Stories Without Endings: Lived Experiences of Yazidi Women in Winnipeg

by

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Abstract

Throughout history, the Yazidis, a minority ethnic group from the Middle East, have faced centuries of religious persecution, socioeconomic deprivation, human rights violations, and genocides. In 2014 a genocide took place when the so-called Islamic State entered the area of Mount Shingal in Nineveh Province of northern Iraq and carried out a plan to eradicate the Yazidi people. This attack and mass exodus of the Yazidis from their homeland resulted in the upheaval of 400,000 people and the abduction or death of 11,000 to 14,000 Yazidis. In addition to this genocide, Yazidi community has experienced both individual and collective trauma.

This study explores the personal narrative and lived experiences of eight Yazidi women in Winnipeg. It is an act of witnessing their experiences of trauma, survival, bravery, and hope, and provides an opportunity for the reader to bear witness to the survivors of this study. These stories help to identify the complex and ongoing challenges this group has faced and continue to experience. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews using semi-structured, open-ended questions which allowed the participants to express their personal experiences and narratives.

The lived experiences of the participants were analyzed and divided into two sections that focus on the periods of violence and post-violence. We Were Lucky We Came So Soon pertains to the period of violence as the participants share their experiences in the subsections pertaining to: (1) Life in Shingal was Simple but Difficult; (2) Traditional Gender Roles and Newfound Freedom; (3) Importance of Kinship, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (4) I Want You to Know What Happened on August 3, 2014; (5) Betrayal from our Neighbours; and (6) Life is Hard in the Refugee Camp. The section - We Will Never Forget - identifies the second theme that emerged and focuses on the experiences of the participants after the events of August 2014,

themes include: (1) Shingal is Home But It is Not Safe for Yazidis; (2) Canada is Good, But Life is Hard; (3) The World Has Forgotten, But We Will Never Forget; (4) Unknown Fate of Missing Yazidis; (5) Gaining Strengths from Children, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (6) Share Our Stories; and (7) Future Challenges and Opportunities for Our Children.

Based on the lived experiences of the participants, several key areas emerged to provide a framework for recommendations which could aid the Yazidis on their journey to heal from the 2014 genocide. The first includes the need for participants to find closure around the events of August 2014. Participants expressed the need to know what happened to missing loved ones, including those who may have been killed by Deash as well as those who were taken into captivity. Exhuming and analyzing the bones found in mass graves was another important factor on what happened to their loved ones and the community at large. Participants also expressed the desire to rescue those still held in captivity by Daesh.

All participants expressed a deep fear for those Yazidis still in Iraq and cited a lack of safety and security for Yazidis in Shingal. It is important for international governments to work towards establishing peace and security in countries plagued by violence, including Iraq. At the same time, it is paramount for governments, including the Canadian government, to continue to sponsor Yazidi refugees. It is evident through this research that participants gained strength from several factors, including their family, community, religion, and their religious and cultural identity. All participants expressed a deep sorrow for being separated from their families and community.

As this tight-knit communal community is settled around the globe, the Yazidis are at risk of losing their culture, religion, and identity. Increasing the diaspora population will help this ethnic minority to continue to prosper outside of their traditional homelands as well as

aiding with successful integration into their new communities. Participants spoke highly of a community-based farming program organized by Operation Ezra. It is important to continue to invest in this type of activity as it not only provided participants with an additional food source, but also connected them to their traditional agricultural way of life

.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank first and foremost the women who participated in this study and shared their knowledge and lived experiences with me. Thank you for trusting me with your stories, your time, and your contributions to this work. I am honoured to carry your stories.

Secondly, I would like to thank my interpreter Ameena as well as Nafiya and Operation Ezra who supported this research. Your support and guidance added great value to this project. Thank you for your time and allowing me to work with your community.

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Lastly, I owe my family and close friends a deep debt of gratitude for their continual support and inspiration. Your encouragement and confidence in me was appreciated throughout this challenging and life-changing journey. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for believing in me!

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Nassima, Habiya, Maha, Shirin, Avin, Ahlim, Naqaba, and Adol who trusted me with their stories and lived experiences as Yazidi woman. I honour your experiences, your strength, your perseverance, and unrelenting resilience in the face of adversity. You are the reason for this thesis. By trusting me to share your stories, I hope the research provides the reader with a better understanding of your history, complex experiences, and the ongoing challenges you and your community face. The ability to carry these stories has at times been difficult to hold, but nevertheless it has been a great honour. I am thankful for the time you gave to share your stories and will hold those moments close to my heart for the rest of my life.

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Table 1. Participant Demographics……**5**

List of Acronyms

AQI - al Qaeda in Iraq

CCR - Canadian Council for Refugees

IDP - Internally Displaced People

IOM Iraq- International Organization for Migration Iraq

IRCC - Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

IS - Islamic State

ISI - Islamic State of Iraq

ISIS - Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

KDI - Kurdistan Region of Iraq

KRG - Kurdish Regional Government

KRHMIJCCC - Kurdish Regional Government Ministry of Interior Joint Crisis Coordination Centre

MAG - Mines Advisory Group

OCHA - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights

PACS - Peace and Conflict Studies

SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

UN - United Nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNAMI - United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

WHO - World Health Organization

Introduction to the Study

In 2010, I was working as a teacher at a non-profit agency teaching refugee children and youth upon their arrival in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was during this time that I had my first introduction to Yazidism, when a Yazidi family was sponsored by the Canadian government and enrolled in our program. I knew very little of their culture and religion besides the fact that they came from Iraq and spoke Arabic and Kermanji.

They were a large family with seven children, the majority of them female. The girls had long hair that they wore uncovered and carried themselves with confidence, they played sports with boys, and they were not afraid to bump or touch them during these interactions. They were outgoing and boisterous, and did not shy away when males were present. They fasted when it was not Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, and wore a red and white string around their wrist. I would later learn the thread must be worn at all time, as it signifies the Yazidi culture. The red represents love while the white represents peace and the purity of Yazidism (Yazidi International, 2014-2015).

After this family came, Yazidi resettlement, particularly through my place of work, was nearly non-existent. We saw a small handful of other families resettled, but most of those who came were privately sponsored by Operation Ezra. It was not until 2017, as a result of the 2014 genocide, that the Government of Canada announced they would resettle over 1,000 vulnerable Yazidis to Canada and I once again had the privilege to work with this community (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2017b).

Throughout history, the Yazidis, a minority ethnic group from the Middle East, have faced centuries of religious persecution, socioeconomic deprivation, human rights violations, and genocides (Tagay et al., 2017). In 2014 a genocide took place when the so-called Islamic State

entered the area of Mount Shingal in Nineveh Province of northern Iraq and carried out a plan to eradicate the Yazidi people (Cetorelli et al., 2017; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2016). This attack and the subsequent mass exodus of Yazidis from their homeland resulted in the upheaval of 400,000 people and the abduction or death of 11,000 to 14,000 Yazidis (IRCC, 2017a; Kikoler, 2015; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; OHCHR, 2016). In addition to this genocide, the Yazidis have suffered centuries of persecution resulting in both individual and collective trauma (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; OHCHR, 2016). The once remote and tight-knit community faces further peril as the diaspora community continues to grow around the world, with new generations being born and raised away from their traditional homeland (Açikyildiz, 2010; Allison, 2017; Kizilhan, 2017; Langer, 2010).

This study takes an explicit stance of witnessing the personal narratives and lived experiences of Yazidi women in Winnipeg. These narratives help to identify the complex and ongoing challenges this group has faced and continues to experience as well as provide an opportunity to take an ethical stance with these survivors. In particular, this study focuses on eight Yazidi women between the ages of 27 to 55 and their experiences of life before August 2014, their experience in living with this genocide, challenges in moving forward, and their perception of what the future holds for the Yazidis. This research utilized a narrative inquiry and storytelling approach to make the voices of these women central to this thesis and allow them to share their strengths and knowledge. Information was generated through open-ended interview questions and guided conversations with the participants. The use of narrative inquiry and storytelling as a methodology was an important framework for this research as it provided a first-hand account of the lived experiences of these women.

Significance of the Study

Yazidis have faced centuries of persecution with little knowledge about these atrocities outside of their closed community, and the 2014 genocide is considered the 74th genocide in Yazidi history by their community (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; OHCHR, 2016; Spät, 2005; Vijayann, 2017). Due to the pre-meditated nature of this event, which aimed at eradicating the Yazidis of Shingal, many groups have recognized this violent attack as genocide, including but not limited to the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights; the European, Armenian, Australian, and Portuguese parliaments; the French Senate; and the Canadian House of Commons (Yazda, n.d.; Vale, 2020). Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, the research available on this event, and the malicious and targeted attack by Daesh, I believe the 2014 invasion was an act of genocide.

In 2017 Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada announced they would resettle over 1,000 vulnerable Yazidis, and as of July 2020 1,240 Yazidis were resettled (Government of Canada, 2020; IRCC, 2017b). This study explores the personal narratives and lived experiences of eight Yazidi women in Winnipeg to help better understand the complex and ongoing challenges the Yazidi community continues to face as well as to bear witness to their experiences as survivors. In sharing these experiences, the overarching intent was to find commonalties and strengths, and identify ways the women responded to this adversity and hardship.

Giving voices to these women was an important means to outline the strength and knowledge they have through their collective experiences as well as the overwhelming cohesiveness of the community to help support each other. Storytelling is an important means for sharing experiences, acknowledging strengths, standing with and bearing witness, as well as giving a voice to vulnerable populations. More importantly, people in power often determine

what and how stories are shared and "cultural knowledge and history may exclude or misrepresent whole groups or people, and collective trauma may remain unacknowledged and unhealed" (Senehi, 2009, p. 204). Similarly, storytelling helps to process and understand past events by the retelling of these experiences into a narrative (Stewart et al., 2015). The lived experiences of the women in this study provide insight into these personal narratives and help to identify the complex and ongoing challenges Yazidis faced and continue to face.

The information gathered from this research will not only shed light on the Yazidi community, but might result in a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by ethnic-minority groups who have similar experiences. It might provide insight on the journey of moving forward from past trauma and identifying what needs to be done to better support Yazidis in Canada. I hope this research provides a foundation for Yazidis to speak about their experiences both directly and indirectly, and allows participants with an opportunity to feel heard. By providing an avenue for them to share their personal narratives, I hope to create dialogue among the greater community in an effort to strengthen our understanding of their unique experiences. This dialogue will help bear witness and stand with the Yazidis and the women of this study as they share the complex and ongoing challenges they face. It will also provide a better understanding of the strengths of this community, as well as the coping mechanisms they have found valuable in moving forward from past adversity.

Framework of the Study

This thesis is divided into seven sections: (1) Introduction; (2) Context; (3) Review of Literature; (4) Methodology; (5) Discussion and Results: We Were Lucky We Came So Soon; (6) Discussion and Results: We Will Never Forget; and (7) Reflections and Conclusion. The first section introduces the study by stating its purpose and explaining its significance. Section two

provides a context to better understand who the Yazidi people are and the historical and ongoing challenges they experience. The third section provides a review of literature that focuses on several key areas of research, including violence, trauma, and storytelling. It provides a theoretical framework to help analyze the lived experiences of participants.

The fourth section presents the methodology used to conduct the study that includes aspects of narrative inquiry and storytelling. The fifth and sixth sections focus on the discussions and results of the research findings. Section five focuses on the period of violence that includes the experiences of the women in Shingal as well as the horrific events that transpired with the invasion of Daesh. Section six shares the women's experiences after the violence and focuses on resettling in Canada, the issues the Yazidis in Shingal continue to face, and the feelings of betrayal from those outside their community. Section seven discusses protective factors the women shared which help keep them strong, the importance of sharing their stories, and their perception of what the future holds for the Yazidis. Section eight, the final part of this study, is one of reflection; it offers recommendations for future research and provides a conclusion to the study.

Caution Statement

This study shares the lived experiences of eight Yazidi women, including their harrowing survival of the 2014 genocide. Readers may find some of these details difficult to read or even triggering. Please undertake this study with caution, keeping your own health and well-being in mind. These stories are difficult to read, but they are the real experiences of the women in this study and speak to their truth and memory. In the sharing of these lived experiences there is an expectation for us to listen. The women in this study need us to listen, hear, and understand their

narratives. Through their bravery in sharing their stories, the eight participants are inviting us to witness and honour their lived experiences.

Context

> I want you to share my story with everybody you want to share it with. You can share it with all the world, even the Government of Canada, and all the world will hear our story and know what happened to the Yazidis. Tell them I went to see this woman and I sat with her and I heard her story. You can use my name. Yes, share my name and say this is my story. I want everybody to hear my story, anyone you want to share it with. Anywhere you go - you can share with all the world what happened to me and that this is my story. Share my story with everybody. I know our stories are hard, but we cannot do anything about it. (Maha, age 31)

This section will provide the context of the project and will focus on several key areas. The first part will provide background information on who the Yazidis are and their lives in Iraq prior to 2014. The next part will recount historical and recent events of persecution as well as crimes of genocide. The third part will focus on the impact of the August 2014 genocide, including issues that continue to affect this community today. The last part will examine Canada's role in the resettlement of the Yazidi refugees.

Who Are the Yazidi People?

The Yazidis are a distinct ethnic minority group unified by their religious practices and ethnic identity that is believed to have formed between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries (Arakelova, 2010). It is estimated that about one million people around the world identify as Yazidi with the majority of the population dispersed throughout Syria and Turkey, and the highest concentration of approximately 500,000-700,000 persons living in their homeland of Nineveh Province in northern Iraq (IRCC, 2017a; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; Oehring, 2017; Salloum, 2013; Six-Hohenbalkan, 2019). Yazidis are thought to be ethnically Kurdish as

they speak a dialect of Kurdish called Kurmanji. However, many Yazidis dispute this and believe that historically all Kurdish people were originally Yazidi, but through years of persecution, they converted to Islam and became a distinct group of Kurdish people (Açikyildiz, 2010; IRCC, 2017a; Spät, 2008). Therefore, Yazidis identify as their own ethnic group, the "original Kurds" (Allison, 2017; Maisel, 2008; Spät, 2005).

Yazidism is one of the oldest religions in the world which can be traced back over 4,000 years, and includes aspects of Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity (Fuccaro, 1999; IRCC, 2017a; Kikoler, 2015; Maisel, 2008; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). Some traditions include believing in reincarnation, practicing circumcision, and baptizing children. Yazidis also pray at designated times throughout the day although it is not compulsory (Allison, 2017; Carbajal et al., 2017). Another unique characteristic of the Yazidis is they traditionally conveyed their beliefs orally through hymns and stories rather than script, and until recently had no written text (Spät, 2008; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017).

Yazidis practice strict endogamy and children must be the offspring of two Yazidi parents (Allison, 2017; Hanish, 2009; IRCC, 2017a; Langer, 2010; Maisel, 2008; OHCHR, 2016). Purity of the religion is important, and as a result conversion is not possible and marrying an outsider results in excommunication (Açikyildiz, 2010; Allison, 2017; Maisel, 2008). Yazidism is founded on the practice that in order to sustain the culture, Yazidis must marry within the religion to maintain the purity and cleanliness of their population (Açikyildiz, 2010; Ali, 2019c). The Yazidi community in Shingal observes traditional gender roles, with women focusing on the domestic sphere as in getting married, having children, and taking care of their family, while men often work as labourers and are the primary source of financial support (Açikyildiz, 2010; IRCC, 2017a).

After World War I, the Middle East was divided in a way that saw the Yazidis living in three countries: Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. This division threatened the connection and closeness of the community as travel between the groups became heavily restricted at the borders (Açikyildiz, 2010; Allison, 2017; Maisel, 2008). The ethnic minority was further weakened in the Muslim majority countries where they were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy and faced decades of discrimination, neglect, and persecution (Anderson & Pellegrin, 2010; Fuccaro, 1999; Maisel, 2008; Spät, 2005). As a result of ongoing persecution, the Yazidis have been forced from their homelands and resettled in other regions around the world. Despite the safety that resettlement provides, there is growing concern for future generations of Yazidis who will now be born away from their traditional homelands and community as each new generation will impact religion, identity, and culture as they potentially modernize Yazidism to find peace (Allison 2017; Omarkhali, 2016).

After centuries of isolation where the community was able to maintain its religious identity and traditional practices, the seclusion that the Yazidis previously sought has nearly disappeared and their identity transformed as contact with outsiders has increased (Spät, 2008). In attempts to maintain their identity, better connect with outsiders, and understand their religion in relation to history and science, the Yazidis have started to modernize and rewrite some religious beliefs (Spät, 2008). This reform has been key in bringing Yazidism into the twenty-first century, as some myths have been discarded due to their absurdity as well as adapting new interpretations of their oral history to better align with the knowledge gained in the present day (Spät, 2008).

Studies have shown that the Yazidis have had differing experiences about their religion and identity as a result of the Daesh invasion. After centuries of persecution, some Yazidis have

become disillusioned about religion, while others, as was the case for the participants in this study, have strengthened their religious identity (Ayhan & Tezür, 2019). At the same time, those Yazidis interviewed in Germany have identified themselves as being more secular, focusing more on their cultural and political identity (Ayhan & Tezür, 2019). Migratory movements and ongoing uncertainty in their homeland will no doubt result in further fundamental shifts within the Yazidi community.

Misconceptions of Yazidism

For centuries Yazidis have wrongfully been labeled as "devil worshipers," heretics, and unbelievers by some individuals outside of their religion and as a result have faced hundreds of years of discrimination and persecution (Langer, 2010; Maisel, 2008; OHCHR, 2016; Spät, 2005; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). These degrading ideologies have led to many inaccurately published documents from outsiders that continued to erode their creditability throughout history and caused further divisions between themselves and others (Salloum, 2013). Research outlines several reasons as to why Yazidism has been misunderstood, which has consequently resulted in repeated attacks against their people.

The first misconception is the result of differing religious beliefs between Yazidis and Muslims. Yazidis are monotheist and believe in one God, the creator, who produced seven holy angels to watch over the world (Allison, 2017; Spät, 2005). Of these seven angels, the most respected archangel is Tawûsî Melek, also known as the Peacock Angel, the mediator between God and the Yazidi people (Açikyildiz, 2010; Maisel, 2008). Some outsiders to the Yazidi religion believe Tawûsî Melek is the reincarnation of Satan as this angel is associated with the story of Satan in Islam (Allison, 2017; IRCC, 2017a; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). In Islam the archangel refuses to bow down to Adam, thus falling from the grace of God, and after being

disgraced, Satan continues to spread sin and corruption throughout humankind (van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017).

Drawing on aspects of Islam, the Yazidis believe that Melek did refuse to bow to Adam, but was redeemed after crying for 7,000 years and filling jars with his tears which were used to extinguish the fires of Hell. After this God forgave Melek who was redeemed for his sin (Açikyildiz, 2010; Langer 2010; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). Nevertheless, the Yazidis dispute the claim that Melek is the equivalent of Satan, and the fallen angel is not a source of malice for the Yazidi people but rather is God's alter ego (Allison, 2017; Fuccaro, 1999; Hanish, 2009; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). This association of the fallen angel between Islam and Yazidism has resulted in the misinformed belief that Yazidis worship the devil (Ali, 2019c, Hanish, 2009; Maisel, 2008).

Another misconception is that some believe the Yazidis originated from the Umayyad caliph Yazid ibn Mu'āwiya, commonly known as Yazīd I (Açikyildiz, 2010; Allison, 2017; Arakelova, 2010; Armstrong, 2002; Salloum, 2013). As a result of the speculation surrounding the origin of the Yazidis, this issue has contributed to the ongoing persecution they have experienced due to the negative opinion of Yazīd I by many Muslims. Yazīd I is connected to the murder of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussein ibn Ali, a controversial and tragic death in the Muslim community (Açikyildiz, 2010; Arakelova, 2010; Armstrong, 2002; Kizilhan, 2017; Maisel, 2008). Although there is no proof to confirm the association of Yazidis and Yazīd I, this belief has historically been used to justify the targeting and enslavement of Yazidis (Allison, 2017; Kizilhan, 2017).

The wrongful belief that Yazidis are heretics or unbelievers has been a contentious issue for centuries, and was exploited by Daesh during the 2014 invasion when they justified their

actions because Yazidis are not "People of the Book". Muslims accept the teachings of Christianity and Judaism, believing they have strayed from God's true faith but hold them to a higher esteem than unbelievers (Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.; Savelsberg et al., 2010). In the Qur'an, Christian and Jewish people are defined as "People of the Book", meaning the words of God are written in their holy texts, the Torah and Bible, and they should be provided with safety and protection and treated well (Abedin, 2019). Yazidis transmit their faith orally by handing down their practices and religious values over generations through verbal art and religious hymns. Thus many extremists, including Daesh, believe "it is halal (not forbidden) to kill them" (Hanish, 2009, p.9; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Spät, 2005; Stern & Berger, 2015).

Some Muslims hold negative attitudes towards the Yazidis in Iraq, including the belief the Yazidis are unclean, and thus some Muslims refuse to eat any food touched by or prepared by Yazidis (Ali, 2019c). These misinterpretations have exacerbated tensions and animosity between the Yazidis and Muslims for centuries, and have long exposed Yazidis to undue hardships. These include Yazidis being treated as second-class citizens, facing ongoing persecution, and making it challenging to find peace in their homeland. Viewing the Yazidis as infidels was one of several reasons Daesh carried out a violent campaign to eradicate and destroy the Yazidis of Shingal through extermination, enslavement, forced conversation, torture, and rape.

Iraq

Iraq is home to a rich mosaic of historical ethno-religious minority groups that includes Christians, Mandaeans, and Yazidis, all of whom have been targeted by the Muslim majority for centuries (Ali, 2019c, Hanish, 2009; Shanks, 2016). Unlike their counterparts, due to the aforementioned misconceptions, Yazidis have been heavily persecuted and arguably have been the most oppressed people in the Iraqi region since the thirteenth century (Açikyildiz, 2010;

Allison, 2017; Hanish, 2009). The Yazidi population in Iraq is traditionally divided into two districts in northern Iraq: the Sheikhan district and the Shingal[1] district of Nineveh Province (Allison, 2017; Ali, 2019b; Fuccaro, 1999; Spät, 2005; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). Between these two districts, a third of the Yazidi population lives in the Sheikhan district, while over 60 percent reside in Shingal (Açikyildiz, 2010; Fuccaro, 1999; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Spät, 2005).

The Sheikhan district, although less populated, is an important area for the Yazidis as it is often referred to as the centre and cradle of Yazidism (Spät, 2005). The holy site of Lalish is located here. It is considered to be semi-divine and Yazidis are expected to make a pilgrimage there once a year if they live in Iraq or once in their lifetime if they live overseas (IRCC, 2017a). According to religious methodology, Lalish was sent by God from heaven and marks the creation and foundation of earth (Omarkhali, 2019; Salloum, 2013).

This thesis will focus on the Shingal region due to the experiences of the participants who all originate from Shingal, in addition to the different and unique experiences of each district both before and after the invasion of Daesh. Although the Yazidis first began settling in Shingal in the twelfth century, it was not until the thirteenth century that Shingal became a popular settlement due to its geographic isolation and mountainous terrain which provided a natural safe haven for Yazidis fleeing persecution (Açikyildiz, 2010; Allison, 2017; Spät, 2005). Due to the marginalization their community has faced, Yazidis have both literally and figuratively been disconnected from the government (Kurdish Regional Government Ministry of Interior Joint Crisis Coordination Centre [KRGMIJCCC], 2015; Omarkhali, 2016). Yazidis continue to face discrimination from the Iraqi government, which includes Arabization, loss of land, limited

[1] "Sinjar" is the official Arab expression while "Shingal" is the Kurdish term which Yazidis are most familiar with. For the purpose of this thesis the term Shingal will be used to honour the participants of this study who refer to their homeland as Shingal.

access to education, military repression, denial of citizenship, and forced conscription (Allison, 2017; Cetorelli et al., 2017; Fuccaro, 1997; Hanish, 2009; IRCC, 2017a; Savelsberg et al., 2010).

Savelsberg et al. (2010) note that Nineveh is the most dangerous province in Iraq and faces violence on a daily basis, partly due to the fact that members of the al-Qaida terrorist network began to retreat to this region in 2007 (Maisel, 2008). To further complicate matters, Nineveh Province is disputed territory which is claimed by both the Arabs and Kurds, putting Yazidis in a position where they are coerced by both the Iraqi government and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) who fight to gain control of the oil rich region (Ali, 2019c; IRCC, 2017a; Maisel, 2008; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Shanks, 2016). Since the early 2000s, the KRG military has moved into the area and the *Peshmerga*[2] forces provide security while the Iraqi forces control checkpoints (Açikyildiz, 2010; Savelsberg et al., 2010). While safety in Shingal continued to deteriorate in the years leading up to 2014, security in the Sheikhan district has only a small number of security issues reported (Savelsberg et al., 2010).

In addition to these security issues, in 2006 Shingal was identified as being among the top five deprived districts in Iraq that lacked basic infrastructure, including unpaved roads, poor housing conditions, lack of educational and employment opportunities, and issues with access to basic necessities such as water, sewage, and sanitation (IRCC, 2017a; Maisel, 2008; Savelsberg et al., 2010). Residents of Shingal focus on subsistence agriculture and livestock herding as their primary sources of income despite poor irrigation and soil quality in a dry climate (Fuccaro, 1999; Savelsberg et al., 2010). The Sheikhan district on the other hand is rated above average in terms of basic needs and economic situation (Savelsberg et al., 2010).

[2] *Peshmerga* is the military for the Kurdish Regional Government and literally means “those who face death”.

Iraq as a country has been plagued by continued conflict, political instability, violence, corruption, and social, ethnic, and religious tension between its diverse populations, while being prone to natural disasters such as flooding and earthquakes (Amnesty International, 2014a; Hanish, 2009; IRCC, 2017a; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2020; Spät, 2005). These issues were complicated by the 2011 outbreak of war in Syria which was further compounded by the four-year conflict with Daesh, who maintained control of much of the country from 2014 to 2017 (OCHA, 2020). This has resulted in several factors continuing to impact the vulnerability of its most at-risk population, which include ongoing security concerns, lack of infrastructure, geographic issues, access to basic services such as health care, historically complex social relations, and a requirement for psychosocial supports (OCHA, 2019). As a result of the invasion, Amnesty International (2018) identified the rural areas of Iraq were in a far worse state than urban centres. Yet they are not a high priority for the Iraqi government to rebuild (KRGMIJCCC, 2015; Webb et al., 2018).

Before 2014, Shingal remained marginalized and underdeveloped as the Iraqi government was reluctant to invest in the area (KRGMIJCCC, 2015; Webb et al., 2018). After the four-year war with Daesh, vast areas remain inhabitable, with much of the population, including Yazidis, unwilling to return (IOM Iraq, 2019; KRGMIJCCC, 2015; Schwartzstein, 2016). Webb et al. (2018) identified several barriers to the Yazidis returning to their homeland such as the lack of livelihood, food security, access to shelter, healthcare, and basic infrastructure including water and electricity.

In 2018, only 12 percent of the population had returned to villages on the north side of the Shingal mountain, with several ongoing threats continuing to impact the Yazidis in Iraq from returning and reintegrating into their former communities (Abouzeid, 2018; Ben-Meir, 2019;

Webb et al., 2018; OCHA, 2020). As of January 2020, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs identified 4.1 million people in Iraq who continued to need humanitarian support (OCHA, 2020). The aforesaid issues continue to persist and heavily impact humanitarian support as well as prevent durable and long-term solutions from being implemented in Shingal (Amnesty International, 2018; OCHA, 2020).

Ferman

The Yazidis describe 74 campaigns of persecution and genocide throughout their history, starting as early as the Ottoman Empire as a result of being seen by some as heretics or non-believers (Ali, 2019a; Kizilhan, 2017; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019; Spät, 2005; Underwood, 2017; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). The Yazidis refer to these campaigns against their people as *Fermans* and it is important to understand the impact these events had and continue to have on them. For the Yazidis, the word Ferman is associated with genocide, destruction, ethnic cleansing, expulsion, Arabization, forced conversion, and massacres, and describes attempts made against their community by the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish princedoms, the Government of Iraq, as well as terrorist groups (Ali, 2019a; Gökçen, 2010; Hanish, 2009; Maisel, 2008; Omarkhali, 2016; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). The word Ferman contributes to a feeling of being outnumbered and surrounded as well as invoking feelings of mourning, fear, and terror among their community (Ali, 2019a; Ceri et al., 2016; Shanks, 2016; Vale, 2020).

The word Ferman, or Firman, has Persian and Turkish origins which means an order or edict, issued by members of royalty or the government (Ali, 2019a; Merriam-Webster, 2020). A fatwa was another legal decree or command issued by an Islamic religious leader (Ali, 2019a; Merriam-Webster, 2020). Historical records show that Fermans and fatwas have been used to

justify the killing and capture of Yazidis which has resulted in their forced migration as well as forced conscription and conversion to Islam (Ali, 2019a; Salloum, 2013).

Documentation of these Fermans is sparse, if not nearly non-existent. Six-Hohenbalken (2019) notes there are several reasons for this, including the fact that Yazidis are often omitted in historical records and are frequently classified together with other ethno-religious communities so their individual experiences are silenced. Another issue is that history habitually documents the side of the winner and omits voices of the oppressed, meaning their stories are not shared (Ali, 2019a; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019; Spät, 2008). Furthermore, the traditionally oral nature of Yazidism means they have no written texts of these experiences, only oral tales that have been passed down to each new generation (Six-Hohenbalken, 2019; Spät, 2008).

Researchers have identified three sources of documentation to help analyze the history of Fermans: 1) primary and secondary sources recounting genocides in which Yazidis are occasionally mentioned; 2) a small number of biographies and memoirs published by survivors; and 3) the most telling documentation being narrative accounts of survivors which have been transmitted orally to each new Yazidi generation and match historical events and experiences of other groups (Ali, 2019a; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019).

Since the personal narratives of the Yazidis have been omitted throughout history, it is impossible to know exactly how many campaigns of violence this community has experienced. Nevertheless, they are an important factor in fully understanding the experiences of the Yazidis. The participants in this study as the oral nature of Yazidism has ensured these experiences continue to be remembered by new generations.

The earliest record of genocide is documented in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The Ottoman Empire controlled the area inhabited by the Yazidis and implemented Fermans and

fatwas to control and convert their community (Ali, 2019a). Violence was committed against those who refused to convert and included murder and the enslavement of women (Ali, 2019a). This persecution continued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which included 15 campaigns documented by French Orientalist Roger Lescot in the eighteenth century (Ali, 2019a).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire continued to implement policies of genocidal priming, including religious conversion, exiling high ranking Yazidis, and forced military training and conscription; those who resisted faced campaigns of violence (Ali, 2019a; Gökçen, 2010; Hanish, 2009; Maisel, 2008; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). English traveller William Heude wrote about an attempt in 1809 to exterminate the Yazidis in Shingal by destroying farms and beheading their leaders. Nearly 80 years later, Harry Luke, an official in the British Colonial Office, documented a massacre against the Yazidis in 1892 (Ali, 2019a; Deringil, 1998, as cited in Allison, 2017; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). One of the last attacks from the Ottoman Empire took place in 1915 against the Yazidis in Shingal that saw forced conversion to Islam or execution (Ali, 2019a). This attack is also known as the Armenian genocide, and as Six-Hohenbalken (2019) notes, the government accused the victims of being disloyal and causing turmoil which required military intervention (Savelsberg et al., 2010). The silencing of this genocide took place well into the early twenty-first century, and often the discourse focuses on the Armenian population, thus overshadowing the persecution of ethnic minorities during this time (Six-Hohenbalken; 2019).

The Yazidis also faced threats from Kurdish princedoms. In 1724, the Kurdish religious cleric issued a fatwa stating that Yazidis were infidels, and it was their religious duty to kill them and take the women and girls as spoils of war (Ali, 2019a). Five campaigns were led by Kurdish

princes, with the largest attack between 1832 and 1834 led by Mīr-i-Kura, a religious fanatic extremist who used fatwas to legalize the forced conversion, killing, and enslavement of Yazidis (Ali, 2019a). With an army ranging between 40,000 and 50,000, Mīr-i-Kura attacked Yazidi villages and slaughtered the elderly, killed all men and older boys, raped women and girls, and enslaved 10,000 Yazidis, mostly women and children (Ali, 2019a). In 1834, Mīr-i-Kura succeeded in overtaking the regions dominated by the Yazidis and was only stopped when the Ottoman Empire ordered his assassination due to the threat he posed to their empire (Ali, 2019a).

This horrific attack impacted the entire population as estimates state survivors accounted for five percent of the original population (Ali, 2019a). In addition to being heavily exterminated, the Yazidis suffered economically through the plundering and looting of property and gold, as well as losing a vast geographical area as many Yazidi towns and villages were Islamized (Ali, 2019a). These atrocities have deeply impacted the Yazidi community which has transferred this tragedy to its collective memory by passing this experience from one generation to the next through stories and songs (Ali, 2019a).

