merriam and Stake, I developed the parameters of my case study. Consistent with the most widely accepted definitions of case studies (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014), I established a “bounded system” including the physical location and research timeframe of my study as an IDP camp located in northwestern

Iraq from 2016-2017. I examined multiple cases of children within the camp to explore how trauma, conflict, and displacement were affecting their educational experiences. Consequently, this study can be characterized as an “instrumental case” (Stake, 1995) since it seeks to understand a specific issue. The intent was not to focus on the individuals involved but rather the insights they provided and possibilities for generalization (White et al., 2009). Moreover, I consider it to be an “exploratory case study” (Yin, 2003) since the goal of the study is to develop “pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry” (p. 6). During the analysis of the data, I identified issues within each case (child) and looked for common themes that transcended individual cases (Yin, 2009).

Ethnographic Case Study

Case studies may utilize methods across various fields of research, including ethnography. The methods of case study research can vary according to the type of study being pursued. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) claim, “Case study is a decision about what is to be studied, not a methodological decision” (p. 255). Similarly, Stake (2005) notes that case study is defined by “interest in the individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used” (p. 443).

Case studies in education are commonly conducted so that specific issues can be identified and explained, and researchers often draw upon other disciplines such as anthropology or sociology for techniques of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Borrowing from the anthropological tradition, “ethnographic case study” designs have been increasingly popular over the years due to key links between the disciplines of ethnography and case study. Such links include, observation in a natural setting, garnering thick descriptions, and quite frequently, an exploratory nature. Willis suggests that case studies and ethnographies are actually more similar than dissimilar, “researchers do not seek to find universals in their case studies. They seek,

instead, a full, rich understanding of the context they are studying” (White et al., 2009, p. 21). As such, instead of considering the dichotomy of ethnography and case study research, I viewed the similarities and how one may enrich or expand the other.

In undertaking my study in Iraq, I used ethnographic methods within the bounds of a case study design. The parameters of my case study included studying conflict-affected children located in an IDP camp in Iraq. The ultimate goal of my research was to understand how culture and the lived experiences of children interacted with the humanitarian aid system, particularly in terms of education and vice versa. These parameters defined the case study, while ethnographic principles of cultural interpretation and holistic inquiry guided how data was collected and analyzed. The result is a presentation of children’s stories, their realities, and how the case of an IDP camp in Iraq might shed greater light on working with traumatized and conflict-affected children.

Research Setting

This study took place in a humanitarian camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq. For anonymity purposes the camp has been given the pseudonym, “al Ain.” The camp is located between the major cities of Duhok and Mosul and has been one of the primary sites to support displaced families since the onset of the crisis with the Islamic State (IS) in 2014.

The camp houses all Yazidi families, who were forced to flee from their homeland in western Iraq. Most of the arrivals came in the immediate aftermath of the invasion by IS militants over five years ago. Escaping only with their lives, inhabitants typically arrived with just the clothes they wore and small bags of belongings. In the ensuing years, other families continued to trickle in as well as individuals who were released or escaped from IS captivity in Mosul and Syria. Many of the inhabitants witnessed severe violence as they fled their homeland

while other inhabitants have been traumatized by their enslavement by the Islamic State. Initially the camp was set up to hold up to 24,000 people but quickly exceeded that number as the conflict unfolded and rapidly expanded. Consequently, temporary make-shift communities began to surround the camp when official housing was unavailable. Exact numbers of people living within or around the camp and utilizing services are challenging to pinpoint but definitely exceed what the camp was built to serve. As such, staffing, resources, and security have been limited.

The camp was set up by the United Nations and is serviced by multiple local and international NGOs as well as government ministries. Although international NGOs and the UN provide the largest monetary support, all activities are overseen and approved by the local and regional governments (located in Duhok and Erbil, Iraq respectively). Services in the camp include a health clinic, a mobile health unit, schools (primary and secondary), child friendly spaces, sports fields, water and sanitation facilities, a legal clinic, a cultural center, and administrative offices for receiving food aid, tent support, etc.

Geographically, the camp is located adjacent to a small town which goes by the pseudonym “al Ain town” (from which the camp takes its name). Al Ain town is a rare Yazidi community found outside of their ancestral homeland of Sinjar; however, its population is linguistically and culturally different from the Yazidis who fled from there. This has not created significant tensions but the camp and town communities maintain limited interactions and consider their identities to be separate in many ways. Al Ain town is located around ten miles south of the large city of Duhok. Duhok is the capital of the governorate (province) and has a population of around 350,000 people, mostly Muslim. Al Ain town is found along the road that connects Duhok to Mosul. Mosul, a city of around a million people, was overtaken by IS just

prior to this study and became the capital of the Islamic State in Iraq. Al Ain camp is approximately 45 miles from Mosul.

The setting of this research study was unique. It was a Yazidi IDP camp located in a Muslim dominated region, just a short distance from the radical militants who had displaced, enslaved, and killed much of the Yazidi community. At night, bombs could still be heard exploding in the distance and smoke from the aftermath could be seen during the day. The camp, like many humanitarian camps, was underserviced for the vast population it served. Initially, set up as a temporary solution to the displacement problems in Iraq, it had remained functional for two years by the time this study was conducted and continues to be open now more than five years on from the crisis. Overtime, Al Ain camp has started to become a small city where inhabitants have set up shops, markets, and began to rebuild their way of life.

Research Participants

The research participants included five displaced Yazidi children in Iraq, who had been abducted by the Islamic State. All participants were living within the al Ain IDP camp or adjacent overflow areas with either immediate or extended family members. Participants experienced varied levels of trauma during their captivity by IS but found themselves navigating similar circumstances in their new community of al Ain. Children voluntarily opted into the study with permission from adult caretakers.

Participant selection

Following in the tradition of most qualitative studies, my sample research population was purposive rather than random (Miles et al., 2014). Seeking to investigate issues in-depth, I sought out participants who could give rich accounts and offered insights on particular experiences. Since the research is a case study, participants were selected within the parameters

of a bounded system that was defined as: traumatized, displaced, conflict-affected children living within the al Ain IDP camp in Iraq.

Initially, the research began with a convenience sample. Since the NGO that I directed had a program to work with Yazidi children who had been abducted by the Islamic State, I began working with the counselors to see who might be a strong initial subject. After determining and gaining consent from two participants, both living in al Ain camp, I used “snowball” sampling for additional recruits. The two participants recommended other children, who then recommended more, to ultimately result in a sample of eleven total participants. I spent time and collected data from all these participants but ultimately selected only five to include in the study. These five were selected for having the most robust data and offering rich insightful descriptions. I chose to eliminate six of the participants because in some cases, the children seemed to become distressed about their current life circumstances and I did not want to enhance that burden with a research study or risk further harm; in other cases, the data was dry, un-insightful, and offered little to reflect upon, even after multiple iterations of coding and review.

In each case, I met with children several times over the course of 1.5 years. Initial meetings were used solely to develop rapport. In many instances we played games, went on walks, took photos with my camera, or ate lunch and dinner together. After a positive relationship was established (usually within a month), we began having conversations that reflected on their past experiences, current life, and future hopes. Detailed descriptions of the selected children are as follows (for confidentiality purposes, I use pseudonyms only):

Khansa:

Khansa is an 11 year old girl who was abducted by the Islamic State and held for over two years in captivity. Khansa is from the southern region of Sinjar, an area subject to some of

the worst atrocities of the conflict. When IS invaded, nine of her brothers and sisters were able to escape, while Khansa, her parents, and three of her siblings were captured. Khansa is the only one of those taken to have escaped IS and now lives with her siblings (age range: 15-24) in al Ain camp. Her parents, two sisters (ages 15 and 6), and brother (age 8) remain missing.

Khansa showed incredible resilience despite her trauma. Upon commencing the study there were no indications of sexual abuse by IS but she did describe the challenges of being taken from her family, the unpredictability of her circumstances, living in a constant state of fear, and bearing witness to ongoing violence. Despite this, Khansa quickly adapted to camp life and became social with other children. The early days were challenging for her but within weeks, she was well-integrated into the camp and her personality could be characterized as “sweet”, “somewhat timid”, and “happy most of the time” (personal communication, December 5, 2016).

Prior to the conflict, Khansa describes her life as happy. She played with livestock, helped her mother bake daily bread, attended school, and spent time with her siblings. Khansa’s family had an average income in her native Sinjar, where her parents were farmers.

Nadia:

Nadia is a 12 year old girl from the northern region of Sinjar. Her native town, Khanasor, is located close to the Syrian border and far from the escape routes many Yazidis used when IS arrived. She is the oldest of four children in her family, including two brothers (ages 9 and 4) and a sister (age 2). Nadia’s entire family was abducted by IS. Her father was eventually separated from them but the children and mother managed to stay together. They were held in captivity for 1.5 years until extended family members were able to purchase the mother and children back. The family now resides in al Ain camp. Nadia’s father remains missing.

Nadia had extreme difficulty adjusting to life after IS. Following her return, there was no indication of sexual abuse but Nadia bore severe scars from her time in captivity. She had several burns on her body, which she said was the result of IS militants putting out cigarettes on her arms and legs for entertainment. She also had a buildup of scar tissue in her abdomen that she claimed must have come from episodes when militants would kick her. Upon release, Nadia spent several weeks in her tent, unwilling to go outside. She did not attend school, go to the child friendly spaces, or communicate much with family. Originally, Nadia was not a candidate for this study due to her condition but after some time she began to make progress. She particularly wanted to spend time with me, an outsider to her community for whom she could confide. After long discussions with Nadia, her counselors, and family I agreed to include her in the study and gained her and her caretakers' consent.

Nadia characterizes her life prior to the conflict as bucolic and quiet. Nadia spent significant time tending to sheep and livestock. She attended school but did not find much interest in it. Her parents were young and she enjoyed spending time with them.

Salam:

Salam is a 12-year-old boy from the south side of Sinjar. He is the second of four children (ages 15, 12, 7, 5). When IS invaded Salam's town, his father and older brother were immediately taken away by the militants. Salam, his mother, and two younger siblings were then abducted by the Islamic State and held in captivity for 1.5 years. Upon release they lived in various informal settlements including partially built homes and abandoned infrastructure. Eventually Salam and his family were granted a tent in al Ain camp.

Salam showed few signs of distress after his experience with the Islamic State. This may have been because Salam was now the eldest boy in a family without a father or older brother.

His new role meant he needed to show leadership and strength rather than despair and trauma. As such, Salam rarely spoke of his own experiences but rather preferred to describe what his family or others endured or were enduring.

Salam claims he was a quiet child in Sinjar. He played mostly with his sister and enjoyed going to school. As the second child and young at the time, Salam did not have many household duties in Sinjar. Now in the absence of his father and older brother, Salam works to take care of his family by helping out around the house and accompanying his mother on errands and throughout the camp.

Talal:

Talal is a 16-year-old boy from the north side of Sinjar. He comes from a small town at the base of Sinjar mountain. His town was held under siege for two days until IS militants began rounding up villagers. Talal's father was taken while visiting a local religious leader for help. The leader was a Muslim Mukhtar but had always been close to the family-- Talal considered him to be like an uncle. Ultimately, it was the religious leader who turned Talal's father over to IS and informed on the family members still in the village. Talal, his mother, brother (age 13), and sister (age 8) were all abducted by IS and held for almost two years until they escaped.

Talal experienced severe beatings by Islamic State militants and a constant campaign of intimidation. He was also sent to a military camp for Yazidi boys where he was taught tactics of severe violence and endured attempts at indoctrination. Despite this, Talal has shown immense resilience. He quickly adapted to camp life after he escaped, gained reentry into school and opened up a shop to help his family.

Talal's life in Sinjar was spent going to school and working alongside his father, who maintained a local store. As the oldest boy in the family, Talal had many duties and not much

time to play. Talal has a large stature and athletic build that made him popular among local boys. His dream has always been to become a doctor.

Abid:

Abid is a 16-year-old boy from the north side of Sinjar. He has a large family that consists of a father, mother, two older brothers (ages 24 and 21), a younger brother (12), and a younger sister (10). Abid and his father were abducted by IS militants while the rest of the family was either able to escape or already living far from the conflict. Abid escaped IS after just a few days and made his way to Syria before being reunited with family in al Ain camp. Abid's father remains missing. Although Abid resides in al Ain camp with his mother and siblings, he spends significant portions of time in the retaken areas of Sinjar working as a child soldier.

Abid exhibits collective trauma. Having only spent a few days in captivity, he did not endure the prolonged physical and psychological abuse that other children did. Instead, he mourns with his community and constantly reflects on how the conflict has upended his life.

Prior to the conflict, Abid claims to have had a normal life even though his family was not as wealthy as others. He lived in a home constructed from mud and clay rather than cement, which was a symbol of affluence in Sinjar. His older brothers worked on farms in the eastern areas of Kurdistan and helped by sending money home.

Ethical Protocols

Ethics is a pivotal part of good research. As Miles et al. (2014) state, "We cannot focus only on the quality of the knowledge we are producing, as if its truth were all that counts. We must also consider the potential 'wrongness' of our actions...in relation to the people whose lives we are studying" (p. 56). In research, there are many potential ethical pitfalls. Creswell (2013) notes that these issues surface particularly during the period of data collection. Given the

sensitivity of my study and high potential risks to participants, I continually assessed when ethics may come into question and referred to expert sources when applicable (counselors, protection specialists, fellow researchers, etc.)

Several research protocols were put into place to protect the child participants and ensure further harm would not result from the study. The first set of protections were defined in advance of arriving in Iraq and documented in the IRB approved protocol submitted to the IRB committee at the University of Maryland. Such procedures ensured gaining informed consent, using pseudonyms for participants and maintaining confidentiality of data, as well as assessing and addressing all possible threats to children.

Extra steps were taken once in country and additional contextual information shed light on potential new risks. Given the severity of the children's trauma, counselors were consulted before meeting with participants, occasionally throughout the process, and whenever possible, following the close of data collection. A translator with a background in social work, particularly dealing with trauma, was recruited and present for all interactions with the children and their families. Lastly, participants were never directly asked about their traumatic experiences. This information came up organically over the course of time we spent together. I developed a strong rapport with children, which allowed them to feel comfortable sharing sensitive information with me. I believe that as an outsider, I offered an opportunity for sharing that would not be accompanied by cultural judgement characteristic of the community. Once rapport was established, children took advantage of speaking freely given my outsider status.

As a researcher, I tried to ensure the utmost levels of confidentiality but was fully prepared to report any instances of self-harm, harm to others, or imminent threats of violence. Fortunately, this did not occur during the course of my study. In the aftermath of data collection,

I did seek out resources and support for many of the children. I refrained from this during the study since I did not want to influence how children were navigating and seeking to understand their circumstances. The resources and support were non life-saving and as such, waiting to provide this assistance did no harm to children.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2013), forms of qualitative data can be grouped into four basic categories of information, including: observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual material. For this research study, I heavily utilized observations and interviews, which was accompanied by some light document analysis. Consistent with ethnographic research, I served as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.

Observations

Over the course of 1.5 years, observations of participants were recorded. These observations were a central data collection technique and buttressed the ethnographic orientation of the study. During the 18-month period, I spent the initial 9-10 months seeing participants weekly since I was posted full time in Iraq. For the last 8 months, I was sporadically taken away on other international work assignments and visited participants only every several weeks. Nonetheless, I gathered significant notes of observations that became critical to the findings of the study.

In characterizing the degree to which I observed, I refer to the typology created by Creswell (2013). I was both a “complete participant” observer as well as a “nonparticipant” observer. As a complete participant, I engaged with the people in my study and noted actions, reactions, and other relevant information. As a nonparticipant, I took field notes from afar and

was often barely noticed. Examples of this included when I would see the children walking home from school or playing with friends. Observational notes were both descriptive and reflective.

Interviews

Interviews formed the greatest source of data for this research. Following on Fetterman's (1989) notion that the interview is the most important data collection tool for ethnographers, I concentrated my efforts on gathering data through discussions with children. However, given the ethnographic nature of the study and sensitivity to child trauma, interviews were almost always informal rather than formal. Instead of following a predefined list of questions with each child, I had conversations with them where I tried to steer their responses toward providing data to answer the research questions.

Prior to establishing the interview protocol, I reviewed literature on different methods for interviewing subjects. Sorrell and Redmond (1995) note that although "research literature provides general information on how to conduct an interview... there is little detailed guidance for the researcher in tailoring the interview format to a specific type of qualitative methodology" (p. 1117). I found this particularly true in the field of ethnographic research where methods of collection and analysis can be especially ambiguous.

In finalizing my interview approach, I referred to Spradley's (1979) claim that the ethnographic interview is a "series of friendly conversations." Yet, although the conversation is informal, it should still have a clear and specific research agenda. I agreed with Sorrell and Redmond (1995) who contend, "The interviewer uses this informal approach to discover categories of meanings in a culture" (p. 1119). As I shaped my interview procedures, I allowed flexibility for the discussions to go in any number of directions but kept clear aims in mind.

In practice, the interviews were “free-flowing” (Sorrell and Redmond, 1995). I typically developed “buckets” of information I wanted to gather from participants but had no explicit avenue to get there (such as a series of questions that would build upon the next). Some of the buckets included educational access and success, ideas on gender, navigating trauma, and community interactions. Having significant time to spend with the children allowed me to take this rather broad approach.

Document Analysis

Document analysis comprised a small portion of data collection. Due to logistical limitations, key documents were challenging to find. Additionally, as an ethnographic case study, time was most effectively spent observing and interviewing children.

Some of the documents reviewed were curriculum and textbook materials used by schools under the control of the Islamic State. These materials were generated by IS when a new Ministry of Education was established by their leadership to support the caliphate. Since travel in IS controlled areas was extremely dangerous, I relied on materials that were left behind once the region was liberated. Unfortunately, due to the effects of conflict, most materials were damaged or made unavailable to me by security forces. Other documents included school homework assignments, advertisements for child soldiers, and administrative documents from schools and child centers in the camps.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is a multi-stage process that consists of preparing and organizing the data, reducing data into themes through an iterative process of coding, and creating a final representation of data and conclusions (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, data analysis entails making meaning of the data, or rather coming to conclusions or making

assertions about the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, data analysis is not always straight-forward and may differ by research approach.

In ethnographic research, data analysis can appear somewhat ambiguous. Agar and Hobbs (1982) state, “data such as ethnographic interviews constitutes the most common way of discovering a culture, but there is a dearth of formal methods for going from a text to the cultural presuppositions that underlie it” (p. 1). In the years since Agar and Hobbs made this claim, much depth has been added to the field of ethnographic analysis (Wolcott, 1990; Spindler, 2014; Spradley, 2016; Van Maanen; 2006); however, methods remain flexible and interpretation can be challenging. Wolcott (1990) emphasizes the challenges of ethnographic analysis when he describes attempting to make sense of human behavior:

“Culture is an abstraction based on the ethnographer’s observations of actual behavior, coupled with insights and explanations of the order ‘That is our way,’ ‘We’ve always done it like that,’ or, ‘If that happened, I guess my reaction would be...’ Attempting to pull all that together into some comprehensive (although not necessarily logical-- human behavior isn’t all that logical) blueprint or archetype, or ‘code,’ or set of implicit ‘rules’ or ‘standards’ for behavior-- is the assignment ethnographers define for themselves” (p. 50)

Data analysis for this research study was ongoing throughout data collection and the research process. This allowed me to condense large amounts of data into more manageable formats. However, like many ethnographic researchers, I experienced what Agar and Hobbs (1982) called “the plaintive cry of the budding ethnographer... what do I do with all this stuff?”

To answer that question, I spent some time trying to let categories emerge from the data. In the initial stages, this was immensely challenging because interviews with children had taken a number of different directions. Sometimes, it was not clear until multiple iterations of reflections if an interview or observation even offered relevant data. Agar and Hobbs (1982)

note, “the more the informal interview is controlled by the informant, the less the ethnographer knows how to deal with it” (p. 2).

Fortunately, themes began to emerge. After several read throughs of the transcripts and field notes, I compiled an initial list of codes (see Table 4.1). Some codes were dropped while others were added over the course of data collection and analysis. When a particular code began to have a robust amount of information, subcodes were often added to maintain structure and organization of the data.

I utilized “constant comparative analysis” to develop the system of coding. According to Merriam (1998) in this method, “The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data...These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared” (p. 159). The comparisons assist in interpreting the data and linking different data sources. “Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated” (p. 159).

Eventually, I garnered what Agar and Hobbs (1982) call “thematic coherence” or the presence of themes that figure importantly again and again. “Thematic coherence reflects a long standing anthropological concern with the move from the detailed analysis of ethnographic material to broader statements of individual and cultural pattern” (p. 7). These broad themes ultimately framed the findings of the research.

Table 4.1: Research Codes

Code	Sub-code
Physical trauma	Before captivity
	After captivity

Psychological trauma	Before captivity
	After captivity
Gender expectations	Girls
	Boys
Support services	INGOs/NGOs
	Government
	Local
	Other
Radicalization/Indoctrination	Schooling
	Exposure to violence
	Socializing
	Other
Home Life	Before Captivity
	After Captivity
Future expectations	Career
	Life
Education - barriers	Access
	Gender
	Income
Education -	Gender

discrimination	Captivity
Education - exams	N/A
Education - corporal punishment	N/A
Education - quality	N/A
Education - language	N/A
Education - other	N/A
Work	N/A
Cultural expectations	N/A
Loss/mourning	N/A
Success stories	N/A
Negative feelings	N/A
Family	N/A
Friends	N/A
Security/ Safety	N/A

During the later stages of analysis, I grouped codes into broad categories. Although I mainly used ethnographic methods, I borrowed on features of grounded theory when finalizing the findings. I condensed the initial codes into additional, more comprehensive categories or what is known as “axial coding” in grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). Axial coding is intended to create a theoretical model. In my study it ultimately produced the “theory of cultural behavior” sought in ethnography.

Role of the Interpreter in Data Collection and Analysis

The interpretation of data is an important topic in the field of research methods. Miles et al. (2014) refer to this as checking the “validity” of the information you have collected. The ability to understand and convey a phenomenon accurately is the goal of all good data scientists. Thus, if a researcher must rely on an interpreter when constrained by language barriers, how data is filtered through that person is an important concern.

In this research study, an interpreter was hired to assist with data collection and analysis. The interpreter was told to be as literal as possible as she translated between the participant and myself. If I needed clarity I would stop the conversation to request a better understanding (this sometimes required the interpreter to convey cultural knowledge or other background to help inform me). The interpreter was hired because she was young and had strong rapport with children, she was experienced in clinical psychology and trauma care, and she spoke both Arabic and Kurdish (including several dialects of each).

To ensure data was passing from participants to me without extreme filtering by the interpreter, I did two things: utilized member checks and sourced opinions from colleagues known as “intersubjective consensus” (Miles et al., 2014). Member checks can greatly improve the accuracy of data and as such, I frequently asked the interpreter to have participants clarify their statements and confirm or deny some of the conclusions I was developing. Since this information was still being filtered through the interpreter, I often used what is known as “intersubjective consensus” meaning I reviewed many conclusions at length with colleagues in Iraq to test the plausibility of my findings. Through member checks and intersubjective consensus, data in this research study was strengthened and deemed reliable.

Theoretical Framework

In an earlier chapter, I offered a review of literature in the fields of education and child protection in emergencies. However, these fields are largely practitioner driven and offer scant theoretical knowledge. As such, the literature review serves to provide background on the fields affected by this research but lacks clear theoretical underpinnings.

Consequently, in this section, I provide the primary theoretical framework I used for the study. I elaborate on how I viewed the research, both going into data collection and during the process of analysis. The theoretical framework I used assisted in giving some direction to the study and guidance on how to interpret findings.

Initially, in determining a theoretical framework I struggled with the question, *how much should theory guide ethnographic research?* Since much of the goal of ethnography is to develop an insider perspective or emic point of view, I considered how a theoretical framework might draw me too much towards an etic, or outsider's perspective. Merriam (1998) defines a theoretical framework as the “the orientation or stance that you bring to your study... This disciplinary orientation is the lens through which you view the world” (p. 45). Maxwell (2005) defines it as, “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p.39). Since ethnographers typically subscribe to explaining a phenomenon from the “native’s point of view” (Creswell, 2013), I found it challenging to undertake my study with extensive underlying assumptions.

Merriam (1998) offered reassuring advice, stating that “A theoretical framework underlies all research” (p. 48). She refers to Schwandt (1993) who believed that “atheoretical” research is impossible. Our positionality, including our ideas and presuppositions, always affect research even when bracketed and understood.

Given the inductive nature of qualitative research, especially ethnography, it can be confusing the extent to which theory drives research versus when research establishes theory. Wilson and Chaddha (2009) offer an interesting discussion of this debate. They claim that few would argue that theory does not belong in ethnographic research, a more valid discussion is rather *how is theory used?* Some scholars like Wacquant (2004) have argued that theory should be largely deductive while others like Anderson (1999) argue a more inductive conception of ethnographic research. He states “an ethnographer should ‘be familiar with and edified by the various sociological theories at hand’ and use his sociological knowledge, in combination with local knowledge gained from the site, to formulate the analytical questions that guide the research” (Wilson and Chaddha, 2009, p. 13). Ultimately, I agreed with the scholar Mitchell Duneire (1999) whose view was characterized by Wilson and Chaddha as utilizing theory both deductively and inductively. According to their work, “There are studies that start out with a deductive theory and end up generating theoretical arguments in an inductive process that integrates old theoretically derived ideas with new and unanticipated theoretical arguments based on data uncovered in the field research” (p. 4).

In pursuing this study, I largely referred to Uri Bronfenbrenner’s theory of Ecological Systems. For application of the theory, I constructed my field work to look for broad contours of each of the systems discussed by Bronfenbrenner. However, as the data was collected, I took an approach that allowed for themes to develop organically and not be constrained by theoretical guidelines. Lastly during data analysis, I referred back to Bronfenbrenner’s theory to reflect on if and how my data might fit into his systems of analysis. The constant balancing of inductive versus deductive reasoning characterized my study.

Ecological Systems Theory

In 1979, Uri Bronfenbrenner published “The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.” His research offered insights on the fundamental processes that guide human development. “Unlike most other recent statements of theory, Bronfenbrenner’s book did not focus on a specific domain... Instead, [he] focused on a scientific approach emphasizing the interrelationship of different processes and their contextual variation” (Darling, 2007, p. 203). It was a novel approach at the time. An examination of how humans are influenced by their environment (and vice versa) introduced a new avenue for social research.

Bronfenbrenner’s insightful work to look at an “ecology” of human development has inspired numerous other scholars and added complexity and richness to the ways researchers view phenomena. In the decades since he introduced this work, the theory has evolved but the original premise remains - context matters. As I began my research to examine displaced conflict-affected children, I borrowed heavily on Bronfenbrenner’s theory to inform my work.

What is Ecological Systems Theory?

According to Darling (2007), ecological systems theory is presented as “a theory of human development in which everything is seen as interrelated and our knowledge of development is bounded by context, culture, and history” (p. 204). Rosa and Tudge (2013) claim the theory “specifies that researchers should study the settings in which a developing individual spends time and the relations with others in the same setting” (p. 244). According to Bronfenbrenner’s own definition:

“The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts within which the settings are embedded” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.21).

Across interpretations of Bronfenbrenner's theory is an emphasis on studying contextual factors that influence how a person acts, reacts, and interacts with the world around them. The theory promotes a constant examination of both the human subject(s) and context to understand the "ecology" of the phenomenon, or rather the "adjustment between organism and environment" (Rosa and Tudge, 2013, p. 246).

Ecological systems theory is often described using concentric circles that represent different spheres of influence. These spheres of influence are viewed as separate but interacting systems by Bronfenbrenner. The systems include: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. It is important to emphasize both the interconnected nature of each system but also the interconnectedness of the human subject(s) and various systems. It is exactly this interconnectedness that forms the ecology that the theory seeks. A description of each system is as follows:

Microsystem: Defined as the most proximal setting, the microsystem includes the most immediate contact points for the human subject. The factors that comprise this setting are considered by Bronfenbrenner to be the most constitutive and impactful elements (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples of factors within this system include home, school, family, and close interpersonal relationships.

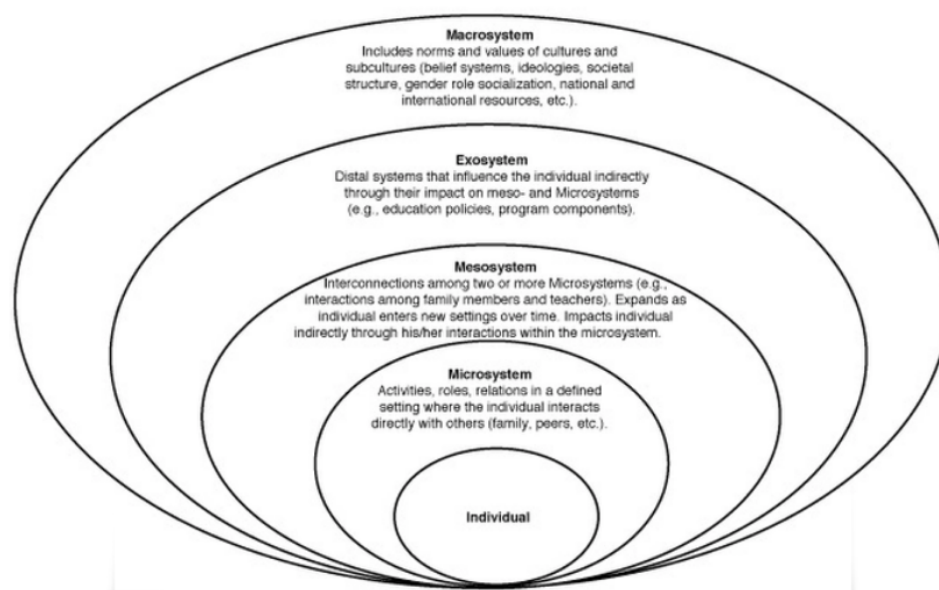
Mesosystem: The mesosystem can be characterized as a system of microsystems. It contains the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the human subject (Härkönen, 2001). According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), "The developmental characteristics of the mesosystem are similar to those of the microsystem, the main difference being that rather than the activities and interpersonal roles and relations occurring within a single

microsystem, they occur across settings” (p. 246). Examples may include the relationship between teachers and parents, the link between neighborhood organizations and schools, etc.

Exosystem: In this system, the human subject does not experience the direct impact of factors such as in the micro and meso systems. In fact, the developing person of interest is not situated in it at all, and therefore, does not participate actively in it, but does experience its effects (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The exosystem represents more indirect influences rather than direct relationships. Examples include social policies, industry and development, media, and politics.

Macrosystem: The Macrosystem has the most broad and indirect influence on the human subject. It involves the larger cultural context in which the human resides and represents the cultural community that helps them to develop identity. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the hallmark of the macrosystem is its overarching belief system or ideology. The macrosystem includes cultural norms, ideologies, societal belief systems, or social codes.

Figure 4.1: Bronfenbrenner’s Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977)



Utilizing these four categories, researchers can organize how a person is affected by numerous elements that contribute to their development. It provides a view on both direct and indirect factors of development and puts together a comprehensive picture of a phenomenon. Since the introduction of the theory, Bronfenbrenner's work has evolved to consider more deeply issues of time/chronology and a greater focus on the individual over context, but his initial framework remains enriching to social research.

Ecological Systems Theory in Relation to this Study.

When selecting a theoretical framework, I was drawn to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory because it reminded me of the work of the well-known anthropologist and ethnographer, Charles Frake. Frake's work included coining the term "cultural ecology" which has been influential in ethnographic research. Cultural ecology refers to understanding the role the environment plays in cultural behavior among members of a society (Frake, 1962). Frake used the term "environment" to typically mean the natural world, whereas Bronfenbrenner used the term "context" to mean the social world, but the principle remains the same. Humans and phenomena cannot be studied separate from the settings (environmental or social) where they reside. Therefore, the comprehensive and interconnected view of Bronfenbrenner, following in the vein of Frake, suited my ethnographic research well.

During the ongoing analysis of the data for this study, I began to fit various codes/themes into the categories defined by ecological systems theory. The presentation of the four systems helped to organize how and why different phenomena might be occurring. It allowed me to see how different ideas become reinforced for a child, while at the same time a child's individual needs or desires may go unfulfilled due to their setting. An example of this type of analysis is as follows:

Analysing “Corporal Punishment:” Students consistently discussed corporal punishment in their schools. This was a practice common in their native homeland of Sinjar but outlawed in the camps where western aid agencies funded education. However, although corporal punishment was not allowed in the camp schools, it still occurred. Teachers spoke of how the policy was unfair to them given the number of students they needed to discipline. Teachers felt they simply could not abide by this rule if they were to effectively maintain enough classroom order to educate children. Despite the chance of being removed from their position by aid agencies, teachers continued the practice of hitting students. Parents were then upset with teachers, not because they were hitting their children but because it should be the parent rather than the teacher to provide that type of discipline. Ultimately, children continued to accept their beatings although they understood it was against school rules and their parents’ wishes.