Iraqi independence did not end the persecution the Yazidis faced, and by the mid-twentieth century, the Yazidis had lost more land, experienced property destruction, suffered military repression and forced displacement, and were pressured by the Ba'ath Party who implemented Arabization policies (Maisel, 2008; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Shanks, 2016). Under the regime of Saddam Hussein, Yazidi communities in northern Iraq faced destruction, depopulation, and deportation as the government sought to increase the Arab population and control the region (Maisel, 2008; Savelsberg et al., 2010). Under the guise of helping to modernize the north and increase access to basic needs such as water, electricity, and sanitization, the Yazidis were forced from their villages and were resettled in towns organized by

the government (Maisel, 2008; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Spät, 2005). In the same year, several hundred Yazidi farmers were evicted off their farmland, had their agricultural contracts cancelled, and were replaced by Arab settlers (Savelsberg et al., 2010). Since the oil-rich land of northern Iraq is a controversial and disputed area between the Iraqis and Kurds, and in order to secure the area, the Ba'ath Party sought to increase the Arab population by resettling the Yazidis, a practice that continued for decades (Savelsberg et al., 2010). Yazidis faced further pressure from the government when they were prohibited from speaking their dialect and forced to change their ethnic identity and register as Arabs (Ali, 2019b; Abouzeid, 2018; Savelsberg et al., 2010).

In August 2007, the 73rd Ferman occurred when several trucks full of dynamite drove through two Yazidi towns, killing around 800 Yazidis and destroying the towns (Ali, 2019a; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). The self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq (Daesh), a former terrorist network linked to al Qaeda - known as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) - claimed responsibility for these attacks and regarded the Yazidis as infidels (Savelsberg et al.,; Stern & Berger, 2015). Around the same time Daesh imposed a siege on the area of Shingal, restricting food, fuel, and construction materials (Savelsberg et al., 2010). Nearly a decade after this, Daesh committed the 74th Ferman against the Yazidis when they invaded northern Iraq, announcing the re-establishment of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria (Ali, 2019a; Savelsberg et al., 2010; Six-Hohenbalken, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015).

As a result of the ongoing persecution, the Yazidi population in northern Iraq was reduced to a minority as they were unable to sustain the continued pressure, forced conversion, and ongoing attacks by neighbouring groups. In the last 700 years, 23 million Yazidis have died and the population has continued to decline due to these Fermans, resulting in less than one million Yazidis being alive today (Carbajal et al., 2017; van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017; Yazidi

International, 2014-2015). As Yazidis are forced to resettle around the globe because of ongoing persecution, their population is further at risk as the once tight-knit and private group is at a crossroads in maintaining its identity and cultural practices (Allison, 2017; Gökçen, 2010; Langer, 2010).

The Fermans Yazidis speak of have remained hidden from the greater community for centuries, which further frustrates the ethnic-minority group who continue to be silenced and are unable to share their experiences of trauma. Unlike other groups, including Christians in the region, the Yazidis lack an international network to lobby and advocate on their behalf (Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). Acknowledging the last 73 Fermans committed against them is an important part in recognizing the long and difficult history of this community as well as understanding the severe impact that the events of August 2014 have had on the collective community. The 74th Ferman is not a stand-alone event, but rather one in a long line of genocidal experiences for the Yazidis. Bearing witness to the lived experiences of the eight women in this study provides an opportunity to ethically stand with, acknowledge, and honour their experiences as survivors.

Daesh

The fall of Saddam Hussein provided an opportunity for terrorists, including Daesh, to breed their extremism, eventually claiming the establishment of the Islamic caliphate (Abedin, 2019; Hanish, 2009; Stern & Berger, 2015). The terrorist group, commonly known as Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS), has had several name changes since its inception, such as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and Islamic States (IS) (Abedin, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015). Daesh or Di'ash is a popular term used by those outside the terrorist group due to its derogatory nature, as it is taken from its Arabic acronym al-Dawla

al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham (Abedin, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015). This thesis will officially use the name Daesh when referring to this terrorist group; however, it is important to note that the participants in this study know Daesh as ISIS and thus use that name when sharing their experiences. When sharing the personal narratives of the participants in sections five and six, in order to honour their words and experiences, the term ISIS and Daesh will be used interchangeably.

Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al Kalaylah, known as Abu Musab al Zarqawi, swore loyalty to Osama bin Laden in 2004 by establishing al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) (Stern & Berger, 2015). Although aligned with al Qaeda, Zarqawi had differing views that would ultimately see al Qaeda disavow AQI. While al Qaeda's main target was on non-Muslims and waging war on the West, AQI followed an extreme form of Sunni Jihadist and believed that Shi'a Muslims were not true Muslims and thus practiced *takfir,* which declares anyone who is not a Sunni Muslim, including Shi'a Muslims, as an apostate (Stern & Berger, 2015; Zenn, 2014). A division between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims arose soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad due to differing beliefs on who would succeed the Prophet. Sunni Muslims believe that any male within the Quraysh tribe could lead, whereas Shi'a Muslims believe the leader must be a direct male descendent from the Prophet Muhammad (Fadel, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015).

In 2006, Zaraqwi was killed in a USA air strike, but instead of weakening AQI, there were calls to establish an Islamic state (Stern & Berger, 2015). From its inception in October 2006, Daesh amassed a large group of fighters to ignite its cause of establishing an Islamic state by targeting and dominating Shi'a Muslims and non-Muslims in Iraq. The group appealed to disgruntled Sunni Ba'athists who were removed from government during the fall of Saddam Hussein, and foreign fighters from all around the world were recruited (Stern & Berger, 2015).

Daesh also became the richest terrorist organization in the world by generating income from taxes, looting, and oil smuggling (Stern & Berger, 2015). In its online English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, Daesh outlined its social hierarchy. Daesh, the true believers were at the top, followed by Muslims who were not yet true believers, then Christians, and at the bottom were the heretics and non-believers like the Yazidis (Ingram, 2018; Kaya, 2019).

Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Al al-Badri al-Samarrai, better known as Abu Bakr al Baghdadi who was a well-educated and traditionally reserved practitioner of Islam, spent a year in an America-run detention centre which unknowingly contributed to the radicalization of Islam in Iraq (Callimachi & Hassan, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015). As a result, Al Baghdadi was released as an outspoken Jihadi and became the leader of Daesh in May 2010 (Callimachi & Hassan, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015). In 2014 Daesh sought to gain more land to establish the caliphate by entering Syria and battling several rebel factions, including al Qaeda in Syria, which resulted in al Qaeda denouncing Daesh as an affiliate due to its extreme and brutal nature (Abedin, 2019; Stern & Berger, 2015). Daesh has been heavily rejected by Muslim leaders around the world who object to its interpretation and extreme ideology, and do not recognize the organization as a true follower of Islam (Abedin, 2019). They argue that Daesh is a divisive terrorist group who are not true believers of Islam, for Islam forbids forced conversion, the killing of innocent life, slavery and torture, does not deny women their rights, and discredits the claim of re-establishing the caliphate (Abedin, 2019).

Events of August 2014

In the spring and summer of 2014 Daesh advanced into northern Iraq, displacing more than two million people and targeting minority groups who identified as non-Muslim and non-Sunni. This impacted the lives of all 400,000 Yazidis residing in this region (Amnesty

International, 2014a; IRCC, 2017a; OHCHR, 2016; Underwood, 2017). On August 3, 2014, Daesh took the Shingal region of Iraq, specifically targeting the Yazidis in a planned and systemic attempt to eradicate them through forced conversion to Islam, slavery, rape, torture, and execution as they aimed to establish the Islamic state (Ceri et al., 2016; Hanish, 2009; IRCC, 2017a; Spät, 2005; Yazda, 2017). In the wake of this attack, Daesh advanced into the region and faced little resistance from the KRG *Peshmerga* forces who were protecting the area but quickly fled without evacuating the local people (OHCHR, 2016; Stern & Berger, 2015). As word spread that the *Peshmerga* forces were gone and Daesh was in control, the Yazidis in the area made a mass exodus from their homeland (Kizilhan, 2017).

Seeking safety, tens of thousands of Yazidis ascended Mount Shingal for protection, which ultimately left them stranded as Daesh surrounded them on all sides. A humanitarian crisis unfolded as the Yazidis spent days on Mount Shingal in the sweltering heat without food, water, shelter, or medical supplies (Abouzeid, 2018; Kikoler, 2015; OHCHR, 2016; Yazda, 2017). The crisis ended when the international community intervened and provided support by dropping in food, water, and medical supplies, while aerial strikes allowed the surviving Yazidis to flee to Iraqi-Kurdistan (IRCC, 2017a).

Daesh perpetuated horrific violence against a vast number of Yazidi men, women, and children during this 2014 insurgence which continues to impact the survivors of this genocide and the Yazidi diaspora today. Daesh consciously set out to inflict physical and psychological harm and long-term suffering on the women and children they captured, and its actions impacted entire families. This terrorst group deliberately forced family members to witness the horrific violence perpetrated against their family by forcing them to watch the rape of mothers, daughters, and sisters as well as the killing of loved ones. Some of this torture continued past the

initial attacks, as survivors continued to receive phone calls from loved ones still in captivity, and were forced to listen to their pleas and the ongoing violence perpetrated against them (Carbajal et al., 2017; Rauhala & Coletta, 2019).

Upon capture the Yazidis were systemically separated into groups: men and boys over the age of 14; women and young children under the age of seven; and boys between the ages of seven and 14 (IRCC, 2017a; Kizilhan, 2017; OHCHR, 2016; Omarkhali, 2016). Girls as young as nine were forced to convert to Daesh's version of Islam, and were systematically raped, abused, and transferred to different sites across Iraq and Syria where they were sexually exploited by Daesh fighters (IRCC, 2017a; OHCHR, 2016). Accounts state that Yazidi women and girls were stripped of their clothing, lined up naked to be photographed, and rated based on their beauty (OHCHR, 2016; Carbajal et al., 2017). Some were given away as gifts while others were sold and trafficked numerous times throughout their captivity (OHCHR, 2016; Carbajal et al., 2017). In addition, the women faced constant verbal, physical, and psychological abuse (Carbajal et al., 2017; IRCC, 2017a; OHCHR, 2016; Yazda, 2017).

Boys from the age of seven and those who had not yet reached puberty were seen as malleable to brainwashing. They were separated from their mothers, radicalized, and trained as child soldiers and suicide bombers for Daesh (OHCHR, 2016; Omarkhali, 2016; Yazda, 2017). They were taught extremist ideologies, forced to convert to Islam, and trained to hate Yazidism as well as their own families and communities (Yazda, 2017). Testimonies shared explained that these children were trained to use weapons, including knives and firearms, and subjected to videos of decapitating hostages and told to replicate these actions (OHCHR, 2016).

Older boys and elderly women had two options, forcibly convert and become laboured slaves of Daesh, or reject Islam and be executed by gunshot or have their throats cut (IRCC,

2017a; OHCHR, 2016; Yazda, 2017). Sources believe many of the men captured by Daesh were executed, as many women spoke about being separated from the men and hearing gunshots in the distance shortly after (Kizilhan, 2017; OHCHR, 2016). One massacre took place in the village of Kocho, where accounts document over 400 men being executed (Amnesty International, 2014b; Kikoler, 2015).

Neighbouring Muslims of both Arab and Kurdish descent turned on the Yazidis by showing Daesh where they lived as well as tricking them into harm's way. Abouzeid (2018) interviewed a Yazidi who was cajoled from Mount Shingal by a Muslim neighbour, only to be captured by Daesh upon the decent. Many Yazidis are also distrustful of the KRG and *Peshmerga* forces who fled the area and failed to protect them, leaving everyone vulnerable to the Daesh invasion (Açikyildiz, 2010; OHCHR, 2016; Spät, 2018).

Daesh also inflicted extensive environmental damage to the area of Shingal. Amnesty International (2018) documented the planned and strategic damage which included the burning or cutting down of orchards, sabotaging and destroying wells, and looting agriculture equipment (Aridi, 2019). The largest rural area of Nineveh Province focuses predominately on agriculture, including barley, wheat, and vegetables and some livestock including sheep and goats (Amnesty International, 2018; Webb et al., 2018; Spät, 2018). The KRGMIJCCC (2015) completed a damage assessment in 2015 and found that 70 percent of the livestock, agriculture land, and machinery was damaged, looted, or destroyed, and during the bombardment to retake Shingal, 70 percent to 80 percent of the city was damaged or destroyed (Aridi, 2019; Peyre-Costa & Jenssen, 2018). In addition to the depredation that took place during their occupation, Daesh set up booby-traps and littered the area with landmines (Abouzeid, 2018; Webb et al., 2018). The Mines Advisory Group (2019) has identified Iraq as being one of the world's most landmine-

affected countries, and with so much environmental degradation, the land has been rendered useless (Abouzeid, 2018; Amnesty International 2018; Webb et al., 2018).

The attack on the Shingal region saw outcry from the international community. National governments and international actors have accused Daesh of committing genocide against the Yazidi people (IRCC, 2017a; OHCHR, 2016; Yazda, 2017). By definition, genocide means "to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial, or religious group" (UNHCR, 1948). The OHCHR completed an investigation of the events that took place and found that public statements and actions by Daesh demonstrated an intent to destroy the Yazidis of Shingal, "composing the majority of the world's Yazidi population, in whole or in part" (OHCRH, 2016, p. 1).

In December 2018, the 45th President of the United States of America declared Daesh had been defeated (Ben-Meir, 2019; The Islamist, 2019). Despite this claim, Daesh ideology continues to exist with mounting evidence that the group is resurging in areas of Iraq and Syria as well as strengthening its support in other countries experiencing continued vulnerabilities (Abouzeid, 2018; Ben-Meir, 2019; Bremmer, 2019; The Islamist, 2019; United States Department of Defense, 2019a; United States Department of Defense, 2019b). With the "defeat of Daesh", discussion soon turned to withdrawing US troops in Syria, allowing Turkey's military to fill this void (Ben-Meir, 2019; Safi & McKernan, 2019; Turak, 2019). The presence of Turkish forces in the complex environment of Syria and Iraq is problematic for the Yazidis and thus another hindrance to their safety and subsequent return to their homeland.

Tension between the Yazidis and Turkish people date back to the Ottoman Empire when the first record of persecution and discrimination occurred against the Yazidis at the hands of the Empire (Maisel, 2008; OHCHR, 2016). In addition, as a result of their presence in Syria,

increased fighting has resulted with hundreds of Daesh fighters being freed from prison (Hincks, 2019; Safi & McKernan, 2019; Turak, 2019). Reports claim that Turkey and its allies have conducted attacks on the civil populations in Syria, and Amnesty International (2019) expressed concerns over the possible escalation of these acts. Turkey's involvement in Syria and Iraq continues to be problematic as its presence negatively impacts the already toxic and precarious environment in these two countries as well as exacerbating the historically distressed relationship between the Yazidis and Turkish people.

The attack on the Yazidi community in Shingal resulted in the entire population of 400,000 persons experiencing death, displacement, or being captured by Daesh (IRCC, 2017a; OHCHR, 2016). Numbers vary, but the invasion resulted in the death of 5,000-7,000 Yazidis as well as the abduction and captivity of 6,000-7,000 men, women, and children (IRCC, 2017a; Kaya, 2019; Kikoler, 2015; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; Shilani, 2019; Vale, 2020). There are still many unanswered questions about the fate of loved ones, and at present 2,800 Yazidis are believed to still be in captivity (Al Jazeera, 2020). The horrific events of August 2014 permeated throughout the conversations that took place with the participants in this study as they shared the impact this genocide had on themselves and their community.

Missing Women, Girls, and Men

Daesh attempted to eradicate the Yazidis of Shingal by destroying families through separation, removing, and murdering Yazidi men, and the use of sexual slavery (Omarkhali, 2016; House of Commons Standing Committee, 2018; Vale, 2020). Wilkinson, Bhattacharyaa, Riziki, and Abdul-Karim (2019) conducted research among 35 recently resettled adult Yazidi refugees living in four cities across Canada. Of those interviewed, 14 females were widowed, while 15 persons were married but did not know where their spouse was. Research conducted in

Shingal after the Deash genocide found 47 percent of households were headed by females, with 60 percent of household heads being older than 60 years of age and 64 percent were now single parents (Webb et al., 2018). Participants of this study confirmed this experience of separation; four of the participants were married but arrived in Winnipeg as widowed or having their husband missing. Two participants lost their husbands before August 2014, while the other two did not know the whereabouts of their husbands or if they were still alive at the time of the interview.

In addition to the abduction of thousands of Yazidis, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the OHCHR have documented 202 mass gravesites in Iraq, with the highest concentration of 95 located in Nineveh Province (UNAMI & OHCHR, 2018). Although there is no universal definition of a mass grave, Yazda (2016) defines it as a location where a massacre took place and a large number of human remains have been found, either fully or partially covered. Yazda identifies as many as 10 additional sites which have yet to be confirmed and states that additional sites may still be discovered (UNAMI & OHCHR, 2018). This is because survivors of the genocide have identified locations of mass killings of Yazidis which have not been examined or the sites were located within Daesh controlled territory and thus could not be investigated (Yazda, 2016).

The large number of mass graves provides the international community with insight into the level of ferocity perpetrated against the Yazidis during these massacres. As of 2018, UNAMI & OHCHR (2018) have excavated 28 mass graves and exhumed 1,258 bodies from these locations. There is fear within the international community that mass gravesites yet to be examined are not being safely maintained to allow for future analysis. This not only jeopardizes

investigators' ability to analyze the area for criminal prosecution, but also impacts any bone analysis to help the Yazidi community get answers on missing loved ones (France24, 2019).

The impact of not knowing the whereabouts or what happened to missing or murdered loved ones can have a debilitating impact on survivors, including serious psychological harm and an increased likelihood of transgenerational trauma (Eppel, 2006; Fics, 2015). Within the area of peace and conflict studies, Fics (2015) examined the "process of exhumation", which is defined as the recovery, identification, and reunification of the missing with their loved ones, and identified the positive and significant impact this process had on peacebuilding in Cyprus post-conflict. Fics noted this process and the identification and reunification of remains offered relatives the opportunity to mourn and find closure by meeting their basic human psychosocial need. The process of exhumation provides an opportunity for restorative justice and truth-telling by acknowledging the experiences of survivors through the use of storytelling (Fics, 2015). Unfortunately, the research also notes that the longer it takes to find the missing person, the greater harm is caused the families, in addition to the ability to recognize and identify remains which is required for closure.

Another important factor in the process of exhumation is the need for public witnessing (Eppel, 2006). Funerals not only provide the living with the opportunity to say goodbye; they provide a context to acknowledge the life and achievements of the deceased in a public setting. "Fo confirm their deaths is to confirm that they in fact lived" (p. 267). When this process does not occur, the lives of the missing are denied and survivors are not given the opportunity to mourn and find closure to move forward in life (Eppel, 2006). This process is even more important when brutal massacres take place because entire communities cannot move past their loss and trauma when missing and murdered loved ones remain in mass graves which are a

continual reminder of the atrocities that occurred in their community (Eppel, 2006). As evident in sections five and six, the participants in this study have been deeply impacted by the unanswered questions they have pertaining to the livelihood and whereabouts of missing or murdered family members, and the process of exhumation can prove to be an important role in healing for the Yazidis.

Health and Wellness of the Yazidis

In addition to living with extensive trauma and the stress of grieving missing or killed relatives and children, survivors have little in the way of mental health and psychosocial support in refugee camps (Amnesty International, 2014a; Yazda, 2017). Many services that are provided do not meet the needs of those Yazidis requiring support, not to mention they are located far from where survivors are living (OHCHR, 2016). Dr. Jan Kizilhan, a German-Kurd psychologist, argues that the concept of psychotherapy is new to the Yazidis and words like depression and trauma are not easily expressed in Kermanji (Vijayann, 2017). Cultural stigmatization associated with mental health could also delay or prevent Yazidis from accessing mental health supports (IRCC, 2017a).

The Yazidis have expressed feelings of insecurity, tension, feeling powerless or hopeless, and fear of separation (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). In addition to the physical wounds that many Yazidi women and girls have as a result of being captured, many expressed mental trauma which include chronic mental illness, colds, skin problems, asthma, and suicidal thoughts (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; Yazda, 2017). It has been noted that Yazidi women suffer from suicidal ideation as well as dying by suicide (Kaya, 2019; OHCHR, 2016). Children also exhibit physical and psychological manifestations of trauma such as headaches, wetting themselves, experiencing separation anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD). Some children exhibit aggressiveness, insecurity, anxiety, depression, and sleeping problems, including falling asleep, waking up throughout the night, and nightmares (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; Ceri et al., 2016).

In October 2019, Doctors Without Borders stated the Yazidis were experiencing a "debilitating mental health crisis" as a result of the events of August 2014 (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2019). Upon resettlement, Canada quickly recognized that the Yazidis were one of the most traumatized groups coming to the country, and would require unique and extensive supports to aid in their resettlement (House of Commons Standing Committee, 2018; Porter, 2018; Sevunts, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Dr. Jan Kizilhan, a Calgary doctor working with the Yazidis, identified many showing signs of PTSD, including flashbacks and anxiety. Dr. Kizilhan's research showed the likelihood of 50 percent of the Yazidis have or will develope PTSD as a result of the 2014 genocide (House of Commons Standing Committee, 2018; Omarkhali, 2016; Porter, 2018). In an interview, the doctor compared Yazidi survivors to survivors of the Holocaust, as they lack confidence, are worried and tense, and have feelings of helplessness similar to Holocaust survivors who continued to need psychosocial supports into the late 1950s and 1960s (Chodoff, 1997; Omarkhali, 2016).

Even though August 2014 is the most recent genocide committed against the Yazidis in Iraq, this is compounded by decades and centuries of neglect and persecution which have resulted in complex trauma and an abundant need for support in the post-Daesh era (Allison, 2018; Omarkhali, 2016; Webb et al., 2018). The invasion by Daesh not only resulted in unimaginable horror, but reopened the collective trauma Yazidis have been carrying for generations due to the historical persecution by Muslims. Six-Hohenbalken (2018) completed ethnographic fieldwork among the Yazidis in Armenia, looking at the impact of

transgenerational trauma within the community as a result of the persecution they faced during World War I. The events of August 2014 left Yazidis in Armenia in complete shock and distress as it echoed the events of nearly a century before (Six-Hohenbalken, 2018).

The 2014 genocide, although arguably the most destructive as it touched all the Yazidis in Shingal, was seen by the transnational community as an ongoing persecution, attacking the Yazidis' sense of belonging, safety, and identity. Community members have been outraged and saddened by the lack of support from the international community who they feel continue to stand by and allow these genocidal atrocities to take place. OHCHR (2016) state that trust has been further eroded in their homeland between Yazidis and their Muslim neighbours, many of whom helped Daesh during the attack (Petersmann & Schülke-Gill, 2018). The suffering that the Yazidis have experienced is complex and compounded over generations in the form of collective trauma which continues to impact the population (Omarkhali, 2016). The recent assault by Daesh has left them feeling a lack of trust as they continue to have to defend themselves and their way of life from persecution with minimal support from outsiders. Dr. Kizilhan argues that without stability and safety, re-establishing a sense of security for Yazidis will not be possible (Omarkhali, 2016).

Canada's Role in the Resettlement of Refugees

Canada is a country that has seen its entire non-Indigenous population immigrate to the continent through migration or refugee resettlement programs. International discussions on humanitarian issues after World War II sparked worldwide concern for populations facing persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations. As a result, in 1951 several European countries adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2011) that outlined laws and guidelines for ensuring the adequate treatment of refugees. In 1969

Canada signed the 1951 Convention and 1967 protocol, which expanded the scope of support for refugees (Canadian Council for Refugees [CCR], 2009; UNHCR, 2011). By being a signatory to these international documents, Canada has recognized its obligation to refugees. Since ratificaton, Canada has been a leader in helping to support and resettle numerous refugees: 37,000 from Hungary; 5,000 from Kosovo and Bhutan; 60,000 from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam; over 50,0000 from Somalia; 25,000 from Iraq; and 40,000 from Syria (Galts, 2016; Government of Canada, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

IRCC and UNHCR state that refugees are people who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of persecution, violence, or war (Government of Canada, 2017). There are four ways refugees can be sponsored to come to Canada: (1) by the Canadian government; (2) by a private sponsor (church or community group, family member, etc.); (3) through a blended sponsorship program where sponsorship is shared between the government and a private sponsor; and, (4) as a refugee claimant seeking refugee status once in Canada (CCR, 2016). In early 2017, IRCC Minister Ahmed Hussen announced a $28 million dollar plan where the Canadian government would sponsor 1,200 vulnerable Yazidi survivors of Daesh (IRCC, 2017b; One Free World International, 2017). The program focused on women, children, and families who experienced extensive trauma and where reintegration or access to specialized supports would not be possible (IRCC, 2017b; One Free World International, 2017).

Despite their horrific circumstances, the decision to leave Iraq was not easy for those Yazidis who came to Canada, as many were still separated from their families as a result of the 2014 invasion. Some family members were confirmed dead while the whereabouts of others was unknown at the time of departure to Canada. Many participants in this study came to Canada to offer their children a better life or it would be safer than staying in Iraq. McClelland (2019)

interviewed four Yazidis who resettled in Ontario, and similar to the participants in this study, many of them left behind immediate and extended family members in camps, not knowing their fate at the hands of Daesh.

Since 2003 more than 100,000 Yazidis have left Iraq, opting to resettle in places like Germany, Canada, and Australia (Abouzeid, 2018). In 2015 approximately 1,500 Yazidis were living in Canada, with the majority residing in Winnipeg with the largest population, Toronto, London (Ontario), and Calgary (IRCC, 2017a; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Coming from their tight-knit community, the settlement agencies worked diligently to place the Yazidi families close together within Winnipeg by resettling them in two clusters: one in the downtown area and the other in the south end of the city (Wilkinson et al., 2019).

The participants in this study reflect this effort to resettle in clustered groups and areas, as most of them lived in pairs. Due to transportation issues and finding their way around the city, seven of the eight participants requested to meet in their homes. Avin and Shirin lived in the same apartment building, as did Naqaba and Ahlim as well as Maha and Habiya. Adol lived on her own in a complex that housed other Yazidi familes and was about a five-minute drive from Naqaba and Ahlim. Nassima's interview was hosted at an agency in Winnipeg that worked with Yazidis, so it was not possible to determine if she lived close to other Yazidis although it is probable she had at least one family from her community close by.

Conclusion

This section has introduced the context of the study. Providing an extensive overview of the Yazidi people is an important framework for the reader to conceptualize the historically complex and ongoing challenges the Yazidis face that continue to impact them today. Research shows the Yazidis experience collective trauma as a result of centuries of targeted persecution.

Understanding their difficult and complex history provides the reader with an enhanced understanding of why the 2014 genocide was so detrimental to their community.

Review of Literature

This section presents the main theoretical perspectives and themes that inform this research project. The purpose of this study is to explore the personal narratives and lived experiences of Yazidi women to help identify the complex and ongoing challenges these survivors continue to experience in a post-violence environment. Three main theoretical approaches help to ground and inform this work.

The first theoretical approach examines the several different forms of violence including structural, direct, cultural, and gender-based. The Yazidis have experienced extensive violence, and women in particular are vulnerable during times of conflict as they are often sought out and targeted. Violence is experienced in many ways and includes dehumanization through the use of slavery and genocide. The participants in this study shared the impact that violence has had on their overall well-being, and it is critical to understand the impact of violence in order to mitigate that violence and support those individuals healing from these experiences.

The second theoretical approach is the impact of trauma, collective trauma, and protective factors. Having endured centuries of violence, the recent genocide on the Yazidi community has left many traumatized and re-traumatized while trying to cope with those experiences. It is important to explore how violence leads to trauma and thus how to support survivors on their road to recovery. Specifically, in section six, the participants shared several protective factors that help keep them strong.

The third theoretical approach considers the role of storytelling and the importance of sharing lived experiences. Providing this opportunity to individuals allows them to openly share their personal experiences, struggles, and survival. This allows others to bear witness to their personal narratives. Sharing lived experiences goes beyond educating the listener and allows the

storyteller to be heard, understood, validated, and dignified. In summary, the theoretical approaches presented here play an important role in considering the lived experiences shared by the participants in this study. It provides an opportunity to build a greater understanding of the impact of violence and trauma, and the role of storytelling to bear witness to these experiences.

Violence: Structural, Direct, Cultural, and Gender-Based

Yazidis have experienced repeated violence in many ways over generations that include structural, direct, cultural, and gender-based violence. Violence has also impacted this community through dehumanization, slavery, and genocide. The participants in this study discuss how their experiences with violence continue to impact them today in the form of extensive trauma and a need for healing. In order to understand how people can heal from violence, it is critical to understand the theories of violence to better support individuals as well as how to prevent or mitigate violence in all its forms.

Although violence can take on different forms and be understood in different contexts, no person, community, or country is untouched by violence (Byrne & Senehi, 2012; Galtung, 1969; World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). Bartos and Wehr (2000, as cited in Byrne & Senehi, 2012) identify that violence can occur in various levels including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group violence, as well as at the organizational, national, and international level. Violence often stems from social divisions including race, ethnicity, class, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, identities, and competing ideologies, which can hurt or harm the human mind, body, and spirit (Byrne & Senehi, 2012; Galtung & Fischer, 2013).

Trying to define violence is challenging due to its complex nature and the fact that it varies based on culture, interpretation, moral values, social norms, and the lens in which one analyzes violence. Byrne and Senehi (2012) provide theories of violence from several diverse

disciplinary approaches including psychology, sociobiology, structural theory, human needs theory, socialization theory, feminist theory, anthropology, and international relations. Each discipline provides a unique perspective and compelling justification on violence theory, demonstrating its interdisciplinary nature.

Galtung (1969) identifies several dimensions of personal and structural violence. The first dimension focuses on the physical and psychological impacts of violence on the body and soul, while another examines the negative and positive approaches that guide violence. Additional dimensions in Galtung's approach include whether or not an object is hurt during the act as well as if the violence is direct, structural, or indirect. The last two dimensions discuss whether or not the act was intended or unintended, and whether the violence was observed, which Galtung (1969) calls manifest and latent violence.

In addition to these dimensions of violence, it is beneficial to use an ecological model to better understand the multifaceted influences and root causes of violence. Byrne and Senehi (2012) refer to the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model that identifies five different environments people are embedded in and where a reciprocal exchange takes place between them and these environments. These five environmental influences are: 1) the microsystem is the immediate environment in which a person lives including home, school, and work; 2) the mesosystem is comprised of two or more settings that a person actively participates in; 3) the exosystem refers to one or more settings that do not contain the person; 4) the macrosystem is the overall structural system and includes values, customs, and law; and 5) the chronosystem includes the changes that occur in the environment throughout an individual's lifetime (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Stewart, 2011). Using an ecological framework helps to identify various influences of

violence while simultaneously understanding how different systems interact when examining factors that may influence violent behaviour (WHO, 2002).

Galtung (1969) discusses three basic forms of violence: structural, cultural, and direct, which he called the violence triangle (Reimer et al., 2015). Structural violence is also referred to as indirect violence due to its often invisible or silent nature (Galtung, 1969). Although less overt, it is just as horrific and deadly as direct person-to-person violence and is often done in a controlled environment (Byrne & Senehi; 2012; Høivik, 1977). Structural violence not only harms the body, but also the mind and spirit (Galtung & Fischer, 2013).

Structural violence is embedded in the very structure of society's social, political, and economic systems, and is identified as the unequal distribution of resources and power (Bloom, 2008; Galtung, 1969; Reimer et al., 2015). Galtung and Fischer (2013) note that violent structures are exploitative when an unequal disadvantaged exchange takes place between those at the top and those at the bottom. Since structural violence is embedded into societal systems, it is often seen as being natural and for many in society, difficult to understand and comprehend (Galtung, 1969). As a result of structural violence, the loss of life is experienced through social conditions, often impacting groups rather than individuals, and can manifest itself through oppression, discrimination, and injustice (Galtung, 1969; Høivik, 1977). Thus it is important to measure both deaths and life-years when examining the impact of this type of violence (Galtung, 1969; Høivik, 1977).

The most obvious form of violence is direct violence which is the intent to hurt or destroy through physical aggression and manifests itself through acts of war, genocide, assault, domestic violence, hate crimes, and murder (Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Reimer et al., 2015). Direct violence is the most common and understood form of violence and the most obvious as it is the

most brutal and detested form (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). This type of violence may arise from a desire to dominate a perceived competitor, or result from a real or perceived fear or threat to personal security (Byrne & Senehi, 2012). Reimer et al. (2015) argue that direct violence results from the conditions established through structural and cultural violence, and without eliminating these forms of violence, direct violence cannot be eradicated.

Cultural violence includes six cultural domains: religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science, and formal science. These use the symbolic sphere to instigate direct and structural violence (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). It is important to note that entire cultures are not seen as violent but aspects of a culture are violent (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Cultural violence is often justified through the legitimate use of structural and direct violence, making these types of violence feel right (Galtung, 1990; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). The justification of cultural violence happens because of distorted moralities which view this type of violence as acceptable (Galtung, 1990).

Galtung and Fischer (2013) note these three forms of violence occupy time differently: "direct violence is an event; structural violence a process with its ups and downs, and cultural violence as a 'permanent', remaining essentially the same for long periods" (p. 46). They are built into social institutions that deny people opportunities, equality, and human rights (Galung, 1996, as cited in Byrne & Senehi, 2012), and often move interchangeably and ultimately deprive people of their needs and human rights (Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Reimer et al., 2015). All forms of violence distort the victims' cognitions and emotions which can leave deep trauma wounds that are difficult to recover from (Galtung & Fischer, 2013).

Violence is a complicated web that intertwines direct, structural, and cultural violence, hence the notion of a violence triangle. The Atlantic slave trade provides a good understanding

of the complex and deep-rooted factors involved in the violence triangle. The forced enslavement and transoceanic migration of Africans serves as historical direct violence. This shifts to structural violence with the abolition of slavery in the USA which sees a division of "whites as the topdogs and blacks the underdogs" (Galtung & Fischer, 2013, p. 47). Over time, the direct violence is forgotten as it is now embedded in the structural makeup of the USA through discrimination and prejudice resulting in cultural violence (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). As evident here, violence is cyclical (Reimer et al., 2015).

Another form of violence pertains to the issue of gender-based violence (GBV). The term GBV traditionally refers to sexual violence and violence against women, and can be grouped into five categories: sexual violence, physical violence, emotional and psychological violence, harmful traditional practices, and socio-economic violence (Scully, 2010; UNHCR, 2003). GBV includes several types of violence within these five categories which include but are not limited to rape, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, domestic and intimate partner violence, forced prostitution, slavery, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (Scully, 2010; Sinko & Arnault, 2019; UNHCR, 2003). Iyanda et al. (2019) argue there are various theories that impact GBV which include the culture of violence theory, ecological theory, evolutionary theory, and feminist theory. Similar to the theoretical background provided on violence theory (Byrne and Senehi, 2012), theories on GBV provide an important and unique lens to view this concept and should be examined using an ecological framework (Iyanda et al., 2019).

Scully (2010) notes that violence against women has always been present in war and it was not until the late twentieth century that GBV was internationally recognized as a human rights violation through the United Nations General Assembly and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Bloom, 2008; Merry, 2006). This declaration defines

violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in" (United Nations Security Council, 1994, p. 3). Since then, several laws and practices have been established to combat GBV, however, their effectiveness continues to be debated as transmitting them from a globalized practice to a local setting has proved challenging (Iyanda et al., 2019; Merry 2006; Scully, 2010). Women are particularly vulnerable to violence during wartime, but they are also valuable contributors to peacebuilding (Scully, 2010; Snyder, 2009).

GBV is always made up of a perpetrator, a victim, and a violent act, and typically, although not always, the victim is female and the perpetrator male (Bloom, 2008; Merry, 2006; Scully, 2010; Sinko & Arnault, 2019). While research shows the majority of individuals impacted by GBV are women, there is a growing but limited body of research that focuses on the inclusion of men as survivors of GBV (Bloom, 2008; Scully, 2010). Deash exterminated men and older boys as well as women past child-bearing age. While women, girls, and children were abducted, beaten, and sold into slavery, boys who had not reached puberty were recruited and trained as child soldiers to fight for Daesh's ideology. Regardless of the gender, acts of GBV perpetuate historically unequal power dynamics between genders and justify the notion that women are inferior and their bodies are mere territories to be subjected to violence (Coomaraswamy & Kios, 1999, as cited in Merry, 2006; Scully, 2010).

Theories of violence including direct, structural, cultural, and gender-based violence are a key factor in this study. Historical events as well as the recent genocide have resulted in the Yazidis experiencing repeated forms of the aforementioned violence. They have found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Iraq for decades, suffering considerably

compared to other minorities in the region. Nineveh Province is the most dangerous province in Iraq, resulting in ongoing violence against the Yazidis through direct, structural, and cultural violence (Savelsberg et al., 2010).

Dehumanization

In the early twentieth century, William Graham Summer coined the term "ethnocentrism", meaning ingroups view themselves as superior to those in the outgroup (Smith, 2011). The concept of the ingroup, also referred to as a social identity, has existed for centuries. Identity refers to how one sees oneself in relation to the world, while social identity describes a person's sense of who they are based on group membership (Korostlina, 2009; Rothbart & Korostlina, 2009; Reimer et al., 2015). Conversely, those not part of the ingroup are referred to as the outgroup, and that outgroup is made up of individuals with whom ingroup members do not identify with (Giles & Giles, 2003). An important dichotomy between ingroups and outgroups are the shared markers that make up each group, such as language, dress codes, historical celebrations, unique traditions, and religious practices (Giles & Giles, 2003; Reimer et al., 2015).

Although Korostlina (2009) states that social identity itself does not often lead to conflict, human beings are innately biased towards members of the outgroup (Smith, 2011). This bias can be manipulated through the use of propaganda, brainwashing, and indoctrination to motivate ingroup members to regard outsiders as less than human (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2009; Smith, 2011). Dehumanization of the other has resulted in some of the most horrific and heinous acts committed by one human being to another, including slavery and genocide.

For many, the ability to attack, abduct, hurt, murder, rape, and force others into slavery is difficult to comprehend. It is easy to believe people who participate in these heinous acts are mentally deranged or monsters, but studies done on individuals who participated in genocidal

acts have found them to be mentally stable (Smith, 2011). This helps to better understand the theory of dehumanization and the ability to target members of the outgroup in savage and inhumane ways. Members of the ingroup who target individuals of the outgroup are merely part of a collective identity that regards others as being less than human. This collective ideology makes it possible for the ingroup to target an outgroup in ways that are seen as being acceptable despite the vile nature of these acts (Galtung, 1969; Rothbart & Korostelina, 2009; Smith, 2011).

Haslam (2006) identifies two notions of humanness: human uniqueness and human nature. Each characteristic provides a framework to distinguish between humanness and dehumanization. Human uniqueness helps to distinguish humans from animals through several different attributes, including civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rational, logic, and maturity. The opposite of human uniqueness describes a person as being uncultured, unintelligent, immature, and backwards, thus perceiving them to be animal-like. Human nature, on the other hand, identifies humanness through emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, individuality, and depth. When human nature is seen as missing, individuals are viewed as lacking emotions, warmth, openness, and agency, thus equating them with machines. Haslam (2006) argues that animalistic dehumanization or mechanistic dehumanization occurs when individuals are denied human uniqueness and human nature, paving the way for being seen as less than human.

Another factor of dehumanization is the goal of humiliating members of the outgroup (Leask, 2013). Mollica (2006) and Leask (2013) state that humiliation involves intentional acts that force victims to question previously held beliefs about the world, ultimately distorting the individual's perception of themselves. Through these acts, perpetrators aim at inflicting public degradation through irrevocable damage by challenging existing social and cultural norms, as

well as disrupting and distorting reality for outgroup members (Leask, 2003; Mollica, 2006). Typically, when someone is injured there is the expectation of help to follow, but humiliating acts reduce or eliminate the ability for help to be provided, rendering the victim defenceless to the attack (Leask, 2013). Humiliation is something that is actively done by one person to another and involves several elements, including dominance of power, and is unpredictable, unjust, and irrevocable (Leask, 2013). Vile acts of humiliation replace basic respect, security, and moral understanding with fear and feelings of impotence, and shift the victims' trust and hope in the world (Leask, 2013; Mollica, 2006).

The dehumanization of others provides a gateway for individuals to commit atrocities, as dehumanization and violence are closely connected. Evidence suggests that dehumanization increases aggressive behaviour towards members of the outgroup as well as dissociating moral beliefs held by ingroup members (Delgado et al., 2009). Dehumanizing members of the outgroup through the use of violence, slavery, and genocide does not involve random acts, but rather planned and purposeful events that aim at eliminating members of the outgroup (Mollica, 2006; Staub, 1989, as cited in Avruch, 2009).

The dehumanizing and discriminatory views held by outsiders towards the Yazidis has fuelled centuries of persecution and violence against their community. Viewing Yazidis as infidels, heretics, and "devil-worshipers", linking their archangel to Satan, and associating them with Yazid I has resulted in them being regarded as less than human. This ideology held by outsiders has allowed individuals to perpetrate horrific and vile acts towards their community. This intentional humiliation has attempted to distort their view of the world and has resulted in the participants in this study feeling unsafe in Shingal, as well as the fearing things will never get better.

Slavery

The dehumanizing enterprise of slavery has been around for much of human history and was seen as a reasonable practice that was legally sanctioned (Bales, 2005; Donnelly, 2013; Welton, 2008). Ancient civilizations, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Greece, and Rome, practiced widespread slavery, while slavery also existed in different capacities in northern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Burnard, 2011; Welton, 2008). Within each of these contexts, slavery took on different forms. Most slaves participated in housework, personal or sexual service, economic activities such as agriculture and mining, and the military (Burnard, 2011; Welton, 2008). While some slaveowners had unlimited power over their slaves, other slaves had limited legal rights, including the right to marry and protection against unreasonable treatment (Lovejoy, 2011; Welton, 2008). Regardless of the type of enslavement, the dehumanization and exploitation of slavery was felt by all those enslaved.

The most notable slave trade is the Atlantic slave trade which was the largest transoceanic forced migration in history. Researchers estimate that approximately 12.5 million Africans were transported to the Americas during this time (Burnard, 2011; Lovejoy, 2011; Welton, 2008). Burnard (2011) states that the Atlantic slave trade was founded on the commerce of slave trade and the willingness of African rulers to sell Africans to Europeans.

The existence of slavery in Africa precedes the Atlantic slave trade and thus slavery was accepted as a natural process. This provided Europeans with an existing network to exploit and engage in to supply slaves to their new colonies (Burnard, 2011). Economic advantages abounded for all those involved, as Africans who sold slaves received valuable goods in exchange as well as securing their personal safety (Burnad, 2011). It is clear the exploitation of Africans during the Atlantic slave trade had economic, social, and political impacts on the

continent of Africa as well as constituting the most tragic crimes against humanity in history (Brunard, 2011; Lovejot 2011; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2004)

The atrocities of World Wars I and II lead to continued discussions on concerns pertaining to slavery (Welton, 2008). In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed by the General Assembly who established 30 articles recognizing the inherent dignity, equality, and rights of all members of humankind (United Nations, 1948). Article four stated, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms" (p. 2). This was further emphasized during the 1966 United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights which established article eight. Besides referencing article four, the new article included individuals held in servitude and forced labour (United Nations General Assembly, 1966; Welton, 2008). More recently, articles seven and eight of the 1998 Rome Statute deemed enslavement and sexual slavery a crime against humanity and a war crime (International Criminal Court [ICC], 1998; Welton, 2008).

Although chattel slavery, the most common form of slavery which is the legal ownership of one person by another, is now illegal and no longer practiced openly, they are not a thing of the past (Donnelly, 2013; Welton, 2008). Modern slavery still exists in many parts of the world and has simply evolved into new forms, like human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage or bonded labour, descent-based slavery, forced labour and child labour, sale of children, and forced and early marriage (Bales, 2005; Welton, 2008). Bales (2005) stated the use of child soldiers also constitutes a form of slavery. Erroneously viewed as having ended long ago, the early twentieth century identified the need for renewed studies on slavery as the modern forms were drastically increasing (Bales, 2005).

Fundamentally, slavery is a means to deny outsiders their rights, privileges, and humanness (Donnelly, 2013; Lovejoy, 2011; Smith, 2011). Slavery in all its forms also represents an exploitative relationship between at least two people for the use of labour resulting in economic gain, sexual exploitation, or ostentatious displays of wealth (Bales, 2005). Bales outlines three ways that modern slavery is different than historical slavery: 1) the cost to purchase a slave is at a historic low; 2) slaves are held for shorter periods of time by their slaveholders; and 3) slavery is globalized. The International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation (2017) identified that in 2016, 40 million people were victims of modern slavery with women and girls accounting for 71 percent.

Estimates state that with the attack by Daesh in 2014, between 6,300-6,800 Yazidis - predominantly women and children -were taken into captivity as spoils of war and forced into slavery, one-third whom remain missing (Vale, 2020). Younger boys were brainwashed in Daesh's ideology and trained as child soldiers to fight for the caliphate, while older men and women not killed on sight were required to convert to Daesh's version of Islam and forced to work. Women and girls, who made up the largest population in captivity, suffered from sexual violence, rape, torture, and forced marriage, and were sold like cattle. During my meeting with one participant, she shared her harrowing experience of being in captivity for one year and three months, and the desire of Daesh fighters to marry her nine-year-old daughter. Although being historically marginalized in Iraq, the use of slavery and specifically chattel slavery equated the Yazidis as being less than human. Being treated as property and severely abused transgressed the moral line of being human and inflicted a new type of violence upon the Yazidis which they had not seen for generations.

Genocide

Humankind has a long and troubled history with genocidal acts dating back centuries. Genocide challenge the very nature of what is right and moral in society and evoke horrific violence against a group of people, making it difficult to comprehend. Researchers argue the concept of genocide is deeply intertwined with the notion of dehumanization, as perpetrators believe members of the outgroup are less than human (Smith, 2011; Staub, 2000). This idea allows individuals to separate what is right and wrong and target outgroup members as evil, thus justifying committing abhorrent and horrid acts of violence against them (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2009; Smith, 2011).

The most recognized genocide in history is the Holocaust. After the horrific persecution against Jews took place during World War II, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew impacted by the Holocaust, coined the term genocide to describe the events that had transpired (Cormier et al., 2010; Pigmon, 2011, Power, 2013). Lemkin became an advocate for the term genocide and argued its need to be recognized as a war crime (BBC News, 2016; Power, 2013). On December 9, 1948, the world swore "never again" as the United Nations General Assembly passed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), denouncing genocide as a crime under international law (BBC News, 2016; United Nations, 1948). The United Nations (1948) defined genocide as:

> ... acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures

> intended to prevent births within the group, forcible transferring children of the group to another group. (p. 1)

Notwithstanding the commitment to prevent genocidal atrocities from taking place, the world has continued to see genocides in Armenia, East Timor, Cambodia, Kosovo, Srebrenica, Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, as well as the 2014 genocide against the Yazidis in Iraq (Power, 2013; OHCHR, 2016; Smith, 2011).

It is common to associate genocide with ethnic conflicts, but there are many reasons why groups commit genocide including religion, political differences, and social class (Staub, 2000). Smith (1999, as cited in Staub, 2000) proposed five types of genocide: retributive, institutional, utilitarian, monopolistic, and ideological (Smith, 2000). Genocides include complex motives and often times have multiple factors impacting its categorization. The most common type of genocide in the twentieth century is the desire to have power and Smith (1999, as cited in Staub, 2000) argues that monopolization of power has been a key factor. Another commonfactor is the way ingroup members target and dehumanize their victims through the use of sub-human ideologies. Outgroup members are viewed as having a human body with hands and legs but lack the inner essence of being human (Smith, 2011).

It could be argued the 2014 genocide against the Yazidis falls within the utilitarian and ideological categories. Smith (2000) describes the utilitarian genocide as the domination and exploitation of Indigenous people for the purpose of commercial and economic gain. Daesh advanced on the Shingal region in an effort to establish the Islamic State, and in doing so destroyed the Yazidi population, exploited their land and resources for economic gain, and forced the still-living Yazidis into slavery. On the other hand, an ideological genocide is the desire to eliminate a group of people as they are perceived as being impure (Smith, 2000). Daesh

referred to the Yazidis as infidels and used this justification to commit mass murder. Smith (2000) states that both types of genocides resulted in total and catastrophic destruction as well as the most extreme form of genocide, a holocaust.

Gregory Stanton (1996), President of Genocide Watch, established a ten-step model that outlines distinctive stages that take place before, during, and after a genocide. The ten stages of genocide are:

- Classification: the way ingroup and outgroup members categorize themselves which is often based on ethnicity, race, religion, and nationality. During this stage, civil and human rights are rescindicated towards members of the outgroup.
- Symbolization: assigning dehumanizing names or symbols to a group of people.
- Discrimination: ingroup members develop an exclusionary ideology to deprive the rights of outgroup members and often use monopolization to increase ingroup power.
- Dehumanization: members of the outgroup are viewed as less than human, and indoctrination and propaganda influence ingroup members to further separate themselves from outgroup members. The process of dehumanization normalizes the use of extreme violence towards outgroup members.
- Organization: plans are made to commit genocide.
- Polarization: extremists target moderates and leaders as well as execute military opposition to ensure the ingroup dominates and can carry out genocidal plans.
- Preparation: ingroup members plan and prepare for genocide.

- Persecution: outgroup members are identified based on ethnicity, race, religion, or national identity, and their basic human rights are violated through genocidal massacres.
- Extermination: outgroup members are targeted in whole or in part to be killed.
- Denial: the perpetrators deny the genocide by eliminating evidence and blaming the victims.

The 2014 genocide against the Yazidis encompasses nearly all ten stages of genocide with the exception of the tenth and final stage of denial. Stanton (1996) argues these stages are not linear and can occur simultaneously in addition to occurring throughout the duration of a genocide.

The international community plays a critical role in preventing, intervening, and stopping genocides, and yet traditionally have been passive during the ten stages and not engaged in this moral obligation to save lives (Goldhagen, 2009; BBC News, 2016; Power, 2013; Staub, 2000). Staub (2000) argues the international community's lack of response during World War II, including condoning the actions of the Nazis and aiding Jewish people trying to flee, actually contributed to the violence that unfolded. Similarly, in 1994 the Rwandan genocide ended only after the Rwandan Patriotic Front defeated government forces (Goldhagen, 2009; Staub, 2000; BBC News, 2019). Several sources have identified limitations to the Genocide Convention, as it focuses on the omission of political and economic slaughters being constituted as genocide, is limited to direct acts against people, highlights issues of proving beyond a reasonable doubt, the difficulty in defining or measuring genocide “in part”, and the failure of states to call out genocides and instead condone individuals who engage in genocidal behaviour (Goldhagen, 2009; Staub, 2000; BBC News, 2016). Genocide after genocide, the world continues to fail the

mandate of the Genocide Convention, allowing perpetrators to continue mass slaughters with limited accountability for their actions (Power, 2013).

Diplomats, journalists, military personnel, refugees, scholars, and civil society all play an important role in genocides (Cormier et al., 2010; McKenzie, 2019; Power, 2013). McKenzie (2019) examined the important role journalists had in covering the Cambodian civil war and its genocide. Using a bi-modal peace and war journalism framework, McKenzie examined the presence of peace journalism which encouraged journalists to examine the multitude of layers that impact violence and provide a voice to all those involved in conflict situations. He noted the tension and challenges that journalists faced in trying to promote peace journalism while reporting on violent conflicts. In addition, he found that knowledge of the region, rather than neutrality, impacted by violence is a critical aspect of being able to effectively analyze the conflict.

Individuals who move in and out of these conflict zones provide important insight and knowledge for advocacy for international intervention (Cormier et al., 2010; McKenzie, 2019; Power, 2013). At the same time, the international community and outsiders play an imperative role in the intervention as they have more security in acting and speaking out, as well as providing resources and support to the region and refugees (Cormier et al., 2010). It is evident that no one is a bystander during times of genocide and everyone has a pivotal role to play. Power (2013) argues that with available information, there is a need for our society to act further in times of genocide and for governments to be held accountable for inaction.

Cormier et al. (2010) and McKenzie (2019) state that genocide is an understudied area within peace and conflict studies. There could be several reasons for this: the extreme and urgent nature of genocide; the international culture on arms, violence, and war; peace and conflict

studies focus more on transformative peace,; and the in-depth, multi-faceted, and time-intensive approaches to transforming peace (McKenzie, 2019; Power, 2013; Reimer et al., 2015). Consequently, peace and conflict studies play an important role in the prevention of genocide (Cormier et al. 2010). Providing support to de-escalate conflicts is a critical aspect of prevention that includes education, mediation, conflict resolution, engagement with community leaders, and creating a space for dialogue between conflicting groups to communicate needs and find common ground (Stanton, 1996; Staub, 2000).

The 2014 genocide inflicted unimaginable violence on the Yazidis as a result of being dehumanized and viewed as infidels and "devil worshippers" by Daesh. During a genocide, barbaric acts and heinous crimes are committed which include extreme violence and gender-based violence in addition to persecution, dehumanization, and slavery. This recent massacre caused memories of past genocides to resurfaceand is viewed as being the 74th Ferman committed against their people. The repeated and ongoing terror the Yazidis have experienced at the hands of their Muslim and Kurdish neighbours has resulted in the survivors re-experiencing multiple genocides, contributing to both individual and collective trauma.

Understanding theories of violence, dehumanization, slavery, and genocide are important to consider when analyzing the experiences of the Yazidis. These theories provide a framework for understanding the next sub-section which focuses on the impact of trauma and the protective factors people use to respond to violence. Understanding the theoretical context allows the reader to acknowledge and comprehend the unique experiences of the Yazidis and support them on their journey to heal.

Trauma

As a result of the misunderstandings outlined in section one, the Yazidis have been one of the most oppressed and attacked religious groups in Iraq. This has led to centuries of violence and ethnic cleansing being committed against them which has resulted in extensive trauma and collective trauma among the population. It is important to understand how violence leads to trauma and how individuals might heal from these traumatic experiences. This section will focus on trauma, collective trauma, and the protective factors that may help individuals move forward.

Traditionally, trauma referred to a physical injury incurred from an external wound, but over the last several decades, this concept has evolved to include non-physical, social, and psychological trauma (Aydin, 2017; Mollica, 2006; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014a). Trauma can be defined as a response to an event or series of events that threatens an individual's ability to cope and can impact one's mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being (Aydin, 2017; Cole et al., 2005; Ruglass & Kendall-Tacket, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a; Yoder, 2005). Trauma is not the event itself, but a stressful response to that event which can cause individuals to feel disordered, disempowered, and disconnected (Yoder, 2005). Trauma can be overwhelming, as individuals may be deeply impacted by their experience and continue to be terrorized, resulting in ongoing suffering (Cole et al., 2005; Klinic, 2013).

Klinic (2013) identifies three elements of trauma: trauma is unexpected, the person who experiences trauma was not prepared, and this experience was outside the person's control and could not do anything to prevent it from happening. Trauma has a debilitating effect on the way a person responds and functions, and how they see and understand themselves in the world. Every traumatic experience is different and thus can have a different impact on an individual.

Factors that might impact a response include age, nature of experience, severity, duration, past traumatic experiences, and support from family, friends, and the community (Cole et al., 2005; Rothschild, 2000; SAMHSA, 2014a). Responses to trauma can be immediate or long after the experience has occurred; be a one-time event or occurring continuously over time (Klinic, 2013); and be experienced directly or indirectly. Indirect trauma refers to something witnessed or learned about through a close friend or family, whereas direct trauma directly targets the individual (Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014).

Singular, multiple, and ongoing traumatic events can result in several different responses: emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioural, and can socially change the way an individual functions and reacts (Brahm, 2004; Ruglass & Kendall-Tacket, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a; Yoder, 2005). Emotional responses include feelings of helplessness, depression, fear, anger, or sadness (Brahm, 2014; Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a). Individuals might feel like they are losing control because of the emotional responses evoked from the traumatic event, while others might deny these feelings exist (SAMHSA, 2014a). When trauma occurs early in life, survivors may experience an increase in emotional dysregulation. This means they have a small window between hyperarousal (feeling overwhelmed, experiencing anger, feeling anxious or out of control), and hypoarousal (feeling too little) where they feel like they are shutting down (National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine [NICABM], 2017; SAMHSA, 2014a).

Since trauma can have a debilitating and overwhelming impact on individuals, it challenges the way one sees and understands the world. Traumatic experiences can alter one's cognitive ability and change the way people see themselves, their world, and their future (Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a). Cognitive responses to trauma include

memory loss, poor judgment, shame or guilt, a sense of hopelessness, feeling like the world is not safe, or misinterpreting situations as dangerous (Brahm, 2014; Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a). This impact on cognitive pathways can be debilitating and some individuals may never return to their previous belief system or be able re-establish their core belief systems (SAMHSA, 2014a).

Like all experiences, traumatic events can create trauma memories. The brain engages in two pathways for establishing trauma memories: declarative memory and emotional memory. Declarative memory is the memory of actual facts and events one experiences and can consciously remember, while emotional memory is the emotion one feels during the event (Mollica, 2006; NICABM, 2017). After traumatic experiences, some emotional memories may continue to replay outside of an individual's ability to consciously control them. These are associated with flashbacks or sensory reminders that trigger this memory (Mollica, 2006; SAMSHA, 2014a).

The human body naturally determines how your body responds to the perceived or actual threat of survival through a response called fight, flight, or freeze (Maack, Buchanan, & Young, 2015). The response is either to stay and deal with the threat if avoidance is not possible (fight), escape to safety (flight), or be completely overwhelmed by terror and do neither fight or flight, but instead freeze (Maack, Buchanan, & Young, 2015). During this time, the body physically releases hormones, including a stress hormone called cortisol, to help mobilize the body to respond to the threat (Mollica, 2006; SAMHSA, 2014a). Severe traumatic experiences can result in the body continuing to release cortisol and when this response is constantly unregulated, it can cause a variety of illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension (Mollica, 2006; Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a). Mollica (2006) notes that although the

body has a natural process for helping to elevate your body to act during a threat, another hormone is released that counters the effects of cortisol and helps to lessen the physical and emotional pain. Other physical responses include stomach aches, headaches, muscle tension, nightmares, tightness in the chest, sleep disturbances, and becoming hypersensitive to pain (Brahm, 2014; Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a).

In trying to cope with emotional, cognitive, and physical trauma responses, individuals might engage in behaviours to try and mitigate the distressing responses. Individuals who experience a behaviour reaction might be irritable, impulsive, aggressive, or have an inability to function in some settings. Others might engage in risky behaviour including self-medicating, attempted suicide, self-injury, or compulsive and impulsive behaviours (Brahm, 2004; Ruglass & Kendall-Tackett, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014a). Social relationships may also be impacted due to the notion that others may hurt you. Cognitive responses to trauma can impact how we connect with others. Protecting oneself from others can provide a means for protection, but it also hinders one's ability to connect with others (SAMHSA, 2014a).

Collective Trauma

Trauma can impact an individual or an entire society as in the case of the Yazidi people (Aydin, 2017; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017; Reimann & König, 2017; Yoder, 2005). Collective trauma is often used interchangeably with other terms, such as "interpersonal, intergroup, intergenerational and transgenerational, historic and chosen trauma" (Reimann & König, 2017, p. 3). For the purpose of this study, the term collective trauma will be used to describe the trauma that has impacted the Yazidi people. The ongoing persecution they have faced because of their religious beliefs has had a lasting impact on new generations (Yoder, 2005).

Aydin (2017) argues that when a group of people are targeted because of a characteristic - for example, religion - this can have a debilitating effect on the entire group who are strongly connected with that trait. The act of genocide can lead to collective trauma because of the extreme nature and "the deliberate and systematic destruction (in whole or in part) of an ethnic, racial, or national group" (p. 127), which challenges an individual's sense of safety within their own identity group. The consistent and unrelenting persecution the Yazidis have suffered as a result of their religion has resulted in ongoing trauma at the collective level (Kizilhan, 2017).

Research confirms that collective memories pass on these once tangible experiences to new generations, so they continued to mourn the past trauma with feelings of anger, sadness, and humiliation (Boss, 1999; Westlund, 2012). Studies on the Armenian genocide show that survivors carried emotional memories from past generations as well as sustained anger, grief, and a sense of wrong-doing (Aydin, 2017; Karenian et al., 2010). Rieder and Elbert (2013) found that survivors of the Rwandan genocide had continuing implications for future generations, including increased mental health issues and trauma. A study done on children of Holocaust survivors found their DNA showed inherit trauma and were more vulnerable to psychopathology (Yehuda et al., 2016).

Individual identity is built around the collective and ingroup identity by fostering a foundation of self, based on traditional and cultural norms as well as shared values, goals, and ideals (Aydin, 2017). Acts of genocide - the targeting of individuals based on specific characteristics - can skew an individual's understanding of themselves and their world. It is evident that sustained collective trauma can have lasting impacts on individuals. Analyzing collective trauma can allow for a better understanding of the complexities of trauma in relation to war-related identities (Reimann & König, 2017).

Collective trauma is evident within the Yazidi community which have a long-standing history of persecution due to their religious beliefs (Kizilhan, 2017; OHCHR, 2016). As a result of these experiences, the Yazidis remained an isolated community in northern Iraq with limited contact with others outside the Kurdish mountains for several centuries (Kizilhan, 2017; Spät, 2005; Spät, 2008). Traditionally, Yazidism was based on oral traditions where religious teachings were passed from one generation to the next (Allison, 2018). The Yazidis had no written texts as writing was strictly forbidden (Allison, 2017; Spät, 2005; Spät, 2008). This reclusiveness and private nature of the Yazidis can be attributed to centuries of mistrust and wrong-doings from outsiders (Kizilhan, 2017; Spät, 2005; Spät, 2008). The collective trauma felt by the Yazidis is the result of centuries of conflict, persecution, and genocide, coupled with the perceived betrayal from their neighbours and the international community who do little to support their ways of life (OHCHR, 2016).

Protective Factors

Cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral responses to trauma are natural reactions to the abnormal circumstances of a stressful experience (Sleijpen et al., 2017). Research that examines coping mechanisms provides insight into what strategies support people after violence, experiences of dehumanization, and trauma. It is important to shift the perspective from a deficit-based model to a strength-based approach that evaluates factors that can enhance these stressful experiences, commonly referred to as resiliency (Southwick et al.,, 2014).

Resiliency describes the ability of something to bend but not break (Masten, 2014; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Sleijpen et al., 2013). Among academics, the term is ambiguous and widely contested (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Kaplan, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000; Sleijpen et al., 2013). Kaplan (2005) argues several factors that question the legitimacy of resilience: 1) does

resiliency depend on specific characteristics of an individual; 2) is vulnerability the opposite of resilience; and, 3) what is the relationship between resilience and adversity? Similarly, Southwick et al. (2014) argue that if two people go through a traumatic experience and one is able to bounce back while the other experiences PTSD, does this mean the latter is not resilient? Luthar et al. (2000) also provide several problematic ideas around resiliency, including the issues of disagreement and lack of consensus around the theory, as well as the inability to conceptualize and consistently define the term.

However, the notion of resiliency is valuable for individuals and groups impacted by violence, dehumanization, and trauma. It is important to examine methods and factors that people find helpful in moving forward from past adversity. For the purpose of this discussion, the term "protective factors" will be used to examine mechanisms individuals have found effective in responding to violence and moving forward. The term "moving forward" is used as opposed to bouncing back because individuals with these experiences can never fully recover from what has happened to them or return to who they once were. Instead, they "move forward" with their lives and learn to live with what has happened to them (Leask, 2013; Sleijpen et al., 2013).

Masten (2014) states that protective factors are "mechanisms that buffered or ameliorated a child's reaction to a stressful situation or chronic adversity so that his or her adaptation was more successful than would be the case if the protective factors were not present" (as cited in Werner, 2000, p. 116). Werner and Johnson (2000) identify three types of protective factors.

> The first reflects dispositional attributes of the individual that elicit predominantly positive responses from the environment (e.g., easy temperament of the child within a family facing significant stress). The second reflects socialization practices within the

> family that encourage trust, autonomy, initiative, and connections to others. The third reflects the external support systems in the neighborhood and community that reinforce self-esteem and self-efficacy (as cited in Goldstein & Brooks, 2005, p.9).

There have been various studies about protective factors, many of which will be discussed in section six. Some of the common factors include a strong support network of family, friends, peers, and a connection to the larger community, spirituality, healing through nature, and arts-based approaches like storytelling, which proven to be a positive influence on people facing adversity (Betancourt et al., 2013; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Goldstein & Brooks, 2005; Mollica, 2006; Overland, 2013; Stewart et al., 2015; Sleijpen et al., 2017; Westlund, 2012).

The presence or absence of positive connections during an individual's early years can substantially affect them as they grow (Betancourt et al., 2013; Overland, 2013). Families are often a source of strength in overcoming adversity (Caldwell et al., 2003, as cited in Zimmerman, 2013). Overland (2013) states that individuals who have strong ties to their culture and religion can strongly contribute to resilience (Mollica, 2014). Additional supports to youth include a holistic approach to education that embraces mental health, overall well-being, and healthy relationships as well as structured activities such as after-school programs, dance, sports, art, and drama (Betancourt et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2015). Stuckey and Nobel (2010) argue a connection between art-based activities including art, music, expressive writing, and drama can have positive effects on enhancing emotions and promoting healing (Stewart et al., 2015).

There is also notable research for nature to aid in therapeutic healing and promoting overall well-being (Carney et al., 2010; Hartwig & Mason, 2016; Kuo, 2015; Maller et al., 2005; Pitt, 2014; Westlund, 2012). Nature provides several environmental, physiological, and psychological conditions that support healing, resulting in a higher reduction of morbidity and

mortality (Kuo, 2015; Maller et al., 2005). These include things like natural environmental chemicals and biological agency that promote health, relaxation and healing through seeing and hearing nature (Kuo, 2015; Maller et al., 2005).

Other studies have found that refugee and newcomer populations have experienced several health benefits when participating in community gardens which promote health and healing from past trauma (Carney et al., 2010; Hartwig & Mason, 2016). The physical benefits of gardening included increased consumption of vegetable intake as well as being physically active, as well as providing food security as the gardeners spent less income on buying groceries (Carney et al., 2010; Hartwig & Mason, 2016). It also provided an outlet for mental health issues such as depression and helped to increase social connections with others, thus reducing feelings of isolation (Alaimo et al., 2010; Carney et al., 2010; Pitt, 2014; Hartwig & Mason, 2016). Studies on the newcomer community also acknowledge the positive connection gardening has to traditional ways of life in people's home country, providing them with a sense of purpose and meaning, and building agency (Carney et al., 2010; Hartwig & Mason, 2016).