In this example, we see how the policies of aid agencies were coming into contradiction with cultural norms. We also see how parents and teachers opposed each other on the question of how punishment was handed out but still supported the same cultural idea that violence was acceptable to keep children disciplined. In reference to Bronfenbrenner’s work, aid policies (exosystem) were being rejected by teachers and parents (mesosystem), who were influenced by broader cultural norms that accepted violence against children (macrosystem). Ultimately, children accepted their fate without challenge because they were influenced by their relationships with parents and teachers, who were trusted authority figures (microsystem).

This anecdote provides one example of how I viewed data for this research study. I worked to understand the complexity of events in children’s lives and how that complexity was shaping who they were and would become. Getting back to one of my original research questions, *How do traumatized and conflict-affected children engage with aid infrastructure (particularly in education)?*, I specifically focused on how interventions in the exosystem might have a ripple effect in the other systems that could improve welfare for children. Findings are elaborated upon in the following chapters, but this brief example displays the route to establishing those findings. The discussion chapter gives insights into possible interventions.

Limitations

The limitations of this study primarily related to my position as the researcher. As a western aid professional, whose ethnicity is generally perceived as white, I was an outsider to the group that I sought to study. Additionally, per humanitarian guidelines, when inside the camp I had to wear a special vest that signified I belonged to an aid agency. Visually, I was in stark contrast to the community where I worked. This contrast may have tainted responses by participants, though I do not believe it was significant.

The outsider status was challenging to move beyond, particularly because many community members already had firm views on Americans. During the occupation of U.S. forces, the Yazidi community in Sinjar experienced the presence of large amounts of military troops (Sinjar was a safe zone for US forces given the religious diversity of the region). Some Yazidis welcomed Americans because they provided jobs as translators and cultural consultants. Americans also stood as symbolic of the opposition to Saddam Hussein, a leader well disliked among Yazidis. However, some members of the community disagreed with the foreign intervention of Americans and rejected any American presence, even aid workers. In a country that has been so affected by U.S. policies, it was common to encounter both discrimination and hospitality.

I was largely able to overcome the outsider status by spending extensive amounts of time in the camp. I came to know community members, attending their weddings and sharing meals, which helped me to be viewed less as “American” and more as simply “Amber.” Although, time spent in the camp helped, I was never fully an insider to the community. Nonetheless, I believe for the purposes of this research, I was still able to grasp an insider perspective.

Along with my outsider status, language was an obstacle. Depending on what region of Sinjar the children came from, they spoke either Kurdish or Arabic. Additionally, the Kurdish speakers had several different dialects. It was the most linguistically diverse environment I had ever worked in. Prior to arriving in Iraq, I brushed up on some Arabic language skills, however, was far from fluent. Nonetheless, being able to have some basic conversations in Arabic helped to relax participants (who all had some knowledge of Arabic even if Kurdish was their native tongue). I also hired an immensely knowledgeable translator who spoke nearly every language and dialect I encountered. Although the translator was highly experienced, some information or context may have been lost, as is typical with translations in qualitative research.

Lastly, I should mention that an inherent limitation of ethnographic and case study research is that it is not typically generalizable. Therefore, I cannot suggest that the participants selected represent the views of all displaced and conflict-affected children. I also cannot claim that they represent the views of all children in the camp where this investigation took place. Rather, instead of sweeping generalizations this research offers a glimpse into the lived realities of a certain set of children. The findings provide commonalities across those children and point to further directions of study.

What is generalizable in this study are broad areas of consideration (e.g. introducing “disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration” programming in EiE/CpiE), which I speculate as increasing efficiency and care in the field of EiE. In reflection upon the findings of this study, I offer ideas on how to reshape the contours of aid responses for children globally. Consequently, although the direct findings of this case study cannot be applied universally across contexts, new considerations rooted in reflection on this work do prove applicable beyond the research context.

Reflexivity

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher serves to mediate the data and differs from other data collection instruments because they are responsive to context, can adapt techniques to circumstances, consider the entirety of the context, and can process data immediately, helping the study to evolve (Merriam, 1998). However, it is widely recognized that the researcher has certain biases that impact how data is collected, analyzed, and presented. According to Creswell (2013), “How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (p. 215). Thus, it is important to consider how we, as researchers, are positioned within our studies. This process of “reflexivity” helps us to be conscious of our biases and convey to research consumers the underlying values and perspectives that may compromise or influence our work. The following offers more detailed information on who I am as the investigator of this study and the historical and cultural background that inevitably influences my research.

In 2004, I began my career in humanitarian aid following the tsunami that struck Southeast Asia. Having just graduated from college I was a novice in the field of international development and admittedly did not consider my work very critically. Over the years and several postings later, I began to reflect upon my impact and the agendas I was promoting for the aid agencies where I worked. I thought back to my initial experiences in Thailand and how we rebuilt communities, not where they once stood, but rather inland where they would be safer from tsunamis. The result of this action was cutting off the livelihoods of many fishermen who no longer had access to the sea given the distance of their new villages and the fact that hotel chains had purchased all the beachfront properties in their absence.

This poor judgement, made by my aid agency and carried out, in part, by me was made without comprehensive input from the community or thoughtful care for the context where we worked. This reflection and dozens more from my years as a humanitarian aid worker, have encouraged me to pursue ways to better conduct international development and emergency aid. Looking back on my experiences has helped me to understand how my background, perceptions, and identity may differ from the places where I work and most importantly, the consequences of not recognizing that fact.

As a researcher, these reflections are central to how I consider data. As such, there are several identities that I try to “bracket” when I conduct research. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing is “a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (p. 80). Some of the identities I carry are as follows: American, western, female, bi-racial, middle income, urban, and progressive. Many of these identities are accompanied by a level of privilege that can negatively impact research, especially when studying underrepresented or underprivileged communities. Although I cannot change these traits about myself when conducting research, I can offer them up front to those who will consume my work so that they may assess my findings as they see fit.

Reflection on Conducting Research in an Active Conflict Zone

In the final section of this methodology, I would like to take a moment to reflect on an issue critical to my field right now-- the value, ethics, and challenges of doing research in active conflict zones. Despite the fact that a significant portion of the world currently lives in places enduring ongoing violence, there is a dearth of quality research on the plight and struggles occurring in these places (Ford et al., 2009). This is largely due to a handful of reasons including: the personal security of the researcher in an ever-changing and often dangerous environment, the

limited access a researcher has without the support of aid agencies who often have different agendas to pursue, and the limited guidance from the academe on how to properly conduct research in these environments.

Yet, even with such large hurdles it remains essential that researchers continue to study issues unfolding in active conflict zones. Particularly, it is vital to understand human needs and the effectiveness of international programming. Too often aid agencies let action get ahead of understanding (Goodhand, 2000).

When conducting research during an active conflict there are several challenges that can severely impact a study. These challenges may limit the data a researcher can collect but also how the researcher views the data. Goodhand (2000) offers three main sets of challenges faced by researchers in conflict zones including: practical, methodological, and ethical. The following displays how I wrestled with these issues over the course of my study.

By far the most critical concerns were ethical. In the world of humanitarian aid, we abide by a shared principle of “do no harm.” As such, I constantly agonized over how my participants and their community may be impacted by my work. According to Goodhand (2000), “Researchers have to be constantly aware that while they are present for only a short time, their questions and the discussions they provoke may reverberate for a long time afterwards” (p. 13).

Over the course of my data collection, there were a number of ethical questions that continued to arise but here I will focus on a few broad issues that transcend to other conflict environments. These issues include: 1. Understanding how my participants would be perceived by community members, 2. Deciding which voices get heard, and 3. Re-opening trauma.

The first concern, seeking to understand how participants are perceived by others, has safety implications in places afflicted by conflict. In an ethnography, it is difficult to maintain

full confidentiality of one's sources. An ethnographer gets to know a community and interacts with participants regularly. It is a long process of data collection that cannot be concealed behind closed doors or through confidential surveys. Although research participants all provide informed consent, it is still important to understand how they may be viewed and any potential harm that may occur. For instance, my local translator (although not a research subject) was often perceived as promiscuous or wild because she worked alongside me, an American whose culture was widely considered too liberal by community standards. I worried that the young girls in my study may also gain that same stigma, but fortunately this was avoided because all were of pre-pubescent age. Additionally, I was working with a population of people who had just endured collective trauma and was weary of outsiders. Especially after an ethnic conflict, it is not atypical for a group to turn inwards towards itself and regulate entrance to their group. For those in a cultural community who do not follow suit, they can be outcasts resulting in discrimination or violence. To my knowledge, this did not occur with my research participants but was always a concern.

Aside from community perception, I struggled with deciding which voices got heard, and the kind of power or animosity that might bring to participants. I used convenience and snowball sampling to define the population for the study; however, as we moved forward, I had several other families come to me wanting their children to participate. I could not accommodate these requests and I worried that may either create a sense of privilege for the children in my study or worse, discrimination from their community. In a setting that has been afflicted by severe violence and where violence has often been normalized, I especially wanted to avoid negative feelings towards participants for their own personal safety.

Lastly, I had concerns about reopening trauma. I consulted with a number of counselors, utilized support services, and ensured the utmost levels of care. However, trauma is often fresh in conflict zones and navigating that with children is difficult, especially across cultural barriers.

Beyond ethical issues, there were a few methodological questions unique to conducting research during active conflicts. My primary concern involved assessing the validity of data, when much of my access was a result of developing key relationships with “gatekeepers” in the community. By gatekeepers, I refer to those individuals who could provide me entrance to the community and offer access to important sources of data. Since gatekeepers are often tribal leaders or persons of power, I can only assume that they have somewhat of a privileged point of view. Although none of these gatekeepers were among my research participants, they offered me important insights on the community and perspectives that were often incorporated into my ethnographic study. I often questioned if their privileged perspectives were reflective of the entire community. In conflict environments, research is often not possible without appeasing the gatekeepers.

Lastly, beyond ethical and methodological challenges, there were physical challenges. Working in a conflict zone typically means threats to personal safety and I was not immune to this. My research participants and local friends often told me they saw Islamic State militants in the markets or around town. These militants had either “retired” or simply taken a break from the conflict to return home. Although they were in regular clothes, they were still recognized. Given the impunity and lack of rule of law in Iraq, IS militants could do this without issue. Aside from the presence of IS in my community, I also was under heavy scrutiny by local authorities. Afraid that my research would produce claims of human rights abuses, I was often targeted and the victim of intimidation strategies. These strategies entailed cars following me home after work or

social meet-ups and alarmingly, the presence of armed men at my door in the middle of the night.

I mitigated my security concerns with the primary fact that I was American and that alone provided a level of accountability. I also had the resources to evacuate country if circumstances called for it. Although the security concerns were managed, I did worry that in some way they may affect how I viewed the research. Perhaps ongoing stress would create a lens of negativity that would corrupt my data? Maybe I was too immersed in the politics of the region to see things clearly?

Ultimately, I worked through all these challenges, but I admit they likely took a toll on the research. Ethics sometimes limited the data I wanted to collect, my access was at the will of privileged gatekeepers, and I was under significant amounts of stress at various points of data collection. I offer this reflection as a call to increase guidance on how to work in these environments. For the many dedicated researchers attempting to conduct studies in the midst of conflict and devastation, there should be a better playbook. Perhaps not one that proclaims to know all, but one that can convey frameworks on how to consider the work and conduct oneself in these incredibly challenging places.

Chapter 5: Introduction to the Findings and Children's Experiences of Abduction by the Islamic State

This chapter describes the organization of the following three chapters, which present the findings of the study. Additionally, it elaborates on important background for the findings in two ways. First, it provides a description of the participants' experiences when they were abducted by the Islamic State (IS) and second, it offers a general overview of how children were treated in captivity. For all of the participants, their abduction represents the beginning of a difficult period in their lives- one that, in part, this research sought to investigate. An elaboration of these experiences establishes where these children's journeys began and provides context to later discussions that reflect their trauma. I offer their stories of abduction as background knowledge for the reader. Data collection and findings, however, have focused on their return from captivity and how they are managing life after the Islamic State. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of how IS treated child abductees. The broad description generalizes the experiences of Yazidi children but helps to contextualize later findings.

Organization of Findings

Each of the following three chapters presents different themes that have emerged over the course of the research. The themes have been grouped into higher level categories to add structure. Each category is represented in a different chapter (chapters 6-8). When examining the various themes, it became clear that children were describing their lives in three particular ways. Through their eyes, this includes: 1. How we *think* about our educational world (psychological barriers and opportunities), 2. How we *navigate* our educational world (institutional barriers and opportunities), and 3. How our *values and attitudes affect* our educational world (cultural barriers and opportunities).

These three categories encompass most of the data collected from participants and provide clear links back to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory framework. At the broadest level, children expressed how specific cultural traits either limited or enhanced their educational access and experience. Elements such as opinions on children's work and duties, as well as how violence has become a central piece of Iraqi culture are addressed. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), these types of ideas, among others, form the overarching belief system or ideology that influences a person's life. He defines this as the "macrosystem." As a result, "the daily experiences of children in any given societal, socioeconomic, ethnic, or religious group tend to be similar" (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p. 247). Findings linked to the macrosystem are found in the chapter covering, "How our *values and attitudes affect* our educational world (cultural barriers and opportunities)".

More specifically, the children addressed institutional barriers or opportunities and how they navigated the educational landscape. Topics such as "aging out" of education or language difficulties were discussed. These issues are largely the result of policies and the institutional influence of national authorities or the humanitarian community. These themes link closely to Bronfenbrenner's conception of the exosystem, which can be described as a system that indirectly impacts an individual. It is the settings or factors that are abstract from a person's life, yet maintain a controlling influence. Findings linked to the exosystem can be found in the chapter covering, "How we *navigate* our educational world (institutional barriers and opportunities)".

Lastly, children discussed the impact of their direct circumstances. For instance, girls emphasized that they felt new optimism in their camp schools versus previous schools. Children also discussed how recent events have shaded their views of where they live, go to school, and

their educational experiences. Much of what children mentioned has linkages with Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, or the particular setting where the person is situated. According to Rosa and Tudge (2013), this system is comprised of the interpersonal roles and relations engaged in over time. It additionally links to the mesosystem, where various systems interact (e.g. neighborhood community and school). Although much of what children reflected upon related to their past experiences with IS, these ideas have shaped how they interact with their immediate setting. Findings linked to the microsystem and mesosystem can be found in the chapter on, "How we *think* about our educational world (psychological barriers and opportunities)".

Each of the following three chapters represent both specific categories of themes as well as systems in Bronfenbrenner's theory. The chapters capture influences on children's educational experiences at different levels of society. Following the findings, a chapter on discussion offers potential interventions in Bronfenbrenner's systems that may enhance educational experiences and success for conflict-affected children in Iraq.

Abduction by the Islamic State: Children's Experiences

The experiences of children who endured the violent invasion of Islamic State militants are tragic. Many were exposed to brutal killings or the severe torture of family and community members. In some instances, children were even forced by militants to participate in the abuse. Unfortunately, these experiences have not been forgotten- memories linger and trauma has gone unmitigated for many former captives.

The children in this study were all abducted by the Islamic State and described to me their capture, time in captivity, and eventual release or escape. Some of their experiences during IS captivity are presented in the following chapters when they reflect on how past trauma

continues to inhibit their lives. As such, this section is intended to focus solely on their initial abduction and the days/weeks to follow as background for the research findings.

In the early hours of August 3, 2014, the Islamic State invaded Sinjar, the Yazidi homeland in western Iraq. Militants advanced on the region from multiple sides, arriving first to towns and villages to the south of Sinjar mountain, then the north. In some communities, IS invaded violently with bombs and gunfire, while in others they were able to round up villagers at gunpoint by going door to door. The invasion entailed surrounding local communities, cutting off access roads out of the region, systematically rounding up and killing Yazidis (considered infidels), and frequently moving the population of surviving captives to various places of temporary imprisonment. Initial stages of the invasion occurred in the darkness of night while families slept, leaving little time to mobilize a defense. According to a report submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council:

“By the time ISIS entered Sinjar, there were few military objectives in the region. ISIS fighters focused their attention on capturing Yazidis. After controlling the main roads and all strategic junctions, fighters set up checkpoints and sent mobile patrols to search for fleeing Yazidi families. Within hours, Yazidis who had been unable to escape to the nearby city of Duhok found themselves encircled by armed, black-clad ISIS fighters” (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2016, p. 7).

By daybreak, Yazidi families from across Sinjar were fleeing for their lives. In just hours, IS had overwhelmed the region. Children described going to sleep on August 3rd feeling carefree and peaceful but being woken up to the sounds of bombs and gunfire or by scared family members trying to escape. Khansa and Talal elaborate on their experiences:

(Khansa) “We eventually went to sleep, but we woke up when we heard bombs. It was summertime so we were sleeping on the roof. We always sleep on the roof in summer because it’s cooler there-- and I can see my friends on their rooftops. Sometimes we would throw things to each other or talk and giggle. Since we were outside, we knew right away that something was wrong, we could

see blasts on streets nearby. I looked over at my friends' rooftops and everyone was frozen. We didn't know what was happening. It was the middle of the night.

I remember my parents grabbed me and my sisters and took us inside. There was a lot of shooting right on our street so we laid on the floor. Then there were two big blasts and one was a rocket that had hit outside the front of our house. That part of the house just crumbled. Our home was made of mud bricks so it wasn't very strong anyway. We waited maybe an hour or two to see if the men would leave town, we just sat quietly trying to text people for help. The men never left, so we decided to try to escape. It wasn't possible to go through the front door because Daesh was there so we crawled through one of the holes the bombs made. I was with my family, we were eleven in total.

My father used to have a car but before Saddam died his people kidnapped him and took it from us. He came back but the car didn't. So that's why we had to walk awhile to get to my uncles. It was scary to walk because we could hear the guns shooting, but we kept going. We stayed close to the houses, it was dark and my mom kept telling us not to cry. We got to my uncles and with their families tried to drive to the top of the mountain... the mountain is where Yazidis have always gone for protection, it's high so it's safe there. My father got into a big fight with one of my uncles because he wouldn't go back to his house to get his family. I guess he was scared like I was. Daesh was shooting all the people behind us.

We didn't make it up the mountain though. We were finally captured because there were checkpoints on the road. My father had a gun but Daesh had more so he didn't bother. They took our car and made us sit with all the other Yazidis they had collected."

Khansa's story represents the experiences of many Yazidis on the southside of Sinjar Mountain. This part of the region was attacked first by the Islamic State, so residents had little time to flee or react. In villages like Khansa's, attacks began after midnight through the early morning hours when most people were still asleep. This allowed IS to swiftly overtake communities with little resistance. Yazidis in the north typically did not receive news of the attacks in the south until they had awoken to messages the following morning. Many in the north were able to flee but a vast number of people were still stranded and captured by Islamic State militants.

(Talal) “On the morning of August 3rd.... it was a Sunday, I remember that... some Daesh fighters came and said we had to stay in our home. There were four of them and some had guns. They told us not to worry, nothing will happen, they will not do anything to us, they will not hurt us. Just stay in our houses.... they told us we should put a white flag outside to show we are not a threat and converting to Islam. My father wasn’t there when Daesh arrived. I guess he was home early in the morning but had gone to a neighboring village to talk to a mukhtar⁴ after he got some phone calls from relatives trying to warn us. So it was my mother and me who had to talk to Daesh.

They came around 9:30 in the morning. I had no idea what had happened on the south side of the mountain at that point. The south side was hit first by Daesh and I was asleep and didn’t hear my phone. Most of my family is on the northside anyway. Many of us had no idea that Daesh was coming. It was a surprise. After that my aunts began to arrive at my house.

So we put the white flag out and stayed inside until 4pm, but then we decided to try to run away. My mother, sister and aunts went first. There was a small car that could take some people away and my mother and sister were able to get in. Also my uncles’ wives and their kids went with them. The car was full. They left and headed to the mountain.

Then the rest of us tried to make an escape. We were six people altogether who decided to run. Someone had a tractor so we all jumped on. We knew Daesh was in the area but we didn’t see them so decided we should just make a run for it. There were a lot of people on the tractor. We held on wherever there was space. I was with so many people- my neighbors, four of my cousins, and my little brother were all on the tractor.

My father wasn’t with us because he was in Khader Ameen, a small village near Hardan. He had gone to see the mukhtar there named Naji. Naji was a Turkmen from Tel Afar originally, and not Yazidi, but I knew him my whole life. I trusted him. He was Creeve. Creeve is a relationship between Yazidis and people in other villages, usually Muslim Arabs or Turkmen. Creeve means you’re like family. Religion doesn’t really matter when you’re Creeve.

My father went to the mukhtar for help and advice, but he called Daesh and turned everyone in. There were so many people at the mukhtar’s house when Daesh arrived. Maybe some went to see him because they heard what happened on the south side of the mountain. By the time Daesh came, 21 of my family members had arrived at his house. This man, the mukhtar, our Creeve, gave us to Daesh. Can you believe it? The man was like family, even though he was Muslim. That is how my father was captured. He wasn’t even with my family when he was taken.

⁴ The head of a village or community in Arab countries.

Only my uncle was able to escape from the mukhtar's house—he came straight to my house because my family had started to collect there. It was after that we decided to leave. When we left, we didn't take anything with us. We just left. There was no time and no room. We were riding on a tractor and trying to take as many people with us as possible.

On our way up the mountain there was a Daesh checkpoint. When we got there they made us get off the tractor and told us we must convert to Islam, because we are the “new Muslims”. They collected us and we all sat together and waited until they took us to a new checkpoint.”

These stories describe the beginnings of the Islamic State's invasion of Sinjar. Khansa reflects on the violent and abrupt siege of her town, while Talal describes the slow process of waiting for news and the growing uncertainty of what might happen to them. Children's experiences varied from town to town given the different tactics of IS militants. However, all describe feeling a sense of immense apprehension and fear. Most were unable to pack any belongings before they fled, which added to the urgency of the threat.

Once Yazidis had been captured, they were typically corralled into different areas for men and women, with the exception of boys who had not reached puberty and were allowed to remain with their mothers (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2016). This was sometimes a violent experience for children who watched militants kill people before their eyes. It was also the beginning of a long process of being divided and transported to various places of imprisonment. Khansa and Salam provide descriptions of what occurred following their initial capture.

(Khansa) “We were sitting in different areas at Daesh's checkpoint. One section was for women and children and the other for men. We sat there for awhile and the sun started to come up. While we were sitting, a man stood up and said he wanted to go back for his family. He thought they were still in his village but couldn't contact them because Daesh had taken his mobile phone. After a few minutes they shot him in front of us and said they would do the same to anyone else who wants to leave to find their family, man or woman. It was very scary.

Then after that trucks arrived to pick us up. They took the women and children to a hall somewhere and we could hear airplanes overhead. The kids were all so scared. Everyone was crying. I saw a plane. Many Daesh fighters were shooting at them so they attacked us. The planes bombed the building next to us where many Daesh fighters were. We were so scared they would hit our building too. We wanted to escape but it wasn't possible. We stayed in that hall for less than a day and then went to a prison in Badoosh between Tal afar and Mosul. We didn't stay in the prison for long, which was good because the day after we left, it was bombed by three barrel bombs. After that we went to a hall in Tal Afar."

(Salam) "They took us to a school yard to sort us. All the men had to be separated from the women and children. So my father was taken from us there. For young boys, they had us stand in a line and roll our pant legs up and hold our hands above our heads. This was so they could see who had hair on their legs and in their armpits. If you had hair, you had to go with the men. I'm very small for my age and didn't have hair yet so I got to stay with my mom... Two years later, we still haven't heard what happened to the men but mass graves are being found everywhere.

After that, we went inside the school. Our mothers stayed downstairs with our sisters and the young boys went upstairs. We didn't understand why. Some of us boys decided to escape out a window and either go find our fathers or go back to our mothers. We were on the second floor but there was a tree we could climb on. Me and another boy went first and we made it to a hiding place without anyone seeing us. But when I looked back, Daesh had captured the four boys who were following us. They made them lay down on the ground then shot them all. It was so fast. They were gone. I made it though, and I got back to my mom."

Dividing and transporting families was done systematically, utilizing buses and flatbed trailer trucks to take Yazidis to prisons, schools, and abandoned villages. Eventually, captives would be rounded up from these locations and sent to more permanent labor camps, to work as sex slaves, or become domestic laborers for IS families in Syria, Mosul and other IS controlled areas. Men, women, and children all endured different fates. "Each group suffered distinct and systematic violations, sanctioned under ISIS's ideological framework" (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2016, p. 8). Hadiya, a young girl, describes her experiences in the weeks that followed her initial capture:

(Hadiya) “They kept moving us. At first, we were in Badoosh prison, then they took us to Hail Hadra (neighborhood near Mosul). In Hail Hadra we were reunited with my father. They had taken him away before but now we got to be together again... for a little while at least. They took him away eventually. But before my father was taken, he found a pair of scissors in the house they put us in, and cut off all my hair. It was so short, it was above my ears. He told me to try my best to look and act like a boy because Daesh was doing bad things to young girls... They never tried to take me and I stayed with my mother.

After a lot more moves, they took us back to Syria. That was really scary because everyone knew Syria is where you go to die. They took us to Raqqa and moved us many places again. In Raqqa, there is a market where people can buy you. We never went there though, Daesh eventually put us in an underground prison. My sister was actually born there. We wanted to take my mom to a doctor but Daesh said they don’t care if we live or die, so why would they help her? Instead, the other women in the prison helped deliver the baby. I was really scared because another woman had tried to give birth in there and died. The women said it was because Daesh wouldn’t give her enough water. It was hot in there so her body really smelled.”

After several transfers in the weeks after IS invaded, Yazidi children usually found themselves some place semi-permanent, sometimes with their mothers and sometimes alone. Several of these experiences are elaborated in later chapters. Their days, weeks, months, and even years in captivity remained a challenging time. Children witnessed constant abuse and severe atrocity. For many of them, the memories linger and continue to have an effect on their lives even after they have returned to their families and regained their freedom.

The stories of participants’ abductions highlight a few of the experiences of Yazidi children during the invasion of IS in 2014. Children endured diverse circumstances but all traumatic. The invasion marked a significant turning point in their lives. Some even characterize their life with the bifurcation of “before Daesh” and “after Daesh.” This came up repeatedly in conversation when I would ask children about things such as school or friends. They would need me to clarify which life I was referring to since each would provide a different response. This

was echoed in the report to the U.N. Human Rights Council (2016), which noted, “The date of 3 August 2014 would become a dividing line, demarcating when one life ended, and -- for those who survived -- when another, infinitely more cruel, existence began” (p. 6).

Overview of Experiences of Abducted Children

Children endured horrific experiences with the Islamic State. Many who were held with their mothers witnessed frequent sexual abuse and threats to their own lives. In other instances, children were sometimes separated from their family and sent to military camps, to work on farms, or attend madrassas (Islamic schools). A report submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council (2016) details the fate of several different groups of children following their abduction.

For Yazidi boys who had passed puberty, they were taken away with their fathers and summarily executed if they refused to convert to Islam. A young girl (age 16) describes witnessing an execution, “After we were captured, ISIS forced us to watch them beheading some of our Yazidi men. They made the men kneel in a line in the street with their hands tied...The ISIS fighters took knives and cut their throats” (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2016, p. 8). For those who did convert, they were taken to labor camps where they worked on construction projects that built the infrastructure for the Islamic State’s caliphate, or they dug trenches and other defenses to help protect IS from invaders.

For girls approximately age 9 and above, they were taken away and eventually sold or given to IS militants as sex slaves and domestic servants. The girls were treated as chattel and taken to markets where fighters could purchase them. The trafficking of these girls and women became a central strategy of the Islamic State to recruit additional fighters. They were not forced

to convert to Islam, which allowed their Muslim captors to continue to rape them and remain in accordance with their moral code. A girl (age 12) describes her experience:

“We were registered. ISIS took our names, ages, where we came from and whether we were married or not. After that, ISIS fighters would come to select girls to go with them. The youngest girl I saw them take was about 9 years old. One girl told me that ‘if they try to take you, it is better that you kill yourself’” (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2016, p. 10).

Hadiya recollected a similar story during her time in captivity.

“When Daesh would come, the girls would put dirt on their faces and try to scratch ourselves so that we would bleed. I would even try to sneeze a lot so there would be snot on my nose. We were trying to look ugly so the fighters wouldn’t take us. We would also say that we were younger than we were, just like our mothers would say they were older than they were. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes Daesh still took people.”

Lastly, children under the age of nine or who had not gone through puberty, had a different experience. Quite often, their mothers had been given to various militants to work as sex slaves or domestic laborers and the children accompanied them. It was often important for children to remain with the mothers so that militants could leverage their welfare in order to gain obedience from the women. Children who returned from captivity often expressed severe emotional turmoil knowing they were the reason their mothers were raped or beaten. In rare instances, children under the age of nine also experienced sexual abuse. The report submitted to the U.N. Human Rights Council describes some of these events (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2016). In the first description, a woman held for 11 months discusses a situation with her children. The second is an excerpt of the report presenting the sexual abuse even young children faced.

“When he would force me into a room with him, I could hear my children screaming and crying outside the door. Once he became very angry. He beat and threatened to kill them. He forced two of them to stand outside barefoot in the snow until he finished with me” (p. 16).

“In one case, an ISIS fighter killed several children after their mother failed in her escape attempt. He beat her for crying over the death of ‘kuffar children’ before raping her. In 2015, a Libyan ISIS fighter bought a Yazidi woman and her young children, the oldest of whom was a 7-year-old girl, and held them in a house in Dayr Az-Zayr governorate. After loaning the mother to be raped by another ISIS fighter for one night, the Libyan fighter took the 7-year-old girl into a room, locking it behind him. He told her mother, who was screaming at the door, that he wanted to check whether the 7-year-old ‘was ready to be married’” (p. 17).

The children who were abducted by the Islamic State endured an array of human rights abuses. Aside from sexual abuse and psychological abuse, they also suffered poor living conditions that included a lack of food and water, poor sleeping conditions, and an absence of heat in the winter months. Now living in IDP camps, many formerly captive children have difficulty sleeping, are prone to bed-wetting, or have behavior issues.

Summary

In summary, this chapter is intended to provide the reader a lens for viewing the research findings. The sections on children’s experiences of abduction help to convey where their stories began prior to arrival in refugee and IDP camps. Excerpts from research participants describe the invasion of the Islamic State and moments of immense turmoil that upended their lives, while key reports presented to the U.N. Human Rights Council elaborate further on the abuses occurring in the days and weeks that followed children’s initial abduction. This information serves as important background to the following chapters devoted to findings. It assists the reader in understanding the

emotional context of participants and why data consistently turned back to stories of trauma. The way children in this study viewed the world was heavily influenced by their time with the Islamic State. As such, a brief elaboration of this topic was important to frame the findings.

Lastly, this chapter began with a description of how and why I organized the findings as I did. In short, the theoretical framework derived from Bronfenbrenner was critical in analyzing the research. To remain consistent with my analysis, I wanted the presentation of findings to reflect Bronfenbrenner's systems. Therefore, the following chapters are structured to help the reader connect the stories and experiences of participants with the "ecosystem" proposed in Bronfenbrenner's work.

Chapter 6: Findings Part I: How We Think about our Educational World (Psychological Barriers and Opportunities)

In this chapter, I present findings that represent the psychological barriers and opportunities for education in emergency contexts according to children in al Ain camp, Iraq. I draw on interviews, conversations, and observations to establish several key thematic issues. In crisis contexts, challenges typically far outweigh opportunities for re-development and stability. This is reflected in the findings as children continually turned to contemplating their troubles and hardships post-IS captivity rather than an optimism for the future. Nonetheless, a few key opportunities also emerged.

The individual participants were the initial unit of analysis. Their thoughts and ideas were recorded over several sessions. This data was then consolidated and examined for common themes in an iterative process that began during data collection and continued afterwards. However, consistent with ethnographic inquiry, participants were not the singular object of analysis. In addition, I investigated the cultural and institutional settings that contributed to children's experiences. Therefore, my analysis is situated where participants' lived experiences within al Ain camp met with the institutional processes and cultural ideas embedded in their environment.

The findings elaborated in these chapters often address multiple research questions at once. In the children's descriptions, we learn about their lives and how they interact with the world around them. This assists in providing a window to understand research question #1: What are the lived experiences of displaced, traumatized, and conflict-affected children in Iraq? These experiences offer valuable insights to understanding the following two research questions, #2: How does exposure to conflict and trauma impact the educational experiences of displaced

children and vice versa?, and #3: How do traumatized and conflict-affected children engage with aid infrastructure, particularly education?

In this chapter, findings are presented that display how children *think* about their educational world. When analyzing the full data set, common themes emerged that could be grouped into a category that covered psychological barriers and opportunities for educational success. Over the course of data collection, children often reflected on the challenges to having positive experiences in school. Challenges addressed in this chapter express solely psychological constraints, whereas institutional and cultural constraints are presented in the following chapters.