Westlund (2012) specifically looked at the lived experiences of four army veterans and analyzed 13 vignettes in the context of trauma, violence, and conflict, and the role that a more-than-human connection had in transforming individuals. Her research identified several significant factors relating to the role of nature in healing and the importance of the more-than-human connection to the earth and its impact on physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Sensory experience in nature evolved as participants in her study spoke about how the natural rhythms of the earth provided structure such as day, night, and seasonal changes, which helped contribute to mindfulness and living in the present. Survivors of trauma often struggle after experiences of violence and trauma to feel safe; the more-than-human connection allowed

the veterans to re-establish a sense of safety and security that helped to circumvent their imprinted trauma. Her participants were able to build confidence which had been eroded as well as a sense of purpose that was previously lost. By studying the experiences of reconnecting to nature and the more-than-human experience, Westlund identified the core aspect of this notion, that we are part of nature which helps to recognize that in all humans.

It is important to note that the aforementioned factors that can contribute to an individual's ability to move forward from past adversity is a unique process that can be used to help foster self-efficacy after violence, experiences of dehumanization, and trauma. Each individual is unique and although one factor might help one individual, it might not necessarily help the next. Trauma is uniquely experienced and the process of healing is also unique to each individual. Hamber (2015) states that coming to terms with past atrocities can help individuals move past the hurt and move forward to rebuild and reconstruct their lives. Despite centuries of violence, dehumanization, and persecution, the Yazidis have found ways to respond to this violence and move forward, so it is important to examine these factors.

Storytelling

Storytelling is a natural way for individuals to build understanding and share experiences, and a critical human process to make sense of trauma. Traditionally the Yazidis have used the oral retelling of stories to pass on to new generations. The opportunity to be both the listener and teacher, as Mollica (2014) noted, is a valued tradition in transmitting lived experiences of their community. By being able to speak about their experiences, the women in this study were provided the opportunity to take on the role of teacher and to feel heard, understood, and dignified.

Human beings have naturally shared stories and the oral tradition has been around long before written text. Stories help to bring people and communities together, provide a platform to educate, foster a sense of understanding by helping to break down barriers, and help to cope with experiences of trauma (Pazargadi, 2019; Stewart, 2011). Stories help to change our narratives and through the process, "how we view the world is always being formed, reproduced, negotiated, resisted or changed" (Senehi, 2009, p. 202).

Storytelling is an interaction of words between the storyteller and an audience of one or more people (Reimer et al., 2015). It is a way to remember and bear witness to events, and to give agency and a voice to marginalized individuals who have been oppressed (Eastmond, 2007; Reimer et al., 2015; Senehi, 2020). Narratives focus on an event that is located in a specific time and place and allow people to tell their story in their own words. As life stories are personal interpretations of events, they provide an opportunity to make meaning out of people's lives and experiences (Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000; Reimer et al., 2015).

Storytelling is a useful method for organizing, understanding, and making sense of experiences, as well as recreating and restoring new identities in the aftermath of a traumatic experience as it can be healing for the teller (Frank, 2010, as cited in Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014; Mollica, 2006; Reimer et al., 2015; Valenzuela-Pérez et al., 2014). This sharing enables individuals to cope and make meaning of past experiences, provides insight into how people are feeling, and empowers individuals to overcome difficulties (Mollica, 2006; Reimer et al., 2015; Valenzuela-Pérez et al., 2014). Listening allows those outside of those experiences to have a better understanding of what happened and the impact this situation had on a group of people (Zemskov-Züge, 2016). Giving voice to those marginalized allows people to speak through others (Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014). The listener has the opportunity to move between the

shared life stories and the greater community, and be a messenger when communication might be limited by the ingroup (Zemskov-Züge; 2016).

Storytelling can also shift personal narratives (Eastmond, 2007), as historical narratives are often one-dimensional and this alone impacts personal identity. Zemskov-Züge (2016) concludes that personal narratives and identity can be directly impacted from war and genocide so it is important to talk about pluralistic narratives in conflict. For example, Stalin's history on the "Great Fatherland War" was so destructive because it was seen as the only historical narrative. When pluralistic narratives on events to be documented are provided, the opportunity for identity to develop based on diverse and pluralistic narratives is allowed (Zemskov-Züge; 2016).

This is particularly important for collective trauma where the collective identity is challenged. Allowing individuals to engage in telling personal narratives can help shift the perspective of the endured trauma and facilitates the rebuilding of identity. The Yazidis have faced centuries of persecution due to religious and cultural misinterpretation, which has been further perpetuated by inaccurately published documents on their ideologies (Salloum, 2013).

Zemskov-Züge (2016) states that providing pluralistic spaces for dialogue and remembering to occur are critical aspects of moving past historical traumatic events (Herman, 2001, as cited in Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014). Puvimanasinghe et al. (2014) also argue the importance of counter-narratives to help heal traumatized individuals and communities. A counter-narrative challenges the dominant or accepted narrative. Reconstructing this narrative helps marginalized groups tell their lived experiences and presents a different perspective that would otherwise remain silent and unseen.

Conclusion

This section provided a review of the literature that examined three theoretical approaches to help analyze the findings in this study. This list is not exhaustive, yet each theoretical perspective plays an important role in the experiences of the Yazidis and the participants in this study. The role that direct, structural, cultural, and gender-based violence has had on the women in this study is extensive, complex, and historically rooted. Similarly, dehumanization through the use of slavery and violence has heavily impacted the Yazidi survivors.

Violence and dehumanization lead to trauma and collective trauma which is shared with new generations who continue to carry those wounds. The impacts are difficult to heal, yet studies have identified protective factors, including spirituality and the more-than-human connection, that have aided in this recovery. Similarly, providing individuals with the opportunity to share their stories and lived experiences helps to foster connection between the listener and the teller, and allows individuals to walk with survivors and bear witness to their experiences.

Participants of this research shared several unique and similar protective factors that helped them respond to their experiences of violence and trauma. Understanding the personal narratives and lived experiences of the participants will help people better understand the intense and unique experiences the Yazidis have had in addition to the ongoing challenges they face. There is also the question of how these experiences are represented by others, and the importance of bearing witness to and standing with these women. The next section addresses the methodology of this study including the use of narrative inquiry and storytelling as a method for

conducting research, develops a discussion on how data was gathered and analyzed, as well as provides a profile of the participants in this study.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative multi-method approach to document the lived experiences of the eight Yazidi women who participated in this study. Furthermore, it includes aspects of narrative inquiry and storytelling as a methodology. This section explores why a multi-method approach was employed, provides participant demographics, and establishes procedures utilized to conduct this research. The research was guided by the following overarching question: what are the lived experiences of Yazidi women in Winnipeg? I thus employed a multi-method approach as it allowed the participants to provide insight into their lived experiences and ensured that their personal narratives were central to this thesis. Lastly, this section will analyze my role as the researcher within the context of sharing stories, representing trauma, and the explicit act of witnessing.

Research Strategy

This sub-section describes the research strategy, provides an overview of the qualitative multi-method research approach, and discusses the use of narrative inquiry and storytelling as a methodology. It also explains the rationale for using this multi-method approach.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a method of conducting research that takes a humanistic approach and aims to understand thoughts, perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes of participants (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Mack et al., 2005; Pathak, Jena, & Kalra; 2013). It is conducted through participant observations, in-depth interviews, or focus groups, and the intent is to allow participants to share their personal experiences and interpretations of events (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Mack et al., 2011). This type of research approach generates non-numerical data and

provides an opportunity to empower participants by allowing them to speak their truths (Pathak et al., 2013).

Narrative Inquiry and Storytelling

Narrative inquiry is a holistic approach to research that allows for a better understanding of experiences through a collaborative partnership between the researcher and the participants. Narrative inquiry evolved in the early 1990s by researchers Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin who argued that humans are storytellers, and narrative inquiry allows us to study the ways in which people experience the world through stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This methodology originated from John Dewey's philosophy that experience is "relational, temporal, and situational" (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016, p.14). Using Dewey's philosophical approach allows researchers to reflect on narratives, gives a voice to those who might otherwise remain silent, and gain further insight and understanding to people's experiences.

> Connelly and Clandinin (2006, as cited in Clandinin, 2006) state that stories are a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience (p. 45).

Narrative inquiries begin with the telling of stories between the participant and the researcher and is a tool used to make sense of these lived experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The use of storytelling as methodology is an emerging practice being observed within the field of peace and conflict studies, and is an important factor in this research (Senehi, 2020). Storytelling provides a framework for research to be conducted in a way that is ethical and decolonizing, and it shifts power from the researcher to the participants who have the knowledge and expertise to aid in the de-silencing of marginalized groups (Senehi, 2020). In peacebuilding,

sharing stories provides an opportunity to foster understanding, acknowledgement, respect, and mutual recognition (Lau et al., 2017). The use of narrative inquiry and storytelling was an ideal methodology for this research as it provided an opportunity for participants to direct the conversation, provide insight into their lived experiences, and share their personal narratives as survivors.

Rationale for Methodology

Storytelling is a valuable part of narrative inquiry and conducting research because "the human brain is hardwired for stories" (Keene et al., 2016, p. 2). When hearing a story, both sides of the brain are activated to process the information, interpret the story, and make sense of what is being shared (Keene et al., 2016). This process evokes the feeling that we are experiencing the story firsthand and allows the listeners to gain lessons from the personal narratives. Stories allow us to share lived experiences and are a simplistic way to gather and share knowledge from experts at the grassroots level (Wilson, 2008). This process is very much a living part of traditions around the world and not only provides a framework for understanding others, but gives a voice that can empower marginalized individuals.

Sharing stories and lived experiences provides the researcher with authentic information about people and the situation being studied. I was not aware of how powerful the use of narrative inquiry and specifically storytelling would be to this study until I began the process of interviewing. Many participants wanted to share their experiences and have their voices be heard; they expressed solitude in their suffering and that all the world has heard what happened to the Yazidis. On the contrary, many in our communities have not heard of the Yazidi people, the horrific events of August 2014, nor the last 73 acts of violence against their people. Using this multi-method approach was an ideal methodology to explore the lived experiences of the

Yazidi women as it provided an opportunity for the participants to have the power in retelling their stories through the process of "discovery, creation, amplifying voice and witnessing" (Lau et al., 2017, p. 148).

Participant Profile

A total of eight female Yazidi community members participated in this study. The following attributes are outlined in Table 1: name of participant, date of interview, age, country of origin, time spent in a refugee camp, participants' journey from Shingal, date of arrival in Canada, and who the participant presently lives with. This information was shared during the interviews and generated by pulling specific demographics to provide a general outline of each participant. All participants chose to use their real name with the exception of Avin, who opted for a pseudonym to help maintain the safety of her family.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name of Participant	Date of Interview	Age	Country of Origin	Time in Refugee Camp	Journey from Shingal	Date of Arrival	Presently Lives With
Nassima	16-Jul-19	31	Iraq	4 years	-	16-Apr-18	Husband + 2 children
Habiya	26-Jul-19	36	Iraq	4 years	Mountain	16-Jan-18	Husband + 4 children
Maha	26-Jul-19	31	Iraq	1 year	Captivity	16-Jan-18	1 child
Shirin	2-Aug-19	-	Iraq	3 years	-	9-Nov-17	Husband + 2 children
Avin	2-Aug-19	-	Iraq	3 years	-	22-Dec-16	Husband + 3 children
Ahlim	22-Aug-19	34	Iraq	1 year	Captivity	21-Sep-17	2 Children

Naqaba	22-Aug-19	27	Iraq	3 years	Mountain	21-Sep-17	3 children
Adol	22-Aug-19	53	Iraq	3 years	Mountain	21-Sep-17	5 children

The following is a brief description of each participant to provide context to the following discussion. This information was compiled based on the information participants shared during the interviews.

***Nassima**:*

Nassima is from Shingal and came to Canada as a government-assisted refugee on April 16, 2018. Nassima is with her husband and two children who are five and eight years old. Prior to coming to Canada, Nassima lived in a refugee camp for four years. Presently Nassima is attending English classes.

***Habiya**:*

Habiya is the sister-in-law to Maha. Habiya and her family came to Canada on January 16, 2018 through the federal government's Yazidi resettlement program. Maha was able to bring one family with her to Canada and she chose Habiya's family. Habiya currently lives with her husband and four young children between the ages of six and 12. When Daesh came in August 2014, Habiya and her family fled to the mountains where they spent several days. After a pathway was opened, allowing the Yazidis on Mount Shingal to pass through, they went to a refugee camp in Kurdistan where they lived for four years.

***Maha**:*

Maha was one of two participants who shared her experience in captivity. Maha has lost most of her family as a result of the August 2014 invasion by Daesh. She witnessed the killing of three of her children, including her newborn baby. Presently she does not know where her husband and other children are as they were taken by Daesh. Maha and her daughter were sponsored by the Canadian government to resettle in Winnipeg. In early 2019, Maha learned that one of her daughters who was in captivity had been freed. She is still waiting to be reunified with her and was unsure when this might be at the time of our interview.

***Shirin**:*

Shirin lived in Turkey for three years as a refugee before she and her family were privately sponsored to come to Winnipeg. Prior to living in Turkey, Shirin lived in Iraq where she tended the garden and took care of her children. Besides their two young children, Shirin and her husband have no family in Canada. Her husband's family is living in Australia, while Shirin's parents and siblings are still in Iraq.

***Avin**:*

Avin had been in Winnipeg the longest and spoke the most English of all the participants. She opened up our meeting with a warm introduction as she spoke proudly in English, "My name is Avin, I came to Canada in 2016, in December." Throughout the meeting, Avin spoke English and Kermanji, opting to use the interpreter for more complex discussions. Avin, her husband, eight-year-old daughter and six-year-old son were privately sponsored to come to Winnipeg after fleeing to Turkey when Daesh attacked her village. Since arriving, Avin has been taking English classes while her husband got a

job doing construction. This past year, Avin and her family welcomed the birth of their new son.

***Ahlim**:*

Ahlim and her family were taken by Daesh after the events of August 2014. Towards the end of the meeting, Ahlim steadily shared her experience of being in captivity for one year and three months, before her freedom was bought and she was released to her family who had fled to Kurdistan. Ahlim and two of her children, aged 20 and 14, were resettled by the Canadian government to come to Winnipeg after they were freed from captivity. Ahlim is still separated from her husband and other children who were captured, and she has does not know their whereabouts. Presently Ahlim lives in a quiet apartment with her two older children, goes to school, and participates in a community farming program.

***Naqaba**:*

Naqaba is a single mother who has three children she prides herself on taking care of, one of them having special needs. Naqaba was the youngest participant of this study. She lost her husband before the events of August 2014 as a result of cancer. Naqaba had a tough life prior to coming to Canada which included difficulties with the daily living in Shingal, losing her husband, and being estranged from her family. Nevertheless, she expressed happiness for her new life in Canada, stating that prior to coming to Winnipeg, she did not have a life. She came to Canada in September 2017 with her sister-in-law after being sponsored by the Canadian government.

***Adol**:*

Adol was the oldest participant in this study. She appeared weary during our meeting, having spent the morning preparing a traditional meal for her family that would need to cook for

several hours. Despite this, Adol exhibited a warm demeanor and shared her knowledge, wisdom, and experiences of being a Yazidi woman over tea. In Iraq she lived with her six children, two of whom were married and had their own families. Adol was sponsored by the Canadian government, and came to Canada on September 27, 2017 with five of her children, one of whom came with Adol's grandchildren. Presently Adol lives with four of her children in Winnipeg.

Research Procedures

The next section outlines the procedures that guided this study, including the selection of the participants, the use of an interpreter, data gathering techniques, and data analysis. This section concludes with the ethical procedures that were followed.

Selecting the Participants

This research was done with the support of Operation Ezra and a Kermanji-speaking interpreter recommended by Operation Ezra. The participants were chosen in collaboration with Operation Ezra and the interpreter who agreed to support my research. Once potential participants were identified, they were contacted directly by the interpreter who set up the interviews, including the day, time, and location of our meetings.

Interpretation was a key factor in this study as among the 1,400 Yazidis resettled by the Canadian government, very few were fluent in English. All participants spoke varying degrees of English; a couple were able to communicate at a basic English level while others could only converse with basic greetings. The interpreter supported all of the interviews and information was interpreted from English to Kermanji and then from Kermanji to English.

The interpreter was a 33-year-old female Yazidi who arrived in Canada in 2009. She has been helping Operation Ezra for many years to support her community and survivors of Daesh as

well as working as an interpreter at another agency in Winnipeg. Thus she knew all the participants prior to our meetings. Working with an interpreter gifted me the opportunity to be welcomed into the homes of each of the women and helped build a bridge in fostering a connection between us. Being a member of the Yazidi community, the interpreter required little preparation for our interviews in terms of the difficult information that would be shared, as it also echoed a part of her history and lived experiences. I did inform her on the type of questions I would be asking, and after the interviews she graciously allowed me to ask additional questions about Yazidism and life in Iraq to enhance my knowledge and understanding of their community.

Data Gathering Techniques

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews using qualitative semi-structured, open-ended questions which allowed the participants to express their personal experiences and narratives (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state, interviews allow researchers to gain insight and understanding from participants and their experiences. Central to this thesis was ensuring the voices of my participants were heard and it was important that I heard their stories. These personal narratives were shared both directly and indirectly throughout the interviews and each interview was guided by the participants which allowed for them to share as little or as much as they wanted. Interviews ranged from 35 minutes up to two hours as the women shared a plethora of diverse and often difficult experiences. By allowing the participants to guide the interview, it enabled them to share at their own pace and allowed them to freely express their own thoughts and ideas.

With permission from the participants, all interviews were recorded onto an audio recorder. After each interview, these recordings were transferred to my personal laptop where it

was stored until it was transcribed. Upon transfer, the audio recording was deleted from the audio recorder. After all interviews were completed, I began to transcribe the interviews verbatim. Recording the interviews was not only useful to ensure the stories accurately captured what participants were saying, but it also allowed me to be fully present with the participants throughout our time together.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that data analysis is the "process of systemically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings" (p. 159). Analyzing the data means organizing the information gathered, assembling it into themes, coding the findings, and synthesizing the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Keene et al. (2016) outline five common strategies for analyzing stories as qualitative data.

1. Transcribe all interviews into written documents.
2. Familiarize myself with the written documents through multiple reviews and identifying patterns, themes, and relationships.
3. Code data using descriptive words and categories to identify themes, recurring ideas, words, and patterns.
4. Identify themes, patterns, and relationships through the coded data .
5. Summarize and report findings from the analysis.

These steps provided a concrete plan for analyzing this data.

I spent considerable time after each meeting reflecting on the interview, content, and process, the stories the participants shared, how it connected to past interviews, as well as the overall research. To document these, I used a research journal and mostly wrote self-reflective

pieces and comments that stuck out to me. Through this reflection, patterns and themes began to emerge as the interviews took place and these initial themes helped to develop a coding system. NVivo was used to code the data and helped to further identify themes and common topics that emerged. Throughout coding, significant thoughts, comments, and quotations were identified to be used in sections five and six which analyzed the personal narratives of the participants.

Ethics Approval and Maintaining Confidentiality

Ethics is an important issue in all research as it guides the principles for what is right and what is wrong. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identify two key issues when conducting research on human participants: the participants must volunteer to participate, and they are not exposed to risks throughout the research. Following these considerations laid out by conducting ethical research helps to keep the participants safe.

Human ethics approval was granted from the University of Manitoba prior to conducting the interviews. Due to low literacy rates among the Yazidis, particularly Yazidi women, prior to starting each interview, I read the consent form in English and had the interpreter interpret the information to the participants in their first language (IRCC, 2017a; Wilkinson et al., 2019). All participants were over the age of 18 and identified as a Yazidi woman. Throughout the duration of this research, all hard copy material was kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, and all soft copy material was kept on a password-protected laptop which, when not in use, was also stored in the locked filing cabinet.

Confidentiality was another important aspect for ethical considerations which is particularly significant when working with refugees. Many refugees can be afraid to share their feelings or experiences for fear of retribution within their new country and the ramifications speaking out might have back home. Participants were informed their participation would not

hinder their access to services or negatively impact their resettlement, which was supported and reaffirmed throughout the process as I partnered with an agency presently working with and supporting the women. To help with confidentiality, the interpreter was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure the stories shared during the interviews were not repeated outside of the research context. In order to ensure anonymity,the participants were able to pick pseudonyms. Despite this option, every woman except one wanted their names attached to their story as a record of their history and a capsule of time which provides a record to their experiences[3].

In sharing their stories, the participants risked being re-traumatized. Steps were taken to mitigate against any stress or emotional challenges that might occur during the interviews. Questions were picked with guidance from my committee and focused more on their life experiences as Yazidis, and no questions were asked about Daesh or the events of August 2014. But all participants, without probing, shared in varying degrees the impact of this event, and in preparation for this, I partnered with the Aurora Family Therapy Centre which provides therapy and supports to Yazidis resettling in Winnipeg. The participants were given the contact information for the Coordinator of the Psychosocial Settlement Needs Assessment Program (M. Basta, personal communication, August 15, 2018; J. Smyth, personal communication, August 12, 2018). In addition, I observed the participants throughout the interviews and did not proceed until they were ready. Furthermore, the women were able to take breaks throughout our time together.

[3] The children of participants are referenced in sections five and six, but all the children were given a pseudonym.

Role of the Researcher and Reflections

This section will provide information on the role of the researcher, the importance of trauma sensitivity in conducting research, as well as my personal reflections on conducting research that represents trauma.

The Researcher's Role

The role between the researcher and participant is important to consider when conducting research. Research shows that storytelling is a useful tool for people who have been impacted by violence and trauma (Mollica, 2001; Mollica, 2006; Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014; Reimer et al., 2015). Sharing stories and lived experiences can only happen when there is one or more people present: the storyteller and a listener or audience. Mollica (2014) talks about the impact of telling one's trauma story and an important component of this is the relationship between the listener and the storyteller.

By bearing witness to a story, we are partaking in the historical process of telling the story (Mollica, 2014). The listener not only becomes more knowledgeable about the lived experience of the storyteller, but also understands the pain, trauma, resiliency, and strength of the storyteller (Mollica, 2006; Mollica, 2014). In exploring lived experiences, the storyteller is the teacher and the listener is the student. In the case of research, the listener is also the researcher (Mollica, 2006).

To honor the women in this study and ensure that their experiences and voices were shared, interviews were mostly open-ended questions to allow them to control the information being disclosed. This provided an avenue for them to speak for themselves and for their lived experiences to be shared in a true way. By doing this, it gave voice to participants and provided them and the reader with the opportunity to make sense of their experiences. It also provided an

opportunity for the researcher to connect with them as they shared their life stories, anda sense of agency and voice over their experiences (Reimer et al., 2015).

Utilizing the multi-method approach, the researcher becomes co-participant in the journey to understand, reflect, and share stories. This approach also helped to ensure the voice of the women was shared and that I was the vessel that carried their voice. Wang and Geale (2015) argue that experiences are not stand-alone events, but rather experiences are constructed and understood through narrative. Thus the researcher develops a deep understanding of the diverse contexts that exist within the participants through their personal narratives. An important part of this research was listening, observing, reflecting, and being actively present alongside the participants which allowed for a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

Trauma-Sensitive Approach

Trauma can impact anyone and studies show that at least 75 percent of the global population has experienced at least one traumatic event in their life (Klinic, 2013). As discussed in earlier sections, the Yazidis suffer from both individual and collective trauma, and in order to conduct research with this population, a trauma-sensitive approach was necessary. Research has shown the impact of trauma as well as the benefits of trauma-informed care, and advocates of trauma-sensitivity urge individuals to adopt trauma-awareness and trauma-informed approaches. Taking into consideration past experiences of participants, it was imperative this research used a theoretical foundation of trauma-informed care principles.

As a service provider who works with refugee children and youth arriving in Winnipeg, I have completed numerous training sessions on trauma and have worked with survivors of violence and understand the value of trauma-sensitivity. Using this prior knowledge and experience as well as additional research into trauma, trauma-sensitivity, and a trauma-informed

care, it was imperative that I implement a trauma-sensitive approach while conducting this research. SAMHSA (2014b) notes that key factors in working from a trauma-informed lens include: 1) a basic realization and understanding of the impacts of trauma; 2) recognizing the signs of trauma; 3) responses to the realization and recognition of trauma by implementing trauma-informed practices; and, 4) resisting the re-traumatization of individuals. SAMHSA (2014b) also outlines six key principles of a trauma-informed approach, of which this research fostered five principles.

The first principle focuses on the safety of participants which includes environmental and interpersonal safety. In order to ensure that the participants felt safe during the interviews and after much consultation with my advisor and Operation Ezra, it was recommended the interviews take place in the safety of the participants' homes so additional stress was not added in them having to transport themselves to a secondary location. The second principle utilized was trustworthiness and transparency which included allowing participants to volunteer to participate in this study as well as being transparent on the goals of this research.

Another key factor was the importance of collaboration and mutuality. This study was done to help give voice to the experiences of the participants and they were the ones with the power and knowledge of their lived experiences. It was important to mitigate any power dynamics that might impact the relationship between myself and the women, and using the multi-method approach of narrative inquiry and storytelling helped to shift our roles where they were the teacher and I was the listener. Although I did not directly tell them that,, I assured them throughout the interview process that they were the experts and I was the listener. I also took the approach of a student who sought to gain knowledge on the lived experiences of these women without whom I would not be able to understand their experiences.

The fourth principle to ensure a trauma-sensitive approach was implemented was the empowerment of the participants as well as providing a voice and choice to them. This research used a strength-based approach, recognizing the knowledge, expertise, and resiliency of these survivors, and the interview questions and interactions fostered this perspective. It was important that the voice of the participants carried this research due to the historical silencing of their lived experiences. Since data was collected through face-to-face interviews using semi-structured, open-ended questions, the women directed the conversation as well as the the interviews.

Lastly, I actively sought to move past cultural stereotypes and biases to ensure this research was responsive to the participants' racial, ethnic, and cultural needs by focusing on their lived experiences. To help mitigate this I kept detailed fieldnotes which not only reflected my meetings and conversations with them, but also my own subjectivity. This documentation provided me with the ability to separate my personal expectations and focus on the content that was being shared by the women. I sought to acknowledge their experiences without passing judgment, and was open to being shaped and directed by the stories while constantly re-evaluating my emotions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It was important to keep in mind the goal of this research was not to bring my personal biases forward but to allow the data to speak for itself.

Klinic (2013) identifies several additional factors to consider when working with survivors of trauma: language accessibility, non-verbal communication, and clarifying and labelling individuals, which are all necessary when incorporating a trauma-sensitive approach. Klinic (2013) notes that when working with individuals whose first language is not English, it is important that appropriate language is used to match the level of the participants as well as avoiding jargon. Based on my years of experience in working with newcomers, I am aware of the importance of connecting with English language learners at their level, while at the same time

not talking down to them so this approach was utilized during the entire process. Similarly, through my work I am cognisant of non-verbal communication as well as acknowledging moments of silence of which there were many when the participants were talking about their experiences with Daesh. During these times we sat together until they were ready to continue. It is valuable to clarify what was shared and in order to do this, I reiterated stories to allow for clarification.

Including a trauma-sensitive approach based on the foundation of trauma-informed care is critical to prevent re-traumatization. A trauma-sensitive approach helps to counter the isolation, shame, and humiliation that results from trauma (Davies et al., 2015). By using the foundational knowledge of trauma-informed care, I was able to approach my work with the participants from a trauma-sensitive lens that helped to mitigate against harmful practices which might otherwise lead to re-traumatization.

Personal Reflections

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identify fieldnotes as being a key component often overlooked when doing research. Fieldnotes can be defined as a written account of a research experience, including an interview, where the researcher journals what they see, hear, experience, feel, and think while collecting their data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Throughout the duration of this process, from reaching out to Operation Ezra to interviews with the participants, and my personal reflections while writing, the information was documented in a notebook. The process of writing the things I saw, heard, and experienced helped to formulate my thoughts and provided an opportunity to learn.

I have been fortunate enough to spend the last ten years working at Newcomers Employment and Education Development Services (N.E.E.D.S.) Inc. It is a non-profit agency in

Winnipeg that supports immigrant and refugee children, youth, and their families through various services, including employment, education, and social programs to develop life skills. For much of this time, I worked with refugee children and youth in the classroom upon their arrival to Winnipeg, while also working closely with their families. As a result of my time at N.E.E.D.S. Inc., I have become familiar with the refugee experience and hearing trauma stories. I have gained a wealth of knowledge, training, and experience that provided a strong foundation in working with refugees which aided in conducting this research.

Despite this experience, no one is immune to vicarious trauma. Prior to the interviews, I prepared myself for the fact that the women might share their experiences with Daesh or the events of August 2014. Having done extensive research into the genocide as well as my experiences working with the Yazidis, I knew there was a high chance they would share those trauma stories. I was hesitant about these conversations as I did not want to re-traumatize the participants, so the interview questions were prepared from a trauma-sensitive framework that aimed at learning about their experiences as Yazidi women, with no specific questions pertaining to the events of August 2014. Furthermore, the interview questions were mostly open-ended to allow the women control over the type of information they chose to disclose.

Regardless, all eight of the women spoke to varying degrees, intensities, and raw emotions of their experiences. Although aware of the experiences of the Yazidis and particularly Yazidi women, I was not fully prepared or expecting the type of trauma stories they shared. When the conversation turned to their experiences with Daesh or the events of August 2014, I allowed the women to control our conversation and talk at will, without redirecting back to the interview questions.

There was obviously a reason why the women wanted to share about that event despite not being asked directly, and I appreciated their desire to be honest and vulnerable. During these moments I empathized with the women, validated their feelings, and practiced “being with” as we sat together. On the one hand, I was prepared to hear these stories, but on the other hand was naïve enough to think it would not come up because I was not directly asking them about it. As the first participants began to share, I thought about the expression “the elephant in the room". Of course they were going to share these experiences, as horrific as they were, since they are their lived experiences. When they asked to share their stories, I said yes to honour them as survivors and their courage in wanting to share, as well as being an active participant in witnessing and standing with these women and their experiences.

In having participants share their lived experiences, specifically their experience with Daesh, I took on their stories. I was a different person leaving the interviews than I was when I had arrived. Navigating the heavy burden of hearing and carrying these stories is not something I hold lightly. However, as a human, I feel it is important to stand with those who may feel the world turned against them. Using narrative inquiry allowed me to be a co-participant on this journey and their experiences have become a part of my personal narrative which I will undoubtedly carry with me forever.

There were times that I struggled with listening and documenting these lived experiences as they are not easy to listen to or write about. There were times I was overcome with emotion and was brought to tears. Recounting over and over the difficult stories of these women who experienced these horrific things was sometimes too much to bear. After sitting for five hours with two women, the interpreter and I decided to stop despite wanting to complete two additional interviews that day. It was just too much; I was too heavy and saturated with their trauma. Unlike

these women who live with their experiences of violence, genocide, and trauma every day, I had the privilege to step away when it became too much.

Mollica (2006) states that the act of witnessing violence and trauma can be deeply injurious to the witness, just as much to those being directly injured. This meant it was paramount I spent time focusing on my own self-care and grounding myself. Throughout the last ten years I have acquired an awareness of the activities that promote that for me. This includes practicing yoga, meditating, journaling, surrounding myself with people who lift me up, connecting to my spirituality, and being in nature.

Conclusion

This section presented the research methods used throughout this study. Semi-structured interviews and a qualitative multi-method approach focused on narrative inquiry and storytelling which provided the participants with the opportunity to control the interview. This section also provided a detailed demographic of the participants and the research procedures employed in this study. Ethical considerations were also documented and the section concluded with my role as a researcher. The next two seions of this thesis will summarize the findings. Section five will share experiences before the period of violence while section six will share the lived experience of participants post violence.

Discussion and Results: We Were Lucky We Came So Soon

The next two sections provide a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the interviews conducted for this study. Section five presents the period of violence experienced by the Yazidis at the hands of Daesh, while the sixth section documents the women's post-violence experiences. This section discusses six common themes: (1) Life in Shingal was Simple But Difficult; (2) Traditional Gender Roles and Newfound Freedom; (3) Importance of Kinship, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (4) I Want You to Know What Happened on August 3, 2014; (5) Betrayal from our Neighbours; and (6) Life is Hard in the Refugee Camp. These themes provide insight and understanding into the unique experiences of the Yazidi women.

Life in Shingal was Simple But Difficult

"They say the Yazidis are not human" (Avin).

There is limited research available to describe the experiences of women in Shingal and specifically the Yazidi culture, as the majority of information available focuses on the 2014 genocide or religious aspects of Yazidism. I felt it was important to ask the participants in the early stages of our face-to-face interviews what life was like in Shingal to help gain a better perspective into their lived history. The stories varied. Many reflected fondly on their lives before the period of violence, although life was hard. Others spoke about being a Yazidi in Iraq meant you were a second-class citizen. As the events of August 2014 weighed heavily on them, I asked if they could share some positive memories of their lives before coming to Canada, and their reflections boiled down to three factors: kinship, community, and their Yazidi identity.

It became evident that the invasion of Daesh has become a dividing line in the lived experiences of these participants and likely the Yazidis as a whole. They have their past life in Shingal and then their lives after the events of August 2014. When asked about life in Shingal,

five of the seven participants referred to their experiences with an emphasis on either before or after the invasion of Daesh. Both Habiya and Naqaba expressed that life was hard but they were happy before Daesh took over. Habiya shared:

> Life was hard, but we had more safety than now and nobody was telling us you have to become Muslim. We're happy with that, even we had breakfast and we had no lunch to eat, but we're happy because of our religion. We want to be Yazidis and there was more safety before ISIS took over.

Naqaba also expressed how challenging life was before Daesh took over.