Many trends emerged as children reflected on their lives and experiences in al Ain camp. Presenting *how they think about their world* displays several themes that were uncovered which connect past trauma to current circumstances. Children often reflected back to their experiences of being held captive by the Islamic State as reasons it is hard to succeed in their current environment. Particularly, children found it challenging to effectively re-integrate into school given recent traumatic memory and feeling “othered” by students who were not taken captive. Although most themes linked to past trauma, one centered more on circumstances in the camp and displayed one of the rare opportunities that develop in crisis contexts among myriad challenges. The four primary themes that emerged from conversations, interviews, and observations of children include: 1. Reconciling radicalization and indoctrination by the Islamic State with a return to formal education, 2. Viewing schools as sites of violence, 3. The challenges of a “return to normalcy” after trauma, and 4. Girls’ optimism for education and life success linked to displacement.

Reconciling Radicalization and Indoctrination by the Islamic State with a Return to Formal Education

The first theme, *Reconciling radicalization and indoctrination by the Islamic State with a return to formal education*, was pervasive among nearly all participants but most significantly impacted the lives of captive male children. Over the course of time that children spent abducted by the Islamic State, they endured processes of radicalization and indoctrination. These processes extended violent and discriminatory ideas. Boys were often sent to military schools where they learned fighting tactics and weaponry to eventually join the ranks of Islamic State militants. Extreme tactics were used including having boys participate in the execution of prisoners and having them view a constant stream of violent images and videos. In instances where boys were not sent to military camps, they endured similar circumstances to abducted girls. They often worked as domestic laborers or farm hands and attended madrassa, an Islamic religious school, in the mornings or afternoons. Madrassa schools sponsored by the Islamic State typically taught a very dogmatic version of the Quran and occasionally math and science courses that aligned with Quranic teachings.

The constant process of radicalization of children has been noted as a key strategy to ensure longevity of Islamic State doctrine (McCue et al., 2017). IS invested significantly in the education of children and mentorship of future soldiers for their cause. Armed child militants were called the “Cubs of the Caliphate” and considered an important and treasured part of their society. Through children, IS began an intergenerational campaign to spread their radical ideology. McCue et al. (2017) state:

“While the increasing pace of [coalition forces’] military gain is encouraging, significant tears in the social fabric of the region will take far longer to repair. In particular, lasting and potentially persistent consequence will include damage to children, especially young men and boys living in the Islamic State, as well as the Cubs of the Caliphate; young men and boys indoctrinated and ‘weaponized’ as part of the Islamic State’s ‘long game.’” (p. 21).

Children who participated in this study, expressed that after years of enduring this type of radical and violent education, it was a struggle to return to formal schooling in the camps. The educational experiences that occurred during captivity were vastly different from their current circumstances and it was difficult to re-adapt once in al Ain camp. IS had manipulated education so significantly that returning to the camp school came with a challenging and sometimes unsuccessful readjustment.

The Violent Curricula of the Islamic State

Children's educational experiences during captivity were atrociously violent. Most of the children in the study, boys and girls, went to some version of schooling during their time with the Islamic State but it was the boys who expressed the greatest difficulty in moving beyond their past experiences given the pervasive violence they withstood for such a lengthy period of time. Talal and Salam offer a description of what they endured under IS with commentary on how it continues to affect their education now that they attend the camp school.

(Talal) "After Qassim Harab, we went to Hail Hadra, a Shia village on the outskirts of Mosul. There was a school there with a big open yard. When we arrived, they separated all the boys 8-16 years old from their families and recorded our names. They said there were 200 of us. We didn't stay at that school.

They took all of us to a military camp where they made us learn fight skills. All 200 of us boys, even the young ones. They woke us up everyday at 4am to start training. We had cushions on the floor to sleep on and there were a lot of us in one room, so we made sure to wake each other up. Otherwise, if we refused to go they would punish us. We learned all about weapons and fighting until the night. We learned about Kalashnikovs, guns, everything. We even learned about landmines.

I was with my cousins and brothers at the military camp. We stayed for more than two months there. ISIS told us that when we finished our training they would take us to different Arab countries to fight for them. They were training us to be terrorists and told us we would kill the kofars [infidels] and be heroes.

We were also studying Quran while we were there. If they tested us and we couldn't read or write Quran they would punish us. It was hard because a lot

of us only wrote in Kurdish. We mostly had to memorize suras but sometimes we would also talk about life and where we live, and how we must obey Allah. We did more fight training than Quran though.

We spent almost three months learning how to kill people, even how to chop off their heads. We would practice on each other, then on prisoners... in sort of a fake way. We also watched a lot of videos of beheadings. After a while, they brought real people to be killed. Once a man's head was chopped off. Another time, they had some boys shoot some people. Training days were longer when people had to die because after we would have to go bury them and that took a while.

After those three months, Daesh let us go home to visit our mothers for two days. They said after that they would take us to other countries so we could fight. But we only got one day with our family and then Daesh from Mosul came. They took us to a new camp where we had to learn more about fighting.

By that point many of the boys had been brainwashed. Four of the boys who were brainwashed were my friends. They got really close to Daesh and I had to watch what I said. We were friends from back home so I thought they would never turn me in or hurt me for saying something, but then again I didn't really know what to expect. That was life... anything could happen. One day you're alive and another you're dead. You can't think you know what will happen. We stayed at the new military camp for another month."

Talal expressed a similar set of circumstances to what many boys experienced when attending IS-sponsored military schools. As he spoke, I noted the general nonchalance of his speech when describing the violent episodes of killings during their lessons. Talal claims he was never radicalized but I found he was still de-sensitized to much of the intense violence occurring around him. His trauma was subtle in a way that could almost be overlooked.

Talal's desensitization to violence continued to manifest in the camp. He still had contact with boys who remained in captivity with the Islamic State. These boys would send him violent videos of executions or sometimes scenes from the frontlines of the conflict. Talal would share these videos with people in the camp. One day, I saw Talal showing his phone to a group of boys after school. The boys were intensely watching the phone while Talal texted on his other phone. Later I asked him what they were doing and he said, "They're videos of executions. I let others

watch in case they know anyone.” Talal asked if I wanted to see the video, which I replied no. He later texted me images of a partial beheading to let me know these are the kinds of things that he receives. It was unclear if he was being boastful or simply thought he was being helpful. Nonetheless, Talal had immense exposure to violence when he was held captive and this exposure continued via text once he arrived at the camp. He was desensitized to it in a way other camp children were not. However, alarmingly, I felt greater concern for the boys who were fascinated by it.

Talal’s indifference was likely a coping mechanism. Unfortunately, this meant his teachers and other adults were unable to detect the trauma that he had endured. The adults in his life frequently described his courage and strength- none ever referenced him as a victim or in need of help. Talal said he often reflected on the education he received from the Islamic State, but he never spoke about it with the adults in his life. His return to formal schooling in the camp marked a stark change from the education he had been receiving for the years prior.

Salam was another boy who experienced education under the Islamic State. He was much smaller in stature to Talal, who had an athletic build and was tall for his age. Whereas Talal’s build made him an ideal recruit to become a militant fighter, Salam was small and better suited for domestic labor by IS standards. Consequently, Salam was not sent to military training camps/schools but instead spent his days working for Muslim families in their homes. He also attended madrassa (Islamic school) every afternoon as part of a campaign of forced conversion to Islam. Salam offers a description of attending school outside the military training camps.

(Salam) “After I finished my work, I went to the school. It was a bad school but it was better than being at the house where Daesh placed us. The Muslim families hated us there. Especially the wives. They were so mean to us. They were the worst to the women but we all had it hard, even the kids. We did their work and whatever they told us. We were their slaves. They beat us and gave us bad food.

Going to school was at least a break from that. I mean, we got beaten in school too but there were other kids there and it kind of felt normal, you know because we went to school in Sinjar before Daesh took us.

The school was a regular school. It wasn't in a mosque or anything. But everything we learned was about being Muslim. We spent a lot of time memorizing text from the Quran. If the teacher called on you and you couldn't remember something, she would slap your hands with a stick. This isn't strange here though- that's what teachers would do even before Daesh came. But we were constantly getting hit in the Daesh schools because there was no time to study so that we could remember things. We worked all the time and were always hungry, so we didn't study when we returned to the house. I think I got hit everyday. Sometimes it wasn't just the hands, they hit you in the head or legs too.

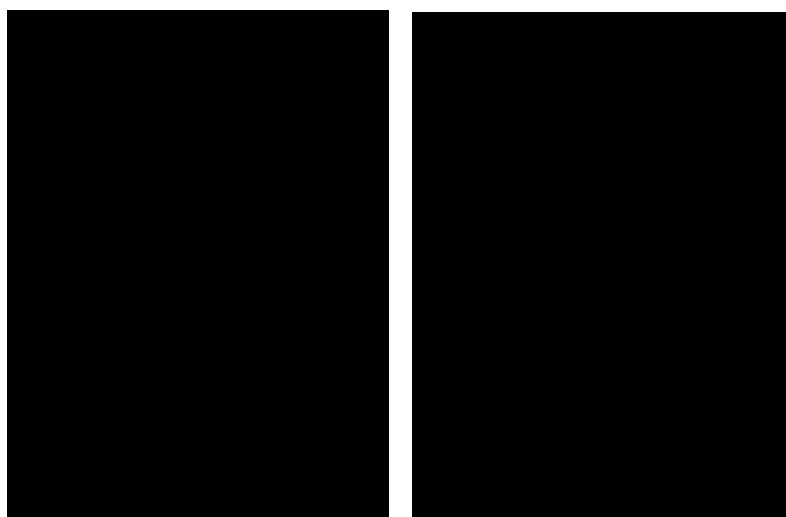
We also studied math and science. We used textbooks that Daesh made so it was always strange stuff. Like the math problems would be about killing people. For example, it would say something like there are 98 people and 22 are kofars [infidels]. How many were left after the kofars were killed? I mean we did harder math than that but that's kind of an example."

Salam describes the type of curriculum that was conveyed by the Islamic State. It centered on a strict interpretation of Islam and conveyed violent scenarios for children to evaluate. Quite rapidly after IS took control of the region, education was entirely reformed. A War Child International report from 2017 stated:

"The ISIS invasion precipitated an almost complete collapse in education services in areas under its control. Within months of taking Mosul in 2014, ISIS had imposed strict rules on dress for students and cancelled classes on art, music, history and geography. A revised curriculum was introduced which manipulated and re-packaged the regular curriculum, combining standard text with jihadist messages. In seemingly innocuous English textbooks children would learn basic grammar and then be faced with language exercises in which characters discuss killing apostates" (War Child International, 2017).

Through schooling, children were constantly confronted with radicalism and IS's violent doctrine. According to Salam, attending the school made him feel normal again, even the math problems were conveyed in a way similar to what he experienced before captivity. However, the specific content was often a subtle subversion of healthy learning.

Figure 6.1: Example of IS textbook



Images recovered from a madrassa school in Mosul operated by the Islamic State. The text of the 4th grade mathematics textbook translates as: “You have a PKC machine gun with 42 bullets, and in front of you are 7 of the non-believers and apostates. You need to distribute your bullets evenly between them... Solution: $42 / 7 = 6$ ”

Although IS had subverted the curriculum in the madrassa school to integrate violence and discrimination, Salam and his sister continued this practice in the camp (with an inverted model). Once, I was sitting in the field where children would go to study after school. Their tents lacked electricity for several hours a day and were too hot and dark for them to study there without fans and lights. Consequently, the field became the place where children went to complete homework. I sat near Salam and his sister who began laughing while looking at a textbook. My translator leaned in to explain that they had rephrased a standard math word problem to say something along the lines of, there were X number of Muslims and X number of landmines. How many died? It was a similar math problem to what Salam had described weeks earlier in IS textbooks, only the children had flipped the scenario so that Muslims were now the victims. The subtle violence of IS curriculum had carried on into the children’s learning even after they returned to formal education in the camp school. They were humored by making up

their own violent scenarios. Sometimes the children recognized the lingering presence of their past education, such as when they would tell me their minds would wander back to IS memories, other times they did not.

Struggles with Social Integration

Beyond violent curricula, the challenges of social integration into the camp school after having attended IS schools was also problematic. Although the children were back to learning the national curriculum and attending schools sponsored by humanitarian agencies, they still struggled to fit in. They were ostracized by many of the other children, who were not abducted.

(Salam) “It’s hard to go to school now. Sometimes I think about the Daesh school. I hated it there but I did it for a year so I remember a lot of it. It was very different than going to school in the camp. I learn more in the camp and teachers are nicer but I think about the Daesh school a lot.

It’s also hard because the other [camp] children make fun of me. None of them were taken by Daesh so they call me a Muslim. They laugh at me because I went to madrassa and I prayed in mosques and read Quran. They say that I’m Daesh even though I’m not. Daesh made me do those things or I would die... I used to tell them that but now I just stay quiet. It can be really lonely sometimes but I have my sister.”

(Talal) “School is ok. I don’t mind it. I actually had to fight to be there so I’m glad that I go. There are some things I don’t like though. The kids and the teachers can be difficult... My friends are all the boys who went to the military camp with me, not the regular kids. There are like ten of those boys here and I’m friends with like four or five. Some of them I met in Qasim Harrab [neighborhood in Mosul]. We meet after school in the field to hang out. We sometimes talk about Daesh together because it’s hard to talk to other people about it-- people always want to know though-- a boy in the school yard asked me just today to talk about Daesh but I refused. He doesn’t understand and people will use it against you anyway. With my friends from captivity, we can talk.

We sometimes say that when we escaped we should have gone to Sinjar mountain to stay and fight. Daesh destroyed our villages and abducted and killed our people. What they did was terrible and we should not accept it, we should challenge it. We think we should go back and fight. I would really like to go back. I have seen so much torture and abuse. When I remember it and think about it, I

want to kill people. I don't go back because my family won't let me. They say, stay here, don't go anywhere, please. And I take care of them so I have to stay... These are the things I talk about with the other boys who were with Daesh-- how we should fight. I can't talk with the regular kids at school.

The teachers are difficult sometimes too. Some of them don't want us there because we were with Daesh and they're afraid of us now. They know we went to military camp and can kill people. There's one teacher that wanted me to talk about Daesh to the class. He made me stand up to speak to everyone but I refused. He was curious and wanted me to describe it all, even the killing and when we had to shoot people. I didn't do it, but I didn't really get punished for it. I'm like a grown man now so I don't get hit. But I think the other students look at me differently."

Due to the violent training and radical education they endured, the boys who were abducted by the Islamic State often expressed difficulties reintegrating into the community, especially among their peers and teachers. Foremost, each felt ostracized. Salam was constantly "othered" by school children who saw him as a sympathizer with the Islamic State. Since Salam was small for his age and soft-spoken, he was an easy target for others to ridicule. Talal, on the other hand, was a muscular boy whose classmates would never dare deride him. However, he was frequently asked about his experiences during captivity and could never fully re-integrate into his community. This was highlighted in Talal's comment that his friends were the others from the military camps rather than the "regular" camp children. Talal and Salam found reprieve from the ostracism only when around others who had also been abducted such as siblings or fellow boys from the military camps.

The girls in the study were largely able to avoid these challenges with the community but reiterated the difficulties for boys. In 2015, the situation of women abducted by the Islamic State made international news when Nadia Murad, now a Nobel prize winner, spoke about their plight on the floor of the United Nations. Particularly, she addressed the widespread practice of sexual slavery and trafficking by the Islamic State. Her speech garnered widespread coverage on the

issue and elicited immense support and sympathy for Yazidi women. Subsequently, the religious leadership of the Yazidi community rallied all Yazidis to accept and care for the women upon return.

In many ways, female survivors of IS are considered heroines to their community. Young pre-pubescent girls were not forced into sexual slavery at the same rates as their mothers but many also experienced the atrocious abuse. Consequently, both women and girls who were abducted by IS, were largely able to avoid the ostracism endured by returning men and boys. They were more widely accepted due to the media coverage and support from important religious leaders.

Nonetheless, the girls in the study often verified the boys' accounts of feeling ostracized through their own observations. Particularly, Nadia spoke often about her little brother's struggles in school. She noted that he has yet to let go of the radical education he received from IS and other children have fully rejected him due to it. According to Nadia, "He was only three when he was taken. He was their pet... they taught him to point to Allah and pray with them. Now he's five and still leaves the classroom to pray. All the kids hate him." Another girl in the study, Khansa, notes that she does not associate with boys who were held by IS. Although she was also abducted, she claims she cannot trust boys who were radicalized. Sadly, the ostracism that boys have endured continues to limit their educational success by not allowing them to fully reintegrate into the school's social culture.

The methods of radicalization and indoctrination used by IS, have had damaging effects on children, which are yet to be addressed or remedied. Children consistently spoke of the vast differences in their schooling experiences over the last few years and the challenges of going back to the national curriculum. IS had implemented a robust campaign to indoctrinate children

where they utilized schools as a primary avenue to convey their ideology. McCue et al. (2017) have documented some of the educational work of IS and state:

“Analysis of Islamic State-produced educational materials reveals an intentionally created curriculum that weaves themes of radicalization and indoctrination throughout the content in an effort to reinforce preferred narrative themes. ‘The Islamic State’s curriculum is uniquely lethal in the way it teaches other subjects to justify its quartet of interests: the foundation of a caliphate, the building of an Islamic state, the use of merciless violence, and the perpetuation of an apocalyptic narrative.’ The material is professionally produced and sophisticated, paralleling Western academic content in pedagogy and the seamless integration of global narrative themes across disparate subject matter” (p. 24).

Participants in the study noted no recognition of their transition in schooling by adults in the camp. In my discussions with humanitarian aid agencies, very little consideration was given to the content that formerly abducted children consumed. The implications of this are hugely problematic. In the case of Yazidi children, they received an education that supported violence and discrimination at a point in their lives where they are “emotionally and morally malleable, underscoring the relatively permanent nature of the behavior change” (McCue et al., 2017, p. 24). Fortunately, participants in this study displayed a strong level of resilience, excited to return to the national curriculum and re-integrate into schooling. However, past educational experiences continued to be a lingering limitation for them.

Viewing Schools as Sites of Violence

A second emerging theme of the research was the connection participants made with schools being sites of violence. This is not a particularly new phenomenon. Globally, schools have been coming under attack at increasing rates and have been caught up in conflict in nearly all regions of the world. In 2015, the issue had become so prevalent that the international

community came together to establish the Safe Schools Declaration⁵ to ensure children were protected during periods of conflict and education could continue without disruption. The declaration aimed to address the growing instances of schools being bombed, attacked, or taken over by militias and armed groups. It was an important step towards protecting education. Unfortunately, much work is still to be done to operationalize the declaration and make certain educational facilities are exempt from conflict. Although schools being targeted by armed groups is not a new phenomenon in academic discourse in EiE, addressing how children perceive their school as sites of violence is woefully underrepresented.

Iraq, similar to many countries in a state of conflict, has endured severe damage to its educational facilities and left students with negative feelings about their safety and the long-term stability of schools. During the conflict with the Islamic State, schools were often taken over by armed groups needing space to convene and operate. The occupation of armed groups meant schools frequently came under attack and were severely damaged in warfare. Schools were also entirely destroyed by IS in an effort to raze the Yazidi homeland, or in many cases, turned into prisons for Yazidi captives.

For many children, schools have become associated with violence and they continue to have lingering memories of traumatic experiences there. Participants in this study described episodes of being held in schools as prisoners, attending IS schools as students, and witnessing the destruction of schools. Their reflections displayed how traumatic memories continued to inhibit them from viewing school as a safe and inherently positive space. For one participant, this deterred him from attending school altogether, while others continued to go but often discussed an anticipation that schools would eventually be overrun by armed groups again.

⁵ The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that was opened for endorsement by countries at an international conference held in Oslo, Norway, on 28-29 May 2015. To date, 101 countries have pledged support.

Khansa, Talal, and Abid share their thoughts on schools being places of violence. Each offers a different anecdote. Khansa elaborates on the beatings that occurred regularly in IS schools and the immense fear she felt over her prolonged period of captivity. Talal describes his time being imprisoned in a school before being taken to a military camp, and Abid offers insights on attending a school damaged by conflict.

(Khansa) “Eventually, Daesh took us to a neighborhood called Hail Hadra- that means ‘Dream City.’ They separated everyone again and I went with the children to a school. None of my family was with me anymore...

We lived in the school. Since we were no longer with our mothers, some Daesh women took care of us. Some of them were nice. We slept in a hall attached to the school building. Every night we would put our cushions on the floor to sleep and pick them up in the morning-- like we would do at home. School started at 8am and finished at 12pm usually. The kids in the classrooms were all different ages. If you were under five, then you went to a different room but 6 years and up were put all together. Except for the older girls... Daesh came and took most of them away...

We mostly studied Quran. The teachers were really mean to us. We got hit if we spoke Kurdish. They only wanted us to speak Arabic since that’s the language of the Quran. It was hard for many of us though since we didn’t study Arabic in Sinjar... We also got hit if we answered a question wrong or didn’t memorize something right. The teachers would tell us that we’re animals and we’ll never learn to be good Muslims because we’re too dumb. We were always getting beaten and yelled at.

I was always scared. I got used to the beatings but I knew worse things could happen. One time a girl tried to go see her brother during a break between classes. Since girls and boys were supposed to be separated, she had to go in secret. They got caught and Daesh took them both away. We never saw them again. Our teacher said we would die like them if we didn’t obey Allah.

One time though, the girls in my class decided to do something really risky. It was Ramadan and we weren’t supposed to eat or drink anything. It was so hot though and people were getting sick. So when the teacher left the room, we pushed a table against the wall and climbed on it so that we could reach the video camera. We turned it away from us so that Daesh couldn’t see us eating. We never got in trouble for that but I was so scared. I thought if I made any mistake I would die... Going to school there was hard, I tried to never make mistakes.”

Khansa's story provides a description of the pervasive violence that occurred in IS schools. She consistently reminded me that hitting children was common practice in all Iraqi schools but the frequency of it in IS schools was notable. I once asked her if she was afraid to make mistakes in the camp school to which she replied, "Yes, but not like at the Daesh school. Here I know I won't die." I went on to ask her if she thought it was ok for camp school teachers to hit students. She responded, "Well, I don't really get hit. It's mostly the boys. But everyone does it, IS teachers, camp teachers, so it's fine."

Talal offers another example of how violent the IS schools were:

(Talal) "I lived in a school for over a month. This was after Daesh moved us from the prison but before I went to the military camp. We learned Quran there, adults and kids together. The teachers were also the guards, so one moment they would have a gun in their hand and another they would be at the front of the classroom. They beat us if we didn't memorize the suras... keeping up with school was hard though. Everyone said there were drugs in our food that made us sleepy. I think they were right because we never had energy to study at night, even if we knew we'd get beaten the next day. We had to eat and drink what they gave us though or we would die... at least that school was better than the military camp school. I didn't have to watch anyone die there."

What struck me about Talal's description was the dual role of teachers in the IS school he attended. In his example teachers also served as armed guards, often making it difficult for Talal to differentiate his classroom experience from his imprisonment.

Schools were inherently violent. Another participant, Abid, describes a different scenario from Khansa and Tala. Abid was able to escape relatively quickly after his initial capture and did not attend school during his captivity. Instead, he recalls going to school in a building that had been destroyed by IS but reclaimed by Iraqi national forces.

(Abid) "After I escaped from Daesh, I didn't go to school for a while. I started again when my uncles moved back to Sinjar after our village had been liberated. My mother was still in al Ain camp but I would stay with my uncles in

Sinjar a lot. After a while a teacher re-opened the school there, so I started going. There were bullet holes in the walls and all the furniture had been taken so we made do with what we could find. Every day that I sat in that school, I imagined Daesh inside, or killing villagers in the school yard. Eventually, I just stopped going. I don't think it's important and I'm a soldier now anyway."

In these anecdotes, participants described how schools became a place of trauma for them while being held by the Islamic State or attending a school damaged by the conflict. They recalled constant physical beatings, psychological abuse by teachers, and in Abid's case, remnants of attacks. During conversations with the children, I would often ask them about their educational futures and how they saw their lives proceeding. For some, education was back on track and ambitions to go to university had returned. Unfortunately, for others, they discussed how after they leave the camp, they cannot be sure they will be safe in community schools and also described how traumatic memories would deter their attendance.

(Abid) "Schools are reopening in the liberated parts of Sinjar. A lot of them were completely destroyed but some are ok with just a little damage. Some organizations have come and wanted to rebuild schools. I mean it's good if they do it. We should have schools... but there's still a war happening, and if [Daesh] come back, then the schools will be destroyed again."

(Khansa) "I wouldn't want to go back to my school in Sinjar... That's where Daesh killed a lot of people in my village. Their bodies are buried there. I don't know what I would do, but I wouldn't go there."

Abid took me to visit a damaged school in Sinjar. It was one of the largest schools in the region and had operated as a temporary headquarters for IS militants on the northside of Sinjar Mountain. The school was entirely demolished by the conflict and was not functionable. However, as we walked through the rubble, Abid would note similarities to his school and others in the area. He picked up bullet casings and said children had started to collect them, almost like they were toys. He pointed out how

bullet holes in the chalkboards made it difficult to read and he showed me piles of broken furniture that meant children would have to sit on the floor. To Abid, these facilities, even the less distressing ones, spoke more to conflict than they did to education. He would always associate schooling with violence.

For Khansa, the traumatic memories of IS's invasion would deter her from attending school if she returned to her village. The school was a killing field and she would never be able to separate that from her educational experience. Khansa was the most optimistic of all the children in the study so it was challenging to know that she would be willing to give up on her education.

After experiencing how easily Daesh attacked schools and transformed them into prisons and places of abuse, the children expressed little confidence that they would always have access to safe learning spaces. Schools would always be sites for potential violence or memorials of past killings. Talal stated, "Schools will never be safe. If Daesh doesn't take them, then someone else will. Schools are where they can keep lots of people." Abid noted a similar sentiment and stated, "the bullet holes in the wall were a constant reminder that there was a war here. Even if there weren't bullet holes, I would think the same."

The Challenges of a "Return to Normalcy" After Trauma

All children who lived under the Islamic State had their lives transformed. Specifically, Yazidi children endured some of the worst abuses. Having returned from captivity, many still struggled to re-adapt and reintegrate back into their community after immense trauma. Parents and caretakers of former captives in al Ain camp spoke of sleeplessness, nightmares, violent outbursts, depression, and isolation. The transition of these children from their time with the Islamic State to al Ain camp has been difficult. Sadly, without expansive and ongoing

psychological support from the aid community, the burden of recovery has largely been on the shoulders of children.

Returning from captivity has also had implications for education. The participants in the study reflected on both the logistical hurdles and psychological limitations for returning to school. Many of the logistical challenges are presented in the following chapter on institutional barriers and opportunities. As such, this section focuses on how children thought about their life after IS and the psychological challenges of returning to school after trauma. Some of the educational implications include: frustrations with the rapid push to attend school, preference of visiting the “child-friendly space” over going to school, and struggles of self-mitigating traumatic memory. However, before discussing the educational implications, I provide a brief description of what return experiences have been like for some of the study’s participants to add background to their responses.

Returning from Captivity

Since the beginning of the conflict with the Islamic State, captive children have slowly been arriving back to families after either escaping or being released. The circumstances they have returned to have varied greatly over time depending on the status of aid operations in Iraq, stage of the conflict, and amount of IDPs seeking assistance. Khansa and Salam offer a description of what their returns entailed:

(Khansa) “My brother takes care of me and two of my sisters now. When Daesh came, he was in Sulaimaniya so he was already safe. He was working on a farm then. Some of my other family members were also working in Sulaimaniya so they weren’t in Sinjar when Daesh attacked.

Khalil’s smugglers took me to meet him in Duhok after I escaped. He didn’t have anywhere to live because he was staying on the farm before... so we ended up going to see some people from my village in al Ain camp. They told us where to go to get a tent and register our names. There were no tents for us

though. They said the camp was full and we would have to wait or we could try another camp. We didn't want to go anywhere else though. The camps aren't safe and we only wanted to stay where we knew people.

Outside of al Ain camp, we heard some families had set up their own tents with scraps they found. So we did the same. Now our tent looks almost like the tents in the camp because my brother has collected all the pieces from there. My two sisters live with us too. One had a husband who was abducted but she escaped and now we live together."

(Salam) "We didn't have anywhere to go at first. All of my family was taken by Daesh so there was no one to help us. Some of the other survivors were living in a house near Duhok that was still being constructed so we went there. There were cement walls and we put up tarps to make tents inside. There were cushions to sleep on too. I don't know how long we stayed there. After that we went to al Ain camp and they gave my mother a tent. She's a survivor so she gets special attention. It was me, my mother, and my little sisters.

The camp is good because they have food here and you can buy things. There's also a medical clinic and a school and places to walk around. When we first came to the camp a counselor was with us to help register my family and get food and beds and stuff. She was only with us that day. After that I had to help my mother do everything. She's been sick since Daesh took us. She faints and gets dizzy. She can't go anywhere alone and I have to talk to people for her. So I was the one who went to the clinic to get medicines and to the school to enroll. I do it for my mother and sisters."

The conflict with the Islamic State displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The humanitarian community struggled to keep pace with needs, as was evident in Khansa and Salam's descriptions. I met Khansa four days after she had escaped from captivity and followed her family's struggle to settle into their new life. Khansa's brother was barely 23 years old and taking care of three younger sisters (ages 20, 15, 11). He consistently went to the camp to search for materials to construct their tent. They arrived to al Ain in early December so the tent required insulation, warm blankets, and a heater. Khansa's brother was able to source some of these things from the camp but ultimately used the earnings from his farm work to purchase what they would need. Since it took some time for the family to be registered for food aid, Khansa's

brother took a job working as a mechanic outside a gas station on the highway that ran near the camp. Khansa's family, like Salam's family, were able to sort through the challenges of finding accommodation and services after displacement. However, the process was fraught with uncertainty and confusion and sometimes took weeks to months to settle in.

Frustrations with the Rapid Push to Attend School

During conversations with children, some expressed the rapid rate at which they went back to school. For some children, they welcomed the opportunity. However, for others they felt unprepared and ill-equipped to restart their education. Nonetheless, most of the children in this study returned to formal education relatively quickly, within weeks of their arrival at al Ain camp.

When I first started working with Nadia, I assumed she had never attended school in the camp. She was still heavily traumatized by her experiences in captivity and rarely left her tent. However, I came to learn that Nadia was indeed enrolled in school but had stopped going when her mother no longer objected. I was surprised that Nadia and her family felt it a better alternative for her to isolate herself in the tent. I asked Nadia about why she had left school and she offered the following insight:

(Nadia) "The counselors told me I should go to school. They helped my mother to enroll me. I didn't really want to but everyone said I had to. My mom didn't really care when I stopped going. She only made me go because the counselors came to us."

I knew many of the "counselors" in the camp. They were social workers from various organizations like War Child, Samaritan's Purse, or several local NGOs. The counselors attended to both practical and psychological needs and operated with a case management approach. Regarding working with children, they typically met with them regularly for a few weeks,

introduced them to child-friendly services in the camp, helped to enroll them in school, and did follow up visits as needed according to their mental health status. Enrollment in school was often heavily encouraged since trainings for counselors and humanitarian professionals (particularly in education) cited the importance of school symbolizing a “return to normalcy” for children. As an EiE professional, this has always been a cornerstone of our argument for rapidly rebuilding education in crisis contexts. According to the Global Education Cluster:

“Education is an important sector within humanitarian response due to the role education plays in providing physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection to children, adolescents and youth affected and made more vulnerable by crisis; disseminating life-saving messages about environmental and health risks; and facilitating a return to normalcy and overall stability for children, as well as families and communities” (www.inee.org)

Consequently, it was not a surprise that Nadia was encouraged to attend school so quickly. Especially among counselors who lacked a deep background in psychology and child protection, it was common to make school enrollment a primary goal despite the mental status and preparedness of the child. I believe I inadvertently contributed to this cycle in the case of Khansa.

Khansa had come to the organization that I directed within days of her escape from the Islamic State. As a western aid worker, I typically did not meet with newly arrived children out of sensitivity for their precarious states (I left that to local, more culturally in-tune staff); however, Khansa was the niece of our office cook/cleaner so she was brought to me rather unexpectedly to say hello. Khansa walked into my office and was quiet and timid. I smiled and spoke some words to her in Arabic, which she found funny. She opened up a bit and even though she was clearly exhausted from her travel with deep bags under her eyes and healing scars on her hands and arms, she continued to smile at me.

Her aunt asked if I would accompany them to the market. Our organization had supplied them with some funds for new clothes for Khansa and they were eager to go. I obliged and that outing is when Khansa and I began to develop a rapport. Before taking a taxi home from the market, we chatted about her future. I wanted to leave her on a positive note- she had been through so much. Khansa later brought up that conversation when I asked why she had chosen to go to school so quickly (Khansa was attending school within a week of her escape from the Islamic State). She said she went to school “because you told me to.” Khansa had liked me and taken my words to heart. I recalled promoting the importance of education to her, mainly because I am an education professional and I have adopted the common mantra that school often helps children to “return to normalcy.” However, after hearing Nadia speak of the pressures she felt from her counselors, I immediately felt guilty having pushed Khansa into schooling perhaps before she was ready. Fortunately, Khansa loved school and was one of the more resilient children I encountered.

In many ways, schools can help children in the recovery process; however, a level of recovery prior to attending is often important for educational success, as was the case with Nadia. Additionally, continued work towards recovery even after a return to school has commenced can be essential. The rhetoric in the field of EiE, encourages rapid attendance with a goal of children experiencing minimal disruption to their education. However, some children require additional time and care for healing. These children are unprepared for school but educational professionals in aid environments sometimes miss this fact since the ultimate goal is to keep children on track to completing their full course of primary and secondary education. Particularly, local staff and teachers who have had the least training in EiE principles, may set inappropriate goals for children.

During the course of this research, I attended “education cluster” meetings convened by UNICEF and Save the Children. The cluster meetings were a chance for all actors in the education sector to meet and discuss approaches/planning. Representatives from various NGOs, the U.N., and government ministries were present. Most representatives did not work directly with children but more operated at the administrative level. Approximately half were foreign staff who had minimal interaction with the local community.

At these meetings, there was often a dialogue about children who were struggling in school due to mental health issues and behavior problems (often linked issues). Resolution of the matter was always to utilize referral pathways and bring in counselors/professionals (coming from the protection sector) to meet with the families. An emphasis, or rather, the burden was always put on the child to mitigate the situation. What I found missing from the discussion was how the child’s external world may be exacerbating the issues. For instance, there was little discussion of working with teachers to better address these children’s transitions. There was also no recognition of how the social community of the school and the child’s peers may be challenging for recovery and reintegration.

Most of the children in this study rapidly re-enrolled in school following their return from captivity. For some, it created frustration and drove them to leave. To better assist these children, two currently absent principles could be introduced: 1. Better recognition of, and planning for children unprepared and ill-equipped for school, and 2. Mitigation strategies that include examining the child’s social world of peers and teachers.

Tensions Between the “Child-Friendly Space” and School

Another emerging theme from conversations with children was their comparisons of the camp’s child-friendly space (CFS) and the school. A CFS is a common element in humanitarian

services. According to UNICEF (2011), “Child Friendly Spaces are widely used in emergencies as a first response to children’s needs and an entry point for working with affected communities... [they] respond to children’s rights to protection, psychosocial well-being, and non-formal education” (p. 2). In the organization of humanitarian infrastructure, CFSs are typically a project of the protection sector rather than education.

Participants in the study frequently discussed the CFS in the camp. It served as a youth center where children socialized, played games, and participated in educational activities. The CFS was open every day and different age-groups were scheduled at specific times (open to all children in that age group). Activities were structured but lacked the rigid discipline of what children experienced in school.

During conversations with participants, most noted a preference for the CFS over their school. The CFS was more relaxed and embraced a “play pedagogy” that was fun and entertaining. In most instances, children continued to go to both the school and the CFS but in some cases, such as Nadia, the CFS was chosen over school.

(Nadia) “I sometimes go to the CFS. Not every day but I go 2 or 3 times a week. It’s better than school was. I don’t feel scared of the teachers there and we play games and do activities. I learn things there too. Sometimes we do music classes but also reading and writing.”

Another participant, Salam, continued to be enrolled in school but also noted that sometimes he would miss class but attend the CFS. He did not find the CFS to be an equal substitute for school but used it to rationalize missing class.

(Salam) “I can’t always go to school. I have to take my mother to her medical appointments and sometimes they’re in Duhok where we have to take a taxi to get there... I have to escort my mother so she’s not alone. When the appointments are during my school hours, I don’t go [to school]. But the CFS is open all the time and I can still go there when I get back. It’s not the same as

school but we still learn stuff and sometimes I see the homework that other children are doing.”

The CFS in the camp was a popular place for children. I attended a few times to observe and could see why it was often preferred. The CFS reminded me of educational summer camps in the United States. They used a “pedagogy of play” which has become increasingly common in humanitarian responses with children. This idea originated with Gunilla Lindqvist, who claimed that the pedagogy “advocates forms of adult and child joint play involvement that are respectful of the child’s culture, creativity and spontaneity, in a way that promotes her emotional, cognitive and social development” (Baumer, 2013, p. 1). The idea, in its simplest form, is that education and play can be integrated into one space, providing a better environment for nurturing intellectual development.

Play pedagogy was central to all activities at the CFS. Upon one visit there, I saw children drawing pictures of “what kindness means to them” followed by a group presentation and discussion. In another session, sanitation and hygiene professionals from a local NGO taught a lesson about hand washing that included a matching game and visual aids displaying cartoon characters. Activities at the CFS typically did not address formal education topics unless children were utilizing the space to work on homework collectively.

It differed immensely from the school, which was a typical Iraqi layout and teachers used a “banking” pedagogical approach. The school had rows of desks and children set separately facing the teacher and blackboard. Teachers typically conveyed information to students and asked follow-up questions to check their knowledge. I found the approach to be antisocial and uncollaborative, and teachers spent a significant portion of their time disciplining children.

Alternatively, the CFS was engaging and inviting. Children were invited to express themselves and there were no fears of wrong answers. Children seemed happy and carefree in the space. Khansa and Nadia provide a description of some of their visits:

(Khansa) “We did crafts today at the CFS. There’s a holiday coming up so the teachers will use our crafts to decorate the center... The center already has some of the projects that kids have done before on the walls, but our crafts are just for the celebration. We made paper chains that can be strung up [like garland]. Before we put the links together, we wrote different lines of a poem on them. And sometimes the teachers used our links to show the younger kids about colors... we all worked together on it. The kids all help each other.”

(Nadia) “The kids mostly played sports when I went today. I don’t play but I watch. Maybe if they did something different I would join, but I go anyway... I guess I like it there. There’s stuff to do and the teachers don’t make me be a part of things if I just want to sit there. Sometimes they still make me talk and say hello to the kids in the group but it’s ok... other than hula hooping outside the tent, it’s probably the only place I go in the camp now.”

Khansa and Nadia both enjoyed attending the CFS. It was a stark change from schooling for each of them. Widely, all children in the camp enjoyed the CFS and I rarely heard anything negative spoken about it. School on the other hand was rigid and children often complained about discipline and boredom.

Ironically, some of the teachers at the CFS expressed wanting to become school teachers. The pay was better and the job had more prestige. They told me it was challenging though because you must have specific qualifications and know the “right people.” Nonetheless, if the pedagogy being used at the CFS could be introduced to formal schooling, students might be more enthusiastic to attend and have better educational experiences. Particularly, in crisis contexts, embracing a pedagogy of care, would serve children immensely better.

Unfortunately, the education system in Iraq has been slow to experiment with new pedagogies. The teachers at the school told me that in their training institutes, they primarily

focused on content knowledge over learning methods to work with children. One teacher said, “Why should we change? If they go to university, the professors will be the same.”

Consequently, the rigid approach to education continues, even in the displacement camps where children would benefit from alternative approaches to learning.

Lastly, it is worth troubling a notion that was common among EiE and CPiE professionals in Iraq and more widely. Occasionally, aid professionals would claim that the CFS was a stepping stone for children attending formal education. In guidance from Save the Children (2008):

“Child Friendly Spaces can provide a child-focused and child-friendly environment in which children continue their cognitive development and can give them opportunities to learn on a variety of levels. In many cases, they can help minimize the disruption to the learning and development opportunities that schooling provides” (p.2).

When I spoke with teachers at the CFS, they confirmed that although not it was not their primary goal, they did think their work was helping children to adapt to school. However, although CFSs are important venues for children to receive psychosocial care that may help them to reintegrate into formal schooling, calling it a stepping stone may be misleading. The pedagogical techniques failed to transfer from the CFS to the school and I struggled to find a direct link of how the CFS supported schooling aside from psychosocial care. There was immense potential for the CFS to work with the school but this did not occur.

Mitigating Traumatic Memory

By far the most pervasive problem in the process of children “returning to normalcy” was an inability to mitigate their past trauma in their current circumstances. Most children who were abducted by the Islamic State had access to some kind of mental health services. Typically, they were referred by camp officials to various NGOs for counseling and care. However, services

have often been inadequate. Memories of trauma affect all aspects of children's lives including family and peer relationships, education, health, and more.

The inadequacy of care is largely due to two key reasons. First, Iraqi universities have not offered degrees or coursework in counseling psychology or trauma care. As such, finding qualified individuals to fill positions has been challenging. Foreign aid staff began conducting training programs to assist in filling the gap; however, the weekend long seminars were not comparable to full university degrees. Second, it is estimated that thousands of children were abducted by the Islamic State and the supply of counseling professionals was insufficient to meet the needs.

Consequently, children are largely left with the burden of mitigating their own trauma. Given the dire situations many captive children endured, this has been no simple task. Participants in this study consistently reflected on gruesome stories of abuse. Often these stories would emerge without prompting and quite frankly, derailed many interviews. This was not the data I was aiming to collect but I let participants speak freely if it seemed healthy and therapeutic for them. Ultimately, reviewing the immense amount of traumatic experiences that these children shared helped me to conclude that they are often still silently struggling. During the course of our conversations and questions about their schooling, many children still came around to discussing trauma. It was a common topic that sometimes overwhelmed our time together. A few times, I asked the children if they thought about these memories when they were with other children, either in school or at the CFS, and most replied with a "sometimes." To give an essence of what some of these children had to mitigate, Nadia and Talal offer their stories.

(Nadia) "Today I was thinking about this baby that died. It was after Daesh had taken all the women and children to a [reception] hall. We all had to sit around the room leaning against the walls. This one woman had a baby that wouldn't stop crying. It was a tiny baby and my mother said it needed to eat but

the mother couldn't make milk. Some of the other women tried to help because one of the fighters was getting mad, but the baby wouldn't stop crying. Eventually the fighter took the baby and slammed its head on the ground. There was blood coming out of it-- the baby was dead. Then the fighter made some of us kids come and look at it and touch it."

(Talal) "Daesh put me in a house in Qassim Harab. There were two other families there and we had a mobile phone that we kept hidden under a floor board. Daesh had heard we had the phone so kept coming back to search us. It was hidden really well though so they never found it. One time, they took me away to a house with other Daesh fighters. They tied my hands and feet together and hung me from the ceiling. Some of them hit me but mostly I just hung there. It was my punishment for not telling them about the phone."

(Talal) "There was a girl in Qassim Harab named Shireen. She was a little older than me but I knew her because she was from Hardan [Talal's village]. One day a Daesh fighter was going to each house looking for her because someone had said she was beautiful so he planned to take her. I knew which house she was in but her family would hide her every time Daesh came. Eventually the fighter- his name was Khalifa- came to me to help him because he knew we were from the same village. He kept asking, who is Shireen? Where is she? I told him I didn't know any Shireen and I couldn't help him. Somehow he figured out where she was hiding- I think other families gave her up. He came to get me and took me to the house. There was another boy who was brought there also and they asked him if this was Shireen's house. The boy also said no, and that he didn't know what Khalifa was talking about. His name was Kheder.

Daesh threatened to kill both of us if we didn't tell the truth. We both knew she was living there but we still didn't say anything. Khalifa told us that he would search the house and if he found her, they would kill both of us. So then we just waited. We were outside the house with Khalifa's driver just waiting not knowing what would happen.

Eventually Khalifa dragged Shireen out of the house. He brought her over to us and asked, is this Shireen?? Ahmed and I both said no that's not Shireen but Khalifa kept asking us. He wanted us to admit that this was Shireen. I kept telling him no, but the other boy got scared and said, ok yes this is Shireen but she has two names and I always call her Nado. The boy said he was confused when Khalifa was saying Shireen because he always knew her by a different name. The other boy was scrambling to give an explanation but Khalifa kept getting more and more mad. After that he looked at me and said, you lied! You're a liar. He called me an animal and said he would kill me.

So then Khalifa took all three of us, Kheder, me, and Shireen. We all got in the car with Khalifa's driver. We stopped and Khalifa got out of the car with Shireen. Then he turned to the driver, Yunus, and told him to take us somewhere and kill us.

Yunus drove to a field and we walked through the grass until he told us to stop. Then he made us get on our knees and put our hands behind our head. At this point we were looking out onto the empty field with Yunus behind us with a gun. He told us to say the Islamic death prayer. It's what all Muslim people must say before they die. We didn't know it though. I didn't memorize it when they made us learn Quran. I couldn't see his face but I guessed he must have been mad. I don't know why but he told us to stand and that today we would live. He said that maybe next time we would die but not today. Then he told us to run back to our houses and we left."

Talal and Khansa both offer harrowing stories from their time in captivity. They were forced to witness killings, were tortured, and lived in a constant state of stress and fear. Talal, Khansa, and other participants in the study would frequently reflect on experiences like these with me. Typically, their stories would come unprovoked leaving me to assume that traumatic memories were always present in their minds. In speaking with Nadia's mother, we talked about why she let her leave school. She stated, "These are the experiences that she had and now she has to forget them and go to school? It's too hard. I haven't forgotten my time either."

Here I offered some of the children's stories to emphasize the challenges of "returning to normalcy" after traumatic events. The enormity of their stress while in captivity was overwhelming and although it has dissipated, it has not disappeared. Children carry these experiences with them, which has had a negative effect on their lives. Even in school, some of these children are unable to put aside their traumatic memory to move forward.

Girls' Optimism for Educational and Life Success Linked to Displacement

Girls' education and empowerment is a major thread of discussion in international education. It has been a focus of international development policy for decades. Since the Beijing

Platform in the 1990s, the MDG era beginning in the 2000s, and renewed commitments called for by Malala Yousafzai in 2012, girls' education and empowerment has gained increasing momentum. Initially, the major focus was on granting girls access (Unterhalter, 2011), however, more and more, discourse has turned to empowerment, structural inequalities, and social transformation.

In Iraq, girls have struggled with both gaining access to education and troubling the question, what does education actually mean for women and society? Prior to the conflict with the Islamic State, gender parity in schooling had improved over the years but girls were still under-represented with just 89 girls to every 100 boys enrolled (UNICEF, 2010). According to Vilardo (2018):

“Girls’ enrolment grew at all levels and at faster rates than boys’ enrolment, although they are still enrolled in lower numbers than boys and tend to drop out at a higher rate. Furthermore, 28.2 percent of women aged 12 years or older are illiterate, more than double the male rate of 13 percent” (p. 6).

A range of reasons help to explain the discrepancy, including, concerns about safety, family poverty, a reluctance to allow adolescent girls to continue to attend school, the distance from home to school, early marriage, and the need to help at home.

Regarding what education means for empowerment and social transformation, there is limited literature for Iraq. However, although education and literacy levels have improved significantly for women over the years, employment trends are slow to keep pace and violence against women continues to rise (Vilardo, 2018). As such, the field of girls' education remains under-developed in Iraq with much room to address both issues of access and more societal level topics such as girls' school to work opportunities.

During conversations with participants of this study, they often discussed their feelings about school and hopes for the future from a distinctly gendered perspective. A common theme

that emerged was how education offered via humanitarian agencies was empowering to girls and helped them to develop ambitions for the future. One of the female participants expressed that her views had changed since she attended school before the crisis, and that she now has a more positive outlook for her own education and life goals. The boys in the study also noted that girls seemed to be excelling in the camp. Following the crisis, girls have been empowered to envision professions they had not considered before and felt encouraged to be top-ranking students. In analyzing participants' interviews, conversations, and observations, I have attributed this change to: 1. The mentorship of female teachers, 2. Improvements in gender parity due to the necessity of boys working, and 3. Negative perceptions of boys in the camp.

Mentorship of Female Teachers

Prior to the crisis, Khansa had been a good student but not at the top of her class. She expressed that most typically it was the boys who held the highest rank. She attributed this to girls having to assist mothers with housework while boys had more time to study. Khansa did not seem to mind. At the time, she had little ambition for the future and saw education more as a fun social gathering rather than a stepping stone to the future.

Since arriving to al Ain camp, Khansa has become a top performing student in her class and speaks of becoming a doctor after she finishes university. She has clear goals for the future and takes great pride in telling me of her accomplishments in school. From what Khansa has described, she has adopted an entirely different perspective on education and life from the one she had in Sinjar. When speaking with me, she had a new enthusiasm for learning and a sense of ambition that was absent before the crisis.

Khansa was not an unusual case. I attended school lessons where girls were frequently the ones answering questions and generally more engaged than many of the boys. Girls also

outnumbered the boys in the lessons I observed. Lastly, the boys in this study all confirmed that generally the girls were performing better than them.

I found that one of the many contributing factors to this was likely the presence of female teachers. Prior to the conflict, the participants described all their teachers in Sinjar as male (beyond early primary school). However, in the camp, schools were sponsored by aid agencies like UNICEF and Save the Children, which highly value gender diversity among teachers and made a point to hire women. Consequently, participants became exposed to female teachers for the first time since early primary school. Sometimes the children would comment on this, which I found particularly empowering for the girls.

(Khansa) “My teachers in Sinjar were men. They were nice, I liked them. One was the father of a student, his name was Ustad Jameel... I have a woman teacher here in the camp. There are actually a lot of women teachers here. They’re nice too. My teacher is S’t Alhan... S’t Alhan went to the medical school and was going to be a doctor, but then Daesh came and she had to leave Mosul. So now she teaches us.”

I found two parts of Khansa’s comments intriguing. The first is that she used a phrase of respect to address both her male and female teachers. The term “Ustad” is used as an honorific for respected men in a community. Not every male receives the title, only elder men and leaders (sometimes including school teachers). In Iraq, men more commonly hold positions of power and respect, so the term is frequently heard. For women, S’t (pronounced “sit”) is the comparable honorific. It is so infrequently used, that the term had to be explained to me during conversations with children. I found it notable that Khansa respected her female teachers to the point of utilizing the honorific. This was common across most students.

Additionally, Khansa spoke highly of her teacher’s ambitions to become a doctor. In Iraq, joining the medical profession holds the highest prestige. It was always among the top two

choices for children when I asked about their future hopes. Khansa clearly respected and appreciated her teacher. She served as a role model to her, which helped empower Khansa to think about her own future pursuits. Prior to the conflict, Khansa recollected having no clear ambitions. She claimed it was not something she thought about. Now, living in the camp, Khansa dreams of being a doctor like her teacher had pursued or an accountant for an NGO.

Improvements in Gender Parity and Girls' Achievement due to the Necessity of Boys Working

When I visited the camp, I typically entered through the back “unofficial” entrance. This allowed me to avoid engaging with troublesome camp officials, who either found it entertaining to speak with a foreign woman or were instructed to delay me due to some affiliations I had with local human rights advocates. The road to the unofficial entrance was lined with vendors often selling fruits, vegetables, tires, or second hand clothing. Many of the vendors were young school-aged boys. Even within the camp, I would see young boys hanging outside barber shops or phone card kiosks. The boys were either working or on a break from work. I inquired with a few of them if they attended school and their response was often “no” or “only sometimes.”

In school, classes appeared to have gender parity. The lessons I attended were generally even among boys and girls. Some classes had 1-3 more boys, while others would have 1-3 more girls. Given the constantly fluctuating numbers of arriving IDPs, it was challenging for the school to provide me exact records of enrollment; however, observationally, there was parity.

This was a stark improvement from pre-crisis conditions. According to UNICEF (2010), the under-representation of girls in school has been known for years. The fact is, there are declining numbers of girls in each successive grade. Girls in Iraq are consistently confronted with obstacles to remaining in school.

However, schools in the camp told a different story, likely due to the number of boys needed to join the workforce to support their families. Abid describes why he did not go to school in the camp (although later briefly attended a school in Sinjar):

(Abid) “I would walk around and sell things that my mother knitted. I had a box and I would go to each tent to see if anyone wanted to buy anything. We had no money and my father is still missing so we had to do this... It was hard because the women would laugh at me inside their tents. They would invite me in and say they would buy something but really they just wanted to make fun of me. They would laugh and I would leave. It happened all the time. But I did sell some things and that was good for my family... I didn’t bother to go to school then because I had to help my family. If I wasn’t working then I needed to help my mother with things.”

Abid later attended a school in Sinjar when he went to stay with his uncles. However, he quickly dropped out when he found employment as a soldier, which helped him to support his mother and family. Abid is similar to many boys in the camps, who often had to work rather than go to school. This was especially true due to the fact that the Islamic State had abducted and executed so many Yazidi men.

The struggles of work did not affect the girls like the boys. In fact, the girls often reflected on how they had so much housework to do in Sinjar pre-crisis, however, now had an immense amount of free time in the camp that allowed them to study. Girls in the camp were enjoying a new found freedom that gave them the space they needed to excel in school.

(Khansa) “In the mornings [in Sinjar], I would help my mom prepare the bread. After that I would go to school. When I came home, we would wash clothes or do a shop, or make dinner. We also had chickens for a while and I would take care of them. There was always something to do. I liked spending that time with my mom... [but] it was hard to study when I was so busy.

Here in the camp, I don’t do any of those things. We buy our bread here and my mother is still in captivity so my older sister does a lot. I mostly just go to school. I also play with my friends after school... I have more time to study here. Sometimes I don’t have anything to do so I just read my school books.”

Khansa, like many girls in the camp, were taking advantage of the circumstances, subtly changing gender dynamics of the camp. Whereas, in pre-crisis conditions they were often bound to the home to assist in domestic labor, they now had freedom to attend school at higher rates or excel in their studies. Girls were seen as higher achievers and consequently, began to envision more ambitious futures (e.g. Khansa wanting to become a doctor). Unfortunately, for boys in the camp, prior gender norms dictated that they help their families financially, especially in the absence of their fathers. Consequently, seemingly boys were attending less and failing more at their studies than girls.

Negative Perceptions of Boys in the Camp Versus Girls

Lastly, a notable trend when conducting this research was the negative perception of boys in the camp. Among both female and male participants as well as community members, boys were largely considered “problems” or “untrustworthy.” Alternatively, girls were not viewed in a negative light and this allowed them to excel at school and fill the void of previously high-achieving males.

Conversations with the participants and community members shed light on reasons that boys were seen so negatively. These reasons included the high rate of gender based violence in the camp, the fact that many boys lacked fathers or respected male figures in their life, and limited space in the camp meant groups of boys spending time together was more noticeable and often perceived as gang-like. The following anecdotes from Salam, Talal, and Nadia help to convey the perspectives on boys that were widely shared in the camp.

(Salam) “All the men are still with Daesh. We haven’t seen them since Daesh came to Sinjar...Most of us don’t have fathers in the camp. It’s hard because we [sons] have to take care of our families. You know, like I take my mom to see the counselors...

My father used to always be around. I went with him to visit my uncles or we would go to Sinjar City together and I would accompany him to a store. It's hard not having him here. It's like I'm not me unless my father is around. It's like this for a lot of boys I think. People knew me because they knew my father. It's different here."

(Talal) "People in Hardan knew my father so they trusted my family. I could go anywhere, not even just Hardan, and it was ok, people were good to me. Here there are only a few families from Hardan. No one knows each other here. No one knows me or my family. They don't know if we're good or bad people."

Salam and Talal reflect on the impact of the absence of fathers. In a patriarchal culture such as Iraq, fathers are considered the head of the family and are the ones most frequently networked into various relations with town/village leaders, other families, etc. Not to discount women, who are often outspoken decision-makers in a community, but patriarchal organization is the status quo in Iraq and men gain the social currency. As such, the boys felt an absence of identity without their fathers who were still missing. The issue extended to the camp community who struggled to perceive the boys in the absence of fathers or respected senior male members of the family. An encounter with a woman in the camp rendered this response:

(Older women in al Ain camp) "We don't know the families of these boys. Maybe they came from a good family where they worked with their fathers and helped their mothers. Maybe they just caused trouble. We don't know who they were in Sinjar so I don't trust many of them. I don't let my daughters walk around the camp at night."

Absent fathers and the complexity of male Iraqi identity contributed to negative perceptions of boys. Additionally, the geography of the camp compounded the negativity. Al Ain camp, although populous, was not large by physical measures. The camp could be walked across in approximately 20-25 minutes. This meant there were limited spaces for children to collect for socializing. Surrounding the camp, there were some fields that were popular for children of all ages to meet and play. There were also places within the camp such as a creek bed or the yards

near the school or CFS. However, the camp and surrounding fields were still a densely populated area and community members noticed when there were gatherings. These gatherings were almost always of young boys since traditionally, girls simply did not collect as much in public. Given the fact that most refugee and IDP camps are typically comprised of 50% people under the age of 18, boy meet-up groups were both obvious and everywhere. Some of the community members spoke about the boys almost like gangs. One community member commented: “They get together to cause trouble. I tell my son not to go to the field if they are there. They just cause problems.” Talal confirms this commonly shared perspective:

(Talal) “The people here don’t trust us. We were taken by Daesh and so they’re afraid of us. We were at the military camps and everyone knows what Daesh made us learn. People get videos of some of the boys now fighting for Daesh and praying to Allah-- so they’re scared. That’s not us [boys in the camp] though. But whenever we’re together, people say things. I think they’re nervous. Where are we supposed to go though? We live in a camp. Or maybe they think it’s bad that we’re together but these are my friends.”

Lastly, among community members there was a negative perception of boys due to the high rates of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in the camp. The issue of SGBV has gained increasing attention as conflicts have displaced increasing amounts of people in the last decade. Camps typically have security measures but the density of living quarters and the absence of social networks that existed prior to the crisis (neighbors, extended family members, etc.) provides an insecure atmosphere where many women and girls suffer the effects of violence.

In al Ain camp, community members frequently discussed the situation of women and their abuse has shaded the way they look at young men in the camp. In a discussion with a parent of one of the participants, she claimed that the camp was perpetually a dangerous place. Over the

years she had stayed in al Ain camp, she had worked to move her tent to be closer to people she knew from prior to the conflict in order to “protect herself.”

(Parent) “We used to live in Section D but it wasn’t safe. We had to take the tent over there when we arrived or we wouldn’t have gotten one... All the families there are from the south side [of Sinjar]. We didn’t know any of them and there were people from my town in Section A so we kept trying to move there. Eventually we got a tent here and it’s much better now. It’s still not safe but it’s an improvement.”

Other women in the camp frequently discussed stories they had heard about abuses occurring. They were keen to tell me the stories because they were worried for my personal safety. I was not able to access camp security records so I cannot verify the accounts. However, the collective notion of insecurity (whether accurate or not) worked to increase negative perceptions of young men.

(Woman in the camp) “There was a young woman who was raped in her tent. She doesn’t have any family here so she lived alone. The man kept coming back to look for her so she had to move tents every night. Maybe he got to her again, I don’t know. She eventually tried to kill herself and burned down her tent in the process.”

Widely, there was concern for women’s safety in the camp. Stories about abuse were pervasive. When I would visit families and the sun would begin to set, women would instruct me to depart. Often times, I would stay for dinner with a friend’s family in her tent before I would go. Since the electricity usually came back on around this time, we would spend an hour or two watching the news before I made my way back home. Sometimes, these visits would go late into the night and the family’s sons would walk me to the gate to catch my waiting car. There was never a moment in the camp when I was without a male escort if it were after dark. Even in my humanitarian aid vest, which designated I was a foreigner, I was still under threat.

This perspective of insecurity turned many in the camp to look negatively upon the young boys there and sadly, many of them adopted the identity that was being placed on them. The children in the study complained of boys harassing students, bullying in the fields, and acting out in class. In one of the lessons I attended as school, several boys were told to leave since they were disrupting class. Reflecting on his school experience, one of boy in the school yard stated, “The teacher always thinks I’m a problem, so I don’t care if I get in trouble. Even if I didn’t do anything, I get in trouble.”

However, the negative perception of boys has had a positive outcome for girls. Many girls are now thriving in school because they feel they have the space to succeed. The high-achieving boys that they typically would need to compete against in Sinjar were no longer present and girls could more easily stand out.

Summary

In summary, this chapter aimed to convey how research participants thought about their educational world. It offers a series of themes, supported by rich narratives, which give insights into the deep challenges Yazidi children encountered as they returned from life under the Islamic State. Focusing on children’s psychological barriers and opportunities, the following summarizes the themes presented throughout this chapter.

First, the findings describe a need to “de-educate” children from the harsh and violent education they were exposed to after their abductions. At the time of this research, many children had not yet been able to fully reconcile their experiences of radicalization and indoctrination in IS schools with their current educational programming in the camp. Additionally, many children still viewed schools as sites of violence. This idea can largely be attributed to traumatic memories of killings that commonly occurred in school yards and lingering bullet holes and

destruction of educational infrastructure. As such, the first sections of this chapter heavily focused on how children are mitigating their trauma under new circumstances in the camp.

Moving beyond reflections of the past, children also struggled with current aid support. Several of the children were highly traumatized but still encouraged to rapidly re-enroll in education. Too much push by aid professionals with insufficient socio-emotional care provided by schools, ultimately resulted in a withdrawal from education by some participants with no plans to return. The common rhetoric of aid agencies to help children swiftly “return to normalcy” was in friction with on the ground realities.

Lastly, although children concentrated discussions on the many barriers they experienced for accessing quality education, one key opportunity indeed emerged. Girls claimed to feel more confident and empowered in the camp setting, largely due to an absence of boys in school or negative community attitudes towards young boys. Although, the situation for boys is distressing, it has provided a context where girls are now excelling and taking on leadership roles in their schools and communities.

Chapter 7: Findings Part II: How We Navigate our Educational World (Institutional Barriers and Opportunities)

In this chapter, I present findings that represent the institutional barriers and opportunities for education in emergency contexts according to children in al Ain camp, Iraq. Children often encounter several obstacles to accessing quality education amid crisis and displacement. In the previous chapter, I presented the psychological barriers and opportunities, which elaborated on the internal issues that many children face. In this chapter, I focus on how policies, procedures, and other external factors impact children's attempts to access quality education during periods of emergencies.

Institutional barriers commonly impact educational access in crisis contexts. Crises often unfold in countries that are considered “fragile” and lacking strong government infrastructure that can adapt to changing conditions and continue to provide robust care for the entirety of its population. Definitions of “fragile states” are contested and vary in the field of international development but commonly it refers to states that lack the capacity to provide basic services and protection for its people. The Department for International Development (DFID) refers to “fragile” as an instance when, “the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to its people” (Mosselson et al., 2009, p. 2). Frequently, the inadequacies come from financial instability and resource scarcity but also stems from poor functioning policies and governance.

It should be noted that “fragile” is not a definitive state, but rather, there are different degrees of fragility that a country may experience. For instance, in some situations basic services may entirely collapse and disappear. Other times, the government may provide some services but not others. In some cases, services like education and health could still be offered but ineffective in practice or inaccessible for much of the population. The varying degrees of fragility are a result of the severity of the crisis and prior stability/instability of the government. Frequently

during periods when national governments have limited capacity to provide basic services, policies and procedures that were in place prior to the crisis may remain even though they are no longer applicable or effective.

In Iraq, governance of the country has been significantly weakened by the conflict with the Islamic State. IS waged a multi-year battle to overtake a large swath of land in the northwest of the country. The conflict has taken a toll on national resources and consequently, international aid agencies have been essential to support core functions such as health, education, sanitation, protection, and more.

Although Iraq has experienced a decreased capacity to provide these services to its population, it has nonetheless retained considerable oversight and control over aid support. For instance, although agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children largely supply education for hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs, education policies are still set by Iraqi authorities. Many of these policies have simply been carried over from pre-conflict times and not adapted to current circumstances. As such, several policies do not support the current lived realities of the population.

In this section, participants offer insights on institutional barriers to education. Their stories exemplify how dated and inflexible policies are often limiting to children trying to access rights and services during a crisis. Particularly, the children discuss four key barriers, which include: 1. Mobility issues and access, 2. Aging out or dropping down, 3. Language issues and enrollment, and 4. Camp security as limiting to studies.

Mobility Issues and Access

The first theme, *mobility issues and access*, was a common obstacle for participants. They often moved several times over the course of their displacement and gaining access to

services like education proved difficult, especially when they had to undergo the same bureaucratic changes time and again upon each relocation. For many families, it can take weeks or months to find semi-permanent accommodations and services after displacement. The frequent moves can be severely inhibiting for acquiring necessary aid and assistance.

In a crisis, children and families are often caught up in an array of procedures that help them to access vital services. These procedures are intended to establish organization in what are typically chaotic circumstances. For instance, ensuring that a child enters the correct grade level or has passed certain exams is important for their long-term educational outlook. This requires families to submit specific documentation or follow alternative avenues to providing this information. It can be a time-consuming and difficult process for families, who may have to repeat much of the work with each relocation.

Children in this study expressed they faced challenges of moving from place to place during displacement and the trouble of finding consistent access to services, particularly education. They discussed their desire to continue to attend school, but also the difficulty in doing so. Salam and Nadia offer their insights:

(Salam) “The first place we lived was that house that was being constructed. We went there because there were other survivors already living there and my mom knew some of them. I don’t know why people were living there. Survivors get extra help so they could have gone to a camp, even the full [camps] find space for survivors. Sometimes, counselors from different organizations would come and try to convince the women to leave [and move to a camp]. Some did but some didn’t. There were a few survivors who were afraid to leave the house. They had been with Daesh for so long and didn’t trust anyone. We eventually left though.