> Before ISIS took over, life was hard, but it was safe. We were happy because we were safe. We had to work hard to make money and life was difficult. Yeah, it was hard. The government of Iraq was not helping Yazidis at all. That country, they didn't help us.

Having Habiya and Naqaba acknowledge their life in Shingal was safer before Daesh took over was an important statement as they shared the difficulties they faced beforehand. Yet they valued the fragile sense of safety they had which was shattered by the violence with the invasion of Daesh. Despite the challenges they faced, four of the other women shared that life was good, or they were happy before the events of August 2014. Maha explained how good her life had been:

> So we - all the family when we were together - that of course was nice. I had my kids and my husband with me. My husband was working, we had a normal life. Yeah, it was good before ISIS came.

Shirin had difficulties sharing her experiences before ISIS took over but stated, “Before ISIS was taking over, it was a nice, good life, but after that it was tough.” I asked her to reflect on what made her happy in Shingal. Shirin shared:

> So, because nobody was in captivity by ISIS and nobody was killed by ISIS, it was good. We were happy with our life. After ISIS, everybody was sad about what they did to us. It wasn’t that safe before, but there was no ISIS and no Yazidis being killed by ISIS or Yazidis in captivity by ISIS. It was good.

On a similar note, Ahlim said, “Yes, it was a very good life before ISIS took over. We had three cars and we had lots of land and houses. It was really nice.” Naqaba also emphasized the timeline before and after Daesh, “It was a simple life, but we were happy with that before ISIS took over. Before ISIS took over it was safe, but after it wasn’t the same.”

As outlined in the context section, the Yazidis faced numerous discriminations in Iraq which was evident in the experiences of the participants. When asked to share what life was like back home in Iraq for the Yazidis, Avin was quick to state that life was very hard.

> It was very hard. It was very different than in Canada. For me, as a farmer, when we found vegetables in the garden - we were planting vegetables to sell them, but there was nobody to buy them. They were not selling fast and it was very hard to sell the vegetables. There were lots of farms, but no stores to buy them from us and there were too many farmers selling. It’s not like here. There is no factory for making juice, or something like that.

Avin and Naqaba shared that basic necessities such as financial support from the government, electrical power, and health care were limited for the Yazidis. Naqaba said she did not get money from the government to help support her family:

> Because my husband was sick with cancer, that's why he couldn't work too much and we had no money to live which made life really hard. We had to rent one room for my family when my husband was alive. We didn't have money to buy anything, like backpacks or clothes or anything. Jehan wasn't allowed to go to school because of her disability.

Avin noted a daily challenge of being Yazidi. "The Yazidis didn't have [electrical] power to live. It was always down. They say that Yazidis are not human." She also shared she came from a big family, as her parents had three sons and seven daughters, and although it was nice coming from a large family, it was hard to live well with that many people: "It was hard too. Living, to live was hard with that many people."

Avin also provided insight into the historically complex relationship between the Yazidis and Iraqi government. When asked about their homelands, Avin stated, "It was our land, like a 1000 years ago, but we couldn't register our names or our houses. It had to be the government's house, so we could not claim it as our land." In addition to the issues faced in land ownership, Avin discussed the discriminatory attitudes they encountered:

> Even if we want to go to the doctor, they didn't even look at us. They say, "You're Yazidi, it's nothing." They don't worry about Yazidis. Even at school, everywhere Yazidis go, they say, "It's Yazidis, don't worry about it." Nobody cares about Yazidis in Iraq. If you have money to pay, you go to the doctor or to the school to pay the teacher They are going to talk to you and they're going to help you, but if you didn't pay or you

> don't have money, they don't even look at you. So if you don't have money, they don't care what you're saying you went for.

When I asked about going to see a Yazidi doctor or someone from the Yazidi community, Avin said it didn't matter because the Yazidis didn't have their own schools or clinics. Instead, they were at the mercy of the government and the complicated relationship between Yazidis and non-Yazidis in Iraq:

> There were Yazidis doctors and teachers, but because they were working with them [Muslims], the Yazidis doctors and teachers had to do whatever they [Muslims] told them to do. They [Yazidis] have to follow them. Yazidis didn't have their own schools or clinics. They were mixed with Muslim and Kurdish people.

Avin continued to share there was no government in Iraq to protect the Yazidi people "because of the small religion of the Yazidi people, there was no law in Iraq".

Despite talking about the hardships and challenges, I dug deeper to find out if life was ever good in Iraq, but Nassima could only speak to the challenges her family faced. "We have breakfast, we didn't eat lunch, we have lunch, we didn't have dinner. That was the life there, a very tough life. Very hard living." Nassima echoed Avin's statement about Yazidis not being important as well as living in constant fear: "It was all the time a scary life there. We don't know from one minute to the next what's going to happen to us. Until I remember everything, even when I was young, Yazidis were nothing and nobody would do anything for us." Ahlim shared that life was very different than life in Canada, and life in Shingal was very simple compared to Winnipeg:

> About living, the houses, we don't have to pay for the rent, or the water, or the electricity. Everything was very cheap, not like here. If anybody worked for one month and then

> they didn't work for six months, that money would be enough for them to live for six months.

Adol, who was the eldest participant in this study, shared her insight into life in Shingal during the reign of Saddam Hussein:

> When Saddam Hussein was alive, he was the principal of Iraq. He got killed, and then ISIS, they started to become ISIS - whoever was loyal to Saddam. But when Saddam was alive, it wasn't like this - showing up everywhere. It was hidden before. It wasn't like when they all came at once and took all the Yazidis. It wasn't like this before. There was no ISIS when Saddam Hussein was around. We were a little bit safer.

Adol noted an important reflection during the reign of Saddam Hussein, that generally Yazidis were safe. Although they were targeted, it was not open or obvious as it was when Daesh invaded. The sad irony is that Daesh's call for fighters spoke to those soldiers and officers who were once loyal to Saddam Hussein and joined the caliphate and participated in the genocide against the Yazidis.

Adol continued to discuss the constant struggle for peace as experienced in Iraq and the issue of forced conscription:

> The men didn't have a choice. They have to go to the army because Saddam Hussein was fighting with other countries all the time, like Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saddam Hussein said it was a law, they had to go and fight. It wasn't a choice.

Adol's insight into life prior to the death of Saddam Hussein under the Iraqi Ba'athist regime helps to contextualize the issues that plagued the Yazidis before Daesh rose to power. There is much evidence to the challenges the Yazidis have faced historically in Iraq, but it was also under the Ba'athist regime starting as early as the 1970s (Abouzeid, 2018; UNPO, 2013). Under

Saddam Hussein, the targeted attacks against the Yazidis were often hidden and generally they were safe, but these experiences become overshadowed by the extreme attacks that took place in August 2014.

It is clear the survivors of this genocide continued to be troubled by their experiences over the last five years. When asked about life in Shingal, nearly all the participants referenced the events of August 2014, showing the deep and continuous pain associated with this time. Aside from this, the participants reiterated the challenges and difficulties the Yazidis faced back home in Iraq. Discrimination is still prevalent access to food and money to support one's family is not easy. Access to power and health care continues to be a challenge as well as being treated as a second-class citizen. Each participant shared experiences unique to their own lives prior to coming to Canada, which provided rich insight into their past to be analyzed.

Traditional Gender Roles and Newfound Freedom

"In Iraq, we only take care of the kids and do the homework" (Avin).

Being a woman, it was important for me to gain a better understanding of their lives in Iraq and gain further insight into their experiences as Yazidi women. As Shirin shared, "It's really hard to be a Yazidi woman, but we understand who we are, we are Yazidi. We need to be following the culture, even in Canada." Through my conversations it became clear that being a Yazidi woman, although difficult at times, was an important factor in helping to sustain Yazidism.

Yazidis abide by traditional gender roles with women focusing on the household, while men worked as labourers. All eight participants in this research echoed this gender role which helps them to navigate their Yazidi identity. When asked what she did before coming to Canada, Nassima said, "Nothing, I did homework." Her husband on the other hand was a painter and

painted houses. After some probing, it came to light that homework referred to taking care of the house and children.

Maha's experience was similar; her husband worked in the army and she stayed home to look after the house and family. Along with taking care of her children, Shirin said, "I was a gardener, tending the garden." Her husband was enrolled in university to become a doctor. Ahlim, Habiya, and Naqaba shared that they too took care of the housework while their husbands worked as a taxi driver, at a gas station, and painted houses. Avin reiterated the specific roles of men and women in their community. "In Iraq, women only take care of the kids and do the homework. Sometimes we need to help with the gardening or farming. That's what we do."

When asked about attending school, Avin said, "Only a few of them [women] go to school, not many of the women. We were not allowed to. We were doing the homework." When I asked why women couldn't go to school, Avin responded, "It wasn't the government, it was our choice. Whoever wants to send their kids to school sends them. But some families were very poor so they couldn't go to school." Avin said she had gone to school for only two or three years when she was little. Adol reiterated Avin's statement about school:

> So because of our religion, it is not easy to be a Yazidi woman. We are different than others because we cannot marry anyone, we can only marry a Yazidi. So that's why it is not easy. We have never been to school before and it's hard for us to understand. Yazidis weren't allowed to go to school, we don't know why. It wasn't the government or anyone, it was just - some people want to go, but some people didn't want to so they didn't.

Naqaba had a similar experience about never attending school before coming to Canada:

> I never went. I have never been in school before. It's very different back home than it is here. It changed a little bit in Kurdistan - but not like here. We weren't allowed to go to school or do work outside. It was really hard to be a Yazidi woman because we weren't allowed to go to school.

The experiences Avin, Adol, and Naqaba shared about their past education echo the research that shows educational opportunities in northern Iraq being limited as a result of the second-class citizen status Yazidis were given (IRCC, 2017a).

Gender dynamics are often complicated during times of conflict as women are more vulnerable, which can impact the level of trauma they incur. That being said, there are times when gender dynamics change for the better and include equality and the ability to empower women (Hosseini, 2018). Ahlim and Naqaba explained how gender roles within the Yazidi community shifted after they were displaced from their homes. Ahlim said before Daesh took over, women were not allowed to work:

> Before we were not allowed to work, but now that changed. Before it's do the homework and everything and the man's job is outside to make money, they make the money for us.
>
> Only some [women] work at a hair salon or something like that. But only a few, that's all.

When asked what she meant by "before," Ahlim explained that due to the exodus from Shingal, the gender roles have changed and even in Kurdistan women can work.

> Before we didn't see lots of people from other countries. Then when ISIS took over, we went to a refugee camp and then the other people from other countries came to help and then we were able to work with those people, us women.

Naqaba agreed that one of the blessings from this experience has been the freedom she now has as a woman outside of Iraq, "Canada is a really good place to be a Yazidi woman. If I was home

[back in Shingal] I wouldn't be allowed to go shopping by myself. That's how the religion is back home." The tight-knit nature of the Yazidi community in Shingal has seen some shift in gender roles, providing women with the opportunity to partake in work and school experiences since leaving Iraq.

As a result of the events of August 2014, the formerly conservative Shingal area is realizing the benefits of education and the importance of fostering agency among females (Kaya, 2019). Historically, families with money sent their children to school, and those without the financial means did not. Kaya (2019) states that Yazidis now see education as a powerful tool to help prevent future atrocities from occurring which enables them to protect themselves. Iraqi society has traditionally valued men over women, but there too has been a shift within the Yazidi community for gender equality (Kaya, 2019).

It is evident the participants are strongly connected to their Yazidi identity and acknowledge the role women have in their culture. That being said, they expressed an appreciation for the freedom they felt in being a Yazidi woman in Canada. As discussed later in this thesis, a big challenge for the Yazidi diaspora is the impact of the exodus from their homeland as well as how these women and their children learn to navigate their new lives in Winnipeg (Allison, 2017; Hosseini, 2018).

Importance of Kinship, Community, and Yazidi Identity

"We were very happy with our life because all of us were together as a family. It was a really nice life" (Ahlim).

In an effort to learn more about the positive aspects of being a Yazidi, I invited the participants to share what made them happy about life in Shingal prior to August 2014. They all expressed they were most happy when they were together with their families and community.

Some women also reflected on their Yazidi identity, including their religion and the deep-rooted connection to their homeland.

When asked what brought her joy and happiness from her life in Shingal, Adol noted the connection to her homeland and the importance of family and community:

> We were very happy before ISIS took over Shingal. We were happy because it was our land and our home and all of the kids and members of our family and the other Yazidis were together. We knew each other, we went to visit each other, it was really good.

Nassima said, "Only when I went to visit my family and we were all together, I was happy at that time. That was it, there was nothing else that makes me happy." Habiya shared a similar notion:

> So only when we were together, like all of us, siblings and parents and we were together. That was the only good thing and happy thing about Shingal. They have been killing Yazidis for many, many years. But that's the most important thing, when we are together. That is what makes us happy, the only thing that makes us happy. But always Muslims around us and trying to kill us.

When asked what types of events back home brought people together, Habiya mentioned "weddings, when someone has a baby, a newborn baby because all the family goes to visit them. Those times were really nice."

Maha also reflected fondly on the joy her family brought her:

> We didn't have that much money for living. But we were happy with what we had because all of us were together. It was our land. We were born there and we grew up there. All of us were together, like my husband and my kids. It was nice.

Avin was also happy when she was with her family, but also shared her religion made her happy, "The Yazidi religion and when all the families and friends were together, it was nice." Naqaba

said, “I was happy before - my kids and my husband, we were all together. That made me happy as well as my siblings and parents.” Ahlim echoed the same sentiment as the other participants had:

> Before ISIS took over, it was really nice. I had my family with me, I had my husband with me, I had my kids, all of my kids. We were very happy with our life because all of us were together as a family. It was a really nice life. We all were together, like my husband and kids and members of our families, that was the best - to be together.

Shirin said, “We [were] all together, the parents and the siblings” which Avin and Naqaba reiterated, stating the importance of family and what made them happy in Shingal. The joy that Nassima, Habiya, Maha, and Shirin exhibited was very evident when they talked about their families. But Habiya and Adol, even as they focused on the time before Daesh, demonstrated they continued to be impacted by the violence.

Adol provided additional context to the importance of family within Yazidism and the deep bond that runs within families:

> Yazidis are very different than the others, because whoever you get married to, that’s it, that’s it for life. If the husband passes away and they have one kid, the women is not going to get married till they die. We’re not allowed to get remarried. If we get married once, that’s for life.
>
> My daughter-in-law, her husband [Adol's son] passed away, and her parents tried to tell her “to come back home, you can get married again, leave your kids and come for a new life". She didn’t want to leave the kids.

I told Adol the situation her daughter-in-law was in sounded very difficult and noted that many of the Yazidi women I have met have lost their husbands. Adol stated, "Yea, this is our religion. If the husband passes away or is missing or whatever, they say we're not allowed to get married again." The collectivism within the Yazidi culture is evident in my conversation with Adol who continued, "I was helping my daughter-in-law when my son passed away and I was taking care of her and the kids. *Family is very important* [emphasis added]. We have no choice, we have to." Being the eldest participant in this study, Adol had the largest family which included grandchildren and Adol, like many of the participants, struggled deeply with the fact she was separated from some of her family. For many, family and community bring a lot of happiness to individuals as they are an important influence in our lives.

The Yazidis have been targeted and treated as outsiders in their own country and have experienced 74 campaigns of genocide against their people. It is natural for these participants to maintain a strong connection to their family, community, and identity as it remains the safest place to be their true self without facing discrimination. It is clear that their happiness is very much dependent on their kinship, community, and Yazidi identity. The tight-knit and historically isolated nature of the Yazidi community has strengthened the connection the participants have with their families and friends. This bond associated with family is discussed further in section seven when discussing protective factors.

I Want You to Know What Happened to Us on August 3, 2014

"We have been through a lot when ISIS took over" (Nassima).

Each participant of this study alluded to the events of August 3, 2014 and shared with varying degrees their experiences and the impact this genocide has had on them. Genocides are a debilitating event in which people experience some of the worst atrocities known to humans. It

was obvious from our meetings that all of the participants had been impacted by these events, and many continue to struggle with moving forward.

For Maha, the impact of the events of August 2014 became evident within two minutes of us sitting down together. “I was in captivity by ISIS.” Much of our conversation pertained to the invasion of Daesh as she shared how her life was turned upside down:

> It was just a normal life in Shingal. My husband was working, I was staying at home. Then when ISIS took over, I was in captivity for two-and-a-half years. After I came from ISIS, I spent one year in a refugee camp and from that camp I came to Canada.

At one point during the interview Maha went to a closet and took out some documents. When she came back to the couch, she showed me pictures, including a picture of her three young children wrapped in white cloth who had been killed by Deash.

“They were very young. They didn’t do anything wrong and they killed them. These are my three kids. My baby, he wasn’t even 40 days old.” I stared at the picture and was at a loss for words. In shock I turned to the interpreter and asked, “How did she get these pictures?” Maha answered, “When ISIS killed them, they did this to the three of them. They took a picture and they posted it everywhere [on social media] to share. "That’s what we [ISIS] did, we killed these three Yazidi kids" and they share it.” Tucked away in her closet, not two meters from where we sat were Maha’s most prized possessions, including the only thing she had left of her three youngest children.

We continued to go through the other photos of several family members who are still missing and whose whereabouts are presently unknown as Maha explained who they were:

> That's my daughter, she's in Iraq, I haven't seen her for five years. She was in captivity by ISIS for five years. This is my brother-in-law and my husband. They're in captivity also. My aunt was killed and these two [points to a picture], they're still missing.

Maha was just one of thousands of Yazidis who were abducted with the invasion of Daesh. Nearly 7,000 Yazidis were taken into captivity and the whereabouts of 2,800 are still unknown (Al Jazeera, 2020; Vale, 2020).

Habiya's family had a different but no less difficult experience during the Deash invasion, as they were among the 250,000 Yazidis who fled death and abduction by running to Mount Shingal, which had historically provided safety to her people (Açikyildiz, 2010; Fobbe et al., 2019). Habiya said:

> We ran away to the mountain. We were there for seven or eight days in the mountain. After that we went to Syria and from Syria to Kurdistan.
>
> We ran away, we had no water, no food for days. There was one bottle of water for 20 people. We shared one bottle of water while on the mountain. We cried, there was nothing we could do, we just ran away to save our lives.
>
> Still, the people on the mountain, we didn't lose our families, we're still happy. It's just that we have no food, we have no water, we just run and run to the mountains in Syria.

Even though Habiya did not experience captivity, she was very familiar with the experiences of her people, "It didn't happen to anybody as it happened to the Yazidis. Whatever you say, it happened to the Yazidis. We see everything in front of our eyes. We know everything and we see everything."

Habiya ended by speaking to the true resiliency of the Yazidis who have survived centuries of persecution by stating the Yazidis will carry on. “It doesn’t matter if they kill our people, we’re going to be happy.”

Habiya was still in disbelief as to what happened that day and the days since. She was still deeply troubled by these experiences and wept while she described the events:

> We’ve been through a lot and we see everything. They weren’t even human people who did this to us. They killed our children. They boil them and they give it to their mother. They say this is your child, now you eat it. ISIS did that to Yazidis. We see a lot, we’ve been through a lot. They killed a ten-day-old baby in front of her mother’s eyes. They killed them and they killed babies still inside their mothers.
>
> Our stories are never going to be finished, there is too much to say. Nobody is strong like us. We’re strong, we stand on our feet but I don’t think anybody could take this - this is what we see and what they did to us.
>
> The people in captivity by ISIS, they see more than me. They carried the hands and feet of their kids, piece by piece. One of the women in captivity, her kid was two years old and he was crying, saying “I’m hungry” and ISIS came and took him and the boy was killed. They cut hum into pieces in front of his mom’s eyes.
>
> Who sees this? This is not human. I don’t think anything is harder than having your kids killed in front of their mother’s eyes.
>
> Even if it’s not my family this happens to, it’s Yazidis. We hear these stories, how are we not going to think about it and feel sad about it? All of these stories are hard, every one is harder than the other stories we share. Even if we share them with you, you’re not going to believe this because this is not a human life.

> I don't think it's happened to any human. They try to tell one of the Yazidi men, "You have to be Muslim." He says, "No, I'm not going to be Muslim" and they kill him, cut him in half, in front of all the other Yazidi men. ISIS said, "You don't listen to us, that's what we're going to do to all of you. Anything we say, you have to follow. You say no, that's what going to happen."

As I sat with Habiya, her voice cracked and she fought back tears as she shared her reaction to the genocide. Although she escaped death and abduction, Habiya experienced the loss and dislocation of her community as well as witnessing violence and extreme cruelty against her people. These attacks have left her deeply traumatized.

> Nassim did not speak directly about her experiences of August 2014, but did say: We've been through a lot. I'm not going to believe Shingal will come to be safe one day. In one hour, everything, all of the houses, our cars, and our belongings, within one hour we ran away. We left everything because we have to save our lives when ISIS took over in 2014.

Adol, like Habiya, fled to Mount Shingal during the invasion and shared some of the atrocities committed against her people, Adol said:

> They did everything to the Yazidis. Two-month-old babies, they were taking them and killing them and boiling them and when they ask for their kids, "Where are my kids?" ISIS said, "This is your kid, you're eating it." This is crazy, what is this?

Adol shared that many of the Yazidi women felt it was best to die by suicide than marry a man of Daesh. "Thousands of Yazidi women, they killed themselves because they didn't want to marry Muslim people and they didn't have a choice, they had to, so they killed themselves. *Better to be killed* [emphasis added]." "Better to be killed" is a statement filled with grief and horror and

deeply expresses the horrendous experiences the Yazidi women and girls faced while in captivity. Dying by suicide was more honourable and a better alternative than being married and raped by Daesh.

Another impact of August 2014 was the destruction of family. Both Ahlim and Maha shared the direct loss of family members at the hands of Deash, but in addition to this, the upheaval and resettlement of the Yazidis resulted in further separation of family and community. Almost all participants in this study have family members they are separated from, either as a result of being in captivity or resettlement.

Nassima said the whereabouts of her sister-in-law is unknown but her nieces and nephews resettled in Winnipeg and are living with other family members. Similarly, both Maha and Ahlim are separated from their husbands as well as some of their children who were taken by Daesh. Ahlim said:

> I have two children still in captivity by ISIS. One of them is 18 and one of them is 16. And my husband is in captivity as well, about five years now. We don't know anything about them for five years.

Habiya expressed that "before ISIS came, they killed four of my family members, and then when ISIS took over, they killed ten of my family members." Both Shirin and Avin are in Winnipeg with their husbands and children. Both they have no extended family here, and their husbands' extended families have been resettled in Germany and Australia, while some are still in Iraq. Both Shirin and Avin's families are alone in Winnipeg.

During our time together, Ahlim asked to share her story of being held in captivity by Daesh for one year and three months. After going through the prepared discussion questions and asking if she had anything further she wanted to share before we concluded our meeting, she

said, “So I have only answered your questions, but I didn’t tell you my story about when I was in captivity by ISIS. Can I share with you what happened?” After saying I would be interested in listening to her story, she proceeded to say, “Okay, but drink your tea first.” Ahlim’s story is extensive and difficult to read, but it was important to have her words written and included in this thesis to honour her experiences as a survivor. It is her story and she asked that we bear witness to her experience. This is Ahlim's story.

On August 3, 2014 at 5:30 in the evening, ISIS took over. We were trying to run away in a car, our family was in three cars. My family was in one and my husband’s brothers and their families were in the other two. We were following each other, trying to go to the mountain, but halfway there, ISIS stopped us. They took us to a place in Shingal and we were there till about 7:00 p.m. that night. There were about 50 other Yazidis who had been taken into captivity by ISIS. From here, they took us to Syria and they put all of us in a school.

At first they separated all the women, children, and husbands. They separated all of the men so they took my husband and my three boys [Ali, Dilovan, and Ayaz] away, but they left my daughter Dalal with me because she was young. My sons were 11, 14, and 16 years old. Dalal was nine.

We were in that place for about 15 days. There were about 80 families and all of the women were together with our young children. Then every three or four days, ISIS would come and check on us and they would take some of the women away. They would take our girls from us. It was very tough. We were here for almost two months. ISIS came all the time to take the single women away. They also told us to be Muslim and whoever did not want to become Muslim, ISIS would kill them.

They came a lot and took our girls. It was very hard, there was no food, sometimes for two days, and the kids were crying because they were hungry. We tried to make some bread with whatever we had available to us but it was very bad bread. Still, we tried to feed the kids.

After this, they took us to Mosul. They took us to Mosul in Iraq, and there were thousands of Yazidis there. It was like a school or something and they put all of us together. While here they continued to come and take away the girls and women. They took some of us to Syria, the others they put up for sale for whoever wanted to buy them.

After they took us to Syria, they brought us back to Iraq. After they brought us to Iraq, they came and took away all the Yazidis with disabilities and they separated them from us. There were about 300 of them. ISIS told us, "Whoever has family in Kurdistan, they can pay us and you can come take your kids with disabilities" because ISIS didn't want them. They wanted to sell them back to their families. We were here for four months.

Eventually they took the young boys who had been with their mothers. We don't know where they took them, but they were gone. Luckily my daughter was still with me. ISIS also moved us back and forth. They would take us to Syria for two months, then bring us back to Iraq for four months, all the time back and forth and to different places. They didn't give us any food or water for two, three days sometimes and when they brought us food and water, it was only once over a few days. It was so hard.

One time they took us to an underground jail in Syria. It was very dark and scary being underground. They put all of us in there, about 600 people in that jail underground. You had to go down the stairs, it was very deep. When they closed the door, we yelled, "What are you

going to do with us?" and "leave us alone" and "we cannot live here" because the washroom, everything was broken. It smelt very bad in there.

We were there for three days. Then after three days, they took us to another place. It was far away from the city. There was nothing around, no houses or anything, just a big hole. They put all of us in that hole and we were there for about two months. While we were there, it was just like a store. People came to buy girls. They could take any number of girls actually, however many they wanted. They came and they looked at all the women and girls and they bought them for themselves. They wrote down their names, whoever they wanted to take, and they took them.

They wrote down Dalal's name. I was screaming at them, "Take me too with Dalal, don't take Dalal away from me." But they took her. I was crying for three days after they took her. I have diabetes and when they took her away, my diabetes got really bad. They told me, "We're going to take you to the doctor" and I was like "No." They kept saying, "We're going to take you to the doctor" but I didn't want to go, I just wanted Dalal.

Finally, after three days, they brought Dalal and another girl back to us. They said, "They didn't have their periods yet, there are not able to get married right now." So they brought Dalal back to me after three days because she was not ready to be married.

Every day the men kept coming to buy women. One time, a man came and he took about 40 women for himself to sell them to other people. Then one day they called my name and Dalal's name too. "We're going to take you and Dalal." They took us and about 25 other women, including my sister-in-law, to Syria.

They took us to a house with three bedrooms. There were 25 of us and after another three days, they brought another 25 more women. We were there for 90 days, living in that house.

Then they took us to another place. There were about 250 ISIS fighters there with their beards and their hair, they were waiting for us. They were very big and very scary. They told us to stand in a line and then the ISIS fighters picked the women and girls they wanted to take. If a few of the men wanted the same women, they put their name in a draw and whoever's name was picked took her for himself. Every day ISIS would come and take the girls and women. Whoever they liked, they took.

It was then that one man bought myself and Dalal, but he bought Dalal for his friend who told him to buy a young girl for him, so Dalal was for his friend. He took seven of us that night to one house - the one man, with seven of us, and he brought seven more the day after.

The man who was going to marry Dalal, he came every day to ask, "Did Dalal have her period yet?" I said, "She's nine years old, she doesn't have her period." He didn't believe me, he thought I was lying so he separated us and asked Dalal without me, but Dalal didn't know what a period was. I was crying all the time asking myself, why is he going to marry a nine-year-old?

We were there for three months. Every day he asked me if Dalal had her period because he wanted to marry her. I kept telling him, no not yet. He said, "If she doesn't have her period yet, I'm going to wait for her to get her period." About ten days before we were going to leave that place, Dalal got her period and her period didn't stop for 16 days. Dalal was very scared of everything and all we had been through. All of those ISIS men, they were scary. I think that's why Dalal got her period.

We were moved to another house because we were told this place is not safe anymore. The man who was going to marry Dalal took us to his friend's house for six days. The people living there, the ISIS women and children - they would laugh at us, they would make fun of

us and they would say “Go do this, do that” while they sat around. We did all the work for them for those six days.

One of the women asked us if we had gold. We had our gold earrings and I said, “We only have these earrings that they didn’t take away from us.” She said, “Okay, I can help you sell that gold and buy black clothes just like ours and you can run away from ISIS.” We said okay and were excited to be able to leave, but she was lying to us. She went and told ISIS we were going to run away so they took us faraway to a house outside of the city.

He took me and Dalal far away from the city so we could not run away. We were there for 15 days before he came and said, “I’m going to take Dalal to a dentist appointment” because she was saying her tooth was bothering her. He was lying and Dalal was crying, “I want my mom to come with me” and he would say “She’s not allowed to because the clinic is only for children.” We both cried, but he took Dalal and I was by myself. There was no electricity, I was really scared. He took Dalal for two days. I just went upstairs and waited for them. He came in the morning and I asked him where Dalal was and he told me she had a surgery with lots of blood and he had to take her to the hospital. “I’m going to take you," he said.

Instead he took me and sold me to another man. His name was Mostafa. That man took me to a house, it was full of water and he told me to clean all this water and locked the door. When he returned, he was with his wife. His wife said, “Okay, we’re going to go to my mom’s house.”

When we got to her mom’s house, her mom was trying to help me. She was feeding me and the other Yazidis who were there. She was trying to help them to see their families and

send them back to their families. Mostafa's wife said, "Just eat, don't cry, we're trying to help you." The wife and her mom helped me.

Then Mostafa brought his friend Mahmoud. I asked, "Are you going to sell me? What are you trying to do with me?" They didn't answer. Instead they told me to go to car with both Mahmoud and Mostafa. While we were driving, Mostafa got out of the car along the way. I asked Mahmoud, "Did you buy me? What are you going to do to me?" He told me not to talk until we got out of the city and he gave me his mom's ID. He said, "If they stop us, if anybody stops us, just show them this ID and say you're my mom and that I'm taking you to the doctor. Just say that and be quiet."

I didn't believe what he was saying because they always lied to us so I kept asking him, "Where's Dalal?" He said I'm going to take you to your family. I still didn't believe him, but Mahmoud was helping to reunite stolen Yazidis to their families. He gave me the phone and on the other end was a Yazidi man. He said, "Don't run away, this guy is good. He is not lying, he is going to bring you back to us." After talking to the Yazidi man, I was hopeful and believed that I might be freed.

While we were driving out of Syria, they tried to stop us. Mahmoud told them I was his mom but they laughed because they saw that I was young and he was young. They didn't believe him but luckily they let us go. We left Syria and the Yazidi man I spoke to on the phone was waiting for us. He paid Mahmoud thousands of dollars and the Yazidi man took me.

The Yazidi man asked who I was and took me to the government of Iraq where they asked, "Where were you? What happened to you?" After two hours they took me to Kurdistan. In Kurdistan my mom, my siblings, and my family members were waiting for me.

But I was not happy because of Dalal. I was crying all the time. Then one day my brother-in-law came and told me, “I have good news, Dalal is safe, I just talked to her.”

After we were separated, ISIS told Dalal, “It’s okay, you are going to see your mom soon, she is going to come and see you,” but Dalal didn’t believe it because she knew that ISIS lied. There was another Yazidi girl with Dalal and Dalal told her, “We’re going to run away.” The other girl tried to tell Dalal, “I have run away from ISIS more than ten times and they always catch me.”

Dalal pushed her, “Please let’s try.” Finally they agreed to run away. They made it to a house and they were crying and asking the owner to help them. Eventually he agreed and said, “Okay, we can help you. You can talk to your family. If you have their number you can call your families. They can come and take you but we want $1000.” Dalal called my brother-in-law and said, “We’re here, you have to help us. They are asking you pay a $1000 for each” and gave my brother-in-law the address to the house they were at. My brother-in-law sent somebody to find them, paid the house owner the money, and brought Dalal and the other Yazidi girl to Kurdistan. Finally, I was able to see Dalal and we were reunited.

We saw so much when we were in captivity. We were in that situation for one year and three months. It is very hard. Some of the people are still in captivity by ISIS. It’s been five years and they are still gone. *We are lucky we came so soon* [emphasis added].

Alhim’s story is just one of nearly 7,000 Yazidis kidnapped by Daesh, with between 2,000 to 3,000 still in captivity (Kaya, 2019; Shilani, 2019; Al Arabiya, 2019). Daesh set out to intentionally destroy the Yazidis through the widespread and systemic nature of the attacks and direct disruption to the community through forced marriage and abduction. It also used slavery,

sexual violence, and massacres against the Yazidi people (Moradi & Anderson, 2016). Habiya shares the impact this has had on her:

> We're never going to forget what happened to us when ISIS take over. Still they have 3,000 or 4,000 Yazidi women, girls, and men in captivity. Lots of them get killed and we don't know anything about the others. There is still a lot missing.

OHCHR (2016) completed an investigation that found the actions of Daesh demonstrated the intent to destroy the Yazidis of Shingal, thus constituting it as a genocide. Despite this claim, many of the participants feel that justice had not been served and many appeared "stuck" with the events of 2014 still heavily weighing on them and impacting their day-to-day lives. While the women expressed their appreciation for being resettled in Canada, they are still troubled by what happened to their community, and stress the challenges of not knowing the fate of their loved ones, as well as the frustration that the world has forgotten about the Yazidis.