That house wasn’t good for us. My mother needed to go to the medical clinic but there wasn’t one around. I also couldn’t go to school. There were schools around but I couldn’t just go. I would have to go to the ministry with my papers and enroll there first. Then I would have to go back to the school to talk to the head teacher. If he let me go then it would be ok. But I also wouldn’t know

anyone there and it would be all the Muslim kids, so I don't know if I would want to go anyway.”

Salam discusses the challenges of his initial living situation located outside a camp setting where displaced families often have to navigate bureaucratic issues without the guidance of aid professionals (who facilitate services in the camps). Moving to a house directly after the family's release from IS strongly inhibited them from accessing important health, education, and nutritional services. Living in a new community, far from their homeland, Salam's family needed to figure out and navigate systems that were unfamiliar to them. Although Salam mentioned aid workers would occasionally visit the female survivors of IS these workers were trauma counselors whose job was to move survivors to camps, not to assist in other needs.

Salam also mentioned the challenge of attending a new school with Muslim children. Salam is a displaced Yazidi child, who was traumatized by the radicalism of the Islamic State. Consequently, it was a struggle for him to trust being surrounded by all Muslim students, even though they were not supporters of the Islamic State. For children who reside outside of camp settings, their only choice is to attend school with the local population of children who may be from other ethno-religious groups. For Salam, who was still processing his trauma, this would have likely kept him from attending even if he overcame the hurdles of paperwork and procedure.

In another example of how mobility issues impact access to services, Nadia offers a description of her cousin's struggles. Nadia's cousin, Vian, was displaced after IS arrived in August of 2014. Fortunately, Vian was able to escape, fleeing to the Kurdistan region of Iraq with her family. Vian lived in the same camp as Nadia and was one of the only children with whom she engaged. However, prior to moving to the camp, Vian lived in a series of other

temporary shelters. Vian's story displays how a lack of documentation among displaced Yazidi children was inhibiting their educational access.

(Nadia) "Vian was living in Sumel town after she left Syria [she was temporarily staying in the non-IS held areas]. Her family was one of the ones that made it to the mountain when Daesh came. They were there for a week trapped on the mountain because Daesh had surrounded them. After a few days, airplanes started to come and dropped water and food supplies to them. Then a few days later, the PKK had opened a corridor from the mountain to Syria where Yazidis could get to safety. They had to walk from 5am to the night and it was August so very hot. A lot of people got left behind on the mountain. Some people died in the heat. Anyway, that's how they ended up in Syria.

Vian and her family stayed in Syria for a while but eventually went back to Sumel in Iraq. There were a lot of Yazidi families living there. They took over a lot of the schools because it was still summer holiday and no one was using the building. But Vian came too late and they couldn't get into a school so they found an empty shop. The shop owner was really nice and let them stay there with other Yazidi families. Some of the Muslim families in Sumel took care of them. They would bring food and water to them. Everyone was taken care of.

But then school came back in session and all the Yazidi families that were living in the schools had to leave. They came here to al Ain but Vian and her family stayed in Sumel. Vian tried to go to the school there but the head teacher said she needed papers. She told the teacher that her papers were in Sinjar and she couldn't get them because of Daesh. So then he told her to get papers at the ministry. But the ministry headquarters was in Mosul and had been destroyed. Anyway, she gave up in Sumel but they ended up moving here to al Ain. So she goes to school here now... she didn't have the same problem with papers in the camp."

Nadia's description of Vian's struggles to enroll in school due to a lack of documents was common in Iraq. Vian was turned away from the school in Sumel town because she could not produce the necessary documentation of her educational record in Sinjar. Vian also did not have her ID with her, which created additional problems for her to access services in her new community.

For Yazidis who were forced to flee, many did not carry anything with them, including records and documents. Vian had fled with her family to the mountain and remained there for

over a week in scorching temperatures of 100+ degrees Fahrenheit. Over the period of time when they were under siege, Yazidis on the mountain had little access to water, food, and other resources until the U.S. and other world governments began air-dropping supplies. When the family finally had a way off the mountain, they had to walk for hours to cross the border into a safe area of Syria. Weakened and dehydrated, it was nearly impossible for families to carry belongings with them. Consequently, many Yazidis arrived at camps and communities in Iraq without the typical documentation needed to enroll in school or gain access to other essential services.

I saw the detriment of these documentation issues firsthand during one of my work trips with the organization that I directed. I visited a tent shared by three female survivors and their children. I was there because a staff member had told me about their under-nourished children and we were conducting a welfare check. The women expressed that the children were not receiving proper nutrition because they were having to stretch food rations for seven people among thirteen of them. This was because several of the children had left their identification in Sinjar and one had been born while in captivity (and never received a birth certificate). The women had applied through alternative pathways to get the proper documentation required to apply for food assistance; however, they were still waiting for the results. I point out this unfortunate example of procedure as problematic for displaced individuals to gain access to vital services. In some instances, problems would be resolved in one camp or community but if the family moved on elsewhere, they would sometimes have to endure the process over again.

With regards to education, children often had to produce their educational records if they were attempting to attend school outside of the camps. Within the camps, rules were much more relaxed since they were run by aid agencies. If the children were successful in one community

but moved on to a new one, it was often at the discretion of the head teacher if their documentation was sufficient. Mobility left many families in a cycle of bureaucracy that was challenging and frustrating to overcome.

Lastly, Khansa describes her attempts to go to school following her escape from captivity and resettlement in the area surrounding al Ain camp.

(Khansa) “We were technically living in the area just outside of al Ain camp. My brother was getting supplies from the camp to build our tent and he was trying to register us for food rations. I think I could have gone to school in the camp but there was one closer to where our tent was. It was a small school that serviced the farms outside of al Ain town. Most of the kids there are Yazidi but not from Sinjar. They’re from here in al Ain. It was better for me to go to this school so I didn’t have to walk so far and also the camp school was across the highway, which isn’t safe to cross. So my brother tried to enroll me there but it was hard. First, they asked for my documents. When my brother fixed that problem they told us that students would be on a break soon and I couldn’t start until after that. They made it really hard for us, then they told us that the camp school was built for kids like me and I should go there... they have a small school and have to take care of the students they already have.”

Khansa’s story displays similar obstacles to several of the children in this study. Her lack of documents and schools’ inflexibility to accommodate displaced children is apparent.

However, Khansa also experienced some discrimination. The school recommended she attend the camp school, which was funded by aid agencies, rather than deplete their small local school. Although it was the closest and safest choice for Khansa, the school worried that taking on displaced students like her would take scarce resources from current students.

Mobility issues were the most common theme when participants discussed the institutional challenges to accessing quality education. The frequent moves and resettlement that occurred after displacement made it difficult for them to enter new schools due to the procedural hoops that were often in place. Fortunately, all the students in this study were able to

successfully navigate the system to rejoin education (even if they later left). However, this most often occurred only once children were permanently settled into camps.

Aging Out and Dropping Down

Another emerging theme among participants was the problem of aging out of education or having to drop down one or more grade levels due to being behind their peers. Globally, it is not uncommon for students to drop down grade levels, especially in developing countries. Particularly, many young people of upper secondary school age still attend lower education cycles. For instance, 1 in 5 children of upper secondary age are still enrolled in lower secondary and 1 in 20 still attend primary school (UNICEF, 2018b). The issue of over-aged children in lower education cycles often puts added pressure on scarce resources and can be discouraged by school personnel. In other instances, children may have aged out of education entirely, increasing the rate of those out-of-school. If a child has not attended school in several years, they may not be allowed to return. For displaced children residing in conflict-affected countries, these types of policies are especially problematic.

In Iraq, displaced children encounter both these issues. Presently, there are close to 3.2 million children out-of-school and 90% reside in conflict-affected provinces (Education: Every child in school & learning, 2018). Many of these children are without access to education due to destroyed infrastructure, while others simply are not allowed to enroll due to aging out policies or are discouraged by school leadership when it is found they would need to drop down grade levels. The rationale for leaving such harsh policies in place is not entirely heartless. Having an aging out policy is helpful to encourage children to stay in school, while discouraging students from enrolling in lower grades conserves limited resources. However, these types of policies are

more effective in peaceful periods. During and following a crisis, they can be immensely inhibiting to children who have experienced exceptional circumstances.

Several participants in this study cited these policies as barriers to their education. Talal describes the challenges of navigating the aging out policy, while Khansa and Salam discuss the challenges of dropping down grade levels. Lastly, Abid reflects on his lack of optimism to return to school following his exit from the militia where he works.

(Talal) “Well the problem was that I was held captive by Daesh for two years. So when I went to ask the school manager in the camp if I could enroll he said no, it’s too late—you’ve been out of school for two years and now you’re too old. The manager refused me so I had to sit at home for the first month or two after I escaped. That’s when I came to Yazda [humanitarian aid organization] for help.

They took me to the Ministry of Education in Duhok and helped explain that I was taken by Daesh and should get to go to school now. They explained that I was abducted and it wasn’t my choice to be out of school. They told them what a hard time I had. But it didn’t matter, even the Ministry said I was too old.

I also asked other NGOs to help. I went to many of them. None of them were able to help me but one of them asked if they could record my story. I said ok and they posted it on social media-Facebook. It was about my time in captivity and what Daesh did to us. After that a former parliament member called me. She had seen the video and wanted to meet to hear more about my experiences. I met with her. She was nice. At the end she asked what she could do to help me. So I told her that I wanted to go to school and asked if she could make that happen. She was able to get a letter from the Ministry of Education in Baghdad that let me go to the Arabic school here in [the camp].”

The original aid organization that Talal initially refers to was the one that I directed so I was familiar with the case. Talal had missed two full years of school and was attempting to re-enter in the middle of the third. Staff at my organization was told by the ministry that Talal was simply too old. A ministry representative conveyed that for Talal everything would be ok- he was 16 years old at the time, which was old enough for him to get a job and earn an income. The ministry representative seemed satisfied with the decision and my staff was not able to make

progress. We continued to try to assist Talal, but case workers were bogged down by the needs of several hundred other children coming to the organization. As such, Talal took it into his own hands to approach additional organizations for help. If you met Talal, you would not be surprised. He is incredibly resilient and ambitious.

As Talal mentioned in his explanation of events, he was only successful when he found an influential politician to champion his cause. Although Talal had been unrelenting in his pursuit of education, it was a stroke of luck that inevitably helped him to achieve his goal. For most other children in Talal's position, they have not been so fortunate.

In the following excerpts, Khansa and Salam discuss another challenge: dropping down grade levels. They convey the experiences of people they know, in Khansa's case it is a friend, while in Salam's case it is a classmate.

(Khansa) "My friend Tina had a lot of problems. She was in captivity with me. We lived in a school together and became friends. I escaped before she did but we met again here. She tried to enroll in the same school as me, not the camp school but the one close to here, but they wouldn't let her.

She was in the fourth grade in Sinjar before Daesh came so she should be in the sixth now. The head teacher told her she wasn't ready for sixth grade though. He said she should ask the people in the camp if she could join there. Tina didn't want to go to that school though because I'm here. So she never went to ask. She just kept going to the village school to talk to the head teacher. One time my brother and me went with her and the head teacher said fine but she would have to be in the fourth grade again. She said ok and now goes to school with me...

She doesn't like fourth. She's older than the other kids and doesn't have any friends. We go to school during the same shift but I don't get to see her because we're separated by grades. We still get to walk home together though."

(Salam) "There's a boy in my class that's older than the rest of us. There are a few kids like that but he's really big. He should be in an older grade but he had to move around a lot after Daesh came and is only just now getting in school.

He's been coming for a few weeks now but not every day. I don't think he likes it. He's really quiet in class and doesn't have any friends. I see him with older boys playing futbol in the field instead of coming to school."

Khansa and Salam describe some of the key challenges to dropping down grade levels. For Khansa's friend Tina, she was discouraged from attending the village school and sent to the camp school to request enrollment. The village schools operate with support from the national government and do not receive aid funding from UNICEF/ Save the Children like many of the camp schools in Iraq. Consequently, it was not surprising that Tina would be turned away. However, Tina's tenacity coupled with help from Khansa's brother, eventually got her enrolled in the village school.

Unfortunately, Tina was not having a positive experience since she had to drop down two grades and her peers were significantly younger than her. Salam describes a similar instance with the boy in his class. Salam notes that the boy belonged in an older grade and seemed unhappy having to drop down to Salam's class. From Salam's comments, it seems the lack of social integration may inevitably lead to the boy dropping out of school entirely to spend more time with peers in his own age group. For many children, school is valued as much for the credentials it provides as it is for the social opportunities.

Lastly, Abid offers his insights on re-enrolling in school following completion of his commitments to the militia where he serves. Abid only lives part time in al Ain camp. The rest of his time he spends in Sinjar where his uncles reside and he serves as a child soldier for one of the many militias that have cropped up in the region. Abid left school to join the militia claiming that it created important income for his family in addition to him feeling like he was "fighting back against Daesh." Once I asked Abid if he planned to be a career soldier, to which he responded

no. I followed up by asking what he would do in the future and if he would return to school. His response was vague but insightful.

(Abid) “I don’t know what’s next. I’ve got to do this for a while. I mean, I think I could quit [being a child soldier] anytime. There was one boy whose parents brought his uniform and gun back to the militia office because they didn’t want him to fight anymore. They took it and everything was fine for him. But I won’t do that. I’ll serve my time.

After that, I don’t know. I could open up a shop. I’ll probably do that. Maybe I’ll open a mobile phone shop. Or I could get some goats. It depends on if the government allows us to rebuild in Sinjar. Right now, they’re not so I couldn’t bring goats here...

If I went back to school, I would be older than all the other kids. I would be 17 or 18 when I went back and I wouldn’t even be in my last year. I would probably have to go back a few grades. I don’t know if I would want that. You only need school if you want to be a doctor or go to university. That’s not me so why sit in school with all these kids? I can just work like the other kids my age.”

Abid’s comments on school emphasize some of the social troubles of dropping down grade levels. Abid was relatively indifferent to school. He chose to become a child soldier instead of pursuing his education. Additionally, he recognized that his future ambitions would not require a graduation certificate. If Abid were to return to school, it would be for its social function. However, not being able to attend classes with peers his own age limited the social enjoyment. Consequently, Abid was not optimistic he would return upon completing his time with the militia.

Language Issues and Enrollment

As students described the institutional barriers to attending school, issues of language frequently came up. Iraq is a linguistically diverse country. Arabic is the common language in the central and south of the country, while Kurdish is dominant in the north. Within the Kurdish language, there are two dominant but dis-similar dialects, Sorani and Kurmanji.

When enrolling in early grades, children would need to select if they were to join the Arabic or Kurdish track and would attend the appropriate schools from primary through secondary education. This was only the case in regions where both Arabs and Kurds resided. Sinjar was one of those areas. Yazidis in Sinjar largely spoke Kurdish as their native tongue but most also spoke Arabic.

Selecting either the Kurdish or Arabic school was often more than a language choice for students. The Kurdish schools were controlled and supported by the KRI⁶ government in Erbil, while the Arabic schools were administered by the central government in Baghdad. Many students felt the Arabic schools were more prestigious and others felt they identified more with the Kurdish schools. Selecting a language track was an important decision for a student, one that defined which institutions of higher education they would have access to and in some ways represented ethnic/political allegiances. However, these different tracks produced challenges for children once they were displaced. Now residing in the KRI (Kurdistan), many had a hard time finding Arabic schools or struggled to keep up with Kurdish curriculum if that was not what they experienced in Sinjar.

In the following excerpts, children discuss their decisions to attend either the Kurdish or Arabic schools and the implications that has had during their displacement. In a conversation with Khansa, she elaborates on her choice to join the Kurdish school primarily for safety reasons.

(Khansa) “It was better for me to study in Kurdish because in Sinjar the Arabic school was so far away and the Kurdish school was closer. My parents didn’t want me walking so far, especially if I was alone. They didn’t think it would be safe. Also they didn’t want me to go to the Arabic school because of the Muslims who were there. The Muslims always went to the Arabic schools and my parents didn’t trust those boys around me. It was ok for my brothers to go though.

⁶ Kurdistan Region of Iraq, an autonomous region recognized by the Iraqi Constitution

A lot of Yazidi boys went to the Arabic schools because they're better than the Kurdish ones... and parents don't worry about them like they do us [girls].

Most of my brothers are older, they actually went to the Arabic school because when they started school, there weren't any Kurdish ones around. That was in Saddam's time so Kurdish schools weren't allowed in Sinjar. I'm younger though and there were Kurdish schools available when I started so I went there because it was safer. The good thing about the Kurdish schools is that they're mostly Yazidi [in Sinjar].”

According to Khansa, the primary reason for selecting the Kurdish school was safety.

Although Arabs, Kurds, and Yazidis all lived relatively peacefully in the same region prior to the crisis with the Islamic State, there was still a great deal of distrust. Since girls in the Middle East typically bear a heavier burden of maintaining family honor, parents become more protective of daughters. Khansa claimed the Arabic school was better quality and although she had hoped to go there in Sinjar, she was happy to be at a Kurdish school now that she was displaced.

(Khansa) “It was good that I went to the Kurdish school [in Sinjar] because now we live in KRI and most schools here are Kurdish. There are some Arabic ones but you have to drive to Duhok or go to the one in the camp. I wanted to go to the village school close to our tent and it's Kurdish so everything worked out for me... I know other kids who had problems because they needed to go to Arabic schools.”

Khansa was able to enroll at grade level in the school she wanted to attend near al Ain camp. For her, language was not a barrier to education. However, for other students like Talal and Nadia, who previously attended Arabic schools in Sinjar, they struggled to find appropriate educational accommodations while displaced. They describe their decisions to pursue the Arabic track and provide insights into the difficulty this has caused since displacement.

(Talal) “I went to Arabic school in Sinjar. It was better than the Kurdish ones because if you go to the Kurdish schools then you can only go to Kurdish universities. If you go to Arabic schools then you can go to the University of Mosul... well before Daesh came. But you can also go to the University of Baghdad or other universities that are part of the central government. They're

much better. They have world rankings. Nobody talks about the Kurdish universities...

My parents also didn't like the Kurdish school because they don't like the KRI government, especially the PDK⁷. Now nobody likes the PDK because they sold us out to Daesh, but even before we didn't like them. Things are better with the central government in Baghdad. They make sure to pay people and services are better. The Kurds just want to take land and build their state."

(Nadia) "My parents wanted me to go to Arabic school so I did. It was where all the kids in my family went. My father said it was a better school than the Kurdish ones. He went to Arabic school when he was younger too... I liked the school. My teachers were Arabs and I wished they were Yazidi like at the Kurdish schools but it was still good."

Talal and Nadia both expressed that the greater prestige of the Arabic schools had a role to play in their decision. Talal also discusses how his family identified more with the central government in Baghdad than they did the Kurdish government in Erbil. Sinjar continues to be a disputed region between the two governments so comments like Talal's were not uncommon. Oftentimes, Yazidi families favored one government over the other. In Talal's case, it manifested through his educational choices.

Talal and Nadia were satisfied with attending Arabic schools when they lived in Sinjar. However, now displaced, each has had trouble with finding appropriate educational opportunities. Nadia has since left school but describes some of her experiences with enrolling and starting classes.

(Nadia) "The counselors told me I should go to the Kurdish school in the camp because it was easier to get into. The Arabic one was pretty full. They thought I could just catch up. So I started there but the problem was I don't read or write in Kurdish. It's the language I speak but I only know how to read and write in Arabic because that's what we did in school [in Sinjar]. So I changed over to the Arabic one.

⁷ The Kurdistan Democratic Party is currently the controlling political party in KRI

The Arabic one was a little easier for me but the teachers were bad. I went for two weeks but I got beaten all the time. The teacher would get mad at me for not knowing things. But I was in captivity for a year and I forgot all my subjects. That's why I wasn't a good student. But the teacher didn't care. I got beaten anyway. I told him I'm a survivor and was in captivity but it didn't matter. He was Arab so didn't care. When I told him, all he said was, 'go sit down and read and write like everyone else. When I ask you questions you have to know it.'

(Talal) "I'm happy with the Arabic school here. Originally, I was going to go to a different one. This one was really full and they said I would have to go during the afternoon shift. This was a problem because I have a clothing shop in the camp and I have to be there in the afternoons so I can only go to school in the mornings. Because of that I was going to go to an Arabic school in Duhok. I was getting enrolled and everything but the transportation was a problem. How could I get to Duhok every day? The taxis are expensive. I have an uncle who has a van but he drives it around the camp selling things so he couldn't take me everyday. I got lucky though and the camp school said I could just come in the morning."

Nadia and Talal each encountered different difficulties with trying to enroll in the Arabic schools. For Nadia, she was pushed to try the Kurdish school for convenience. The Arabic schools were full because there were so few in the region. Unfortunately, Nadia was unprepared to abruptly switch the language of instruction that she was familiar with and ultimately failed at the Kurdish school. Once transferred to the Arabic school, Nadia expressed the challenge of having Arab teachers. She felt they did not understand or sympathize with her. Nadia was clearly still traumatized by her time with the Islamic State, so the extent to which this was true was unclear to me. Nadia eventually left school for several reasons, primarily her mental health, but the language issues had evidently had an impact as well.

Talal echoed Nadia's point about the limited availability of the Arabic schools. Due to overcrowding in the camps, schools often operated on shifts. Children would be assigned either morning, early afternoon, or mid-afternoon class sessions. Talal had a small business that would not allow him to attend in the shift he was assigned. As such, he tried to attend a different school

farther away. Unable to figure out the transportation issues, Talal was almost left with no choice but to give up hope of an education. Fortunately, a change in head teachers at the camp school allowed Talal the chance to attend.

Several participants in the study talked at length about the differences between Kurdish and Arabic schools and the troubles their choices sometimes caused them now that they were displaced. Nearly all the children claimed that the Arabic school system was a better academic choice when they were in Sinjar; however, students in the Arabic track now seemed to have greater difficulty accessing education now that they were residing in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Overtime, the children all resolved their issues and were generally happy with their outcomes, but the process was not without challenges.

Camp Security as Limiting to Studies

A final concern for children's access to quality education is their physical security in the camps. This issue is categorized as an institutional barrier although cultural elements also contribute. I have chosen to initially examine it this way because institutional issues are often far easier to resolve than cultural. The building blocks for cultural change may frequently begin as institutional policies and reforms. As such, this section offers insights from participants on the security issues they experience in the camp and commentary focuses on practical problems and solutions rather than addressing cultural ideas that contribute to the atmosphere of insecurity.

Overtime, the humanitarian community has come to recognize the troubles of consolidating refugees and IDPs to camp settings. Throughout most of the last century, it has been common practice to place these distressed groups in isolated settings where aid agencies can easily measure the logistical needs and relief required. It has also assisted host country governments in tracking arrivees and facilitating future repatriation. However, over the last 15

years, the efficiency of this approach has come under growing scrutiny (Crisp, 2017). Since camps are often isolated and crises can last for years or even decades, consolidating displaced populations can mean limited livelihoods, a disintegration of human rights, and dramatic increase in security issues. According to Crisp (2017):

“Even a well-resourced refugee camp provides an unnatural and often dangerous environment for its inhabitants, especially women and children. Camps are frequently characterized by high levels of sexual violence, the forced recruitment of adults and minors into militia groups, as well as attacks from hostile external forces. Encampment is also known to generate trauma, psycho-social problems and inter-generational conflict, making it difficult for individuals and communities to prepare for a peaceful and productive future” (The case against refugee camps, 2017).

Jacobsen (1999) emphasizes the insecurity of camps and claims the primary issue is how an aid response is prioritized. She goes on to call for “security first” measures that stress physical security before assistance. Jacobsen’s ideas have been seen in more recent responses but issues of violence are still problematic.

“During the past few decades, the main focus of the international humanitarian response in asylum countries has been to emphasize assistance at the expense of protection. Particularly in the initial emergency phase, physical assistance (“biological needs”) is given priority over protection and security concerns... this focus [should] be redirected, particularly in the contingency planning and emergency phases, so as to stress security and physical protection needs before assistance: that is, adopt a ‘security-first’ approach. Such an approach would be the basis of an overall strategy to ensure security and protection in refugee hosting areas” (p. 2).

The issue of camp violence continues to be pervasive. The humanitarian community is well aware of this and has made attempts to remedy the problem but risks remain. Women and children are especially vulnerable. According to the Women’s Refugee Commission,

“Adolescents in regions affected by conflict and war and who live in unstable situations and

camps are highly vulnerable” (Threats around every corner: gender-based violence, 2020).

Displaced girls and women are at the highest risk for violence.

In al Ain camp, residents spoke frequently of security issues. They described violent events and the lack of accountability. During my time in the camp, it seemed clear that security was not a high priority. For example, according to international guidelines, male and female restrooms are supposed to be separated with locks to prevent sexual attacks (Threats around every corner: gender based violence, 2020). Although the camp restroom facilities were separated, there were no locks and boys would often enter the women’s toilets to vandalize the property. Additionally, over time many of the lights outside the restrooms had burned out and not been replaced. This meant that women needing to use the toilet at night would have to wake up a male family member to escort them since the risk of attack was heightened by the dilapidated infrastructure. This was problematic for many families that did not have a male adult living with them. For instance, Salam’s mother would rely on her small 12-year old son for protection.

The insecurity of the camp impacted education in several ways. Foremost, it left few spaces where children could study outside of school and still feel safe. Additionally, insecurity seemed to contribute to poor concentration and sometimes became a distraction for students. Lastly, a dichotomy had grown between the ideal world that children could imagine through education and their real circumstances in the camp. The following was from a conversation with Salam and elaborates on the issue of finding safe study space.

(Salam) “It’s hard to do well in school because I don’t have anywhere to study. I can’t study in our tent because my mom always needs help with things. Sometimes I go to the field, that’s where all the kids go after school, but I don’t get to study there. If you’re a boy it’s hard because the other boys will come pick fights with you. For the girls, it’s ok, they study there... I get in trouble a lot at

school because I don't finish my homework. I try but the boys in the camp always want to fight and cause problems."

Salam describes very common instances of violence in the camp. Frequently, groups of boys would start fights that camp security would ignore. The fights were seen as innocuous by security staff who maintained the idea that "boys will be boys." The fights were overtly violent, but more subtly, deterred many young boys from taking their homework and studies to the field. Salam went on to tell me that he would often go with his sister, which decreased the potential to be picked on but did not eliminate the threat entirely. Other than the field, there were several other places to study, but gangs of boys were pervasive and security staff ignored the issue. Nadia also provides insights on how insecurity impacts education in the camp. She describes how limited electricity drives girls to sit in unsafe spaces at night to study.

(Nadia) "It's hard for kids to do their homework here. You have to do it during the day when the sun is out, otherwise you risk not getting it done... The electricity usually comes on at night in our tents but it's hard to study then. When the electricity comes on, all we want is to charge our phones and play games [rather than study]. Also, if you have a TV then that's on too. And you might have to make dinner or clean dishes. So getting homework done in the tents at night is hard. Some students will try to go sit near the toilets and study there [under the light post]. But it's not really safe, especially for girls. At night is when you can get attacked."

Nadia's comments display how after the sun sets, safe study space can be difficult to locate. The tents typically have electricity and light at night; however, there are several distractions and children wanting to study find it better to go elsewhere. Unfortunately, the only lit areas in close proximity to most of the children's tents were the restroom facilities. As noted earlier, these areas may not be well lit and pose threats of violence.

Looking back on the many dinners I had with families in the camp, Nadia's description is accurate. Often, we would eat dinner together and children would quickly retreat to the corner of

the tent where their (or their parents') phones were charging. If there was a male adult in the family, then news would be turned on the television. I could see why children wanted to find other study space at night but agreed with Nadia that the restrooms did not seem safe.

In addition to insecurity causing problems for finding safe spaces to study, it also seemed to more generally distract children. Many times in conversations with participants, the discussion would turn to something related to camp violence and they would tell me a story that would be spreading through the camp. The children always had security issues on their mind, which was unhealthy in many ways, and I assumed distracted them from their studies. Additional data to support this assumption would be helpful but the frequency at which these issues were discussed leaves me confident that children were not always in the best frame of mind for their studies. The following two excerpts are from conversations with Salam and Nadia. They represent the types of stories that frequently invaded our discussions.

(Salam) "It's not safe here. Just yesterday some Arab people came to burn down the camp. I was over in the field where people can come in and out without going through the police checkpoint. That's where I saw them. They were Arabs from Syria who are staying in Domiz camp. They had gasoline with them so they were serious. Soon the police came and they ran off but one of them camp back later and still burned down a tent. No one got hurt but now the woman has no place to live."

(Nadia) "A while ago there was a girl my age who got kidnapped. Her parents sent her down to the road to beg for money. It was at the edge of the camp just before you got to the vegetable and fruit vendors. She was kind of alone down there. Anyway, a car with three men from the camp stopped and took her. They drove her to Duhok and I don't know what they were going to do with her. Probably something bad. She escaped though. There was an accident in the road and the police were there so she yelled for help. The men got in trouble but they're back living in the camp again now. They live in a different block than me but see? The camp isn't safe for us. That's why I only go outside my tent or to the CFS."

These types of stories were commonplace with participants. Sometimes I heard the same story from multiple children leading me to think either the validity of the story was being verified, or I was being exposed to a culture of story-telling and tall tales. Either way, stories of camp insecurity seemed to frequently be on the minds of children. Most often our conversations were intended to center on education and schooling but nonetheless, these anecdotes of violence continued to come up.

Lastly, there was a noticeable dichotomy between the ideal world that children could imagine through education and their real circumstances in the camp. When I spoke to the participants who attended school frequently, they envisioned a positive future, with careers and respectable livelihoods. However, the world they pictured was vastly different than the one they lived within in the camp. In al Ain, children were limited by the camp's insecurity. Young boys were struggling to keep up with their studies and failing grades because of the frequent peer-to-peer violence. Girls were constantly under threat of sexual violence, which limited their mobility and access to study space. Collectively, boys and girls were distressed by the ongoing camp violence that they had to navigate each day. I found that many of the participants spoke of the positive futures that education typically provides but were held back by their troubling reality. On one hand, children told me of their dreams to become doctors and lawyers. On the other hand, they were struggling in school due to insecurity issues in the camp. Salam offers an insightful comment on this:

(Salam) "It would be great if one day I had a job that made good money. Like being a doctor or something. I already take care of my family now and I'll need to make more money in the future for them... I'm not the best in school so I probably wouldn't get to study to be a doctor but I could do something. After I finish school, I could go to university, and then I'll get a job."

Like most of the other participants, Salam was optimistic when he spoke about his future. Whenever children discussed education, they emphasized the opportunities it would bring them. However, Salam was also struggling to turn in homework and pass his classes due to the limitations he experienced in the camp. Somehow, he remained optimistic about schooling and his future despite the fact that his lived reality was inhibiting him from getting there.

Summary

In summary, this chapter aimed to convey the institutional barriers and opportunities occurring for Yazidi children returning from IS captivity. Previously, children expressed how their deep emotional struggles inhibited their educational access and experiences in the camp. Compounding those psychological challenges is a set of institutional barriers that children struggled to navigate. Those barriers were presented in this chapter and briefly summarized as follows.

Two of the themes, *Mobility Issues and Access* and *Camp Security as Limiting to Studies*, directly linked to the problem of displacement. Following the invasion by the Islamic State, children endured frequent moves as their families sought refuge wherever they could. Mobility proved a daunting challenge for children who struggled to get enrolled in a school, only to have to re-enroll in another soon after. Regarding security issues, camps are commonly plagued by poor measures of protection. Consequently, insecurity in the participants' camp left few places for students to study safely, slowing down educational progress.

The other two themes, *Aging Out or Dropping Down* and *Language Issues and Enrollment* linked to problematic policies of the government. These policies were established prior to the conflict and carried over to the post-crisis context. Although the policies may have had relevance in the years preceding Yazidi students' displacement, their legacy served to be

only problematic in the new country context. Children described these challenges in-depth, questioning the logic of certain procedures and governance during periods of crisis.

Chapter 8: Findings Part III: How Our Attitudes and Values Affect our Educational World (Cultural Barriers and Opportunities)

In this chapter, I present the cultural barriers and opportunities for education in emergency contexts according to children in al Ain camp, Iraq. In the previous two chapters, I addressed the psychological and institutional issues impacting children's lives and education. In this chapter, I focus on the broader cultural norms that shape a child's world and more specifically, their educational experiences. I examine beliefs, attitudes, and values that came through conversations and observations of children in al Ain camp. Through this data I present a window into the cultural world of the study participants.

In gathering and analyzing the data, I relied on anthropological techniques. I looked for key elements of culture that defined how Yazidis in al Ain camp thought about the world and their resulting behaviors. According to Peoples and Bailey (2011), "culture is learned, shared, largely responsible for differences between human groups, and necessary to make individuals into complete persons" (p. 23). They go on to quote E.B. Tylor, one of the founders of cultural anthropology, who claims culture is "the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 22). The comments of Peoples and Bailey, and E.B. Tylor emphasize the acquisition of ideas via group membership and how a unique collection of ideas establishes "culture."

As such, when analyzing the culture of Yazidi children in al Ain camp, I focused on two questions to guide the work: What are the distinctive cultural ideas emerging from the camp community (impacting education) and how are these ideas being transmitted? I found cultural ideas that linked to gender expectations, traditions of story-telling, and how respect and admiration was garnered within the community. These cultural ideas manifested in certain key

themes found in the research. The themes are as follows: 1. Children's work, 2. Competing tragedies and respect, 3. Absence of parental pride, and 4. Normalization of violence.

These themes (or patterns of behavior in anthropological terms) help to define how children understand and react to the world around them. They display practical examples of how cultural ideas related to gender, respect, etc. are transmitted to children through commonplace community behaviors. Since culture is most often an intergenerational phenomenon, many of the themes represent cultural barriers that may continue to impede children's educational experiences for years to come.

Children's Work

The first theme, *children's work*, elaborates on gender norms in the community. It was a common topic among participants when discussing the obstacles to school attendance. In a previous section on "*Improvements in gender parity and girls' achievement due to the necessity of boys working*," I presented how the lack of boys in school, due to work expectations, presented space for girls to excel and feel empowered to achieve educational success. I examined the psychological aspects of the issue and emphasized how girls' confidence and ambition were increasing due to their new circumstances in the camp. In this section, I also refer to children's work but present it from a cultural perspective. I interrogate the gender differences in work expectations and the cultural ideas present in how participants and community members think about child labor. The findings display how boys are at higher risk for missing out on education due to long held ideas on gender, duty, and work.

Child labor is a global phenomenon; however, communities in crisis are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. State fragility and armed conflict are often underlying conditions. It is estimated that children residing in countries impacted by conflict are 77% above the global

average of incidences of child labor (Habib, 2019). UNICEF (2016) approximates that around 535 million children now live in conflict or disaster-stricken areas- many of whom are at risk of labor exploitation. According to Habib (2019), child labor thrives in crisis conditions because of the poverty, vulnerability, and lack of opportunities characteristic of places affected by conflict and ecological disasters.

The problem of child labor in the Middle East is especially pervasive. Ever since the conflict in Syria displaced almost 7 million people and helped to destabilize the region, including Iraq, children have been increasingly vulnerable. UNICEF estimates that nearly half a million children in Iraq are now working, a number that has doubled since 1990 (Khoder, 2016). Ongoing violence and loss of income are forcing an increasing number of families to send their children to work.

Boys' Duty to the Family

The issue of child labor in al Ain camp was quite visible. Upon driving the highway from Duhok to the camp, I would notice children sitting on top of coolers in the middle of the road trying to sell water to passersby. The entrances to the camp were littered with vendor stalls often looked after by young boys, and trucks of goods would drive around the narrow tent rows with children selling items off the back. Children were a noticeable part of the workforce in and around al Ain camp. Some of these children, like Talal, also attended school, only working when they were not studying. However, a large number of the children whom I spoke with had given up school entirely to earn a livelihood. Almost always, the working children were boys and their rationale for leaving school was to support their family.

The following is a comment made by a teenage boy who worked at a mobile phone kiosk in the camp. He emphasized the need for an income taking precedence over his education. Talal

makes a similar comment. Although still in school, he also worked to support his family. Both boys subscribed to the idea that attending school is important, but secondary to their duties as eldest male children.

(Boy working at a mobile phone kiosk) “If we were back in Sinjar then I would be in school. Here I need to make money for my family. The camp helps us with some food and gas but we still need money to live. We have to pay for taxis to Duhok if we need to go to the hospital or sometimes we need extra blankets or a heater or something. So that’s why I work. In Sinjar, my family had money so I went to school. Here we have nothing. My father was in Sinjar too, but he’s not here now.”

(Talal) “A Japanese organization came to me and helped me to open the shop where I work. They first helped me to buy clothing and supplies for it, and then they helped set up a good stall. It’s nicer than the other shops here because we laid down cement and it’s not a tent like the others.

The organization had heard about my story in captivity from someone. So they came to visit me. They interviewed me. They were probably worried because they know the kids in captivity had difficult experiences. They asked what I do every day and I told them nothing. I couldn’t go to school then since I wasn’t allowed and there were no jobs in the camp.

They wanted to provide me some help after they heard about my story. They knew my father was still missing and I’d been through a lot. I’m the oldest boy so helping me was also helping my family. But they told me they wanted me to open a vegetable and fruit stand. I didn’t think it was a good idea though so I asked them if we could do clothes instead. I knew it would be too difficult to do vegetables because they rot and you have to constantly be re-stocking, which is hard when you don’t have transportation sometimes. I knew a clothes shop would be better...

It helps my family and I’m good at it. Before, my mom just had my uncle to help her but he has his own family and his wife’s sister and more. Now that I’m back, she has me. My little brother helps too. He watches the store during the hours I’m in school. It works because we go to school at different shifts.”

Talal’s most telling comment was, “I’m the oldest boy so helping me was also helping my family.” Talal clearly abided by the cultural idea that the eldest male of a family was responsible for the family’s welfare. Since Talal’s father was still being held captive by IS, this

duty fell to him. Fortunately for Talal, he had assistance in running his business and did not need to drop out of school like the boy at the phone kiosk. Talal's brother and occasionally his uncle helped mind the shop during his school hours. Talal's case was relatively unique among working children because he was his own boss. Other children generally did not have the flexibility that Talal had and needed to report to work in hours conflicting with their education. Yet, what can be taken from Talal's comment as well as observations in the camp, is the expectation that young boys needed to be working to fill the role of their absent/abducted fathers. This was a shared idea amongst the community including the young boys who rose to the task. Given the vast amount of men who were taken by the Islamic State, this issue was especially problematic in Yazidi camps like al Ain. In a conversation with Nadia, she commented on her female cousin's desire to work but also notes that although it would be acceptable, it is generally the expectations of males to do this. Nadia's comment recognizes that child labor and boys' duties to family are a shared cultural idea among both genders.

(Nadia) "My [female] cousin, Jiyan, wants to work but right now she just goes to school. Before IS, Jiyan left school in Sinjar for a little while to work with her family on a farm near Sulaymaniya. Her parents told her she could stay in Sinjar but she didn't want to. She wanted to stay with them so they let her. She missed a little bit of school but it was ok, she still got to go when she returned.

Here, she also talks about going back to a farm to work. Her family doesn't let her though because they want to stay here in the camp... and some of her brothers are already working and send money to them so she doesn't really need to. So she just goes to school every day...

For her brothers it's different. They have to help the family. Jiyan helps too when she's needed. And she helps her mother here sometimes. But her brothers are older so they take care of those things."

Nadia's comments similarly reflect Talal's as well as the boy from the phone kiosk. Like them, she also emphasized the need for boys to work to care for their families. Nadia helped to expand my ideas on her community's gendered views by stating that working women are

important too. However, the expectation of “family bread-winner” most typically falls to fathers and male children when available.

The idea within the community that boys needed to be working when fathers were absent was commonly followed; this, however, left an immense impact on their educational opportunities. School sessions were only a few hours long since they were conducted in shifts (morning, early afternoon, late afternoon) to remedy overcrowding. In many instances, such as Talal’s, boys could likely work around their already shortened schools schedule. However, I did not see this happen. Once a boy in the camp said to me, “I don’t think about doing both. It’s either work or school.” Additionally, Talal and his brother commented to me about the challenges of doing homework while balancing school and the shop. On slow days at the shop, the boys could simultaneously study there. However, on busy days or when they needed to resupply inventory, it was challenging to complete their school work when they were minding the shop. The duty that boy children had to their families with regards to providing financial support did not make education impossible but often a hassle many chose not to endure.

Gendered Expectations for Success

Aside from the need for boys to work in the absence of their fathers, the community also felt that it was less necessary for boys to complete school in order to be successful in life as compared with girls. Commonly, it was expressed to me that boys would always be able to find a livelihood, whereas, girls would need education and credentials if they expected to work outside the home. This idea came through conversations with both children and their parents. In a conversation with Khansa, she described to me why education was valuable to her future as well as the limited opportunities that would be available to her if she did not complete her schooling.

(Khansa) “I want to be a doctor so I have to go to school. I have to do well now so I can go to a good university and get accepted into the medical school. Not everyone gets accepted to the medical school. It’s only for the best students. But now I’m one of the best so I plan to be a doctor... I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t go to school... In Sinjar, I guess I would help my mom around the house, or maybe tend to our goats and chickens.”

Khansa seems to have an understanding that to work outside the home, she would need her education. Without it, she would likely work alongside her mother doing domestic chores until she was married. In my conversation with Khansa, she went on to describe a dream of opening a beauty salon as an alternative to becoming a doctor. To open a salon, she might not need a formal education (though she spoke of an apprenticeship) but would need wealth and seed money to get it started. Consequently, it seemed that for Khansa to succeed professionally, she would need either an education or money. For boys, employment prospects were more promising. Talal describes his ideas on work:

(Talal) “If I didn’t go to school then I would just run my shop. I can make money doing that and maybe I’d sell other things too. I’ve thought about selling mobile phone supplies. In Sinjar, I would do the same. I would be a shop owner in Hardan and maybe I would open up another shop in Borek or Duhola [villages in Sinjar]... I could even raise and sell livestock... I’m still going to finish my education. I plan to be a doctor so I’ll need to finish. Being a businessman, you don’t need to go to university. It’s good but you don’t need it.”

According to Talal, he would have work prospects that did not require an education. If his plans to become a doctor failed, he would simply fall back on being a “businessman” in his community. In conversation, Talal also spoke of purchasing and selling livestock. Whereas Khansa would only help to tend her family’s livestock, Talal would be in the business of it. In conversations with children, there was always a gendered perspective that, at the very least, subtly conveyed different expectations of male/female employment and their opportunities for professional success. Boys seemed clearly at an advantage.

The edge that boys had over girls in the job market likely made it more acceptable for them to leave education in al Ain camp. For the boys at the vendor stalls, whom I would sometimes speak with, they seemed generally content with not being in school. Since their livelihoods apparently were less reliant on education, their sense of contentment was somewhat logical. These boys seemed to understand that their community would support their pursuit of income/livelihood more so than girls. Even in the camp, boys were preferred hires to girls by shop owners, and most work was seen as “boy’s work” rather than girls’.

This section on *Children’s Work*, helps to tease out some of the underlying gender norms within the community. It displays how gendered ideas about work both directly and indirectly impact children’s education. The data presented in this section heavily focuses on the educational disadvantages of boys in school, which is perhaps uncommon in literature on gender and education. Nearly twenty years ago, Weaver-Hightower (2003) claimed, “Until recently, most policy, practice, and research on gender and education focused on girls and girls’ issues. This is as it should be, for in every society women as a group relative to men are disadvantaged socially, culturally, politically, and economically” (p. 471). He goes on to explain that nonetheless, “Such work [on the “boy turn” in education] has produced the necessary complement to the research on girls, increasing our recognition that gender inequity is not a deficiency in girls but rather is caused by problematic masculinities and femininities” (p. 490). For children in al Ain camp, deep cultural ideas on gender, duty, and work are increasing educational inequality, as was made clear through participant comments and observations. Yet, one must wonder how much it is truly disadvantageous to boys? In an economic sense, perhaps very little.

Absence of Parental Pride

Another theme that arose in the course of this research relates to the topic of parental pride in children's education. It was commonly cited as a primary factor in successful student performance on important school exams. In this section, I discuss a cultural trait common across the Middle East of family influence on educational achievement and the impact of missing parents for Yazidi children in al Ain camp, Iraq.

Six years ago, I was working in the West Bank. Frequently, throughout the day I would be startled by the sounds of celebratory gunfire and see small fireworks lighting up the sky. If I recall correctly, this went on for a week or two in mid-summer. My colleagues informed me that these were the celebrations of families whose children performed well on the end of school exam known as the Tawjihi.

In much of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), children sit for exams each year to ensure they can either pass onto the next grade level or be eligible for university. The exams are typically proctored at local schools but controlled and recorded by national authorities. Each country administers a different exam defined by their Ministry of Education and aligned with national curriculum standards.

In many countries, such as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) and Iraq, students are ranked according to their scores and the highest achieving students receive accolades from not only their school but the wider community. In many ways, children bring a great deal of respect to families according to their performance. This is what was occurring during my time in the West Bank. In Iraq, I experienced a very different story since the conflict with the Islamic State had severely disrupted the education system as well as life more generally.

According to UNICEF (2018), eight million children across the MENA region sat for exams despite a host of challenges that include poverty, child labor, and most significantly,

conflict. UNICEF noted that, “In Iraq, where one in four children live in poverty, half of the schools need rehabilitation after years of fighting and violence. Many children are forced to travel for hours in scorching heat to reach the exam sites.” The end of year exams have been logistically challenging to administer in Iraq for the last several years. However, camp schools, sponsored by aid agencies, have typically been able to facilitate testing for students and encouraged them to do well.

Although children in al Ain camp indeed could take the exams, many students showed little enthusiasm and low motivation to study. This was a stark departure from what I had experienced in other MENA countries and what some had described of life in Iraq prior to the conflict with the Islamic State. A colleague at the organization where I worked described his exams just a few years earlier. He told me that he studied for weeks or perhaps months. Ultimately, he was ranked in the top 30 students nationally and would be awarded the opportunity to study at nearly any university he liked, in any field. I had no doubt this was true, foremost because this particular colleague had coded and built a database to house genocide data that was now being used by lawyers at the International Criminal Court (he was entirely self-taught) but also because others had told me of his achievements. Even years later, these exam results were a mark of immense pride and respect among the community, to the point that people provided my colleague’s exam standings as background when speaking about him (he ultimately was not able to attend university due to the conflict). Consequently, it made little sense to me that so many children in al Ain camp seemed not to care about the exams.

Upon further probing this issue with participants, I found one common factor in their indifference to the exams: the lack of parental pride. Children informed me that for many of them, the exam results mattered not only for their future ambitions but also for the pride it would

bring to their family. Prior to the conflict, exam results were celebrated and children felt a sense of competition and pressure to achieve. However, the conflict with the Islamic State had broken down family structures in Iraq, removing a major motivation to perform well. It is estimated that thousands of Yazidis are still missing and tens of thousands more have already perished in the conflict. Consequently, children often find themselves without parents, especially fathers. The lack of parental figures in their lives has meant the practice of celebrating exam results has all but disappeared. Without this level of parental pride, children have been less enthusiastic about doing well on the exams. Salam offers his perspective on the matter:

(Salam) “I did ok on my exams. I always passed and went on to the next grade. I studied for them but I just didn’t do as well as the others. There were some kids [in Sinjar] who got perfect scores. They studied a lot for the exam. Whenever the results would be announced their families would have celebrations. There would be fireworks and sweets. All the family would come over... We don’t celebrate like that here. I don’t know why. Maybe because not all our family is here like in Sinjar.”

Salam’s comment confirms that a major motivating factor for performance was the respect it garnered for families. Given that Yazidis had now been dispersed among many camps and transportation between each was rare and also expensive, social gatherings and celebrations were far less common than in Sinjar previously. Additionally, since many fathers had been killed or abducted, many children lived in single parent households. In the case of several of this study’s participants, sometimes both parents remained missing. Consequently, the motivating factor of gaining respect for one’s family was removed and children felt less inclined to do well on the exams. Khansa offers an additional perspective:

(Khansa) “I always wanted to be the best in my class [in Sinjar]. I studied for my exams but I was never the best. It was usually the boys who were the best. After the exam results would come out, there would be parties and some people would celebrate... I’ll do well on my exams here and I’ll study hard for them... I’ll do this because it’s important for my future. I want to go to the university.”

Khansa's comment similarly reflected Salam's. When the children were in Sinjar, exam results were celebrated but there had been a change since coming to the camp. Khansa still believes in doing well on the exams but her motivation is now solely her desire to go to university rather than the notoriety and respect it would garner for her and her family.

It was unfortunate to see children in al Ain camp disregard the value of the end of year school exams. None spoke negatively about them but the excitement that once existed was no longer apparent. Prior to the conflict with the Islamic State, children pushed themselves to excel and a clear value was placed on their educational achievements. However, displacement to camps and the loss of parents had changed this important cultural behavior and exams were less prioritized.

Competing Tragedies and Earning Respect

Another important theme to stand out in the course of this research was the culture of story-telling among Yazidis and what I found to be a growing competition among children to have the most tragic stories. I attribute this, at least in part, to the tradition of oral history among Yazidis. In Yazidi culture, due to high rates of illiteracy and the lack of a holy book, story-telling has been a deeply embedded cultural trait for centuries. In this research, I point out how children have embraced this and adapted their tragic experiences into narratives that often compete for a captive audience. Regarding the impact to education and child protection, I have found that these competing stories of tragedy often made it difficult for teachers and aid workers to differentiate and prioritize children's care needs, especially given that some stories were "tall tales" while others were entirely legitimate.

To avoid the assumption that I have the inherent knowledge to dispell truth from fiction in a culture quite foreign to me, I must add here that these conclusions about “tall tales” were drawn with help from the local community. In evaluating what stories might hold truth and what stories were being exaggerated or even fabricated, I relied on other children to verify accounts. In several instances, bystander children would discreetly tell me if a story was true or false. Additionally, some children would tell me stories that I had already heard from other children leaving me to disregard their account. As such, defining the legitimacy of children’s stories was done by engaging the local community rather than making assumptions entirely on my own.

Regarding the story-telling tradition in Yazidi culture, history of the group has been passed down orally throughout generations. In collecting literature and research on Yazidis, I found that little academic knowledge could be found. In the last two decades a few books have emerged but the majority of my learning about Yazidis was conducted in Iraq via visits to local religious leaders and conversations with community members. According to Omarkhali (2017), Yazidi culture and history is in the process of shifting from oral to textual in large part because of historically low literacy rates:

“The Yezidi religious tradition, both sacred texts and priestly learning, was transmitted orally in a non- or semi-literate milieu until recently. Apart from Armenia, it was not until the mid-20th century that literacy became widespread among Yezidis (or at least Yezidi males), and started to affect community culture. Furthermore, a large percentage of the Yezidi inhabitants of Turkey, and somewhat later many Yezidis from Iraq, migrated to Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century. The development of increased literacy accelerated acceptance of Western ways and concepts, which was to lead to a profound change in the way the leadership of the community thought of and defined its religion” (Omarkhali, 2017, p. 14).

The Yazidi community has improved their literacy rates over the last half century; however, the tradition of oral history over generations has meant story-telling continues to be an

enduring cultural behavior. This became increasingly apparent to me the more meals I shared with Yazidi families and community members. Frequently, someone would tell a long tale about a family member who had survived Saddam's reign or someone else who had braved another type of injustice. The stories were long but captivating and made my meals quite entertaining. The stories always ended with either a hero or call for sympathy.

During my time with children in al Ain camp, I also saw this cultural behavior. Occasionally, I would meet informally with participants when their friends or cousins were around. The youth of al Ain camp found me particularly intriguing. Most had not seen foreigners other than military troops prior to arriving in the camp. As such, they were attracted to me and always vying for my attention. Oftentimes, we would either be sitting in the field together or inside someone's tent. The conversation would turn to the crisis or the Islamic State and children would start sharing their stories. Most of these children were not abducted but did indeed flee when the conflict began.

The participants in my study would occasionally share something of their experiences in captivity, which would be answered with stories from other children about their escape from IS or hard times in the camp. The children were constantly trying to "one up" each other by showing me they also had tragic experiences, if not more so than my participants (typically a false claim). The stories were long and elaborate, similar to the tales their parents told me over dinners. At the end of their stories, it seemed the children (not participants) were expecting to elicit either sympathy from the listeners or respect for what they endured. The participants typically sat quietly and offered little response to the other children.

In the following, I offer an exchange between Nadia, a participant in this study who was abducted by the Islamic State, and her cousin Jiyan, who was not abducted. Beyond these two girls, the audience consisted of me and Nadia's younger brother.

(Nadia) "When I came back from captivity, I couldn't really study much. I had to go to Duhok a lot for medical treatment. I had kidney stones so I was in the hospital a lot. They say I still need surgery next year. I also have stomach problems now [lifts her shirt]. See these lumps? This was from when Daesh would kick me. They kicked me so much that I have these lumps all over here and here [points to parts of her midsection]. The doctors say maybe it will go away, or maybe I'll have another surgery. I also have these burns [shows arms] from when Daesh would put their cigarettes out on me. I think I'll always have those scars."

Jiyan quickly interrupts Nadia to bring some attention to herself. She tells a long harrowing story of her family fleeing the morning IS arrived. An excerpt:

(Jiyan) "Nadia gets lots of help now though [because she is an IS-survivor]. For me it's different. We lost everything and have no help here. When we fled from Daesh, we went to the mountain. We walked for hours to get to the top. It was hard because there were so many children making everyone go slower—we all followed a narrow path up the mountain.

When we got there, we were really afraid. We didn't know if Daesh was going to come take us away. All the time people were shouting and some of the men were going up and down the mountain. They had weapons with them and they thought maybe Daesh was coming. We never knew. We thought maybe we would die there.

We spent a week on the mountain waiting for someone to come help us. A lot of people died there because it was so hot and there was no water or food or shelter. There was a stream with some water and my father would go there. But he could barely get one bottle full when he went because there were so many people and it was a small stream. Eventually the planes sometimes dropped food and water to us but not much... they would drop it really far away from everyone and sometimes we had to walk for two hours to get it."

Jiyan made it a point to emphasize how tragic her experiences were. She interrupted her cousin, Nadia, to be able to convey her own tale. She was seeking not only attention but sympathy and respect from others in the room. She was seemingly jealous of Nadia. Jiyan

emphasized how hard her life has been but continued to explain all the ways she was strong and enduring her circumstances. Her story was meant to compete with Nadia's.

In another exchange with a girl in the camp, she reacted similarly to Jiyan. She knew I was working with children abducted by IS and wanted to share her own tragic account that might garner my sympathy and attention. Although never abducted, she elaborates on the challenges of displacement following the invasion.

(Girl in camp) "We couldn't sleep for like three days when we first got to the camp in Syria. It wasn't really even a camp. There were some tents but it wasn't really organized. Not like this one. Because of the fights we couldn't sleep for many days. Some men were fighting with knives. I don't know who they were, there were so many people. We just wanted to be safe so we didn't try to figure out who was fighting. We wanted to stay out of it..."

We were always in danger. We wanted to get out of Syria and get to Kurdistan. When we finally got a bus to Kurdistan it was also dangerous. Many people had knives and I thought they were going to kill us. We had a knife too. Some people who I didn't know wanted to take my little sister because they said they knew my brother."

Children like Jiyan and the girl in the camp seemed to be saying, *what about me? Let me tell you about what I have overcome*. This always came in the form of long elaborate stories meant to elicit sympathy and respect. Although all these children had been through varying levels of trauma and deserved care and attention, it was important for the aid community to prioritize those most severe. Unfortunately, the overwhelming number of stories perhaps served to convolute child protection responses. When every story is tragic, it is difficult to assess where to concentrate scarce resources and assistance.

I discussed this issue with several of the case managers at the organization where I worked. I expressed that it seemed children were often competing to tell the most tragic story. Nadia, the participant, had even told me that Jiyan was exaggerating parts of her story for effect. The case managers only acknowledged that there were a lot of tragic stories and they helped all

children who had experienced hardship. I appreciated this response but worried that sometimes resources were spread too thin rather than focusing on the most severely traumatized. When children came to the child friendly space at my organization or when case managers visited camps, they indeed worked with all children. Every child who expressed trauma received care and their stories were recorded in a case file. I concluded that the children in the most need were likely receiving inadequate support due to the overwhelming amount of stories coming from Yazidi children and a struggle to know what is true and what is exaggerated.

Normalization of Violence

Lastly, an important theme of the research was the *normalization of violence*. Children in al Ain camp spoke constantly of violent topics with a surprising level of nonchalance and acceptance. They spoke of the period prior to IS and the influx of the U.S. military, Saddam Hussein's security forces, and the growing strength of the Kurdish military known as the Peshmurga. They also spoke of the immense atrocities undertaken by the Islamic State and future expectations of violence and instability. The way that children spoke so commonly and easily about these issues display how violence has become a natural part of their world. It is an element that is always present when children reflect on the past and look to the future. It has become a pervasive and habitual part of their lives and displays an important cultural phenomenon in this research.

For most of these children, they have not experienced a moment when their country was not at war. The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and although a new Iraqi government was installed relatively quickly, U.S. forces remained on the ground. In 2013, the Islamic State declared their caliphate and began a genocidal rampage through northwestern Iraq. Beyond these external military interventions, Saddam Hussein's internal security forces wreaked havoc among the

population, especially in Kurdish areas. Due to all these episodes, the children residing in al Ain camp had never known peace in their country so it was not surprising that violence had become so normalized among the population.

In many ways, violence was not only normalized but also idolized. In discussions with children and observations in the camp, it was clear that there was intrigue when it came to violent topics. Fighters were considered heroes and the atrocities of war added to the stories that children and adults would tell during dinners or among peers. Like child marriage or filial piety are considered cultural phenomena in various groups around the world, I also count the acceptance or admiration of violence as a cultural phenomenon. This seemed to be occurring among the Yazidis in Iraq and I worried about the negative implications it would have for children. Research sub-themes emerged that tied to the normalization of violence including: 1. Adoration of violence and military, 2. Violence as an answer for injustice, and 3. Pervasiveness of violence. They are explored in the following sections.

Adoration of Violence and Military

Children often spoke of soldiers with a sense of reverence. It was a respected profession in Iraq and serving in the military came with a sense of heroism. This is a common occurrence in many countries around the world where armed forces are spoken of with respect and valor. Support for the military often unites a nation and increases patriotism. In Iraq, this adoration of the military seemed to contribute to an acceptance of violence as a means to resolve disputes or gain justice. For children, it seemed to help normalize violence as a common cultural phenomenon.

In speaking with community members, this adoration appeared to stem from two distinct military interventions that Yazidis welcomed. The first was during the al Anfal campaign when

Saddam Hussein attempted to subdue and eradicate much of the Kurdish north. At that time, the Peshmurga military (Kurdish-led) bravely fought against Hussein's security forces. Many Kurds died in the conflict and became martyrs among the population. Given the ethnic ties of Yazidis and Kurds, respected for the military seemed to transcend communities. The Peshmurga became admired by a growing number of Yazidis, who even joined their ranks.

Another military incursion welcomed by most Yazidis was the influx of U.S. soldiers beginning in 2003. The occupation brought several jobs to their small ethno-religious community, who worked as translators and cultural consultants. The arrival of troops brought much needed income as well as gave Yazidis an opportunity to fight back against Hussein's oppressive regime.

For children, the constant presence of well-armed and well-resourced soldiers was impressive. Several children expressed to me how "cool" the military was to them. They spoke of tanks and heavy equipment. The following excerpts are from Abid and a girl in the camp. Their comments reflect a common attitude among children that displayed not only an acceptance of military presence but an appreciation and admiration of it.

(Abid) "Of course I like the military. I'm a soldier now. Even when I was younger I thought maybe I would join. A lot of our men worked for the U.S. and they made a lot of money and fought against Saddam. When the U.S. forces left, they went to work for the Peshmurga. Being in the military is a good job. I'm only in a PKK militia now but I'm still a fighter. I'll fight IS if they come back to Sinjar."

(Girl in camp) "I always loved seeing the U.S. soldiers. When I was little they would come through the town and bring all the kids candies and treats. They had jeeps and tanks and wore nice uniforms... Once a soldier handed me a ring I could keep. It wasn't expensive or anything. I'm sure he just got it from a little store in Sinjar but it was the nicest thing I owned. I kept it for a long time. My friends and I would bury it in the yard and tell others to try and find it. It was my favorite thing. That's why I loved the U.S. soldiers. They were so 'cool' to me."

Children found armed forces to be a welcome presence. They were in awe of the organization and resources of troops. I found this problematic for children primarily because several militias (paramilitaries may be a more appropriate term), had started accepting child soldiers in the aftermath of the Islamic State's invasion. The adoration for the military along with a regular paycheck ultimately encouraged many to leave school in order to serve. Abid elaborates on his recruitment as a child soldier:

(Abid) "In al Ain camp, I had heard that the militias in Sinjar were hiring. There are a lot of militias here. There's the PDK, PKK, PUK, even the Hashd al Shaabi [various militias in Iraq affiliated with political parties]. I followed the 'Angel of Death'⁸ [on social media] and wanted to be like him. I'm not Shia though so I joined the PKK. The Angel of Death is a warrior. He fought IS and was very brave...

The PKK helped to free Yazidis from the mountain so I decided to join them... it wasn't possible to stay in school and also fight so now I'm just a soldier. I need to earn money for my family so that's the main reason I joined but I probably would have anyway because it's a good job."

Abid's response displays how serving in the military was considered a strong alternative to school. His infatuation with the military comes through with his admiration for the "Angel of Death" who was a violent and controversial public figure in Iraq. The "Angel of Death" was a militia soldier who fought against IS and showed little mercy- even desecrating bodies and performing similar atrocities to the Islamic State. He became somewhat of a social media "influencer" during my time in Iraq. Ultimately, Abid left school to become a child soldier presenting how children's adoration for the military has had a negative effect on education.

⁸ The "Angel of Death" was a popular fighter belonging to the Hashd al Shaabi militia. According to Wikipedia, he became a public icon of resistance to the Islamic State and had a large social media following. His motto was interpreted to mean "grind you into dust" and he was known to desecrate bodies of deceased IS militants.

Violence as an Answer for Injustice

Children commonly spoke of a need for justice for their community. The Yazidis had suffered mass atrocity at the hands of the Islamic State. They had witnessed and sometimes endured severe violence, and Iraq as well as the international community had failed to hold anyone accountable.

At the time of this research, the crisis was ongoing but had lasted for several years. Over the course of that time, IS had continued to abuse the Yazidi community and still held several thousand people captive. Past trauma in addition to the ongoing abuse left Yazidis yearning for accountability and justice.

For most of the people I spoke with, including children, justice should come in the form of violent retribution. Although global organizations and lawyers were attempting to bring cases to the International Criminal Court (ICC), this type of justice was a secondary goal for many Yazidis who wanted a more violent end to IS that might in some way equal their own suffering. Many of the adults I spoke with were illiterate and unfamiliar with the ICC. Particularly for them, death/torture was the appropriate and desired consequence of their actions.

This idea was transmitted to children. All the participants in this study consistently expressed hope that IS would come to a violent end. They had experienced such tragedy but also accepted violence as a logical and necessary solution.

(Salam) “I hear the bombs dropping in Mosul from my tent at night. It’s far away so not very loud but I can still hear it... It doesn’t bother me. I’m glad to hear the bombing. It means people in Mosul are dying. I’m glad Daesh is dying. They should all die.”

Salam’s comment echoes all the participants in the study. Each one emphasized a desire for severe violence towards the Islamic State without hesitation. Given the experiences they had endured, I could see their logic. However, the way they conveyed their desire was done with

such nonchalance. For these children, violence was the only solution. A friend of Salam's emphasizes this point:

(Female friend of Salam) "Daesh should die. What else is there? They did terrible things and now they come home and go to our markets and visit their families. There's no one here that punishes them and we all know who they are. They don't need to wear black hoods and masks. I hope they go back to Mosul so they can die there."

Salam's friend made a comment that stuck with me. Referring to death, she said, "What else is there?". The idea that death and violence was the only answer to the Yazidis' injustice was pervasive. Participant responses hardly varied on the topic. This idea contributed to the normalization of violence that I saw among children. They maintained the perspective that violence was an appropriate response to a problem (granted one of extreme magnitude). This idea seemed to be a commonplace piece of culture and one that would continue to promote cycles of conflict for generations to come in Iraq.

Pervasiveness of Violence and Violent Imagery

Lastly, the pervasiveness of violence and violent imagery was a deeply embedded part of children's lives. They frequently showed me photos and videos of atrocious acts. Much of it were scenes from the conflict with the Islamic State and included dead bodies, slit throats, mutilation, and the effects of torture. This material came from a variety of sources including other children in the camp, family members from afar, or even Yazidis still living under the Islamic State's authority. Almost always, the material was stored on mobile phones where children could easily transfer it from one to another.

I typically encountered these photos and videos when I was hanging out with children informally after school. They would collect in either the field or by the creek that cut through the

camp. We sometimes played sports, jump rope, or simply sat and talked during these periods. A frequent occurrence when together was the sharing of violent content.

Sometimes the children would be hesitant to show me what they were looking at but quickly warmed up and would soon be competing for my attention. One child would show a video followed by another wanting to show what he had on his phone. It was all very disturbing and I encouraged them not to view such material. The children would gather to view this content away from their tents because they knew their parents would admonish them for having it. Ironically, when I was with adults in the camp, they commonly tried to show me similar material on their phones.

Additionally, Kurdish and Arabic news channels in Iraq often disclosed deeply violent images when reporting from the field. Sometimes following dinner, families would turn on televisions to watch the news. On the evenings when I stayed over, I would sit with them shocked by what I saw. News channels did not censor any violent imagery and families watched with utter indifference. Violence was such a pervasive part of culture in Iraq that it went unnoticed by the Yazidi families I visited.