Betrayal from Our Neighbours

> *"Yazidis want a human being life"* (Avin).

As participants shared their stories, it became clear they felt betrayed and distrustful of members outside of their community in Iraq, identifying their neighbours as perpetrators of the violence inflicted upon them at the hands of Daesh. This experience echoed generations of fear, isolation, and persecution that preceded the events of 2014 as outlined in section one. The participants described the lack of support they received in trying to counter these attacks on their community and the overall issues Yazidis face in finding safety and security in Shingal.

Nassima and Habiya shared that even before Daesh came to Shingal, Iraq was a dangerous place to be a Yazidi. Habiya said:

> It was also Muslim people and Christian people. So our neighbours killed us, our Muslim neighbours, only because we are Yazidi and because of our Yazidi religion. Muslims don't like Yazidis. Muslims don't like Yazidis but we know that Europe and Canada - they like Yazidis and we like them too. How they like us, we like them too, but not the Muslims. There is a problem with us and Muslim people.

Similarly, Nassima talked about the tense relationship between Muslims and Yazidis in Iraq:

> It was always scary in Iraq. We didn't even sleep good at night because always something bad happened. I didn't see a good day in my life in Iraq. They were killing people in Iraq, they are taking our kids and asking for money. "Give me this much money, if you don't have the money I am going to kill your child and send them to you." That was the life in Iraq. The Muslim people, they were my neighbours, they were Muslim and they take your children. If you didn't give them money, they'd kill them and send them to your family. It was horrible.

When I probed further and asked how she kept herself safe, Nassima said, "We didn't go outside a lot. We stayed in."

In addition to the strained relationship between the Yazidis and Muslims, Habiya and Ahlim both said it was not just Daesh who were targeting the Yazidis in Shingal in August 2014. Habiya stated the Yazidis did not have any problems with Muslims, but Muslims did not like Yazidis. "They said that Yazidi are not good. They didn't like us and we don't know why. And then we are trying to work for them and do everything they want and yet they are trying to kill us." It was important to understand this statement so I inquired if this was an experience they had with all Muslims or just some. Habiya responded:

> No, even if some Muslims are good, when ISIS came, they all went with ISIS. We didn't see any of them. And they not only did this to Yazidis in Iraq, but they also did that to Christians too. The Muslims tried to kill the Christians.

Ahlim reiterated that the Muslims in Iraq joined forces with Daesh to target the Yazidis, she shared:

> Shingal is not going to be safe until the Muslim people are gone. All of ISIS is around the Yazidi area of Shingal, it's not going to be safe. ISIS wasn't from different countries. We know it was Muslims, our neighbours who did that to us. It's not only ISIS, it's Muslim people around us who also did bad things to us. Before they take over, it was in front of us. We worked very close and even a few hours before they were at our house and they knew that ISIS was coming, but they didn't tell us "we're going to do this to you".

Avin said, "Our neighbour is still there, the Muslim neighbour who helped ISIS and showed them the area where Yazidis live and helped them to take over. That's why we're scared to go back, they're going to do the same." The issue of Muslims and Yazidis co-existing in Shingal is an important one the participants talked about, and fundamentally challenged their desire to return home.

When asked why there were problems between the two groups in Iraq, Adol said, "It is because of the Muslim people that we are in this situation." When asked if she was referring to Muslim people or Daesh, she said:

> Both, Muslim people and ISIS. The problem is our religion. They want to marry Yazidis and they're not allowed to. They say, "If you're not going to come to be Muslim, we're going to kill you." They want all Yazidis to become Muslim. The religion is the problem.

> About 74 times the Muslims have done this to us, because of our religion. When ISIS took over, whoever didn't become Muslim, they just killed them, they cut their head off.

Naqaba also reflected on this betrayal:

> The government of Kurdistan was supposed to take care of us. Some of our families were going to leave before ISIS came. We heard news three or four days before, that ISIS was coming. We heard that they were going to come to the area and they would kill the men and take the women and girls but the government of Kurdistan didn't let us to leave.
>
> Then when ISIS took over the *Peshmerga* forces ran away and they didn't save us. They left us and they ran away to safety. In Kurdistan, they try to tell all the world, "We're helping Yazidis" but this is all a lie, they're not helping. They don't help. When we tried to run away, the *Peshmerga* forces made fun of our men. "You're a man, how are you going to run away? You can run away and leave the women and girls with us. We're going to take care of them and we're going to support them." Then they left us when ISIS came.

The animosity, distrust, and hesitation the participants discussed regarding their Muslim neighbours is a common thread throughout the Yazidi community. It is evident from the above experiences as well as those documented by researchers that any relationship between the Yazidis and Muslims in Shingal was destroyed when Daesh entered the region. It will take much reconciliation and repair to recover this ruptured relationship.

Life is Hard in the Refugee Camp

> "*It's a very hard life to live in refugee camps*" (Adol).

The attack on the Yazidis in the Shingal area resulted in the displacement, death, or abduction of the entire population, and those who were not killed or abducted fled the area.

Nearly 350,000 Yazidis sought safety in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KDI) where camps for internally displaced people (IDP) in the provinces of Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah were established (International Organization for Migration Iraq [IOM Iraq], 2019; Moradi & Anderson, 2016). In 2018, a collaborative survey conducted by the Kurdistan Region Statistics Office, International Organization for Migration Iraq, and United Nations Population Fund, [KRSO et al.] (2018) found that 65 percent of the IDPs in Duhok arrived in 2014 from Nineveh Province, accounting for the largest population of Yazidis.

All eight participants in this study spoke of living in refugee camps after fleeing Shingal, with six residing in camps in Kurdistan while two fled to camps in Turkey. These camp experiences mirror the struggles they faced in Iraq, but proved to be more challenging as the women tried to navigate this period of their lives being separated from their families and community. Their time in the camps emphasizes their struggles with displacement, being forced from their homes, and simply fighting for survival. This section shares the experiences of the participants when they lived in refugee camps before being sponsored to come to Canada, as well as the present issues facing their families and friends who still reside there.

Nassima and Habiya expressed concern over the lack of basic necessities in the camps in Kurdistan, where both of them spent four years. Habiya said, “The refugee camp - it’s a very terrible life. There was no water, no electricity. It was a really, really hard life. There was nothing good in the camp.” Similarly, Nassima said, "It’s very hard. There is no water, we have to go get the water and it was far away from our camp and we had to go get it to drink.”

In addition to the daily challenges of accessing water and electricity, Maha, Naqaba, and Adol talked about the fires that plagued the camps in Kurdistan. Maha said, “It’s a very hard life in the refugee camp. There were many, many times when the camp would just burn. It’s really

hard." When asked if these fires were accidental or set on purpose, Maha responded, "Some of them happened due to electricity. Fires very, very easily spread in the camps. It's a very hard life in the camp. The refugee camps, many times the camps just burn." Adol echoed this complaint, "So a couple of days ago they burned about 20 tents at night. They were Yazidi refugees in the camp. This stuff happens every day, you don't know what's going to happen next." Naqaba explained that fires were common because there is no one to help put out the fires:

> There is nothing good in Kurdistan. Yazidis are living in refugee camps. When they have a fire, there's nobody - like fire trucks to help - nobody can stop the fire. If anything happens, nobody is around to help. There's no life in refugee camps. It's a very tough life.

A google search found various incidents of fires wreaking havoc in the Kurdistan refugee camps, supporting the safety concerns that Maha, Naqaba, and Adol shared (Basnews, 2019; Nawzad, 2018; Ramazan, 2019).

Naqaba and Avin, both of whom lived in a refugee camp for three years, one in Kurdistan and the other in Turkey respectively, shared about the isolation they faced. Naqaba said:

> Life was very hard in Kurdistan. It was a really tough life. We were at a refugee camp and nobody was helping us with anything. I was separated from both my mother-in-law and sister-in-law's family. I was just alone with my three kids in the refugee camp. I was there for three years.

When asked what her life was like after leaving Iraq, Avin said:

> We were in a refugee camp in Turkey in a tent. We hoped that Europe would send for us. There were not a lot of Yazidis in my camp. There were people from Syria and other Muslims. I couldn't garden. We were just waiting.

Nassima explained that living in the camps did not extinguish the issues between the Yazidis and Muslims:

> The other Muslim people - they also speak Kermanji, they were in the refugee camp, but they were not Yazidi. Yazidis and Muslims were close to each other in the camps, but still they don't like us in the camp. There were still problems because of our religion.
>
> Muslims don't like Yazidis. I don't know why. Yazidis never do anything wrong to anybody but they think Yazidis are the worst. I didn't let my children get close to Muslim people. To protect my children, I said, "Don't go near Muslims because they might hurt you."

Resettling in refugee camps did not provide the Yazidis with an escape from the challenges they experienced in Shingal as they continued to struggle with access to basic necessities as well as the strenuous relationship with Muslims. Instead, their lives appeared more challenging as they found themselves separated from family and unable to engage in tasks such as gardening that they took pleasure in.

When asked if Yazidis were still living in the camps or if they had returned to Shingal, Adol said, "It's a very tough life in Kurdistan. All of the Yazidis want to go back to Shingal but it's not safe. Even though life in Kurdistan is very difficult there is no life in Shingal." Maha explained why people were not able to return to Shingal yet:

> Most of them are still in the refugee camp because Shingal is not safe. There is no water, there's nothing, they bombed all the houses, nobody can live in Shingal anymore. And people are scared to go to Shingal because of the bombs and nobody knows what ISIS did. They don't know from minute to minute what's going to happen to Shingal. It's very dangerous.

> We are hoping Shingal will be safe for Yazidis and people can return, but my parents live in a refugee camp, my siblings, all my family, all the Yazidis, which is just a very terrible life for them.

Similarly, Nassima and Shirin's families are still living in a refugee camp in Iraq. When asked what keeps her happy, Nassima said:

> When I talk to my family and they say "we have power today" because it's very hard there. I feel very happy when they tell me that they have power because they are in a refugee camp and it's very hard. And my mom, she has some problems too with her health. But all of my family is in the camp. They've been there for five years. It's been five hard years for everyone.

Despite being resettled in Canada, all the participants expressed concern for those Yazidis still living in the refugee camps and discussed the hopeless feelings they had while living there as well as for those still stuck behind.

In March 2019, Daesh lost its land-based control in Iraq, yet stability in this country remains compromised. Presently 300,000 Yazidis are still displaced and living in refugee camps (The Islamist, 2019). Abouzeid (2018) identified several reasons why the Yazidis could not return home: insecurity, lack of supports and services, destruction of communities, and the turmoil pertaining to their Arab neighbours. It is evident that despite some improvements being made in the Shingal area, rebuilding is merely one part of this story.

Conclusion

This fifth section presents the information shared by the eight participants during the semi-structured interviews. As a co-participant on this journey, I was able to witness six major themes that emerged from their stories and lived experiences during the period of violence which

include: (1) Life in Shingal was Simple but Difficult; (2) Traditional Gender Roles and Newfound Freedom; (3) Importance of Kinship, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (4) I Want You to Know What Happened to Us on August 3, 2014; (5) Betrayal from Our Neighbours; and (6) Life is Hard in the Refugee Camp. One thing is clear: the events of August 2014 act as a gateway between two worlds: their past life in Shingal which was simple but good, and their life after Daesh as they struggled to cope, understand, and move forward with their lives. The next section will focus on the participants' experiences after August 2014 which continue to be impacted by the 74th campaign against their people.

Discussion and Results: We Will Never Forget

Section six will focus on key findings shared during the interview process and will highlight the experience of the participants after the 2014 period of violence. The themes include: (1) Shingal is Home But It is Not Safe for Yazidis; (2) Canada is Good, But Life is Hard; (3) The World Has Forgotten, But We Will Never Forget; (4) Unknown Fate of Missing Yazidis; (5) Gaining Strength from Children, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (6) Sharing Our Stories; and (7) Future Challenges and Opportunities for Our Children. During the interviews it became obvious that most of the participants felt stuck; their lives have physically moved forward from what happened to them, but there is still much pain they continue to live with.

Despite the challenges they face and continue to experience, it was important to look at how they responded to this violence and identify the protective factors they used to help move forward. Although many of the participants were unable to directly respond to that question, they provided insight into how they responded to this violence and trauma and shared what has helped to keep them strong. Maha also shared the importance of telling the world what happened to her and her people, and this section will look at the importance of sharing these stories.

The last theme in this section will look at what the future holds for the Yazidis. Living in near isolation for centuries, the invasion of Daesh in 2014 forced them to flee and has resulted in nearly the entire population migrating out of their homeland. The next several decades will be an important time for this minority ethnic group as they learn to navigate apart from their community. The participants shared their hopes for themselves and their families as well as for their way of life.

Shingal is Home, But It is Not Safe for Yazidis

"*I think it's going to be better than Shingal because it's not safe for us, there is nothing in Shingal*"(Nassima).

Since 2014, the Yazidis in Shingal have experienced incredible loss. All eight participants talked about the losses they experienced, which included the loss of their homes, loss and separation of family, and loss of their way of life. They also discussed the loss of their homeland, including the safety and security for those Yazidis in Shingal, as it appears a sense of belonging in their homeland may be impossible to achieve. They said there is no longer any life in Shingal, and Yazidis will never be safe there. When asked about returning to Shingal, none of the participants were optimistic that things would ever get better or that they even wanted to return, Nassima said:

> All Yazidis in Iraq, they want to go, they want to leave Iraq and go to another country. It's our traditional homeland, but it's a very hard life, a very tough life. Everyone wants to leave Iraq because it's not safe. We know they are going to do this again to us. That's why we wanted to leave Iraq. That's the only reason we want to leave. This has happened to us before and it makes it very hard to be a Yazidi in Shingal.

When asked why it was not safe in Iraq, Nassima continued to share the challenges of being a Yazidi in Iraq:

> We have been through a lot. When ISIS took over, they took the women, the men, and the children and they separated all of them. There is no life in Iraq for Yazidis. They did this to us only because we are Yazidi. We are nothing in Iraq. And it's a very tough life.
>
> There are no jobs and no government that is helping. They are giving us nothing, no money, there is nothing to live on there. All of this happened just because we are

> Yazidi. We are never going to be anything in Iraq. Things are always going to be bad, because of our religion. It's very tough life in Iraq for us.
>
> We are here, and we're happy because we're here, but we still worry about our family back home. I know lots of people in Iraq. They want to leave Iraq. Iraq is not safe and we know that even if it becomes safe one day, it's going to happen again to us because this is not the first time. It's not only ISIS but also Muslim people who do this to us. Muslim people do not like Yazidis. They never liked the Yazidi.

Emphasizing that this must be hard, I inquired if Nassima would ever return home to visit:

> It's not safe. I want to go home but it's not safe. Maybe I would visit, but I am never going to go live in Iraq. I remember those days, the bad days. We've been through a lot. I'm not going to believe it will be safe one day.

Ahlim agreed with Nassima's statement and said she too would not go back, "Because we see everything, life in Shingal is really hard. We don't want to go back." Habiya continued to echo these doubts and agreed Shingal would never be safe for the Yazidis:

> All Yazidis in Iraq want to go to a different country because they don't want to stay in Shingal. Yazidis are never going to be safe. If there are going to be Muslims in Iraq, Iraq is never going to be safe for us. We don't do anything to them and they kill us. We see a lot. We're never going to say it's going to be safe one day. They did lots to us, so I don't think it's going to be good for Yazidis to live in Shingal anymore.

These three women saw history repeating itself through the persecution of their community and expressed doubt that this violent cycle would ever change.

Even though Habiya said there was no life in Shingal for the Yazidis, she explained it was still difficult to leave her homeland:

> We know it is safe in Canada, really safe, but we grew up there, it's our land. We would really like it to be safe. We want to go one day but it's not safe. If it's like this, we're never going to go back. Nobody wants to live there. Growing up in there, is really, really hard for Yazidis to live. It's our land but we had no choice because there was no safety - they were going to kill us if we didn't leave our land.
>
> If ISIS didn't take over, half of the Yazidis wouldn't be going to any other country. We don't want to be here, we were happy where we were, we were born there, we grow up there, we are around our families, our membership and if ISIS didn't take over, Yazidis wouldn't be going anywhere.
>
> If ISIS never came, I would be happy, I would never come here. We know we're here, we are safe and it's good, but we are still worried about family members. Even if I am here for 100 years, I will still miss my land and my country.

These statements made by Habiya and Ahlim were echoed by Maha:

> We know it's our land in Iraq, we grew up there, but there is no life there. It's a dangerous life, it's not safe. Everybody wants to go a different country. If they open their doors, Yazidis will leave Iraq. They want to go to a different country.

When asked why the Yazidis would want to leave Iraq, Maha said, "We want to go to a different country because we're never going to trust Shingal anymore. We're never going to be safe like before. It's very dangerous, everybody's scared to go back to Shingal."

It was evident the participants are very connected to their homeland. It not only connects them to Lalish, but also to their community and their people. Listening to the women talk about leaving Iraq was bittersweet. They were happy to be safe but mourned the loss of their homes, knowing that if they were not persecuted, they would have never left, but they also mourned the

ongoing attacks against their people. The violence and persecution they faced at the hands of Daesh and their non-Yazidi neighbours permeated through their narratives as they shared they would never feel safe returning home, because home was destroyed.

Shirin continued to build on what Nassima, Habiya, Ahlim, and Maha had said about life in Shingal, "We know lots of things are going on there, and I wish all the Yazidis would just leave Iraq because life is much better here. Yazidis would be better if they left Iraq. It's safe here." The sense of safety they had about their life in Shingal was lost when Daesh invaded their homes, forcing them from their homeland. The ongoing cycle of violence inflicted on their community has left them doubtful that Shingal will ever be safe again.

Some of the participants indicated that even through it was hard to leave their homeland, they had no choice. Avin said:

> Life in Canada is good for us and we know we're safe here. Nobody can kill us, nobody can do anything to us. It's hard to leave our land, but we had no choice. It's our land, it's hard to leave because it's our home. We're born there. We have our history there. We pray at Lalish. We don't want to leave.

Similarly, Adol said:

> We're born there and we have our life there. It's very hard to be away from our land and our homes, but it's not safe to go back to. I don't think it will ever be safe. It's hard. Day by day it gets worse.

Maha shared that because it was just her and her daughter, it was very hard after the events of August 2014 and they no longer had a life in Shingal:

> Shingal is not safe. We know it's our land and our area but life is going to be hard in Germany and Canada too. We have no choice though because Shingal is not safe and Iraq is not safe.
>
> It was me and my daughter in Iraq and we had no money to live and we had nothing. Nobody was helping us. We had no choice, we had to go to a different country when they opened the door. It's not easy to be in a different country but at least it's safe. That's what we are happy about.

When asked if all Yazidis wanted to leave Shingal, Avin had this thought:

> Some people, the older people, want to stay. But most of them want to leave Iraq because it's not safe, but they can't because they need help from other countries. Yeah, it's not safe. I know people are talking about wanting to leave Iraq because living is so hard and it's not safe.

The decision to leave Iraq is hard and as Avin shared, some of the older members of the community want to stay, but due to ongoing safety concerns and the lack of opportunity for a good life in Shingal, many Yazidis want to leave.

When asked what could be done to help the Yazidis in Iraq, Avin said, "Safety is the first thing, then we need everything else fixed, like our houses. Then whoever wants to go back to Shingal, they can do something on their own land." As she spoke, she grew doubtful of this possibility and instead expressed the same fear for safety and the continued threat that Yazidis face:

> But it's not safe. Nobody wants to go back because they are scared ISIS is going to take over again and do the same thing like what they did to us before. Our neighbours are still there, our Muslim neighbours who helped ISIS and showed them the area where Yazidis

> live and helped ISIS to take over. That's why we're scared to go back. They're going to do the same thing again.

The continued persecution the Yazidis have faced has left them feeling discouraged by the ongoing conflict between themselves and the Muslims in Iraq, and the events perpetrated against them by Daesh further escalated those feelings due to the extreme nature of the atrocities committed against them (Omarkhali, 2016).

Interview after interview, the participants echoed the same sentiments about returning to Shingal and the safety concerns for the Yazidis in Iraq. The violence committed against their people triggered centuries of persecution, each attack leaving the community more and more vulnerable as their population was impacted. The participants now believed their safety and livelihood in Shingal will continue to be jeopardized as they experienced first-hand the infringement of their basic human rights and liberty.

Ahlim was asked if there was still life in Shingal, she said:

> There is but it's dangerous. ISIS is still around. Once in a while they show up and kill some of us, so it's not safe. I don't think Shingal will ever be safe. It's really hard to say that. Those of us who have left Shingal are happy that we are safe. Those who are still there, they are not happy because it's not safe, they want to get out, they want to try to leave, to go to other countries.

Habiya agreed that Daesh was still around and shared the impact this continues to have on people. "Even yesterday there was a fight, and ISIS killed two more Yazidis. ISIS is still there. None of Iraq is safe for the Yazidis." Despite the "official" claim that Shingal and Iraq are free from the hands of Daesh, the participants know the extremist ideologies still exist as the Yazidis continue to be killed six years after the initial invasion.

During our time together, Habiya kept reflecting on the impact the 2014 genocide had on her community.

> There are thousands of women with their children whose husbands are missing and they don't have a dollar to buy things for their kids. It's a really, really hard life, especially for the women who are now widows because ISIS killed their husbands.

Naqaba continued to share similar sentiments and discussed how there was nothing left in Shingal for the Yazidis. "I think life is going to be better somewhere else other than Shingal because it's not safe and there is nothing in there." When asked what could be done to help make Shingal safe, Naqaba stated:

> It's hard, I don't think there is anything. The problem is never going to go away. It's never going to be safe with Muslims around. All of the Muslims around are ISIS and they say, "You're not going to become Muslim, we're going to kill you." The problem is both ISIS and Muslims. It's kind of like Muslims and ISIS are both together. That's what I think. Shingal with Muslims will never be safe. It's never going to be finished. Nothing's going to help anyways.

When asked if there was something that could be done to help the Yazidis, Naqaba stated it would be beneficial if places like Canada and Germany brought over more people. "Yes. That would be very helpful. It's very dangerous to go back home to Shingal. Their homes, they're all full of bombs and when they go back into their homes, ISIS takes them and kills them."

The shared sense of belonging within Yazidism proved stronger than any individualist successes as the participants were very concerned ahout the safety of those Yazidis still in Iraq. Naqaba and Adol both mentioned the Yazidis who were stuck in refugee camps because they can't return home and yet are not able to resettle elsewhere. Adol said, "It's a really hard life for

Yazidis in Kurdistan. They want to go back to Shingal, but it's not safe. They want to move away from Kurdistan but another country must help." Similarly Naqaba said, "The people who left Iraq, they are happy. The other people who are living in refugee camps, it's very hard life for them to live. Everyone wants to get out, to leave Iraq. There's no life in refugee camps." Habiya pleaded for help, "Any one who can help the Yazidis would be good, especially Yazidis in Iraq. It's a very, very hard life they are living. If anybody can help with anything, that would be great." The exodus of Yazidis from Shingal in 2014 has left them dispersed and away from their homes; some are in refugee camps, others have been lucky enough to be resettled. It is clear the experiences of the participants have left them feeling a collective hopelessness about Shingal never being able to provide them with a safe and peaceful life.

Canada is Good, But Life is Hard

"*It's true Canada is safe, but the life is still hard for me and my daughter*" (Maha).

This section focuses on the experiences of the participants being sponsored to come to Canada and the challenges they continue to face as a result of August 2014. All eight women were sponsored to come to Canada as refugees by the federal government and three privately sponsored by a group in Winnipeg. Four women arrived with their husbands and the other four women are the heads of their household due to the death or abduction of their husbands. All the women arrived with one or more children. All eight participants were attending English classes for part of their day. None of them were employed and when not in school, they took care of their families.

Knowing the challenges refugees face when resettling in Canada, it was important to consider the resettlement experiences of the participants. Typically, refugees wait months or years in a refugee camp after violence forces them from their homes. However, due to the

extreme and complex challenges facing the Yazidi population, many governments around the world, including Canada, prioritized their resettlement. Knowing the tight-knit nature of their community, the violence they witnessed and endured, as well as the level of individual and collective trauma, the women's perspectives on resettlement would provide valuable insight about their experiences.

When asked about their life in Canada, they expressed appreciation for the new life they had been given as well as the connection they still could maintain with their community. Nassima was thrilled about being in Canada:

> This life in Canada is good. We are safe now. Everything is just - everything is awesome in Canada. We are very happy in Canada. We go to English classes and Canada has not forgotten about us. We are living in beautiful apartments and houses. And the rules [law] are good. I love the rules in Canada.

Shirin appreciated the fact that despite not having extended family in Winnipeg, her family was not alone, “It’s nice having Avin’s family in the same building. It’s nice to have them around because they speak the language.” Finding comfort in having another Yazidi family in her building meant having companionship for both families who otherwise would have been isolated in their apartment complex. This was evident as, after my interview with Shirin, she walked us down to Avin’s home and stayed as we began our meeting. When Avin’s young baby began to cry, Shirin whisked the baby from Avin’s arms and took all three children to another room.

It is clear that Naqaba, the youngest participant, also had a hard and difficult life in Iraq. When asked about being resettled in Canada, Naqaba expressed her joy:

> My journey from Iraq to Kurdistan to Canada was very hard, but in Canada it's very good for me and my kids. I love Canada so much. This is the life. I didn't have a life back home. I have a life in here.

Intrigued and saddened by Naqaba's comment, it was important to understand why she felt she did not have a life back home. I asked her to clarify how different her life back home was from her life in Canada and Naqaba expressed that:

> Life was not better back home. It is only because my husband was alive, so it was good then. Because my husband was sick with cancer, that's why he couldn't work too much and we had no money to live which made life really hard. But Canada is much better.

The struggles Naqaba's family faced with the illness and eventual death of her young husband heavily hung over Naqaba's life in Iraq, which escalated with the invasion of Daesh as she ran to the mountain for safety with her three young children, all under the age of ten.

Ahlim, a now-single mother in Winnipeg with only two of her children, had a much different experience in her resettlement than Naqaba, Shirin, and Nassima. Ahlim shared that life in Canada was very different than back home:

> The life here is different than the life in Shingal and Kurdistan. Kids go to school for only half a day in Shingal, so we are all together most of the time. We also see lots of Yazidis back home. It's very different here, everything is different.
>
> The life is there, my community is there, it's better than here because I don't see anyone in Winnipeg. I see my community, but not like in our houses. We have to go out to events to see lots of people from the community.

I empathized with Ahlim and reiterated this would be very hard to get used to considering Canada is very different from Shingal and much more diverse. Having been in Canada for nearly

two years at the time of our interview, I asked if this was something she has gotten used to or if it was still difficult for her to which she shared:

> For a couple of months when I came, I was always crying, saying "I'm going to go back" but I'm used to it now. My kids love it here, they are very happy and they say even if I go, they're not going to come with me.

It is natural for children to integrate quicker than their parents when they are resettled. Being immersed in school full time increases their language and social skills as well as their malleability to adapt, so what Ahlim shared made sense coupled with the extreme experiences she survived before coming to Winnipeg.

Due to her time in captivity, as with many survivors of Daesh, Ahlim was able to bring her mother and sister-in-law to Canada but was living in a basement suite with two of her children who are between the ages of 14 to 20. Ahlim shared she is often alone which further perpetuates her feelings of isolation, "I am by myself most of the time because my kids go to school so I don't see them, and then my son goes to work every day till late at night." Transitioning to her new life in Winnipeg has been difficult for Ahlim as she lived the majority of her life surrounded by family and her community. Although here with her mother and sister-in-law, it does not replace the emptiness and longing she feels for her previous life.

The participants shared that Canada is a good place and they are thankful to their sponsors for bringing them here, but similar to Ahlim, they did express challenges they faced in their resettlement. Habiya, who had been in Canada for just over a year and a half when we met, said:

> It's hard for all of us who have to learn everything. It's new for us, like a newborn baby, we have to learn everything when we go to another country. It's not easy learning this

> new life. Canada is helping as much as it can, but we don't know the language, we can't do anything and most of us - we are just women and children, we're missing our husbands. It's really hard to do everything in this new place.

The example of feeling like a newborn baby trying to learn everything is a common experience for newcomers, but the Yazidiresettlement has been more complex and challenging as a result of the recent and historical experiences of violence (IRCC, 2017a; Rauhala & Coletta; 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

Traditionally the Yazidi women in Shingal focused on the domestic sphere and were likely to receive little or no formal schooling (Açikyildiz, 2010; IRCC, 2017a; Wilkinson et al., 2019). To complicate this, the official language taught in Iraq is Arabic so even those Yazidis who attend some school are illiterate in their first language, Kermanji (Akin, 2011; Aridi, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Benseman (2014) states that if one is literate and educated in one's first language, it is easier to acquire additional languages and continue to build one's literacy skills. Being illiterate poses additional challenges when learning a new language as individuals learning to read and write for the first time must learn a new set of skills which is often more challenging as one ages (Benseman, 2014). Being forced from their community has resulted in all resettled Yazidis outside of Shingal needing to adapt to a new way of life. This requires a basic level of literacy to complete tasks such as reading medicine labels, filling out applications, completing transactions at the store, understanding policies, wayfinding, and banking (Cree et al., 2012).

Being away from their homeland, community, and for many their extended family and friends is difficult and as noted in section five, kinship and family are an important foundation for the Yazidis. They find strength and a sense of belonging in being together with members from their community. Many participants in this study expressed that being together with their

family and other Yazidis was the best thing about life in Shingal. Now they were separated from their families and loved ones. Maha shared:

> Canada is safe and it's good, but it's hard without family. We know Canada is safe and Canada is good and helping us but we still cry every day with what happened to us and what we see. It's not easy. The only reason we came from Iraq to Canada is because there was no life in Iraq for me, especially a woman like me with my daughter. Nobody was helping us. I had no choice. We had no money to buy food. We had to go to another country to live.
>
> We want to live like human beings. I am here for a better life. It's just me and my daughter and the rent is very expensive. Whatever the government gives to me I pay for my rent, and with only my daughter's child tax benefit I spend on food and a bus pass for both of us.
>
> Life here is hard too because nobody can work for you and we can't work because we don't know the language. The budget is not enough for me and my daughter because there's only two of us. It's a really hard life in Canada too. It's true Canada is safe, but the life is still hard for me and my daughter.

Being resettled does not solve all the problems and as the participants mentioned, they faced a new set of struggles and challenges when restarting their lives in Canada.

Maha shared that one of her daughters, who was 12 when she was abducted by Daesh, ran away in March 2019. For nearly five years, Maha had not seen or heard from her daughter and did not know what happened to her. Her daughter is now in Iraq and Maha is hoping to be reunited with her in Winnipeg, "We have been working on her paperwork and the government told us in about three or four months my daughter is going to be here. Now it's five months and

we still didn't hear any news about it." Maha expressed how she is living in two worlds. She is living here in Winnipeg, but knowing her other daughter is alive but they are separated does not evade her, "She ran away from ISIS and still I don't see her because I'm here and she's there. All the time I talk to her, she cries and cries and I can't do anything about it because we're separated."

Adol was another participant who shared she was thankful to be safe in Winnipeg, but she continues to be troubled by the separation from her family and worries a lot about those she left behind:

> It was very hard to come to Canada because I left my kids behind, my land, and everything. I was not very happy because I left five of my children. It's really hard. It doesn't matter how much life is good here, because my kids aren't here. I'm not very happy, I worry about them. I'd like to go back or have them bring my kids here.

When asked if she would like to go back to Iraq to be with her children or if she wanted them here, Adol replied:

> I want them to come here. I would be very happy then. If my kids were here, my family, then I wouldn't want to go back because all of Iraq is dangerous and we don't want to go back, but I want my kids here.

Knowing Adol longed for her children still in Iraq, I asked what her life was like now that she was in Canada. Adol said, "Canada is good but like half of us are here and half of us are in Iraq so that's very difficult." Given the collective nature of Yazidism as well as the importance of family and kindship, the participants continue to face challenges in their resettlement due to being separated from their family, especially their children who are left behind.

Despite the desire of Adol to have all her children here, Habiya, whose children are much younger than Adol's, expressed concern about raising her kids in Winnipeg which is very different than back home because the community is not together. Habiya said:

> My kids like Canada but still they talk about Iraq too. They have not forgotten their friends and cousins. They miss them and they talk to them on the phone. They were together, their cousins and friends all the time back home.
>
> Life is very different here than in Iraq. They are inside in Canada, always inside the house. In Iraq they were outside all day. In Iraq, all the kids go play together outside and we don't have to watch them. Here the community's not close to each other and then everyone is busy, everybody is busy with their own life here, and the kids are not going every day to play together. I'm taking the kids to the park, but still they want to be around the community, but it's not happening here. That's why it's different than life in Iraq.

As Habiya continued to discuss the issues and challenges that to follow her every day, despite being safe in Canada she shared:

> My two brothers and four cousins, they fight in the Iraqi army so I worry about them a lot. If anything happens, I hear the news at 3:00 a.m. or 4:00 a.m. Sometimes I'm up until 5:00 a.m. because of my family in Iraq.
>
> I know my brothers have been fighting for ten days but what I'm going to do? I just pray and have been crying a lot. When we hear the bad news from Iraq, we are trying to call them and ask, "What's going on, what's happened? Are you safe" You're safe but it is still really hard to hear the bad news.
>
> Even though we went to another country, it's really hard for us because we're going to miss each other. They [her children] are not going to grow up together, it will be

> really hard for them. They're going to forget each other when they grow up.If not for my kids, I won't be here now, we'd just leave to go back to Iraq to be with my family.

Maha agreed that the separation is not easy and does not just go away because they are safe in Canada, "We know we're safe here, but still we're not happy because our families are still in danger in Iraq, they are not safe. We still worry about our families." This has made it difficult for the participants to fully integrate into their new life in Canada as they continue to worry about family back home and hoping to be reunited.

Adol, Ahlim, and Avin shared that they participated in a farming project in Winnipeg, hosted by an agency that is working to support Yazidis in Winnipeg. In 2018 Operation Ezra partnered with some local groups to provide farming opportunities for the Yazidis in Winnipeg, with main goal to bring the community together and provide them with an additional source of food (Johnston, 2019; Luschinski, 2020). Many of the Yazidi newcomers farmed back home, including the majority of participants in this study who said they farmed or tended to the garden. Not only was this opportunity providing them with additional food but it also provide the opportunity to connect with members from their community and their traditional agricultural way of life, and it also helped them spiritually (Johnston, 2019; Luschinski, 2020).

Adol was very happy to talk about the impact of this activity, "Yeah, I am happy, very happy when I go there. We go every week or every second week, but I want to go every two or three days." When asked what kind of things they do when they go to the farm, she said:

> We went to take some grass away and then afterwards we pick the vegetables and bring them home and eat them. We pick all the vegetables and put them together and split them up for all the families. Then we bring it home and cook it. We are happy doing this. That's our job back home, farming. But back home it's different. We farm from March to

> December. Here it is much shorter like June to October, so only three months so it's different.

When asked what kind of vegetables they grew, Avin said they planted carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, corn, eggplant, and zucchini.

Ahlim said, "We think about what happened to us a lot. It's always on our mind. But we go to a garden and we're very happy because it reminds us of back home." What initially started out as a way to help the financial issues and food shortages the Yazidis faced has turned into an opportunity to help build agency and foster a sense of belonging between their past lives and present lives (Marchildon, 2019). This activity has helped the participants and their community to build confidence, foster independence, and it fills them spirituality while connecting them to their traditional roots.

The World Has Forgotten, But We Will Never Forget

"*Nobody is helping us*" (Maha).

A theme that permeated through all of the interviews was the pain the participants and their community continue to live with every day and yet are left to suffer with unresolved memories and feelings while the world has moved on and forgotten about them. Maha said:

> Nobody is helping Shingal. Governments are not helping Shingal, and it's all Muslims around and ISIS. Nobody is controlling them, saying "Don't do that to Shingal." Instead, whatever they want they are doing because nobody is stopping ISIS. The government is not helping Shingal at all. So how is it going to be safe?
>
> It's always been like this. It's never going to be safe in Shingal unless the governments get up on their feet and do something for Shingal and say "Nobody can do whatever they want to do in Shingal." Then of course it's going to be safe.

When asked why no one was helping the Yazidi community, Maha was unable to answer. “I don’t know why. We’re not sure why nobody is doing anything. Nobody’s helping Shingal and nobody’s taking care of Shingal. That’s why ISIS took over and killed our people. That’s why it happened.” Maha was adamant that the world be made aware of the injustices the Yazidis faced as well as continuing to need help:

> We want to tell the world, “Nobody is helping Yazidis and we want the world to do something for Yazidis” but nobody is helping us. We want to tell everybody and tell the world. But even if we say this, nobody is helping. Even if we share our stories, even if we go to other places, it doesn’t matter.
>
> We want help, lots of help, but nobody is helping. If the people open their doors for Yazidis, it would be great. It’s very dangerous, everybody’s scared to go back to Shingal and nobody is helping them. There is no government, nobody’s controlling Shingal. How are they going to go back to Shingal?

The sense of hopelessness that no one was helping saturated our conversation as Maha shared her frustration, anger, and disillusionment that things would ever get better for her people.

Although she did not talk in-depth about her experience during the invasion of Daesh, Shirin was obviously impacted by those events as well as the lack of support her community continues to receive in Iraq, in refugees camps, and those lucky enough to be resettled, “The Kurdish government and the Iraqi government, they don’t do anything for Yazidis. They don’t care about Yazidis.” I asked her what she felt needed to be done:

> They don’t help us. Where are the people in captivity by ISIS? Or even the bones of those killed? They have been in the ground for five years and they don’t collect them and they don’t help us to find the people who are missing.

> Even in the refugee camp, they're in the tents, and like every day three or four tents burn because the sun's too strong. They don't help them, they don't do anything, and our homes need to be fixed. Shingal needs to be fixed, and they don't fix it.

I affirmed Shirin's feelings and agreed that something needed to be done, asking why they do not seem to care about the Yazidis. She said, "All the world knows about this, even Nadia Marda tells all the world and even Nafiya and they don't do anything for Yazidis. We don't know why they don't help." When asked what could be done to help Yazidis, Shirin said,:

> We want to sponsor our family in Iraq because we know nobody is helping us in Iraq. That's why everybody wants to leave Iraq. It would be good for the governments of the world to stand up - even Canada, the USA, Germany, Australia, anyone - and tell the government in Iraq [to do something]. Then they might start to do something for Yazidis, maybe start to fix Shingal.

Similarly, Habiya said:

> If anybody can help Yazidis, that would be great because they need everything in Iraq. Especially - whatever, money and the other stuff - clothes, anything that anybody wants to send it for them would be great. They need help with everything. And then it would be great if the world stands up and does something for the Yazidis and brings them other places. Europe, here - it doesn't matter. They just want to get out.

Both Maha and Shirin were at a loss as to why their community was receiving no help and it was evident they felt frustrated, alone, and abandoned.

Avin expressed the same sense of hopelessness that no one is helping her people, "It's only Nadia [Marda] who takes care of this and tells the world and talks about this. But still nobody is

doing anything - the government of Iraq or the government of Kurdistan. There's no way to do it." When asked what she meant by "there is no way to do it," Avin responded:

> The life has been very, very hard. Tomorrow is going to be five years. In 2014 ISIS took over and it's the same, nobody's helping them, there is no work and the people are looking for jobs and there are no jobs. It's really hard to live.

The women continue to feel a sense of defeat as a result of the events of August 2014. The invasion not only shocked their sense of normalcy but transgressed the boundaries of human morals as they continue to feel abandoned by the rest of the world, and are shocked by the lack of justice and support their community has received since this violence. Adol said:

> It's hard, especially with Muslim people around. These other countries, they didn't help Shingal. The Government of Iraq is not going to make Shingal safe if the other countries like Canada or Germany don't help. All around us are Muslims. It's hard when the other countries don't help us. I don't think the Muslim people are going to leave us alone. We have a small community there and nobody is helping us.
>
> All the other countries are helping Muslim people, the Arabic countries especially. We have nobody helping us. It's been like this for a long time.
>
> Nobody's going to go back to Shingal. One day it can be safe but then the next day it's not. It's like, even after ISIS took over, something comes up on the news that ISIS was showing up and killing some people. They tried to bomb some houses and stuff like this.
>
> Unless the world stands up and helps Yazidis, I don't think Shingal will ever be safe for us.

When asked if the Yazidis always wanted to leave Shingal, Habiya spoke of the ongoing attacks against their people and their desire to just have a human life. She also wants governments to

help the Yazidis, including the Government of Canada, because even six years after the invasion, life is still very hard:

> We tried working so hard before. We tried to build our houses and everything like a human life. But then ISIS took over and they do it again to us. They take everything and they try to kill us. We just want a normal, human live, but we don't have that.
>
> I want to tell the Government of Canada to open its doors to Yazidis, all the Yazidis want to leave Iraq because it's a terrible life in Iraq. If you ask them "You want to go to another country?" they are going to say "yes" without even asking any questions because they just want to get out. Where they are living now it's very hard.

The participants expressed a desire to help their community, but being unable to do so personally, they alluded to feeling isolated and helpless by the lack of support for their community.

Maha spoke passionately and emotionally about her experience with Daesh which included her time in captivity as well as the possible death or abduction of her family. Her story continues to deeply impact her life which has been irrevocably damaged.

> We want to tell the world our story and then no government helping us. Because all the government is gone, that's why it happened to us. We didn't do anything to anybody and yet they killed all of our men, children, women, and girls. We did not do anything to anybody and I don't know why they do it to us.
>
> They were killing us and they were taking us, and whatever they wanted to do to us, they did it to us and nobody is stopping them. The world is not doing anything for us. I am here only because ISIS killed my three kids. I thought the government was going to do more for me because I have the right to ask, "Why they kill my three kids?" But the government never come to me to ask me anything.

> I want to ask the world, "Why did they kill my three kids?" and I want something to be done about it. Even if the world is not doing anything for Yazidis, somebody needs to stand up and do something for us. Then we won't be in this situation. We have nobody. That's why it's happening to us.
>
> What did my three kids do to ISIS that made them kill them? Why would thousands of those kids be killed without doing anything? It was hard for us but there is nothing we can do. We never see government around us. That's why it happens to us all the time.
>
> If we had somebody around us, ISIS wouldn't be doing this. ISIS killed lots of people and kids and they took us. I think all the world heard about Shingal, what happened to us in Shingal. Even if they didn't hear about Yazidis before 2014 when ISIS took over, all the world has heard about it now. But nobody went said, "We're going to do something" even when ISIS killed us.

Feeling alone and forgotten by the world, Maha expressed being defeated by the lack of help and support for her people, despite the world knowing what happened to Yazidis in Shingal:

> We want to tell everybody and tell the world what happened to us, but even if we say it, nobody's helping, even if we share our story, even if we go anywhere, it doesn't matter. We want help, lots of help, but nobody's helping us. I have my story and it's important, but even if they hear it, they don't do anything. That's the point.

Similarly, Avin discussed the helplessness she feels in not being able to support her community and the gravity of the situation still facing Yazidis five years after the invasion:

> I think all the world heard about what happened to the Yazidi in 2014 when ISIS took over and it was all over the news around the world. I'm just like a normal person, people helped

> to bring me here. I cannot do anything. I cannot help my people. Of course they're going to need help from around the world.

Feeling at a loss by the lack of help, Nassima said the Yazidis have been targeted because of their religion, "Nobody's doing anything in Iraq for Yazidis. The Yazidis are never going to have a happy life in Iraq because of their religion." Habiya expressed concern for her community and said it is not just her brothers and sister she wants to save but all Yazidis need help:

> It's like all Yazidis are my brothers and sisters. I'm not talking only about my family, my brothers and sisters. I want the world to do something for all Yazidis. If something could be done for all Yazidis, not only my family, that would be good.

Habiya reiterates the narrative that the attack by Daesh touched the lives of all Yazidis in Shingal due to their collective nature and how they suffer as a community. Avin expressed her exasperation around these issues and echoed the sentiment expressed by the other participants:

> Yazidis just want to live. They don't say, "I want to be ahead of everybody in Iraq." No, we don't want that, we're not asking for this. We just want a normal life, like a *human being life* [emphasis added]. We don't like to fight, we just want to be live a normal life, and we want to tell the world to help Yazidis.
>
> It's been five years and nobody's helping and we want to tell the world Yazidis need help. People have diseases and they have no money to see a doctor. There is nobody helping. People have problems with their heart or kidney and they don't have money to take care of themselves and pay. I saw this when I was in the refugee camp. I saw everything happening.

The participants expressed a sense of helplessness for not being able to help their community and how important that is to them, not just their immediate family, thereby showing the depth of connection they have with each other.

In addition to feeling betrayed by the world and feeling that everyone has forgotten the issues facing the Yazidi community, Yazidis themselves are constantly immersed in their experiences. The participants indicated they will never forget what happened to them, and many of them relive these atrocities daily and find it difficult to move on from these experiences. Adol said, "I'm never going to be happy. We're never going to forgot what happened to us." During her interview, Habiya echoed this statement:

> They did lots to us. We're never going to forgot what they did to us. They did lots to us. We're never going to forgot what they did to us. It's hard for us. How can it not be hard for the children? Children, like her age [referring to her young daughter sitting on her lap], ISIS killed them in front of their mom's eyes. So it's really hard. We've been through a lot.
>
> All the Yazidi families here, most of them are missing their husbands. They came with just their kids. They were in captivity by ISIS and when they came out, their husbands were missing and some of their children were missing. Most of them are single mothers with their kids in Winnipeg. We've been through a lot. This didn't happen to anybody else, like what happened to us. It's really hard. We're never going to forget. Even our girls - like ten-year-old girls - ISIS tried to marry them to 80-year-old men. This is really hard to see. Everything like this, they do to us, and they did to our ten-year-old girls.
>
> It didn't happen to anybody like the Yazidis. Whatever you say, it happened to Yazidis. We see everything in front of our eyes. We know everything and we see

> everything. If not for my kids I wouldn't be here by now. How am I going to be happy in Canada? I know it is a good life and it's safe, but I am only surviving because of my kids.

Maha continued to struggle with understanding why her children, her family, and her community were targeted and reiterated the fact that she could not forget what happened:

> We didn't do anything wrong but they did this to us and to our children. We know we're alive but this is not life - to be crying every day, not forgetting these people. It's hard but there is nothing we can do. It's really hard.
>
> Sometimes when I'm trying to eat, breakfast or lunch, I remember them and I just get up and cry and cry. Even if I go to bed or I am in the shower, it just comes up and I don't know what to do. For about five years now, every night I have been crying, even during the day. I never go to bed, I just cry.

Shirin shared she can never forget what happened to her and her community and that even today she still suffers from these experiences:

> I faint when I have a lot of stress. Sometimes it's too much to handle. It happens at different times, sometimes it's once a month I faint, sometimes three times a month.
>
> When I worry about my family or think about Yazidis in Iraq, I want to help but I can't. I want to work one day. If not for my fainting I would be working by now. Sometimes for one or two days I am very sad and then after that I am okay for a while.

Maha reiterated the difficult path the Yazidis continue to walk. "That day, August 3, 2014, is coming and it is still hard for us, that day we remember. We've been through a lot and we've seen a lot, like people are not even going to believe it."

The participants have identified several barriers that continue to prevent Yazidis from returning to Shingal, despite being nearly six years after the invasion of Daesh. These include

ongoing security concerns in the region, lack of infrastructure, geographic issues, no access to basic services such as health care, and psychosocial supports, all against the backdrop of the historically complex and ongoing social relation issues between Iraq's diverse populations (OCHA, 2020; Webb et al., 2018). Reports have identified the need for extensive support and development aid to be provided in order for life in Shingal to be possible, but despite pleas from the participants and the Yazidi community, these efforts seem to fall on deaf ears.

Genocide evokes a sense of betrayal and abandonment from its victims due to the sudden and shocking levels of violence inflicted upon them (van Zoonen & Wirya, 2017). The genocide of 2014 and centuries of persecution, isolation, and neglect have deeply impacted the Yazidis. Several participants shared concerns that the world has forgotten about them. Their lived experiences have been immersed in turmoil, frustration, and anger, and evoke a sense of being stuck, as the Yazidis feel they continue this battle on their own. Not only did the participants express feeling betrayed by locals and the Iraq government, but they also feel a sense of betrayal from the international community which continues to watch the suffering of their people and yet does nothing to prevent it.

Unknown Fate of Missing Yazidis "*How are we going to forget these people?*" Maha.

Besides feeling abandoned by the world and with 2,800 Yazidis still held in captivity, the Yazidis have many unanswered questions about the fate of their loved ones as mass graves and bones have yet to be (Kaya, 2019; Shilani, 2019; Al Jazzera, 2020: Al Arabiya, 2019). Adol expressed how hard it is to move on and be happy when there are so many unanswered questions about missing loved one, "I have my family around, I will be a little bit happy. The other Yazidis in captivity by ISIS, it's still a lot and we don't know anything about them. It's hard for us to keep going every day." Similarly, Habiya explained why it is so hard even if her family is not in

captivity. “It doesn’t have to be our sisters or our mother. All Yazidis, we are family.” Maha shared the difficulties she has had in moving on from these horrific experiences and the unknown nature of what happened to her and her loved ones:

> So my husband is missing. He was taken by ISIS and then my brother-in-law and my uncle and two other members of my family. They killed my three kids in front of my eyes. ISIS killed them. I’m never going to forget them. And my daughter, she was 12-years-old when ISIS took her away from me, and until a few months ago I didn’t know she was alive until she escaped from ISIS. She ran away from ISIS but still I haven't seen her because she’s in Iraq.
>
> How are we going to forget all these people? It’s not easy to just forget. We don’t even know if they are killed or alive. For sure they killed them, but we’re hoping they are not dead. We know my three kids - we know for sure they killed them because I saw it happen in front of my eyes. But my mom, we don’t know anything about her. We’re hoping they can all show up one day. We don’t know, but we’re just hoping for that.

The pain the Yazidis feel which was expressed by the participants is compounded by the fact that the fate of their family members and community is still unknown. Several participants talked about the mass graves in Iraq that contain the remains of murdered loved ones. Habiya said, “So about 15 days ago, they found about 400 people, Yazidi women, girls, children, and men. All of them were killed. ISIS killed them and they just found their bodies about 15 days ago.” Maha reflected on the difficult nature of not knowing whose bodies have been found:

> We are happy because we are Yazidi. That’s why ISIS did this to us because we are Yazidi. Now they found lots of bones of Yazidis that ISIS killed five years ago and in August [2019] they’re going to get everybody’s blood and they’re going to know whose

bones are there. Then they're going to give them to us and we can do whatever we want with the bones of our family.

It's really hard what happened to us. My four family members are in captivity by ISIS. We don't know if they have been killed or if they are still alive. We don't know any minute if ISIS is going to say, "We have killed your people." We just don't know. We are hoping they are not killed but we don't know anything.

In Syria I was in captivity and then they killed my three kids in front of my eyes. They took them from me. I don't know if they put the bodies in water or burned them. I didn't even see the bones. I don't know what they did to them.

Maha adamantly expressed her desire to find out what happened to her family and spoke with optimism as she shared they were going to take everyone's blood and find out if their loved ones had been murdered:

What about the bones from the ground? Even the world didn't do anything for the bones. Still there are thousands of our people still in captivity by ISIS and we don't know anything about them. About five years ago, ISIS killed Yazidis and still the bones are missing. Even though we want the bones of our people to be returned to us, nobody's doing anything.

We want the government to do something, to work on finding the bones of our people. We want to tell the world what happened to Yazidis, what ISIS did to us - the Yazidis killed by ISIS. We're not going to be finished until the world collects the bones of Yazidis.

Shirin discussed the turmoil this type of unknown loss has had on her:

It's been for five years and nobody is doing anything for Yazidis. Half of them are in captivity by ISIS and we don't know anything about them. Some of them killed, some of

> them - we don't know anything about what happened to them. The governments don't help us. Where are the people who are in captivity by ISIS? Or even the bones in the ground? For five years nobody is collecting them. They don't help us to find our people who are missing.

Ahlim echoed the concerns Maha and Shirin had about those Yazidis who were still missing and unaccounted for and how hard it was to keep moving along:

> It will never be forgotten. Every day, every night, I put my head down, I think about everything. Whoever has their families around, they are happy but if there are children missing or members of their families, they are still not happy. We still think about them and what happened back home.

The women expressed deep pain not only from the attacks on their people but about the unknown fate of missing loved ones who may still be in captivity or lying in mass graves in Iraq. Adol said:

> I am never going to be happy. We're never going to forget what happened to us. I have my family around. I will be a little bit happy. The other Yazidis in captivity by ISIS, it's still a lot. We don't know anything about them. It's hard for us to keep going every day.

Not knowing the fate of their missing or murdered loved ones can have a debilitating impact on survivors which include serious psychological harm and an increased likelihood of collective trauma (Eppel, 2006; Fics, 2015). Boss (1999) described the concept of ambiguous loss and the notion that people are frozen with their grief, unable to move on. Ambiguous loss, as experienced by the participants in this study, describes the idea that people are physically missing but psychologically present as it is unclear if they are alive or dead. Moving on from this ambiguity can be difficult as most people need concrete experiences to continue forward from

the physical loss of a loved one. Without the confirmation of a body, funeral, or ceremony, it can be difficult to process (Boss, 1999). The participants were very clear that knowing nearly 3,000 Yazidis were still in captivity and the fate of thousands may never be confirmed is a struggle they will continue to bear even if the loss was not direct.

Gaining Strength from Our Children, Community, and Yazidi Identity

"*My kids make me strong*" (Ahlim).

One goal of this research was to examine the protective factors Yazidis found helpful in moving forward from past difficulties, as the participants continued to be physically, emotionally, and psychologically connected to their past trauma. Similar to survivors of the Holocaust, the genocide inflicted on the Yazidis would not be forgotten and their experiences would stay with these survivors for as long as they lived. Despite the presence of trauma, many of the participants were able to share what motivated them to keep living and how they responded to their experiences of violence. Through this I was able to identify protective factors they gained strength from. Family, their children, religion, and their Yazidi identity all played an important role in keeping them strong each day.

When Habiya was asked what gives her strength, she shared:

> The day is not going to come back. I have my kids. I have to get up and stand on my feet. My children help me. I do it for my children. If I did not have my kids, I wouldn't be in Canada, I wouldn't have come here. It's because of my kids that I came here, for a better life.
>
> On the inside you're not happy. You're always worried about your family back home. It's not safe and it's still hard. I would like to be with my family. If I didn't have my kids with me I wouldn't be living. If not for my kids, I wouldn't be here in Canada.

Habiya's motivation to keep living are her four younger children and like many refugees, she came to Canada to provide them with a better more promising life.

Ahlim found herself in a similar situation and shared how difficult it was for her to come to Canada while leaving her husband and other children in Iraq. Referring to the ambiguous loss of not knowing if they were alive and still in captivity or if they had been killed, she said she cried every day when she first arrived and told her children she wanted to go back home. When asked how she dealt with these moments of sadness Ahlim said:

> My mom was trying to help me. She said, “You’re going to get used to it” and “your kids love it here,” and “if you go out, go to school, you’re going to be happy while you’re here.” My family helped me get through these hard times. My mom and my children. My kids make me strong. When I look at them, I sometimes want to cry but I stop and push myself not to. That’s how I keep myself strong.

I was shocked at how blasé Ahlim had appeared during our time together despite having to carry this burden. I asked her, “How do you keep going with all of that? With everything you’ve experienced?” She took a sip of her tea before looking at me and reiterated the strength she got from her children, “It’s hard to live sometimes, but because of my kids I stand up and keep myself strong.”

When Naqaba was asked how she gets through difficult times, she shared she takes medication from her doctor. “I have medication and I take the medication when I’m sad. The medication helps me to feel better. And if I look at my kids, I am strong because of my kids.” Naqaba said there were issues with her family after her husband had passed away, as her parents wanted her to move back home but leave her kids behind so she could get married again and start over. Naqaba refused. “After my husband passed away, I had problems with my family, my

siblings and my parents because they told me to leave my kids and come back home. I didn't listen to them and I don't talk to them." Regardless of the challenges Naqaba faced living life as a widow in Iraq, her children provided her with the strength to carry on and continues to do so to this day.

Several participants shared that their Yazidi identity also helps to keep them strong. They referred to identity as their community, religion, and past history. Maha said, "We are born Yazidi. Our grandparents are Yazidi, that's how we came to be Yazidi. We are happy because we are Yazidi." Nassima shared her community and the hope of being reunited with her community kept her strong:

> I am happy when the community is together. We just talk, we feel happy when we see each other, talk to each other. We just talk about everything and share. My community is important to me. I know there are other people just like me. We worry about our families and the people with ISIS, but we just try to keep ourselves happy and go forward.
>
> I keep myself strong. One time the government said, "We're going to bring more Yazidis" and I was really happy. Also, Nafiya is doing a lot for us. Nafiya is just like my family in Iraq. So that's how I am strong, because of Nafiya. I get inspired from other people in my community. Nafiya is doing a lot for us, anything we need. It's only her, we have only her. She feels just like my family.

Another factor in their identity that brought the participants strength was their religion and the resiliency of their community. Habiya said:

> That's why we're here, because of our religion. ISIS told us, "You're going to be Muslim" but we don't want to be Muslim. That's why we ran away. They killed us because we are Yazidi. That's why we're here, because of our religion. But I like my

> religion. I like to be Yazidi. I have no choice. I have to keep myself happy and just pray and that's all we can do. We have nothing else to do.
>
> They have been killing us for many, many years. There are always Muslims around and they try to kill us, but the most important thing is when we are together. That's what makes us happy. That's the only thing that makes us happy.

What keeps Shirin strong was the importance of her identity as well as the unique bond and experiences that the Yazidis share, "We've been through a lot and we see everything. Tomorrow is August 3 when ISIS took over. It's tomorrow, August 3. We see everything, that's why we're strong. We have hope, we're never going to give up."

Avin echoed the hopefulness that Shirin discussed, "We feel hopeful because it's safe here and because of my kids. I do think about my family in Iraq and pray for them. God helps them and that's all I can do." Despite the difficult experiences the participants shared, there were moments of happiness that seeped through our conversations which pertained to family, community, and religion, and in addition to their children, these factors gave them the strength to carry on. However, it was apparent that some of the participants were still living in survival mode, even as they were moving forward despite the tremendous hardships they endured. Maha said:

> We have no choice. We have to be strong. Life is not stopping. Life keeps going. If we're doing something and we don't want to do it, we have no choice. We have to get up on our feet and we have to just do it. We just have to work on life. We've been like this for five years. We've been crying every day and are worried and sad, but there's nothing we can do.

When Adol was asked how she continued to be strong, she said:

> Life is not going to stop. Life keeps going, life keeps going. Whatever happened, you cannot bring back what happened and fix it. We tell ourselves, you need to do something and we're never going to forget what happened, but that's how life is.

Ahlim as been emboldened by her growing independence, "Slowly I am getting better. I know how to go shopping which makes me happy now, and when I am sad I go see my [Yazidi] neighbours or go for a walk."

All the women experienced hardships growing up in Iraq, including being poorly marginalized by their government as well as being misunderstood by outsiders which has resulted in centuries of discrimination and persecution. The events of August 2014 exacerbated their historical knowledge of genocide as they directly experienced the 74th Ferman against their people, but at the same time, the strength and perseverance they have comes from the strength of their people. Shirin eloquently summed up the Yazidi experience and continued determination to survive. "We do have hope, we're never going to give up." The participants shared their ability to respond to the horrific violence their community experienced by identifying their protective factors, including their family, children, religion, culture, and identity. These help them to carry their stories.

Sharing Our Stories

"*I want you to share my story*" (Maha).

There is much research that shows the importance of sharing one's stories and listening to a life story (Mollica, 2014; Reimer et al., 2015; Senehi, 2009; Stewart et al., 2015). Sharing personal narratives can help shift ideologies, and for the Yazidis who have experienced centuries of persecution and have been wrongly labeled as "devil worshippers", it is important their stories be shared (Allison, 2018; Langer, 2010, Maisel, 2008; Senehi, 2009; Spät, 2005). All participants

in this study shared their personal narratives and lived experiences as a Yazidi woman. For Ahlim and Maha, it was particularly important to share their experiences of being in captivity by Daesh, Maha said:

> I said if I go a different country, I'm going to share the story of what happened to the Yazidis and what happened to my kids. I came with no help. I didn't see help around, I didn't see anybody wanting to hear my story and share it with the world.

When I entered her apartment, Maha was reserved and solemn, and she physically carried the burden of her experiences. Meeting Maha and hearing her story was one of the hardest interviews I conducted for this study. We met for over two hours and through much of it, Maha cried.

It was hard for me to hear about her time in captivity which totaled two-and-a-half years, during which she was separated from her family, gave birth to a baby, and witnessed the murder of her three youngest children. She experienced unimaginable violence at the hands of Daesh. It was hard to understand how people could commit such heinous acts against her and her community. It was hard to sit with her and hear her stories while she wept in pain for her family and the loss of her children because there was nothing I could do to help her. All I could do was sit with her and try to find the right words to console, comfort, and validate her experience.

Maha expressed her frustration in addition to the grief and defeat she felt with the lack of support she and her community received. "We want to tell everybody in the world what happened. But even if we share our story, it doesn't matter, nobody's helping. We want help, lots of help, but nobody's helping." Maha paused a moment before continuing, "I have my story. Can I share it?" This is Maha's story.

My name is Maha. I am 31 years old and I am Yazidi. My whole family and I were taken by ISIS when they invaded my home in Shingal in August 2014. Before that, it was just a normal life. My husband was working and I stayed home with the kids. Then ISIS took over and I was captive for two-and-a-half years. When ISIS came, they separated us, the men and the women. They separated me from my family and I was only with my youngest children. I was seven months pregnant when I was captured by ISIS. In captivity, they would not feed us a lot and they would not let us speak our language. We were kept together with lots of other Yazidis and our children were crying all the time. It was very hard. They sold us many times, sometimes as gifts, other times we were bought by ISIS fighters. I was given to a soldier in Syria and gave birth to my son while in captivity. I tried to run away from him but Syria was full of ISIS fighters and I was caught by his friend and returned to my captor. He was mad and beat me up. He could not understand why I was trying to save the infidels, my children. He told me if I tried to escape again he would kill us.

I knew it was dangerous but I needed to escape, so I tried again. This time I got a bit farther but again was captured and returned to the ISIS solider who owned me. This time he killed my three kids in front of my eyes. He took my son and daughter and my newborn son who was not even six months old. He took them away and brought them back to me after an hour, but when they came back they had bumps all over their bodies. They were crying and throwing up. I was hysterical, crying, and screaming, I was so scared for them. The ISIS solider laughed and said, “I poisoned the infidels.” I begged him to take them to the hospital and he did, but it was too late.

> My infant son died in my arms and my other two children died shortly after. After they died, they took them from me. I don't know if they put them in water, or burned their bodies, I didn't even see the bones. I don't know what they did to them. They put me and my older daughter in jail. I was broken, I wanted to die. I hit my head against the wall until blood ran down my face.
>
> What did my children and newborn baby do to deserve to be killed? How am I going to forget this? Four of my family members, including my oldest daughter and husband, are still in captivity by ISIS. We don't know if they killed them or if they are still alive. We don't know any minute if ISIS is going to say, "We kill your people." We just don't know. We are hoping they're not killed but we don't know anything. It is very hard to not know.

Maha's story is hard to read and comprehend. Knowing this is Maha's experience and that she is a survivor makes you wonder how she could go on after suffering the losses she has had. Despite the difficulty in reading her story, it is important that we listen, acknowledge her truth, and bear witness to her experience.

Maha acknowledged the shared experience of her community and agreed that every story and experience is different and unique:

> I know it happened to all the Yazidis in Shingal, but what happened to me didn't happen to anybody else. My story is very important to me, even though my story is hard with my three young kids. It's really hard for me because they killed three of my kids in front of my eyes. Always I see them. Even if I die, I am never going to forgot them and what ISIS did to them.

When asked if sharing the stories of Yazidi survivors was important, Habiya said:

> It is when people want to hear our story. I think everybody hears about our stories and what happened to the Yazidis and what they did to the women, girls, and children. I think it's very important for everybody to hear our stories.

Regardless of the desire to their stories, both Maha and Adol expressed the depth of pain these experiences have had on them. Adol said, "We're never going to be finished our story. We're never going to forgot. Most of the night we don't sleep because of all the things we've been through. It's not easy." Similarly, Maha said, "Even if you tell someone, nobody's going to believe it. It's never going to be over."

Being able to share one's story can have a powerful impact on the teller, but also an impact on the listener. When power dynamics are at play in the ability to share a story, the voices of marginalized individuals often go unheard, and thus acknowledging and healing from past traumas may never occur (Senehi, 2009). When marginalized groups like the Yazidis are given the opportunity to share their lived experiences, this helps to empower them as well as providing an opportunity for their stories to be heard by outsiders (Lawless, 2001; Senehi, 2009). Reimer et al. (2015) argue that when individuals are invited to share their personal stories, it provides an opportunity for both the teller and listener to make sense of their lives and experiences (Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014; Stewart et al., 2015). In addition, sharing stories helps to break down barriers between different cultural groups and provides an opportunity for change.

As Maha said, the Yazidis cannot move on without the help of others:

> We want all the world to hear our story. That's what we want and what we're looking for. Maybe it will help. We have nothing else to do and that's why we want you to hear our stories. Maybe then you will help us.

The participants want the world to know what happened to them on August 2014, and by many accounts these lived experiences have not reached the greater community. There is an immense opportunity to learn from the experiences of the Yazidis and only through the sharing of these stories will this knowledge come to fruition.

Future Challenges and Opportunities for Our Children

"*I'm hoping that what I see, my kids don't see*" (Habiya).

Considering their tight-knit nature and historically isolated community, being forced to resettle around the world will mean the next several decades will play an important role in the identity of the Yazidis and the fate of this ethnic minority group as they learn to navigate a new way of life (Allison, 2018). The participants were asked about their future and the future for Yazidis around the world. Many of the women expressed hope for their children and it became evident the importance Yazidi children have on their families and community. When Ahlim was asked what her hopes were for her children, she said, "School before everything. I want them to finish school first. Then take care of me and take care of themselves." Naqaba also recognized the value of school and the important opportunity it would provide for her children despite not being able to go to school herself. "I want them to go to school and finish school one day. I want to learn English too, and I want to learn how to drive a car. And to work one day."

Shirin acknowledged the challenges her family and young children will face in being away from their community and homeland. She said, "It's hard when we grow up here. The kids are going to forget our families, our language and they don't know who they are. They are going to follow Canadian culture." When asked what she plans to do to help her children remember, Shirin said, "We are going to teach them who we are and that this is our language." After being in Canada for less than three years she already recognized her children were starting to forget.