The issue of “normalization of violence” was a common thread in the research conducted for this study. It came across consistently in fieldnotes and interviews and can be viewed in much of the data presented throughout the findings. However, *what does this mean for education?*

In a broad sense, education is intended to build stability, promote peace, teach important social norms, and contribute to continued development. Education is the lifeblood of a society and common pillar of community planning. It is a critical avenue to hand down cultural ideals

across generations as well as ensure children have the tools they need to pursue future livelihoods. Typically, education is seen as advancing society in a positive way.

However, it must be considered, *how effective is education in achieving its goals if embedded within societies that embrace violence as normative?*. It seems unlikely that education in Iraq will achieve its full potential of contributing to productive and peaceful societies when norms of violence continue to cause cycles of conflict. There is a tension between the ideals of education and culture of violence in Iraq.

Uniquely, education has the opportunity to transform culture. Time and again, education has been utilized to convey certain cultural ideas via content, methods of instruction, and the climate/atmosphere of schools. Bush and Salterelli (2000) highlight this concept in their work on the “two faces of education.” They claim that education has the potential to infuse both positive and negative ideas into society. Focusing on the positive, schools could begin to counter violent narratives and images through adopting new approaches and curricula. This has not yet occurred in Iraq but clearly students would benefit and perhaps the “normalization of violence” would no longer inhibit the long-term goals of education.

Summary

In summary, this chapter aimed to present the cultural barriers and opportunities for displaced Yazidi children attempting to access education in Iraq. In compiling these findings, I examined data for cultural patterns of behavior or pervasive community ideas. The goal was to display how beliefs, attitudes, and values shared among Yazidis in al Ain camp, impacted the education of children. Certain distinct cultural ideas emerged which are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Two of the themes, *Children's Work* and *Absence of Parental Pride*, linked to the cultural idea of certain individuals carrying out particular roles within the community. Regarding the work of children, it was commonly assumed that young boys would step into the roles of missing fathers to generate important income for their families. Typically, the eldest son would take on this duty, which unfortunately limited him from accessing education. Regarding parental pride, it was found that students were less enthusiastic to perform well on school exams without fathers to announce and celebrate their achievements. Although mothers or other family members were often still present in the camps, it was fathers' duties to support children in this manner. With their abduction by the Islamic State, this no longer occurred.

Another theme, *Competing Tragedies and Respect*, referenced the deeply cultural trait of storytelling in the Yazidi community. Children often told "tall tales" about their experiences following the invasion of the Islamic State. Their stories garnered attention and sometimes respect from others. Frequently these children exaggerated the truth to compete with other children, including those who had actually been heavily traumatized. This became problematic for aid professionals/service providers who needed to triage children for purposes of care.

Lastly, an important finding of the research was the *Normalization of Violence* among children in the Yazidi community. For the entirety of these children's lives, they have experienced some form of warfare. As different conflicts in Iraq gave way to new ones, exposure to violence became pervasive. Consequently, it was found that children in this study objected to what happened to them (e.g. abduction and violence by the Islamic State) but failed to reject the culture of violence occurring around them. This was most evident in their desire to use violence as retribution for the injustices against their community. I point this out as a key finding because it was common in children's dialogues with me but additionally because it elicits an important

question of how effective is education for development and stability when embedded in such cultural norms?

Chapter 9: Discussion

The findings of this research produce critical areas for consideration and discussion.

Reflecting on the data and theoretical framework, several key opportunities emerge to improve education and aid for Yazidi children in Iraq. Furthermore, looking broadly at humanitarian aid structures and policies, important reform recommendations can be garnered to help children in crisis contexts more efficiently. Therefore, in this chapter, findings are discussed within the frame of next steps for the education of Yazidi children in Iraq and beyond.

I organize this chapter first with an analysis of findings via Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory framework. The analysis reviews the various systems described by Bronfenbrenner, how findings fit within those systems, and potential systemic interventions on behalf of children. I also add some theoretical implications for Bronfenbrenner's work, worthy of further exploration. Next, I extrapolate on the research findings to ponder broad reforms within the humanitarian community that could serve to strengthen overall assistance for children and improve educational networks.

Review: Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner is credited with bringing attention to contextual variation in human development (Darling, 2007). His work introduced the idea that humans cannot be viewed separate from context, more specifically that human development and relationships are embedded within larger social structures of community, society, and culture. Bronfenbrenner's contribution to social science has provided a structure to view social phenomena and analyze it more holistically.

In this research study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework helped to tease out layers of influences for children and their access to education. The micro, meso, and exo

systems described by Bronfenbrenner helped to decipher many of the institutional barriers and opportunities that children were experiencing, while the macrosystem displayed cultural ideas and habits that influenced children and education. The following section elaborates on some of the findings of the study and posits specific interventions that may improve children's educational success. These interventions are drawn from reviewing the barriers children cited during data collection and speculating possible solutions. I examine the layers of Bronfenbrenner's systems and discuss how interventions in one system may create a ripple effect to others.

The greater aim of this study was to improve humanitarian support for crisis-affected children and their access to education. Consequently, when considering solutions that may help remedy many of the issues brought to light in this study, I focus on interventions that are either policy reforms or program recommendations at the institutional level. This is an essential piece of knowledge to keep in mind while reading through the discussion section. I focus on institutional solutions given the study's aim of supporting the humanitarian community but recognize that several other cultural interventions could also be significant. These types of institutional actions are most relevant from the perspective of the humanitarian aid community, where this research aims to be most relevant.

According to Bronfenbrenner's framework, these interventions would fall within the exosystem. The exosystem can be characterized as "an ecological setting in which the developing person of interest is not situated, and thus does not participate actively within it, but nonetheless experiences its influence" (Rosa and Tudge, 2013, p. 246). Examples of influences in the exosystem may include, the economic structure, system of education, and social policies. To support improved work in the humanitarian aid sector, the following presents several

potential interventions on behalf of children (positioned as actions within the exosystem) with brief description on how such interventions at one level may create positive change in others as well.

Table 9.1: Interventions for Yazidi Children

Action in Exosystem	Implications for Micro/Meso System	Implications for Macrosystem
Increased trauma care & reflection for former captives and their families	Children and parents become more bonded. Parents understand better their children's needs	Therapy and counseling becomes less stigmatized
Cash assistance programs for fatherless families to stop child labor	Boys do not need to work and can return to education	Community recognizes importance of all children attending school rather than working
Review of pre-crisis policies for relevance in post-crisis conditions. Particularly, addressing issues of "aging out" and language	Children can return to school more easily	Revising language policies may serve to breakdown issues of power and identity
Greater focus on out-of-camp children and their access to education by the aid community and local authorities	Children can return to school more easily as well as access essential services via schooling	Reinforces value of education among community
Incentivizing school exams with celebratory public announcements of top students	Children gain confidence and motivation for exams. Families feel pride in children's achievements (even when fathers are missing)	Visibility of public announcements eliminates need for fathers to announce and celebrate
Inclusion of peace education in formal schooling	Children learn peaceful and more effective ways to interact with others	A step towards removing violence as a culturally accepted behavior

Intervention: Increased Trauma Care for Children and Families

Among the first interventions this study concludes is adding increased care for traumatized children and their families. According to Ehntholt and Yule (2006), it is estimated that up to 40% of young refugees may have psychiatric disorders, mainly post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and other anxiety-related difficulties. In crisis contexts, children can experience extreme violence and trauma becomes compounded when they are displaced from their homes. Mental health issues are a pervasive problem among crisis-affected children and services to help them heal remain inadequate. Frequently, parents who should be helping children are reeling from the same issues.

The concept of trauma care for children is challenging in many emergency settings. Foremost, families may not have time to be concerned with their children's mental health issues when obtaining basic services such as food, sanitation, and housing are their priority. Additionally, parents or family members may also be traumatized limiting their capacity to assist children. Lastly, culturally many of these children may be hesitant to come forward if psychological care is not common in their communities. They may view a stigma around it. Yet, although mental health is typically a marginal response during a humanitarian emergency, it is vital for communities to heal and move forward.

In Iraq, Yazidi children displayed significant mental scars from war. They often spoke of traumatic memories that continued to cause them ongoing stress and anxiety. Poor sleep, isolation, and violent outbursts were common in case reports on children formerly held captive by the Islamic State. To make matters worse, their living conditions in the camps were far from providing them healing spaces. Children characterized their temporary community as “dangerous” and lacking the support structures that were present in their home villages. Without

proper mental healthcare, these children are not likely to continue on in school, as was the case with two of this study's participants, Nadia and Abid.

Consequently, prioritizing trauma care for children and their families during an emergency response is essential for the long-term outlook of distressed communities. I emphasize care for both children and families because quite often parents are unable to help children until they can help themselves. In Iraq, many of the participants had mothers who suffered from extreme gender-based violence. As a result, in many cases such as Salam's, the children became the caretakers of the family. According to Ehntholt and Yule (2006), "Unfortunately, if mothers have trouble coping with the stress of displacement then refugee children often display greater stress reactions" (p. 1200). Other scholars emphasize that poor mental health among parents is associated with psychological distress in war-affected and refugee children (Smith et al., 2001).

Additionally, extensive work has been conducted in the field of psychology noting the value of family in caring for traumatized children. According to Garmezy and Rutter (1985), the family is frequently a buffer against stress. Family cohesion before and after migration is a predictor of good mental health in refugee children (Almqvist and Broberg, 1999). Laor et al., 1996) note that adaptability and cohesion within families helps to protect the emotional state of children following traumatic exposure. Clearly, family support of children can go a long way to healing their experiences and helping them to move forward.

Therefore, a possible intervention within the humanitarian community should be to support more robust mental health programming for children and their families. This would require a distribution of trained professionals, resources, and financial support. According to Bronfenbrenner's framework, this would be an exosystem intervention. However, although this

intervention is conducted at the institutional level, it may serve to influence other systems as well. For instance, at the micro and meso system level, both children and families receive direct assistance and care. This type of programming will help parents to better identify the needs of children and can improve familial relationships and responsibilities. At the macro level, where change is often most difficult, it could destigmatize therapy and counseling, creating a culture that is more inclusive of these vital services.

Intervention: Cash Assistance Programs for Fatherless Families

A second proposed intervention includes financial support for “fatherless families” displaced in Iraq. During data collection, it was discovered that child labor was inhibiting educational access for many young boys who needed to take up the role of breadwinner for the family. These young boys dutifully assumed various employment opportunities in order to care for younger siblings and single mothers. Culturally, this was often the expectation among the Yazidi community. Unfortunately, this practice was observably driving down gender parity in the camp school since boys were often absent.

Given the policies that ruled children’s access to education in Iraq, boys who left school to work for extended periods of time (more than 2-3 years) were not allowed to re-enter once families were secure or another adult male had arrived to support the family. “Aging-out” policies that existed prior to the crisis limited children from accessing education if they had been out of school for too long. Consequently, many Yazidi boys who had already lost important years of education while being held captive by the Islamic State (or simply busy navigating constant mobility during early displacement), had little hope to return to school if they needed to work to support the family.

This situation represents a cultural practice among Yazidis that creates problems for children. The expectation that boys assume the breadwinner roles once held by their fathers meant education became less prioritized. To help remedy the problem, a potential avenue forward is the establishment of cash-transfer programs that may provide families with financial relief allowing boys to attend school at increasing rates.

Cash transfer programs have become popular in international development. They are one of a range of measures for addressing poverty. According to Lund et al. (2008) a cash transfer refers to when “A regular amount of money is allocated directly to particular groups such as the elderly, the unemployed, or children. Cash transfers differ from in-kind interventions, such as the provision of food or food stamps, in that the former give the recipient choice about how to spend the money” (p. 1). Cash transfers may be one-time or ongoing payments. Over time, interesting externalities have been observed from cash transfer programs such as increased school enrollment or improved nutrition among children (Aguero et al., 2006). Cash transfers may also be conditional and incentivize certain actions or behaviors such as ensuring children attend school in exchange for funds.

Cash transfer programs have been successful in several countries around the world. The *Progres*a program in Mexico was found to enhance school outcomes when money was provided to poor rural women (Aguero et al., 2006). Additionally, the *Bolsa Escola* program in Brazil was found to increase school attendance; however, noted that child labor remained high. In the case of Brazil, families were incentivized to send their children to school but financial circumstances meant they had to work simultaneously. As such, cash transfer programs are not without limitations; however, they can still be incredibly effective. McArthur and Ingram (2018) note that cash transfers are efficient and avoid heavy human infrastructure typically constructed to

provide aid, they are empowering to individuals who have the right of choice, and they create social safety nets and measures of resilience within communities.

Establishing cash transfer programs in Iraq for fatherless families could work to improve the situation of young boys missing out on school. By replacing their income with financial assistance, these boys and their families may have greater flexibility allowing for increased school attendance. Particularly, if cash transfer programs were provided under the condition of having enrolled children, educational access could vastly increase for this population.

Such an intervention is worth exploring within displaced communities in Iraq. In reference to Bronfenbrenner's framework, this would be characterized as an influence stemming from the exosystem but may prove to become influential in other systems as well. At a micro-level, boys would return to school. While at the macro-level, communities may come to view greater value in educating all children.

Intervention: Review of Pre-Crisis Policies for Relevance in Post-Crisis Conditions

One of the primary findings of the research was the institutional setbacks children experienced when trying to access education. In particular, children noted the challenges of pre-crisis government policies deciding their fates although they were no longer relevant in post-crisis conditions. Due to these policies, many children were left without the possibility to pursue an education.

In particular, children noted the issues of "aging out" and language accessibility. Regarding "aging out" children were not permitted to enroll in school if they had been out for a defined length of time. Prior to the crisis, this policy was applied to encourage children to consistently stay in school rather than leave for a period (usually to work) and return later. Unfortunately, the crisis displaced thousands of children for months to years, while others were

held in captivity by the Islamic State. The policy served to limit a large population of children impacted by the crisis.

Regarding language accessibility, children struggled to find schools that could accommodate them post-crisis. Many children had attended schools that conveyed the Arabic curriculum prior to the invasion of the Islamic State but could not find similar schools once displaced. The Iraqi government did provide flexibility in allowing children to change from the Arabic to the Kurdish track (which offered more schooling options in their displaced setting), however, it did not give resources to help them adapt and catch up. Consequently, many children struggled in their new educational environments without the tools they needed for success. Policies around “aging out” and language proved to be a significant limiting factor for crisis-affected children that should have been reviewed in the post-conflict context.

Unfortunately, the education system in Iraq is highly centralized and as such, policy reforms can be challenging. Localized problems can easily be overlooked at the regional or national level. Issa and Jamil (2010) note that education has been in a steady decline since the 1990s due to ongoing conflict and instability. The Ministry of Education has been slow to redevelop education networks including instituting more effective policy reforms. However, reforms are critical for crisis-affected children to be able to continue education as displayed by the situation of Yazidis.

Regarding Bronfenbrenner’s framework, such policy reforms would have a clear impact on the micro and mesosystem levels in that children would return to school at much higher rates. Whether or not this would create a cultural shift is unclear. However, since language carries designations of power in Iraq, it may. Children often spoke of how language aligned them more with either the central government (supporting Arabic language) or Kurdish government

(supporting Kurdish language). It is possible that new policies which would allow for flexibility between the two tracks may break down these power dynamics. This is of course strictly speculation but an interesting point of conjecture when considering the interaction of Bronfenbrenner's systems.

Intervention: Greater Focus on Out-of-Camp Children and Their Access to Education by the Aid Community and Local Authorities

An important intervention, which the EiE and humanitarian aid communities are already moving towards, is an emphasis on assisting children outside of refugee/IDP camps. According to Mendenhall et al. (2017), an unprecedented number of displaced persons are now living in urban settings outside of camps (e.g. on the streets or in informal settlements and temporary housing). It is estimated that half of the world's 65 million displaced individuals are of school-age, which means there is a vast population of children who have little access to the services that camps typically provide. Regarding education, children who do not reside within camps are extremely vulnerable to losing out on important years of schooling. Given that the average length of displacement is now 20 years, it is highly unlikely that many displaced children will ever access education under current circumstances and policies.

According to Mendenhall et al. (2017), there are several key barriers to education that children experience outside of camps. Foremost, children may not be able to enroll in new schools if they lack proper legal status or documentation, as was the case with some of the participants in Iraq. Children may also need to travel long distances and have poor transportation options in their new urban settings. Aside from bureaucratic and logistical challenges, children may experience discrimination, xenophobia, and psychological challenges. Lastly, families may simply need to prioritize children's work over an education.

Attempting to access education outside of camps can be a daunting process. Life outside of camps has both advantages and disadvantages for displaced families; however, regarding education it produces a dismal outlook. Refugees are five times more likely to be out of school than other children and this rate likely goes up significantly outside camp settings (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In Iraq, several participants expressed their challenges of accessing education in the early days of their displacement. In the period just after the Islamic State's arrival, families struggled to find housing and assistance as the humanitarian community was unprepared for the large influx of IDPs. As such, many families settled in informal settlements or temporary housing in urban communities. During this time, children described wanting to attend school but also the several barriers they experienced in trying to achieve this. Particularly, the lack of identification and required documents slowed their progress to enroll, which became compounded by their difficulties in finding transportation to schools. This situation was incredibly limiting to Yazidi children in Iraq but has become a common issue across contexts. Human Rights Watch reported a similar situation in Jordan among Syrian refugee children who were living outside refugee camps. They state:

“Existing policies that prevent Syrian boys and girls from going to school also need to be removed. For example, refugee registration policies that require school-aged children to obtain identification documents, or “service cards,” to enroll in public schools may have prevented thousands from doing so” (Human Rights Watch, 2016)

Consequently, an important intervention on behalf of Yazidi children and other crisis-affected youth is to increase services and support for those residing beyond refugee and IDP camps. Over the years, the humanitarian community has developed camp infrastructure with a robust set of services for displaced families. However, outside of camps assistance is still

lacking. Mendenhall et al. (2017) conducted a multi-country study on this topic and has produced key recommendations that could be considered in the Iraqi context. Among them: supporting effective policy implementation by bringing together multiple stakeholders, fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments for both refugee and host community students, promoting social cohesion among communities, and building solidarity for countries hosting refugees.

By creating policies and programs that better support children residing outside of camp communities in Iraq, access to education would be greatly improved. In examining how this (exosystem) intervention would create change in other systems, most likely students would be enrolled at higher rates in school (micro/mesosystem) and community-wide there may be greater acceptance of the value of education (macrosystem).

Intervention: Incentivizing School Exams with Celebratory Public Announcements of Top Students

A minor but important intervention that could increase children's educational success is to alter how exam results are announced and celebrated. As noted in the findings, students in Iraq undertake similar end-of-year exams given in countries across the Middle East. These exams are typically highly important to students and their families. The results of the exams determine if children can pass onto the next grade level as well as define top-ranking students who become eligible for the country's most prestigious universities. In Iraq, families take great pride in their children's rankings and success, often having parties and celebrations in their honor. In the past, this celebratory tradition has driven students to study and excel.

In the current post-conflict setting, this tradition has been disrupted. With the absence of fathers taken by the Islamic State and in the context of displacement from local communities, the exams are not celebrated at the level they have been in the past. Consequently, several students

expressed to me that they do not feel obliged to study or prepare for the exams. Instead, most are content to simply take the exam and meet a passing score.

The indifference children felt towards the exams seemed to underscore similar feelings they had for education in general. The healthy competition that used to drive them has transformed into complacency. To remedy this, the Ministry of Education (MOE) could consider a new method of announcements. Instead of posting the exam results and letting families celebrate individually, the MOE could establish their own celebrations and perhaps find innovative new ways to announce results to the community. Bringing this tradition alive again may help to reinvigorate enthusiasm for education despite the current troubled circumstances.

Developing new methods of conveying exam results could deepen students' commitment to education and strengthen the connection between schools, families, and children- some of the most direct influences in a child's micro/mesosystem. Culturally, there is potential to remove the need for fathers to support education and instead replace that support with more equitable community support. Of the interventions gleaned from the findings, this is likely the least impactful and most small-scale; however, should not be overlooked.

Intervention: Inclusion of Peace Education in Formal Schooling

A final intervention proposed from this research is the inclusion of peace education within formal schooling in Iraq. For decades, the country has been in a protracted state of conflict. Regional wars, occupations of foreign militaries, and most recently the rise of radical terrorist organizations has inhibited progress and peace. As a result, violence has become a pervasive component of culture. It has been normalized and sometimes idolized by new generations of Iraqis.

Within the data collected for this study are several stories of extreme violence, which children had grown to accept as an unfortunate experience but not outright reject. They were traumatized by what they endured but never seemed to question why such events would occur. Children seemed to have a relative indifference to the topic of violence. Additionally, the sharing of violent images and Youtube videos was constant among camp youth. Absurdly, it seemed to meet the same level of interest as video games in contemporary American culture or baseball cards during my youth.

To transform the pervasiveness of violence in Iraq, education should be utilized to convey principles of peace. By introducing peace education or similar programs (e.g. human rights education, contemplative inquiry education, etc.), children can be grounded in philosophies that promote positive progress in society as well as elements of care, love, and coexistence. The idea of using education to promote peace is not a new one. Societies have done this for generations. Bar Tal (2002) notes that peace education was introduced in countries around the world throughout the 20th century. He goes on to explain that it is often adapted to context, providing examples of how peace education in South Africa has targeted topics of equality and reconciliation, whereas Japan has focused on nuclear disarmament. In Iraq, peace education should focus on de-radicalization, principles of diversity and respect, and religious pluralism.

Children in Iraq presently do not have access to any version of peace education within formal schooling. Some children learn about their religion during specified school hours. For instance, many Yazidi children had a weekly “Ezidiati” class where they learned religious stories that would help carry on their tradition. However, although religious teachings have the potential

to convey peaceful messages, in Iraq it is more linked to preserving cultural heritage. As a result, education in Iraq is severely lacking when it comes to the transfer of peaceful cultural ideals.

As such, a final recommended intervention for displaced Yazidi children, and all Iraqi children, is the inclusion of peace education into their formal school curricula. This could be in the form of a regular class but ideally it is a topic spread throughout various courses such as history, science, math, and more. For many in Iraq, this is a novel idea but truly, it should not be. The Islamic State took the same approach to infuse violence into their curricula. IS textbooks were rife with examples of violent math scenarios and reading excerpts frequently told of the value of discriminatory practices towards women and “infidels.” IS took the methods often used in peace education to advance an alternative goal- mass and extreme violence. Nonetheless, the damage of the Islamic State can still be reversed and we can ensure that future generations of Iraqis share a common foundation of peace and social progress if education is transformed to include such elements.

Implications for Bronfenbrenner’s Framework

Regarding Bronfenbrenner’s framework, this research produces a new consideration for the ecological systems theory. Rosa and Tudge (2013) claim that it is important for researchers to understand that Bronfenbrenner’s work has evolved over the course of several decades. Bronfenbrenner’s original application of the framework was a simplified version of concentric circles describing various contextual influences. However, the framework evolved overtime to place more emphasis on the individual as well as add in a new system, the chronosystem, focused on the passage of time. Bronfenbrenner developed several iterations of his work over the course of his career to continue to refine and add complexity to his theory. Since his passing, other scholars have taken up this work to improve the relevance of the framework. In this

section, I add another point of consideration for scholars and practitioners to reflect upon when utilizing Bronfenbrenner's work.

As I collected and analyzed data for this study, I found that the psychology of children was an important topic but one absent from Bronfenbrenner's framework. His framework assisted me in organizing issues like institutional policies and family relationships. It also guided me in looking for cultural traits that influenced children's lives. Through his framework I was able to divide much of the data into two categories reflective of his theory: *Chapter 7: How we navigate our educational world (institutional barriers and opportunities)* and *Chapter 8: How our attitudes and values affect our educational world (cultural barriers and opportunities)*. These two sections directly corresponded with Bronfenbrenner's exosystem and macrosystem.

However, a broad range of data fell into a category that linked more closely to the psychology of children. I consolidated these findings into the category: *Chapter 6: How we think about our educational world (psychological barriers and opportunities)*. I reflected immensely on how this chapter of findings could fit within Bronfenbrenner's framework but was unsuccessful in finding a firm conclusion. In some ways, all of Bronfenbrenner's systems feed the psychology of an individual. However, psychology is also so uniquely personal that to assume that these various systems drive how a person thinks/reacts/behaves seems naive. As such, an important implication of this research for Bronfenbrenner's work is a new consideration on how individual psychological traits (resilience, ability to navigate trauma, optimism/pessimism) may also interact with the various systems.

Broad Reforms

During reflection upon the research findings, several concrete interventions speculated for children in Iraq were accompanied by broader reform recommendations that may improve the

status of children globally. Over the course of this research, noticable aid inefficiencies emerged which should be remedied for enhanced care/services. As I recorded the several challenges that Yazidi children in Iraq were having to overcome, I was struck by how certain reorientations of aid work could vastly improve their circumstances. The following offers two such recommendations including an increased collaboration between the fields EiE and CPiE, and a thorough integration of “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration” programming as a standard offering to prepare children to reenter education post-violent conflict.

Increased Collaboration Between EiE and CPiE

This dissertation provided a thorough review of literature in the fields most relevant to the research: Education in Emergencies and Child Protection in Emergencies. Each of these fields has been critical to the health and development of children caught up on crisis. Both EiE and CPiE have immense potential to continue to improve the lives of children; however, greater collaboration among the fields would vastly increase efficiency. The following conveys where the fields have overlapping interests, areas where they diverge, and commentary on steps forward that would enrich crisis responses for children.

As background, the development of both these fields similarly began in the 1990s as conflicts in Africa and the Balkans drew international attention. Millions were displaced and the plight of children came to the fore as the U.N. and other international authorities began to recognize the alarming impact of conflict. At the time, global agreements and advocacy networks were established to aid children caught up in crisis. Among the key priorities were efforts to protect children and ensure their right to education.

Since the 1990s, the fields of Education in Emergencies and Child Protection in Emergencies have been established to address the needs of children. Both fields continue to gain

momentum, and each is now a commonly deployed response by the humanitarian community. The fields are marked by differing philosophies and distinguishing features, but they maintain important core goals to protect and advance child rights.

Some of the key areas of convergence and divergence have been noted by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). In 2018, the INEE Advocacy Working Group set out to map research parameters for which the two sectors could focus to enhance collaborative responses. The exercise also produced divergent distinguishing features/ideas held by each field.

Regarding inherent differences in the fields, a comparison of literature by the INEE team concluded that EiE tends to view itself as a measure of protection, whereas CPiE views education as an access point to improving protection measures for children. The INEE states:

“Despite similarities...CP and EiE fields tend to approach the relationship between education and child protection from different viewpoints. The CP literature discusses child protection within educational settings and how to strengthen protection through education, whereas the EiE literature focuses more on ensuring access to quality education, which would in itself provide a protective environment for children” (2018b, p. 12).

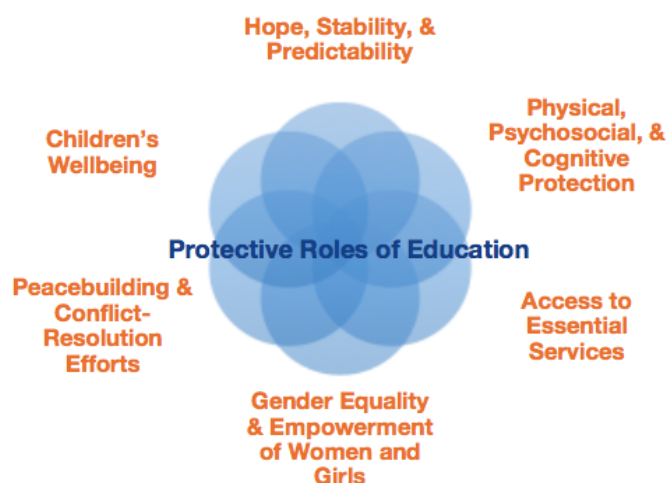
EiE literature frequently describes its protective role. Education provided during emergencies can establish safe and healing spaces. Children who stay in school are also less vulnerable to abuses like child marriage or sexual or economic exploitation (Global Education Cluster, 2016). According to EiE literature, the provision of education serves to safeguard the protection and rights of children. However, the INEE notes that “in the CP literature, it is not always obvious that education is key to protection” (INEE, 2018b, p.12). Instead it often warns against the potential threats for children in schools including unsafe learning spaces or sexual violence. Nonetheless, CP literature does more generally recognize the potential for education to

strengthen protection measures such as utilizing schools to implement interventions aimed at gender responsiveness or psycho-social care. This brief description displays how each field is oriented slightly differently although they share many common goals.

A key contribution of this research is to promote how the fields align rather than differ, and how they have significant potential for further collaboration. Both the literature review for this dissertation and the INEE Advocacy Working Group (2018b) inform a strong foundation to begin this discussion. The INEE provides a thoughtful assessment of the various protective roles of education (displaying the fields' alignment), while I give commentary on how the work of the INEE can be further operationalized.

Among the protective roles defined by the INEE are: 1. Hope, stability, and predictability, 2. Physical, psycho-social, and cognitive protection, 3. Access to essential services, 4. Gender equality & empowerment of women and girls, 5. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and 6. Children's wellbeing. These six roles convey the wide range of ways education in emergencies is inherently a protective mechanism for children. These roles are each highly valued in child protection responses.

Figure 9.1: Protective Roles of Education (INEE, 2018b)



Regarding “Hope, Stability, and Predictability” EiE literature claims schools provide structured tasks and needed routines for children. Education gives them consistency during a time when all other aspects of their lives may be disrupted. In several studies, children have shown to become hopeless or anxious when they are unable to return to school and worry for their futures (Akram et al., 2012; INEE, 2018b). The “Physical, Psychosocial, and Cognitive” function of education helps to further ease this anxiety. Schools provide safe spaces where children can avoid threats of physical/sexual violence and engage in activities that enrich their coping strategies and survival skills. Education also conveys basic skills like literacy and numeracy, which enable and empower students to gather and understand information about their environment.

During an emergency, schools often provide “Access to Essential Services” beyond the education sector. These services may include health care, nutritious food, clean water, or psychosocial support. Utilizing schools as an access point for children is incredibly valuable in contexts where families are hard to track and circumstances are constantly changing. Access to diverse services means aid professionals are able to address “Children’s Wellbeing” in a comprehensive manner. Education thus serves as a “protective shield” (INEE, 2018b) giving students the external protections and resources they need to survive, while also empowering them and offering pathways to healing.

Lastly, according to the INEE, education in emergencies can address challenging societal issues such as gender-based threats/oppression and conflict resolution. Regarding “Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls” education can be responsive to these issues and conduct targeted interventions. Schools can provide “support and [teach] skills that help strengthen individuals’ ability to rebuild their lives over the long-term” (2018b, p. 9). Studies

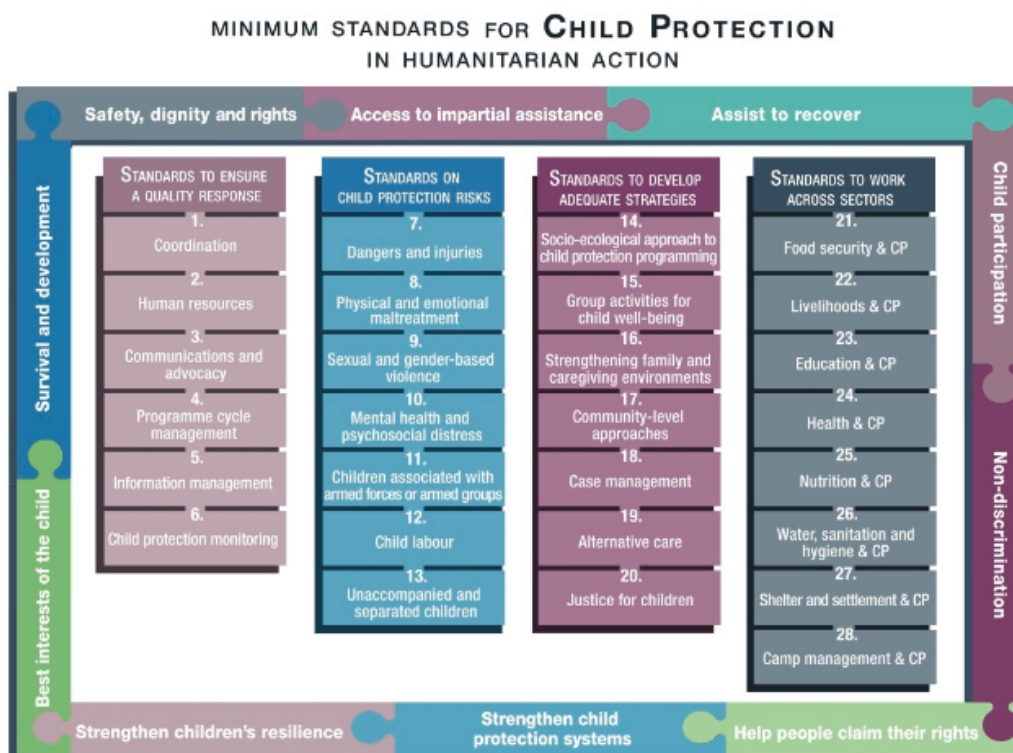
have shown that when girls attend school, they are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth and have lower levels of mortality (UNESCO, 2011). Regarding “Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution Efforts”, education has the potential to address issues of injustice and inequality. It begins by modeling inclusion through efforts at improving accessibility and can further progress through programs that speak to specific social issues.

The INEE’s mapping of the protective roles of education is helpful to understand where and how the fields of EiE and CPiE overlap. Their comparison of literature across both fields serves to highlight key principles promoted by each. However, their assessment does little to discuss how to create efficiency and work more collaboratively across the two sectors. It introduces a foundation to understand the synergies between the fields but has far to go in terms of operationalizing the work.

Going forward, I propose avenues to increase the collaboration across EiE and CPiE to maximize outcomes for children through concrete actions. The description of activities is intended to be brief but lays out important new areas for inquiry and evaluation. These suggestions fit best within the strategic planning of organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, and other groups that work across each sector but additionally take a lead on providing guidance within the humanitarian aid field.

The first step I propose is to examine how the “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action” is applicable to the field of education in emergencies. These standards were developed by a global network of operational agencies, academic institutions, policy makers, donors, and practitioners. They are intended to guide professionals in CPiE and are commonly known in humanitarian response. There are 28 standards divided into four pillars of protection.

Figure 9.2: Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action



Upon examining the standards, it becomes clear that EiE buttresses the categories devoted to “Standards on Child Protection Risks” and “Standards to Develop Adequate Strategies.” Regarding protection from risks (Pillar 2), education creates a space that prevents children from encountering many of the threats listed. Children in school are less likely to be victims of physical and sexual violence, they are less likely to engage in child labor, and they have greater access to psycho-social care.

Regarding developing adequate strategies (Pillar 3), EiE directly addresses two of the standards including “Group Activities for Child Wellbeing” and “Strengthening Family and Caregiving Environments.” According to the minimum standards for CPiE:

“Children’s regular and consistent engagement in group activities can positively impact their well-being, enhance their resilience and reduce their stress. Group activities provide opportunities for children to come together in a predictable and stimulating environment to be safe, to learn, to express themselves, to make

connections and to feel supported. Such activities can also promote protection by (a) identifying children who are vulnerable or who are experiencing abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence and (b) supporting appropriate referrals. Group activities can provide a sense of normalcy” (2019, p. 173).

Child-centered education naturally provides this type of group engagement. Children work among peers on school projects and engage in collaborative learning. Schools provide a logical setting for children to work with others in a supportive environment. Education is a key avenue to advance this standard within CPiE.

Education also strengthens caregiving environments by ensuring that children have access to a range of vital services. Within EiE, a common trend has been to support children’s holistic needs and incorporate greater cross-sector work. Schools also engage with families and have the ability to influence life even beyond the classroom.

In comparing standards in CPiE with education’s protective role, there are clear links. However, although I have just referenced several ways education has potential to advance CPiE in a concrete manner, it is simply just potential and optimistic speculation until a detailed mapping can take place accompanied by a strategic plan and monitoring and evaluation framework. This is where entities like UNICEF and UNHCR can do better to improve the efficiency of work within EiE and CPiE. These organizations typically lead aid responses for displaced children and provide immense guidance to others working in the field. By examining broadly how standards and activities align across fields, aid agencies can be stirred into greater collaboration.

Taking this further, a next step is to investigate specific interventions that could become commonplace in humanitarian responses for children. For instance, “Child Friendly Spaces” (CFSs) have been notable in CPiE and EiE literature and provide a rich place for collaboration. According to UNICEF (2011):

“Child Friendly Spaces are a child right’s programming approach that supports children’s well-being in the midst of emergencies. Used widely since 1999, CFS protect children by providing a safe space with supervised activities, by raising awareness of the risks to children, and mobilizing communities to begin the process of creating a Protective Environment” (p. 9)

Child Friendly Spaces have typically been an intervention conducted by the protection sector rather than education; however, literature in the field of EiE has frequently noted the importance of CFSs for restarting education. Kostelny and Wessells (2013) note that specific objectives of CFSs are to mobilize communities around the protection and wellbeing of children, provide opportunities for children to play and develop relevant skills, enable inter-sectoral support, and “depending on the context, CFSs are also used for a variety of other purposes such as laying a foundation for restarting formal education and supporting national education systems” (p. 120). CFSs are also an important example of non-formal education where children continue to engage in learning activities, even if not aligned or accredited by formal authorities.

Overtime, practitioners and scholars in the fields of EiE and CPiE have acknowledged the potential for CFSs to contribute to both fields; however, little work has been done to create co-programming and shared goals. By co-developing these spaces during times of emergencies, children could be ensured both protective measures as well as tailored support to re-enter formal education. For instance, establishing trainings that included CFS facilitators as well as teachers could help teachers to gain important skills in identifying and mitigating threats to children, while facilitators could learn the expectations of schools to better prepare children for the future. Important content sharing could also occur between CFSs and schools (e.g. peace education activities).

Literature in EiE and CPiE confirms that programs like CFSs are important avenues to achieving the goals of each field. However, in practice the potential for collaboration is yet to be

explored and operationalized. The example of CFSs is one of many concrete avenues that could be pursued to bring EiE and CPiE professionals together to increase the efficiency of their work. Other potential areas include cross-sector data collection and evaluation, training models, and advocacy campaigns.

Together, the fields of EiE and CPiE have the greatest influence on children receiving humanitarian assistance. Both fields are dedicated to ensuring children are protected and able to reach their full spectrum of rights, including education and future livelihoods. Since the establishment of each field roughly 20-30 years ago, immense progress has been made on behalf of children. However, this progress could increase in efficiency, more deeply helping children, if greater collaboration could occur across sectors.

Inclusion of “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration” Programming in EiE work

Frequently in conflict/ post-conflict environments, children are not only victims of violence but they become the perpetrators as well. Children can easily be targets of armed groups. For instance, schools can be attacked, or children can come under threat when walking to markets or using outdoor toilets. Alternatively, children can be the ones enacting the violence. They can be recruited as soldiers for local or national militias, either willingly or by force. Children occupy multiple roles in a conflict, but aid networks often overlook the assistance needed for those who have been actively engaged in fighting. Instead, a greater focus is put on non-child combatants.

Yazidi children in Iraq have experienced this misguided offering of aid. Children have been considered within one category of “crisis-affected” with little differentiation of their experiences. Among Yazidi children, many were abducted, some were forced into sexual slavery, some were trained as child combatants, and many more were simply displaced. Yet, aid

agencies in Iraq have treated children largely the same, with the exception of children abducted by the Islamic State having access to light and often ineffective psycho-social support services. Aid for Yazidi children in Iraq has generally focused on non-combatant needs such as healthcare, education, nutrition, and other basic services.

Unfortunately, this basic and simplified assistance for children excludes those who have deeper needs. As this research uncovered, many Yazidi children are struggling with radicalization by the Islamic State and forced practices of severe violence (e.g. engaging in executions, torture, etc.). These children are struggling to make sense of their experiences and move forward with their lives. In some instances, children have not been able to take advantage of services like education or nutrition because of the psychological burden they still carry from the conflict.

In particular, the boys who were abducted by the Islamic State and forced to attend military schools need significantly more attention. These boys were exposed to atrocious violence for months or years during their captivity. They witnessed beheadings, firing squads, torture, and even participated in some of these events. Many boys were brainwashed during their time at the military camps, while others were not. Nonetheless, all have been traumatized and now reside in environments where their experiences may not be understood.

The issue of child combatants is not a new one. Around the world, children have been recruited as soldiers, either forcefully or voluntarily, during periods of conflict. Children have been trained alongside adult combatants learning many of the same skills. Although a direct abuse of child rights according to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, this practice has been difficult to curb. The problem of child combatants began to be recognized in the early 1990s, with aid programs emerging to address the issue.

One primary method of assistance to counter this problem over the years has been “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration” programming (DDR). According to (Muggah, 2005), “DDR is a process introduced following a conflict and directed primarily at ensuring the transition of combatants to civilian life” (p. 242). It is a three pronged approach that involves disarming combatants by encouraging them to turn in their weapons, demobilizing them by supporting their exit from armed groups, and reintegrating them back into peaceful society. DDR approaches gained momentum when they were championed by the World Bank in the 1990s. The World Bank was one of the first institutions to recognize the advantages of offering DDR programs and broadening aid responses beyond physical infrastructure and financial capital (Muggah, 2005). Although the World Bank has been the primary source of investments for DDR programs, the idea has been picked up by several organizations around the world. However, despite its promise the limitations of DDR emerged relatively early on. Overtime, its weaknesses have gone largely unaddressed leading to limited expansion of programming and much room for progress.

Some of the weaknesses have included how to measure its effectiveness, how to operationalize the three prongs, and poor guidance that clarifies universal principles and contextual considerations important for replication of programs. Regarding measurement, Muggah (2005) notes that successful DDR interventions are frequently “measured by the de facto collection of weapons rather than the extent to which such initiatives have demonstrably improved safety or security, much less human development” (p. 246). Measurement strategies have perplexed aid agencies for years that seek to assess programs within short to medium term timeframes. Unfortunately, although disarmament and demobilization can be easily confined to a short/medium period of time, reintegration could take much longer to fully assess. To get around

this, some programs have simply considered family reunification as effective reintegration although this is clearly an inaccurate conception (Williamson, 2006).

Additionally, questions around how to operationalize each of the prongs has inhibited the growth of successful programs. Disarmament and demobilization are usually the first two steps of the process. However, simplifying each to the plain tasks of taking away weapons and removing children from armed groups is insufficient. For instance, taking away weapons may not reduce violence in a society. Muggah (2005) states: “governments continue to prioritize, even fetishize, the gathering of hardware. This ‘disarmament bias’ persists despite growing evidence that absolute numbers of arms collected do not necessarily contribute to improved security” (p. 246). In many cases, the arms get recycled back into communities or other weapons are acquired. Regarding demobilization, many child combatants are re-recruited or go on to criminal activities. Many carry a stigma that prohibits them from being accepted by their community. Lastly, reintegration is largely overlooked given its long term timeframe and needs. Since elements of culture must be addressed to ensure children re-enter their communities in good standing, this is likely the most complex of all the prongs. As such, to be successful, DDR programs should thoroughly consider how to be more transformative. These programs have significant potential to assist children but programs must be deep, rich, and tailored to their context/circumstances.

Despite the challenges and critiques of DDR programs, they remain an important part of reconstruction for many conflict-impacted societies. During the conflict in Sierra Leone that spanned the late 1990s to early 2000s, DDR programs helped 98% of former child combatants return to their communities (Williamson, 2006). Although there were challenges, the program was considered a success. After the conflict in Angola, more than 20,000 child combatants took

advantage of reintegration support (Knight, 2008). DDR continues to have immense potential and many programs have produced significant successes. Clearly, there are obstacles that need to be overcome when developing programming but ultimately are worth the effort. Lessons learned from previous programs may help to create universal principles and contextual considerations for new programs to develop.

For instance, children in Iraq would benefit enormously from well-planned DDR programming. Yazidi children who were abducted by IS have already disarmed and demobilized physically; however, psychologically many children are still aligned with IS philosophies of violence. These children have also struggled to reintegrate into their communities. They feel like outsiders and peers are sometimes afraid of them. DDR programs could help remedy many issues Yazidi children are experiencing post-captivity.

More broadly, DDR should be a consideration within the field of education in emergencies. Since reintegration efforts are often in the form of non-formal education programs (e.g. community sensitization programs, psycho-social support programs, etc.), it belongs under the EiE umbrella. Additionally, DDR may serve as a valuable precursor to formal education activities. Children who have been radicalized into violent behavior need to be de-radicalized before they can re-enter and be successful in schools. DDR has significant potential as an EiE intervention but uptake has been slow.

Agencies supporting EiE work have likely overlooked the potential for DDR since it typically comes as part of a peace deal. For instance, DDR programs in Sierra Leone were established as part of the Lome Peace Accords. In South Africa, DDR programs were established after the formal transition from an apartheid state to democracy. Typically, DDR programs have been seen as having military or security objectives rather than contributing to education and

social stability. However, DDR has immense potential to enhance many sectors from peacebuilding to education to economic development. Consequently, I argue that the field of EiE has considerable space to incorporate DDR programs as important non-formal educational interventions.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Children around the world continue to be caught up in crises. Nearly half of all refugees are estimated to be under the age of 18 and many have experienced or witnessed severe violence and unimaginable suffering. Over the last two decades, aid agencies have given increasing attention to the plight of these children. They have worked to improve quality services like education, health, nutrition, etc., but space remains to enhance efficiency and deepen the quality of care.

Particularly, the fields of “Education in Emergencies” (EiE) and “Child Protection in Emergencies” (CPiE) have gained robust attention over the years and scholars and practitioners continue to grapple with methods for improvement and new avenues of assistance. Of all aid sectors, these two fields most directly engage with children and serve their needs. Although immense progress has been made on their behalf, gaps in services still hinder the lives of many crisis-affected children.

This research sought to help address those gaps by taking a “deep dive” into the experiences of displaced Yazidi children in Iraq. Since 2014, hundreds of thousands of Yazidis have been displaced from their homeland in the western region of the country due to the invasion of the Islamic State (IS). The violent incursion of militants not only forced Yazidis to flee but many were taken captive and forced into sexual/domestic slavery, militias, or were killed in the conflict. Now returning home, a vast population of Yazidi children are still reeling from their experiences.

Using Yazidi children as the target population of this study allowed me to have a window into the lives of children currently still navigating crisis. They offered a glimpse into their authentic struggles and how they viewed the world. Through their stories and experiences, this

research presents areas of strength and weakness when it comes to providing aid and care for children in crisis environments.

Ultimately, the broad goal of this study was to inform better practice within the fields of humanitarian aid and education in emergencies. By bringing to life the stories of Yazidi children, this research offers a point of reflection for aid practitioners who are constantly adapting and revising services to improve care. It displays the hardships that many children in Iraq have encountered when trying to access relevant quality education to move their lives forward. Through the five children selected as participants for this study, we gain a sense of reality that has sometimes been missed by humanitarian professionals.

In the following sections, I revisit the research questions that drove this study. I provide reflection on how the findings fit within the original questions and the value these findings have for the overall work within EiE, CPiE, and humanitarian aid. Subsequently, I provide some commentary on the broad contribution of this research. Lastly, I give thoughts on research limitations and future avenues of inquiry.

A Return to the Research Questions

The research questions in this study were designed to bring out deeply qualitative data that could enrich the overwhelming amount of quantitative work occurring within humanitarian aid fields. The research questions sought to understand “lived experiences” and how trauma, displacement, and conflict affect how children engage with aid infrastructure. At the core of this study are the stories of children and their rich descriptions of life amid dire circumstances, told through their eyes.

All the research questions are interrelated and overlapping. I start broadly in question one by asking what are the lived experiences of Yazidi children caught up in conflict? I go on to

narrow the inquiry in question two to inquire how crisis affects educational experiences. Lastly, I narrow even further in question three to gain an understanding of how humanitarian aid (specifically in education) is either helping or inhibiting children. In the findings chapters, I organized this information by distinct high level categories that included how children *think* about their educational world, how they *navigate* it, and how their *attitudes and values affect* it. In this section, I deconstruct those categories to give a broader overview of how the data connected to each of the research questions with new reflections.

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of displaced, traumatized, and conflict-affected children in Iraq?

Consistent with ethnography, data was collected through observing children in their natural environment as well as through a series of both formal and informal discussions. This data helped to garner rich descriptions of their lives. Collectively, their narratives and my field notes provided a robust data set that rendered a wide range of lived experiences for displaced, traumatized and conflict-affected children.

It is important to note that the findings for this particular research question underlie the two other questions in the study. Consequently, the lived experiences of children are presented thoroughly in the findings chapters and will be discussed again in the following two sections. As such, this section aims to take a step back and look at their experiences to find common threads of discourse at the broadest level. During data collection and analysis, I focused on more acute themes in order to develop concrete solutions but here I reflect more generally on the data. My reflection includes topics important for aid professionals to keep in mind while undertaking work with children, though I provide no specific directives. The major themes include: hidden trauma, changes in future outlook, and isolation and neglect.

Regarding hidden trauma, going into this research it was anticipated that children would be traumatized. All participants had been abducted by the Islamic State, a terrorist group known for their atrocities. During their captivity, children experienced severe and disturbing forms of violence. However, what was surprising was that for many children their trauma was not overt or easily observable. Once returned to their community, many children quickly adapted to their environment and were visibly hard to distinguish between non-abducted children. There were absolutely exceptions such as Nadia, who did not leave her tent for lengthy periods of time after her return. However, most children were quick to re-socialize and integrate into the culture of the camp.

Although children's reintegration seemed rapid, this did not mean their trauma had resolved. For some children, their trauma was carefully guarded and often not even recognized. For instance, Talal had witnessed severe atrocities as a result of his abduction. During his time at the military camp, he watched his friends become brainwashed and participate in the beheadings of his own community members. Talal was also beaten and endured threats to his life. However, upon arrival to the camp and re-entry to his community, Talal did not speak much of his past experiences. Instead, he focused on enrolling in school and playing sports in his free time. When observing Talal, you could assume he was relatively unaffected by his time in captivity. However, through deeper examination and intimate conversations, it was clear that Talal often reflected on his abuse. It constantly weighed on his mind and manifested when he would share violent videos and images with the other boys. It also shaded his perspective on the future- he frequently thought about taking up arms and killing his perpetrators. Talal's trauma was hidden until I could gain his trust and truly get to know him.

This issue of “hidden trauma” was common in many children. Unfortunately, it means that for aid providers, these children’s needs may often go overlooked. They simply may not understand the severity of these children’s experiences as they try to triage a massive influx of refugees/IDPs. For children like Talal, if this trauma were recognized early on, he could perhaps take advantage of DDR programs or de-radicalization interventions. Addressing the trauma could help ensure children stay on a path to peaceful and productive futures.

I note the issue of hidden trauma to encourage aid professionals to keep this in mind as they work with crisis-affected children. I offer no specific recommendations on how to intervene in such trauma but rather a proclamation that it is a much more pervasive problem than what current aid programs assume. In this study, Yazidi children displayed an immense amount of resilience. However, what the research importantly teased out was that coping mechanisms of avoidance were sometimes misinterpreted as resilience. The children’s lived experiences of trauma and displacement described in this research certainly enforce this point.

An investigation of children’s lived experiences also displayed changes in their future outlook. Over the course of the last several years of displacement, children’s lives have transformed immensely. With these changes has come new perspectives and expectations of the future. For instance, the findings noted that girls frequently displayed heightened levels of empowerment and confidence in the camp. With fewer domestic duties (compared to life in their homeland), fewer male students (who typically garnered more teacher attention), and the presence of female teachers, girls gained significant confidence. Their outlooks transformed from assuming domestic roles to pursuing higher education and career paths. For many girls, their experiences in the displacement camp generated new hopes and dreams.

Alternatively, some of the boys felt their futures were restricted and constrained. They were now assuming the roles of their missing fathers, taking on work to earn an income for their families while abandoning education. These boys sometimes expected to return to education and their original life path, while others did not. Collectively, none of the boys resented their situations and all accepted the new roles they had to play. Their outlooks on the future had changed just as much as the girls in many cases. It would be too generalizing to say that displaced settings were serving girls better than boys, but these common themes of changed outlooks and new realities are worth exploring as aid is developed and conveyed.

Lastly, a common theme in reviewing the lived experiences of children is the isolation and neglect that was pervasive in their lives. Children were resilient in many ways but upon deeper examination, still frequently felt isolated and neglected. For instance, several of the study's participants returned to school immediately after their escape/release from the Islamic State. Not only did they return but some, like Khansa, excelled at school work. However, through conversations with the participants I learned that they often still felt "othered" by classmates. Or alternatively, participants felt different from their peers even if classmates were inclusive. The experiences that these children had over a long period of time with the Islamic State has led them to feel isolated. On a surface level, they were participating in normal child activities such as school and socializing, but had not been fully reintegrated.

Linked to their isolation is a neglect for their care. As mentioned earlier, often children's trauma is hidden from aid professionals who fail to connect them with proper services. Additionally, crisis-affected children may not have parents who have the emotional capacity to fully attend to their families' needs. Children can easily become neglected during periods of crisis leaving them to navigate their own feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

To sum up findings for the research question, *What are the lived experiences of displaced, traumatized, and conflict-affected children in Iraq?*, I conclude that their experiences are diverse but helpful themes can still be drawn. Since their actual lived experiences are expressed in subsequent research questions, this section was saved for broad reflection that rendered some key points of considerations for aid professionals working with children. Particularly, assuming children have hidden trauma, pervasive feelings of isolation and neglect, and possibly changed outlooks on life can help the aid community to better triage and assess needs for a better response.

Research Question 2: How does exposure to conflict and trauma impact the educational experiences of displaced children and vice versa?

This research question is one that has been asked time and again within the field of education in emergencies. However, what set my inquiry apart was the qualitative orientation of the question rather than the quantitative orientation more typical of the field. Through discussions with children, I garnered a sense of their barriers and opportunities to pursue quality education and organized them according to psychological, institutional, and cultural categories. The qualitative nature of this dissertation allowed me to uncover new considerations for the fields of EiE and CPiE. It expanded far beyond issues of access, which has often been the priority of education-focused aid agencies.

Regarding psychological barriers and opportunities, there were several findings that linked directly to their educational experiences. Foremost, there was a need for many Yazidi children to be “de-radicalized” and “de-educated” from learning that occurred under the Islamic State. Participants commonly discussed the violent imagery that was present in their IS-sponsored textbooks or instruction in schools. Some boys described the military academies and their participation in brutal forms of torture and killing. These children spent months to years

gaining exposure to such atrocities and returning to national education networks was challenging. They consistently compared their current education to previous experiences and even wove in violent elements to their learning in the camp. This was the case with Salam, who would amuse himself by editing math word problems to reflect a violent scenario/outcome for his Islamic State captors.

Aside from the radicalization that children experienced under IS, they also noted the challenges of such a rapid return to normalcy, advocated by aid professionals eager to re-enroll children in school. For some children, their experiences in captivity were so severe that a quick re-entry into education was actually cited as negative. For instance, Nadia was aggressively encouraged to attend school as soon as possible. Unfortunately, since she was mentally and emotionally unprepared for this, she left soon after starting and has little interest in ever returning. For some participants, their quick return to education was helpful in feeling normal and reintegrated but for others it seemed somewhat harmful to their fragile emotional and psychological states.

Linked to this return to normalcy, children also still associated schools with sites of violence. What seemed like a normal school to an aid professional was occasionally something more traumatic for Yazidi children. Many children witnessed community members killed in the yards of their village schools, other children experienced the violence of IS-sponsored schools during captivity, and some children residing outside of the camps attended schools that still showed signs of bomb blasts and bullet holes. Although the camp school was built new since the start of the conflict, for some it symbolized a place where violence commonly unfolded.

Regarding institutional barriers and opportunities, the research found a significant need to review pre-crisis policies and to develop new policies relevant to displaced children's

circumstances. For instance, children were sometimes refused educational access because they had “aged out” of schooling- meaning they had been out of school for longer than the three year limit the government imposed. This policy is extremely problematic for students who have been displaced and spent significant periods of time moving around.

The structure of education was also problematic, particularly language restrictions that left students without educational access or poor chances to succeed. Iraq has a complex system of education where Arabic schools compete against Kurdish. They abide by different curricula and it is not easy to switch from one to the other. Unfortunately, for students coming from Arabic schools in Sinjar to displacement camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, they may be without access to their former curriculum or have to switch tracks to gain any kind of educational opportunity. These types of pre-crisis policies can be incredibly limiting and should be thoroughly reviewed in post-crisis contexts, or as crises unfold. In addition, new policies should be established to better assist crisis-affected children.

Lastly, this research uncovered several cultural barriers and opportunities. Particularly, community views on gender, work, and the normalization of violence were problematic to accessing quality education. Regarding gender and work, boys were often being left behind in terms of education. This is a unique twist in the field of gender and education as it is far more common globally that girls struggle to gain access to schools and generally have much poorer literacy rates. Nonetheless, in the Yazidi displacement camp that served as the site of data collection, boys were often expected to work to fulfill the roles of their missing fathers, leaving them little opportunity to pursue an education. This cultural expectation was observed by most of the community without question, leading to a generation of young men who will lack the full spectrum of their education.

Regarding the normalization of violence, children were being exposed to the idea that violent behavior was a common and even acceptable part of culture. Due to decades of conflict in Iraq, violence had become pervasive. Media channels often showed bloody massacres and war was discussed with nonchalance. When children were asked about their ideas on justice, it was overwhelmingly cited that their perpetrators should die and endure the same violence they experienced. Children simply could not see a world where disputes are settled peacefully. This becomes problematic for education in a broad sense. It raises the question, what is the point of education if it cannot produce stable and peaceful societies? The normalization of violence in Iraq is something that could be countered in schools with well thought out planning. However, it first needs to be recognized as a problem.

Research Question 3: How do traumatized and conflict-affected children engage with aid infrastructure, particularly education?

This research question was intended to produce concrete ways the aid community could adapt to better assist children. I aimed to investigate the ways that children were interacting with aid and education to find efficiencies that could be exploited and deficiencies that could be remedied. Largely, the research findings produced several key barriers and opportunities that the aid industry could address, which were noted in the last section. As such, in this section I would like to reflect more broadly on two common issues that came across in discussions with children: 1. Broken communication channels between aid professionals, parents, and children, and 2. Logistical hurdles.

Regarding broken communication channels, there were several missed opportunities for children to access quality education. I recorded in my field notes that children overwhelmingly wanted to attend school. At the same time, aid professionals were working hard to provide children access to education. Hence, this seemed a recipe for success but some children still

voiced difficulty with enrollment. In reflecting on field notes, it seemed in many cases parents simply were not taking an active role in sorting out their children's needs. These parents were highly traumatized themselves and frequently focused on more basic services such as nutrition and housing infrastructure. Although aid professionals provided information to parents and were accessible to them to help children become enrolled in school, some parents simply did not take advantage of this opportunity given their priorities and own mental health status. As such, I observed several students struggle to navigate their paths back to education without guidance from adults. Communication and assistance had been among the adults (aid provider to parent) when in many cases it was the child who was the primary force behind re-entering education (e.g. Talal). Consequently, returning to the research question, when assessing how children are engaging with aid infrastructure, the answer is sometimes they are not. Aid networks in Iraq have typically provided aid via parents instead of empowering children directly. The situation of Yazidi children in al Ain camp displays how this is a problematic protocol.

Lastly, regarding logistical hurdles, research findings showed that aid providers sometimes overestimated the capacity of children to resolve such issues. For instance, psycho-social support and educational tutoring was frequently available to children but not within the camps. Instead, they needed to travel to the city of Duhok to gain such services. With many parents unable to help children (either because of psychological limitations due to trauma or more practically financial limitations), these children were left to create solutions on their own. Most often, these logistical hurdles were impossible for them to overcome leaving them without access to many aid services.

Intended Contribution of the Research

This study adds to the bodies of literature on children caught up in crisis. In particular, it supplements research in the fields of Education in Emergencies and Child Protection in Emergencies. The study expands the scope of research in these fields by adding a deep qualitative look at the authentic lived experiences of crisis-affected children. It provides real-life examples of the obstacles children encounter when pursuing quality education and protection both during and post-crisis. Additionally, this study contributes to the field of research methodology by providing commentary on the challenges and opportunities of conducting research in active conflict zones.

The fields of EiE and CPiE have long been driven by quantitative research. During a crisis, decisions need to be made expeditiously since life-saving measures cannot wait. As such, the field of EiE has focused largely on issues of access and safety. Questions such as *how many schools have reopened post-crisis? How many children are enrolled in school? What is the gender parity in classrooms, and, Are schools safe from attack?*, are commonly part of a first phase response. These questions are framed quantitatively without a deep look at the circumstantial issues that may be inhibiting or encouraging change. Driving questions like these help to form interventions for children focused on getting them access to safe schools as soon as possible. Encouraging a “return to normalcy” via education is a common ethos in the field.

Overtime, EiE has expanded and we now see greater attention for programs focused on accelerated learning (ensuring children can get caught up on missed education), conflict-sensitive education (ensuring education does not exacerbate conflict), and psychosocial support (ensuring children have the tools to navigate trauma and distressing circumstances). However, much of this work still lacks deep qualitative insights that could vastly increase effectiveness and efficiency of programming.

Similar comments can be made for the field of CPiE. In practice, progress in the field has typically been counted by how many violations have occurred against children and how many children have received access to quality care. In 2005, the U.N. launched the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to track six grave violations against children. Violations include: 1. Killing and maiming of children, 2. Recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, 3. Sexual violence against children, 4. Attacks against schools or hospitals, 5. Abduction of children, and 6. Denial of humanitarian access for children. The field of CPiE has largely relied on quantitative data for these violations to measure impact and organize its efforts. Unfortunately, qualitative research has been relatively marginal in the field, meaning the depth and diversity of children's experiences worldwide are not adequately covered.

As such, this research study aimed to provide that deeply qualitative angle. The stories of children were intended to give insights into the challenges and obstacles often missed by quantitative data. Taking an ethnographic approach, children were interviewed and observed in their natural environments to understand how aid assistance and policies might break down once it reaches the level of the child. These policies are made with the best intentions and are typically supported by robust data sets such as the MRM or UNESCO's databank on out-of-school children; however, further data is needed to view contextual nuances that may be limiting progress.

Consequently, the study offered several new avenues for consideration in the fields of EiE and CPiE both at the programmatic and policy levels. The findings of the research uncovered several barriers to quality education for children in this study and the discussion section offered potential programmatic interventions as well as broad inter-sectoral policy reforms. Insights such as developing/expanding programs aimed at de-radicalization, limiting

boys work, reconciling pre-crisis policies with post-crisis conditions, and countering the “normalization of violence” pervasive among children were important to better shape aid responses for children in Iraq (and potentially beyond). More broadly, this research found a need for more intricate collaboration between the education and child protection sectors. As the two sectors most directly impactful to crisis-affected children’s lives, these sectors should be working closely to establish policies and procedures that are implemented across both fields.

Aside from adding to the bodies of work in EiE and CPiE, this research contributes important discourse to research methods in active conflict zones. Although only a brief portion of this study is dedicated to addressing this issue (see chapter on methodology), it brings to light certain key considerations worthy of further exploration. Considerations include the value, ethics, and challenges of such work. In particular, I note logistical issues and safety, ethical recruitment of participants, and data validity in chaotic circumstances.

Research in active conflict zones is challenging for many reasons and not often pursued. However, to gain accurate understandings of crisis contexts, this type of research is essential. Moreover, endeavoring to undertake qualitative research which is often prolonged and time-consuming can add much needed complexity to the field.

Limitations and Future Research

In this final section, I reflect on the limitations of the study and potential for future research. The primary limitation, consistent with most qualitative work, is that the findings are not generalizable. It was never my intention, nor is it possible, to make universal assumptions in order to improve the lives of crisis-affected children on the basis of this study. Contexts around the world differ vastly and to view them as rigidly uniform would be irresponsible. I undertook

this research well aware that it focused on a distinct population of children under unique circumstances in Iraq- it is why a case study methodology was so fitting.

Nonetheless, although the expectation was to produce findings directly applicable to Yazidi IDP children in Iraq, it was the hope that this research might stir new avenues of inquiry across the fields of EiE and CPiE in contexts around the world. In earlier chapters, after the presentation of findings I offered discussion and reflection on the data. The ideas provided are intended not to be prescriptive for other practitioners but rather to add to the breadth and depth of considerations when developing aid assistance. As such, findings for this research are limited by generalizability but still enrich the ways we think about our work on behalf of children.

Another limitation of the study is having to conduct work in an active conflict zone. I also offer this as a contribution of the study in a previous section. It is in fact, both. As a result of the ongoing conflict with the Islamic State, there were several challenges to the research. Foremost, logistical and safety issues limited me from living closely among participants in the camp. A hoard of other conflict-related obstacles (discussed in the methodology) were also prohibitive (e.g. working through gate-keepers of knowledge, awareness of child trauma, secondary trauma for the researcher). In many ways, the conflict limited the amount and richness of the data I was able to acquire. Nonetheless, I hope I garnered sufficient data to produce strong and insightful findings. Although I consider the conflict circumstances to be a major limitation, I believe it was important to undertake this research at the time the conflict was unfolding. It allowed me to have a rare window into the lives of crisis-affected children that other research has only marginally examined.

Regarding directions for future research, I name many of these ideas in the discussion chapter of the study. Specifically in Iraq, aid agencies would benefit by looking into the several

potential interventions I speculate on. More broadly, I claim that deeper research should be conducted to integrate work across EiE and CPiE globally. I also emphasize the importance of adding DDR programming and other interventions aimed at community reintegration of youth as part of common EiE and CPiE responses. These ideas have emerged after reflection of the data collected in Iraq. It is beyond the scope of this study to tease out those ideas here but nonetheless, they are offered as important avenues of inquiry for practitioners and scholars in the future.

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