"They forget things but we remind them. We bring it up all the time. If we leave them, of course they are going to forget." Shirin emphasized that in addition to carrying the burden of their experiences of violence, they are also faced with the responsibility of instilling their Yazidi identity in their children who will grow up away from their community and homeland.

Shirin was not the only participant to share the important role the older generations have in sharing their faith with those growing up in a different world. Avin said, "I am going to keep teaching them. If they forget, they forget. I can't do anything else but teach them." Nassima echoed this sentiment, "I'm not going to let my kids forget. We're going to teach them every day that we are Yazidis and this is our religion. I'll pass it on to them by teaching them." These challenges are immense, and the changes and shifting identities will impact the new generations of Yazidis who will be born away from their homeland and way of life. The Yazidis must learn how to navigate these new and complex environments as they try to maintain their culture, faith, and identity.

Regardless of their determination to pass on their culture, faith, and way of life, the participants were aware of the issues facing their community. Habiya discussed these challenges:

> I don't know what the future holds for my children, my family, or for Yazidis, but I think it's going to be hard for us. We know Canada is safe and it's good for our kids, but when our kids grow up, they're not going to see family around. They're not going to know each other. They're going to forget each other. I think it will be really hard for the kids when they grow up.

Avin acknowledged the struggles facing Yazidis in wanting to maintain their identity:

> Everybody's different. Some of them will follow the culture and religion and some of them, they don't. They do things differently because they don't want to be Yazidi

> anymore. Some of them want to follow the religion of Yazidi. They want to be Yazidi because they believe it - the religion, but some of them, they don't want to. It's going to be hard living away from our homeland and our history.
>
> Some of us are scared because our kids are going to forget their religion and their culture. That's why we're scared, for the kids. Everybody's different. Some of them believe their kids. They say, "They're not going to forget the culture and who they are. They are Yazidi." But some of them don't care even if they forgot about being Yazidi.

Ahlim said the next generation of Yazidis born away from Shingal will be the same as Canadians, "They're going to be the same like Canadians. It's the parents, if the parents teach them who they are and tell them "you are Yazidi", then hopefully they are not going to forget." It became clear the participants worried about their children's future and the new generations in maintaining their identity.

Naqaba, although aware of this issue, acknowledged that despite this, her children would have much more opportunity in Canada than they would in Iraq. She agreed with Habiya, Ahlim, and Avin but still felt it was better for her children to be Yazidi in Canada than a Yazidi in Iraq. Naqaba shared:

> Not everybody is going to follow the other religion. Sometimes I get scared because I think maybe my children are going to change one day, but you never know what's going to happen when they grow up. I want to see my kids here all the time, not in Iraq because they couldn't even go to school there and we had no money to live and it was really hard, especially with my daughter and her disability. They didn't do anything for her.

Naqaba's faith in her children is strong. She is hopeful they will stay close to their roots and maintain their identity as they have the opportunity to live a good life in Canada.

Ahlim hoped the Yazidi community in Winnipeg and those around the world will continue to grow and the large Yazidi diaspora will carry on its religion and identity, "It's a very small Yazidi community in Winnipeg. More Yazidis would be nice. It would be better if all of us were together, but now we are everywhere; the USA, Germany, Australia, everywhere." Habiya echoed this statement:

> We know we're safe here but if I could, I would ask the Government of Canada to bring our families, bring more Yazidi families to Canada and then we can be happy, a little bit more than we are now. Everybody is heartbroken with what we see, what we've been through, and to let us bring our families, like one sister or one brother, it doesn't matter, just so we can be a little happier.

Increasing the Yazidi community in Winnipeg to help support Yazidis here was also something Maha discussed:

> Of course it's going to be a better life if my parents and siblings were here. Of course for Yazidis, we're all brother and sister and it would be a better life if we were together. We're not going to be worried that much. We know it's not safe and it's very dangerous in Iraq. That's why we're very worried about them. We wish everybody who is Yazidis would be here but we can't do anything. This is the government's job. They need to do something for Yazidis.

The communal and family-oriented nature of the Yazidis has made it hard for the participants to successfully integrate into their new lives as they face ongoing stress, worrying about those left behind as well as what the future will hold for their children and community.

Shirin expressed the challenges facing the Yazidi diaspora, "It's really hard to be a Yazidi woman, but we understand who we are. We are Yazidi and we need to follow the culture

even here in Canada. We have to follow the Yazidi culture." Regardless of the challenges facing Yazidis around the world, Yazidis are still hopeful. Avin shared, "I do have hope because I'm in Canada." Habiya is also hopeful that things will now be different for her people and her children will not experience the pain and suffering that she did:

> I'm hoping that what I see, my kids don't see. What I've been through, I don't want my kids to go through. Whatever they want to be when they grow up, they can be. It's their choice. As long as they don't see what I see, it doesn't matter what they do in Canada.

The participants expressed varying thoughts on the future of their children and Yazidis. On the one hand, they noted the challenges their children will face being raised away from their family, community, and homeland, while one participant acknowledged the opportunities her children will have in Canada. It is clear the Yazidis require security and stability for their future. They have a long road of healing and recovery before it is clear which path future generations will take.

Conclusion

This section presented information on the key themes that were shared during the interview process which discuss the experiences of the participants after the violence of August 2014. These themes include: (1) Shingal is Home but it is Not Safe for Yazidis; (2) Canada is Good, but Life is Hard; (3) The World Has Forgotten, But We Will Never Forget; (4) Unknown Fate of Missing Yazidis; (5) Gaining Strength from Our Children, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (6) Share Our Story; and (7) Future Challenges and Opportunities for Our Children. The participants discussed issues pertaining to safety and security in Shingal, identified protective factors they use to respond to their experiences with violence and trauma which help keep them strong, the importance of sharing their lived experiences, and being stuck while the world has

moved on. It is evident that the Yazidis, a tight-knit and closed community, will face further challenges as new generations are born outside of Shingal, potentially shifting the Yazidi religion and identity from what it historically has been. As participants try to navigate their new lives in Canada, they continued to be burdened by what happened to their community and the lack of support they have received.

Reflections and Conclusion

As the participants shared their experiences, it became apparent that the violent events of August 2014 acted as a gateway between two periods: their experiences of violence with the invasion of Daesh, and the post-violence events that have transpired over the last six years. The personal narratives and lived experiences presented in this thesis revealed that participants continue to experience extensive trauma, not only from the events of August 2014, but also from the historical persecution and marginalization they have faced. The lived experiences shared by the eight women in this study help to identify the complex and ongoing challenges this ethnic-minority group continue to experience as well as the coping mechanisms they identified that help keep them strong. This final section reflects onthe key findings, the impact of sharing and hearing stories, areas of recommendation, and suggestions for future research.

Reflections on Key Findings

The lived experiences gathered throughout this research provide unique insight into the ongoing challenges the participants have faced. By analyzing their personal narratives, it was evident the violence endured by their people have impacted the women immensely, and themes emerged that focused on the period of violence and their post-violence experiences. The themes in section five focus on the period of violence and were broken into six sections: (1) Life in Shingal was Simple But difficult; (2) Traditional Gender Roles and Newfound Freedom; (3) Importance of Kinship, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (4) I Want You to Know What Happened on August 3, 2014; (5) Betrayal from Our Neighbours; and (6) Life is Hard in the Refugee Camp.

Although my goal was to gather information on their experiences of life in Shingal, all responses were connected to the atrocities committed by Daesh, which shows the level of trauma

still experienced by the participants. It came down to the fact that life in Shingal was simple but difficult. The participants discussed the historical challenges their people faced in Iraq, which included contested land rights, issues between Muslims and Yazidis, and the ongoing threat of violence inflicted on them. In addition, it is evident they were treated as marginalized citizens who often lived a very tough life.

Gender dynamics heavily influenced the participants. All eight women had either never gone to school before, or only for a short period of time. They all followed the traditional roles that women occupied in Shingal which included getting married, having a large family, taking care of the husband and children, and being responsible for the domestic sphere. Since leaving Shingal, the women have gotten used to the gender dynamics outside of Iraq and some were even happy for the newfound freedom they had.

Regardless of the challenges, the participants expressed their happiness and content prior to August 2014, and much of this stemmed from the closeness of their families and community as well as the connection to their land, religion, and Yazidi identity. As a result of centuries of persecution, the Yazidis became heavily dependent on themselves and this has ultimately strengthened their collective identity. At the same time, the participants discussed the debilitating events that transpired in August 2014, which touched the lives of every Yazidi in Shingal and led to the exodus of their people from their traditional homeland. It became clear early on in the interviews that this invasion acted as a gateway between the two lives for the participants. Prior to the violence of 2014, their lives was simple but good, and after Daesh they struggled to cope and move forward.

The participants struggled to not only understand the genocide, but to comprehend the betrayal they felt from their neighbours, the local government, and the international community.

Naqaba expressed pain and anger when she reflected on the *Peshmerga* forces assigned to protect her community, who fled without evacuating the people they were supposed to protect, leaving Yazidis vulnerable to Daesh. Several participants said it was their Muslim neighbours who helped Daesh to expose and kill the Yazidis. This sense of betrayal permeated through all of my meetings as the women shared their sense of isolation within Iraq and felt their community continued to suffer alone.

The last section discussed connected to life in the refugee camps. Daily challenges included access to basic necessitates such as water, electricity, and safety. The participants said their lives in the refugee camp were very hard and they all had a very terrible time. As the Yazidis were settled in these camps, many were separated from their families and community and found themselves living among a diverse population of Iraqis. The participants explained that many of their family members and Yazidis of Shingal are still living in these refugee camps because there is nothing in Shingal to return to, coupled with the ongoing fear of persecution in Iraq.

The sixth section focused on the experiences of the participants after the period of violence. Themes include (1) Shingal is Home, But It is Not Safe for Yazidis; (2) Canada is Good, but Life is Hard; (3) The World Has Forgotten, But We Will Never Forget; (4) Gaining Strength from Our Children, Community, and Yazidi Identity; (5) Sharing Our Stories; and (6) Future Challenges and Opportunities for Our Children. The participants discussed the issue of safety and security in Shingal and what that meant for Yazidis who remained stuck there. After 74 campaigns of genocide, they expressed doubts that the Yazidis would ever live in peace, while at the same time, leaving home was not their choice and they would have remained if the circumstances were different. Maha and Avin both shared that if they had not been attacked in

August 2014, they would not have come to Canada since Shingal is where they were born. It is their home.

They also discussed the ongoing presence of Daesh. Despite international governments reclaiming land occupied by Daesh, the extreme ideology is still present and mounting evidence suggests that Daesh is resurging in areas of Iraq and Syria. In addition to concerns with safety, there is extensive damage to the Shingal area, including environmental destruction which makes it nearly impossible for the Yazidis to return home.

All the participants expressed their gratitude for being resettled in Canada and felt happy they were safe. At the same time, they also described the challenges, such as the cultural differences between their life in Shingal and new life in Winnipeg. Many Yazidis, although resettled in two clusters around the city, still felt isolated and alone. Ahlim said that in Shingal, the Yazidis community was together. Everywhere she went, she saw her community, but here she doesn't see them unless she goes to community events.

Similarly, the participants mentioned the challenges they had in adapting and learning everything in their new lives. Habiya referred to their experiences as being like a newborn baby; they must relearn everything they thought they knew about life. Resettling in Canada meant they would no longer be surrounded by their community or families. Most of the women said their families came to Canada so their children could have a better future, which included peace and safety. They explained they missed their family back home and their life in Canada would be so much better if they were all together.

Another challenge identified was that being in Canada did not erase what happened to them. Many shared they still cried every day because of the violence inflicted upon

their people. These daily challenges further complicated their adjustment and resettlement in Canada.

The participants also felt frustrated and alone, feeling they have been forgotten and the world has moved on while Yazidis continue to be stuck and require help. The participants also have many unanswered questions about the fate of their loved ones, as mass graves and bones have yet to be analyzed, also, between 2,000 to 3,000 Yazidis are believed to still be in captivity by Daesh.

As the interviews progressed, it became apparent the participants were still physically and emotionally connected to their past trauma, but at the same time, they shared the protective factors that helped them respond to their experiences with violence and trauma and motivated them to keep living. These factors included their children and family, their religion, and their identity. It could be argued that centuries of genocides have required the Yazidis to develop coping mechanisms to help with their survival and the ability to self-heal after ongoing atrocities are committed against their community. These protective factors have helped participants move forward with their lives to keep them strong in the face of adversity. Many participants said they got up every day because the day is going to come no matter what. Similarly, they expressed that what's done is done and nothing can go back and fix what has happened to them.

It was apparent the women wanted their stories to be told. Both Maha and Ahlim explicitly expressed a desire to share their time in captivity. Maha said that the only reason she came to Canada was to tell her story and tell people what happened to her and her people.

Discussions about the future of the Yazidis was the last theme to emerge in this section. The participants explained that raising their children away from their homeland and community was going to be hard, but it was very important to teach and remind them so they would not

forget their history. At the same time, they acknowledged the challenges facing their families and their community as they found themselves scattered around the world.

Shirin shared that despite being in Canada for less than three years, her children were already starting to forget things like their family, their language, and who they are. There is the concern their children will grow up, change, and follow Canadian culture. Despite not knowing what the future holds for their children or their people, the participants have hope that things will be better for new generations. Habiya said she does not want her kids to see what she has seen. It is too early to know how the future will unfold for Yazidis in Iraq or their diaspora. At present, they have a long road of healing and recovery ahead of them and establishing safety, security, and stability will be required for this group before anyone can speculate on what path future generations will take.

The Impact of Sharing and Hearing Stories

Sharing stories and lived experiences can only happen when the storyteller is ready to share and when they do, their stories need to be heard by the listener or audience. The relationship between the storyteller and listener is important. It is important to bear witness to a story because we are partaking in the historical process of telling the story (Mollica, 2014). The listener not only becomes more knowledgeable about the lived experience of the storyteller, but also understands the pain, trauma, resiliency, and strength of the storyteller (Mollica, 2006; Mollica, 2014). In exploring lived experiences, the storyteller is the teacher and the listener is the student (Mollica, 2006). In the case of research, the listener is also the researcher.

It is important to pay attention to the transfer of trauma through the telling of a story. As a listener, I was greatly moved and inspired by the lived experiences of these women. Throughout the interviews, I felt it was important to maintain my composure while at the same

time be empathetic to their experiences. I was moved during the telling of their stories and found that afterwards I began to relive and reflect on what had been shared.

In particular, I recall interviewing Habiya and Maha on the same day over the duration of five hours. Both expressed deep pain and sadness throughout the telling of their stories which included crying and long pauses in our conversation. I was not sure how our time would conclude, but eventually both women expressed that was all they could share for that day. As Habiya thanked me for coming to visit her, she said, "Our story is never going to be finished. Even if we sit here for one more year."

By the end of that day, I was physically and emotionally drained as well as shocked and horrified by the actions inflicted by one human to another. I left with a heaviness I did not have before. After our meeting I realized the significance of this work and the privilege I have in sharing their stories. It awoke me to the severity of the situation facing the Yazidis and the participants. I set out to avoid these conversations, and yet they needed to be told.

I completed the remaining interviews with a cautious expectation that these stories were an active part of the Yazidi narrative, and became a sensitive and empathetic listener. After completing the interviews, it was important for me to carefully analyze the data to see what the participants were trying to say. It took nearly three months of analyzing, reflecting, and going back to my notes to feel I had done justice to their experiences through the themes that emerged.

An important process throughout this research has been the impact of hearing these stories as a listener and dealing with the impact of secondary trauma. It was important I ground myself throughout this journey, so I sought ways to cope with holding these stories. It has been a difficult journey for me as a writer and I often journaled about these emotions. It was critical to remember that giving these women a voice is why I was doing this research. They are teaching

us how to live with and respond to violence and trauma. They are the reason for this thesis and it is important their stories are carried forward and provide an opportunity for further discussion.

Recommendations

Presented below are seven recommendations for moving forward based on this study. They include: (1) the need to share and listen to trauma stories; (2) the need for closure on missing loved ones; (3) timely family reunification; (4) support for Shingal; (5) reconciliation; (6) the value of the community-based farming program; and (7) the need for the further resettlement of Yazidi refugees. These recommendations are important to consider when looking at the complex experiences of the Yazidis as well as helping the community to move forward with their experiences of violence and trauma.

Sharing and Listening to Trauma Stories

It became evident in this study that the participants wanted to share their trauma stories. Going into the interviews, I was mindful of these experiences and hesitant for them to be shared as I was concerned about retraumatizing the women. Regardless of my intentions, without being asked, they chose to disclose these narratives, often asking if they could share their stories with me.

It was essential for their stories to be told during our time together and it was important that I took part in witnessing their experiences. A key finding of this study shows the value of meeting people where they are at and allowing survivors to be in control of the conversations. In telling trauma stories, survivors need to be allowed to tell their stories in their own way.

Mollica (2006) argues that survivors are often afraid of being able to reconnect with others after they experience atrocities of violence and genocide, fearful they will never be "normal" again in their human connection. When we shy away from conversations with

survivors about their trauma stories, we convey the message their experiences do not matter and thus reinforce the feelings of humiliation instilled by their perpetrators (Mollica, 2006). The denial of listening to and acknowledging these experiences perpetuate feelings of marginalization as survivors feel no one cares about their lived experiences.

Similarly, having a listener is part of the healing process in addition to the fact that sharing pain and suffering helps to alleviate it (Mollica, 2006). Allowing the participants to share at will about their horrific experiences provides them with the opportunity for healing. It is important their stories are heard and understood by the listener to ensure we can apply these lessons of survival (Mollica, 2014). By hearing these stories, we can better understand the Yazidi experience and provide support to their community.

The Need for Closure on Missing Loved Ones

The participants alluded to the fact they are stuck and unable to move forward as a result of many unanswered questions. This includes missing loved ones and community members who have either been killed or were abducted by Deash. In order to find closure on these experiences, they need answers and need to know what happened to their missing children, family members, and community.

Those who did not escape were either killed or abducted. Although some deaths and abductions have been confirmed by eyewitnesses, many Yazidis are still waiting to hear the fate of their loved ones. At present, there are between 2,000 to 3,000 Yazidis still believed to be in captivity (Kaya, 2019; Shilani, 2019; Al Arabiya, 2019). All the participants discussed the impact of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones and how difficult it is to move on without knowing if they are alive or dead. Many of the women also spoke about the mass graves and bones of Yazidis that hold some answers to their questions. Maha is just one Yazidi who is

still waiting for answers. Without analyzing the bones found in the mass gravesites in northern Iraq, many Yazidis will remain wondering, hoping, and questioning the whereabouts of their loved ones. Unable to move on, the participants were adamant this situation must be resolved so they can find closure. Even if not directly impacted by this loss, the collective nature of Yazidism evoked a sense of longing for those who are missing.

This recommendation would be for governments and international bodies to focus on exhuming the mass graves and analyze the bones in a swift and dignified manner to determine who these victims were. Although the process of exhumation has begun in Shingal, the process is slow and confirmation of findings is at risk due to poorly managed gravesites over the last six years. Due to the volume of identification required, Iraq has been inundated with DNA, slowing the process considerably (al-Taie, 2020). This delay will not only impact community members who will have to wait for identification, but due to the poorly maintained gravesites, the delay will make it more difficult to identify the remains.

It is paramount the international community steps in to help locate and rescue the nearly 3,000 Yazidis still in captivity. The longer it takes to find them, the more challenging it will be. As Daesh fell from power in 2019, the need for finances to support the caliphate and soldiers increased. This has seen an increase in ransom payments demanded of families hoping to free their loved ones in captivity, many of whom do not have the financial resources to pay these exorbitant amounts (Ahmado, 2020). Another challenge is that many loyal to Daesh have fled to conflict areas in Syria, making location and rescue efforts nearly impossible (Ahmado, 2020). Both of these issues continue to plague the Yazidi community as they wait for answers, and the participants expressed the challenges they face in moving forward with so many unanswered questions.

Yazidis are experiencing ambiguous loss surrounding the missing men, women, and children who were abducted or killed during the Daesh invasion (Boss, 1999). The participants want to know the fate of their loved ones, and through the process of exhuming the mass graves there is the possibility they will know what happened. It is also important for the Yazidis to find closure on what has happened to their missing loved ones, knowing that nearly 3,000 remain in captivity and are unaccounted for. Establishing supports to help deal with ambiguous loss as well as prioritizing the identification and location of those still missing is a small step towards healing for this community. Only then will they be able to gain some closure around their unresolved grief.

Timely Family Reunification

Although this research did not look into the reunification of loved ones, Maha shared that despite her daughter escaping her captors in early 2019, as of July 2019 when we met, they still had not be reunited. As hard as it is to not know what happened to family members, having loved ones freed but being physically separated through resettlement is not much better, as Maha shared. She expressed the extreme pain she continues to feel as well as her sense of hopelessness that she and her daughter have not been reunited. Due to the nature of the 2014 invasion coupled with the strategy to quickly resettle vulnerable survivors of Daesh, many Yazidis face similar experiences. In 2017 Emad Mishko Tamo, a twelve-year-old boy who spent years in captivity by Daesh, was quickly reunited with his mother who had resettled in Winnipeg with the help of advocacy groups (Thorphe, 2017).

For refugees resettling in Canada, there is a one-year window for family reunification if sponsored refugees include these family members on their application form. The violent and protracted issue of Yazidis still missing or in captivity has complicated this process. Firstly,

many Yazidis did not list family members on their application form when they were resettled as they believed them to be dead, so in some situations there is a complex legal process that must take place before they can be reunited (House of Commons Standing Committee, 2018). Secondly, the one-year window was not a feasible amount of time considering the high number of those still missing when Canada began sponsoring survivors of Daesh in 2017. As a result, the Canadian government has temporarily extended this one-year window (Carbert, 2018).

Despite the extension, there is a need within the Yazidi community to prioritize the reunification process. Considering Maha's daughter is not yet an adult, the fact that she had not been reunited within six months of escaping captivity is six months too long for Maha. Prioritizing and speeding up the process for the reunification of families who were separated during this invasion is an important issue, as many resettled around the globe due to a lack of safety they felt back home. Being further penalized for these choices by a slow reunification process is hindering the ability of individuals like Maha and her daughter to move forward with their lives.

Support for Shingal

There are several issues in Shingal that continue to hinder and prevent the return of displaced Yazidis. At present, 200,000 Yazidis remain in the inhospitable region of Mount Shingal where they fled in 2014, or in refugee camps due to their inability to return home (United Nations Development Program, 2020). The issues in Shingal are vast but can be divided into two major factors. The first issue impeding the return of the Yazidis is around safety and security, which permeated throughout my conversations with the participants who stated that Shingal was not safe for Yazidis. The second issue is due to the level of destruction inflicted on

the Shingal region during the invasion, Daesh occupation, and liberation that destroyed the area (Amnesty International, 2018; United Nations Development Program, 2020).

Communities around the world as well as the Iraqi government need to support the rebuilding of Shingal in northern Iraq. Due to the continued increase of refugees around the world, the resettlement of all refuges, including Yazidis, is likely not possible. At the same time, the areas of Shingal and Sheikhan play an important role in the history and identity of the Yazidis and without support, the future for them will be left in a precarious situation. It is important that international governments work towards establishing peace and security in countries plagued by conflict, in addition to investing and rebuilding cities and countries devastated by violence.

These efforts should include a coordinated plan to include the Yazidi community in re-establishing safety in the region, providing manpower and much needed financial support, and dealing with the issue of non-state armed groups in the area. As evident throughout this thesis, the participants expressed doubt and concern that Shingal would ever be safe. Yazidis need to be involved in re-establishing safety in the region and governments need to prioritize the safety of this community, not only due to the horrific events of 2014 but also because of the historical persecution the Yazidis have experienced.

Reconciliation

In addition to the need for safety, security, and physically rebuilding Shingal, there is also a need for social reconciliation between Yazidis and Muslims in the region. The participants expressed anger and fear towards those Muslims in Shingal, stating their own neighbours participated in the atrocities committed against them. Research conducted among Yazidis also

echoes the concerns of the participants, that their community will never be safe in Shingal if Muslims continue to live there (Abouzeid, 2018).

Due to the ruptured relationship between Yazidis and Muslims in Shingal, reconciliation and repair need to take place if there is any hope to return Yazidis to their homes in northern Iraq. Reconciliation is a complex, subjective, and nonlinear process. It occurs in differing degrees within the individual and collective levels, and is not necessarily experienced by everyone at the same time or in the same way (Kriesberg, 2009). Several elements are important to consider, including justice, an apology, equal rights, acknowledging the past, and having a shared vision for the future (van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018). Research conducted within the Yazidi community in 2016 identified three key areas that needed to be stabilized before any reconciliation could take place. These included the need for justice, security, and reparations (van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018).

Justice is an important process for reconciliation that includes establishing laws to ensure that further injustices do not take place. For Yazidis this also would include social, economic, and cultural rights of minorities in Iraq as well as political representation (Kriesberg, 2009; van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018; Yazda, n.d.). Retributive justice would be another important factor for the community to ensure perpetrators were held accountable for their actions with the desire for an international court to ensure a fair, unbiased trial (Kriesberg, 2009; Al Jazeera, 2020; van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018). Reparation is a key factor in the process towards reconciliation and pertains to the restoration and rehabilitation of Shingal (van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018). Acknowledging the damage inflicted on their community and making concrete efforts to improve the living conditions in Shingal would be a critical step towards reconciliation.

Security is another important factor in reconciliation which includes the notion that individuals previously targeted are guaranteed safety from further mistreatment and human rights violations (Kriesberg, 2009). Due to the tension surrounding the withdrawal of the *Peshmerga* as Daesh advanced, there has been a need for Yazidis to carry arms and defend themselves from further attacks in order to feel safe, including support for a Yazidi armed group such as the Shingal Resistance Units (van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018). Security also includes tension around the acceptance and reintegration of women who experienced sexual violence at the hands of Daesh as well as children born of rape (Vale, 2020). Considering that nearly all the families of Shingal were impacted by this genocide, Yazidi spiritual leader Baba Sheikh welcomed the women back but the issue of children born from rape continues to be a contentious issue within the community (Omarkhali, 2016; Vale, 2020; van Zooneen & Wirya, 2018). The road to reconciliation is a long and complex process which could take years, if not decades, and will require investment and dedication from the Yazidi community, local governments, and the international community to help transcend this process.

The Value of the Community-Based Farming Program

The eight women shared the benefits of participating in a community-based farming program organized through Operation Ezra. These conversations emerged without being asked for and yet provided an opportunity for the women to talk positively about their new life in Canada. Many expressed a desire to do this activity every day and were sad that it happened every couple of weeks. Not only did they find joy, connectedness, and a sense of belonging, it also provided them the opportunity to sell their produce at the farmer's market and bring food home to their families.

As outlined in section three, nature can aid in the healing of past trauma and promote overall well-being. Continuing to invest financially to support this farming activity as well as providing land to the Yazidi community in Winnipeg will allow them to participate in this initiative which has proven to have a tremendously positive impact on the entire community. Providing Yazidis with the opportunity to connect to their traditional agricultural way of life is proving to be a strong pillar that the participants in this study drew strength from. It was evident that simple community-based supports can have an immensely positive impact on all those involved while also contributing to financial stability and positive self-worth.

The Need for Further Resettlement of Yazidi Refugees

Due to the unique experiences of the Yazidis as well as their collective nature, it is essential for Canada and other countries who have sponsored Yazidi refugees to continue their resettlement efforts. The Yazidis gain strength from their family, community, religion, and identity, and increased resettlement will enhance the cohesiveness and build a stronger diaspora community. As this tight-knit community is forced to resettle around the globe, the Yazidis are at risk of losing their culture, religion, and identity. Boss (1999) notes that ambiguous loss can also impact the immigration experience when families become separated due to resettlement, as they are psychologically present but physically separated. For the Yazidis, the collective nature of their community has been impacted by the events of 2014, and the additional separation they face from their families and community has been further perpetuated through their resettlement.

Resettling just over 1000 Yazidi refugees to Canada provided safety for many individuals, and yet it is evident from the experiences of the participants that they depend heavily on their immediate families and external families for their survival (Frangou, 2018). Separating families has led to debilitating effects on those resettled Yazidis who have had to navigate a new

way of life outside their collective community. All the participants expressed deep concerns for family members left back home. Increasing the number of resettled Yazidis will not only help to maintain their cultural and religious identity, but will also help this vulnerable and marginalized community to prosper outside of their homeland with successful integration into new communities.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note some limitations of this study. First, only eight women participated in the interviews. I would have liked to include more participants. However, it was important to conduct the interviews in a cohesive and timely manner.

Although children were present for two of the interviews, they were not given a voice in this research. During the interviews, the children watched television or played on a game console, seemingly unaware of our conversations. Their relaxed nature while their mothers shared their experiences made me believe they were desensitized to hearing these stories. As Habiya shared, it is hard for the women, how can it not be hard for the children?
Men were also excluded from this research and it would be valuable to understand their experience of being a Yazidi.

Another limitation that needs to be examined are my personal biases and cultural stereotypes. The first limiting belief I had was the notion that Yazidis were victims and my mindset focused on the victimization. As the interviews progressed, I quickly realized that although they were victims, they were first and foremost survivors. They were survivors of the 2014 genocide but they were also survivors of 73 campaigns of persecution, a collective trauma that goes back centuries. The Yazidis continue to live and focus on factors that help them to

respond to their experiences of violence and trauma, and their children and religion motivate them to forge ahead.

Another bias I had was the belief that the participants would not want talk about the events of 2014. As stated previously, the questions were prepared in a way that did not directly ask about the recent genocide so as to provide an opportunity for the participants to control what they shared. But it became clear very quickly they wanted to talk about what happened to them. These stories make up the bulk of this thesis and provide valuable insight into the limiting belief around a trauma-sensitive approach.

All the women required an interpreter to participate in this research. While invaluable (and the research could not have been done without a trained interpreter), the translation from one language to another and through a third person can impact the quality of the conversation. Lastly, as a result of language barriers, these stories are being shared through this non-Yazidi researcher. In order to mitigate power dynamics, I sought to use a storytelling and narrative inquiry methodology to help ground the research and highlight the experiences of the participants.

This approach helped me to connect with the participants as they shared their life stories while also providing a sense of agency as their voices led our conversations. As the researcher, I became a co-participant to understand, reflect, and share their stories. An important aspect of this included listening, observing, reflecting, and being actively present alongside these women to allow for a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. After all the interviews were completed, it was important that I analyzed what the women had shared, and that took several weeks before overarching themes began to emerge that needed a platform for sharing.

Future Research

The conversation and research available on the Yazidi people is limited. There is much work that still needs to be done to highlight the lived experiences of this community as well as other ethnic-minority groups. As globalization continues to increase, the knowledge and lived experiences of these groups will continue to be valuable and important in documenting history. Similarly, studying the long-term impacts of genocide and collective trauma will continue to be a complex issue that requires a more in-depth study. Yazidis have endured centuries of collective trauma as a result of the ongoing discrimination and persecution they have experienced, and yet their determination to survive is paramount.

As extensive damage has been done between Yazidis and Muslims in Iraq due to the 2014 invasion, it will be important and particularly relevant for the peace and conflict studies community to analyze the reconciliation process of Yazidis returning in Shingal. The future of the Yazidis, both in Iraq and around the world, will be a critical component to analyze in the coming years and will allow for important conversations about diversity and the rights of ethnic-minority groups. The path forward for the Yazidis will be difficult as this tight-knit community finds itself thrust into a new environment away from their traditional way of life.

Final Conclusion

> That's enough for today. It's never going to be finished. It's too much. We've been through a lot and nobody has seen what we see. You heard my story and now you know my story. I want you to share my story with everybody, the government or anyone else you can. Share it with them. Anywhere you go, I want you to share my story. We want the world to hear about our stories. (Maha, age 31)

This research study explored the personal narratives and lived experience of eight Yazidi women in Winnipeg. It is an act of witnessing their experiences of trauma, survival, bravery, and hope, and provides an opportunity for the reader to bear witness to these survivors. In addition to ethically standing with these women, their stories helped to identify the complex and ongoing challenges this group has faced and will undoubtedly continue to experience. I sought to gain a better understanding of the unique experiences of this ethnic-minority group and help provide a platform for their stories and lived experiences to be shared.

The attack on the Yazidis in Shingal touched all 400,000 members of this community. The struggles they face are complex, not only from the 74th Ferman, but from centuries of marginalization and persecution which have shattered their sense of security, sense of belonging, and way of life. It is evident the Yazidis experienced deep emotional and physical pain and yet continue to find the strength to carry on. The participants shared various coping mechanisms that helped motivate them to keep living, which included drawing strength from their children, family, the Yazidi community, their religion, culture, and identity. Despite continuous threats, the Yazidis have remained resilient in the face of ongoing adversity. The coming years will be a critical time for them as they learn to adapt outside of their homeland and apart from their tight-knit community.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Can you tell me about yourself?
2) What did you do before coming to Canada?
3) What do you do now in Winnipeg?
4) What role do stories or storytelling have in your culture?
5) What is one story you might like to share?
6) Can you share your favorite/best memory growing up?
7) Can you share a story/memory about your life before coming to Canada?
8) Can you share a story/memory about your life on your journey coming to Canada?
9) Can you share a story/memory about your life here in Canada?
10) What is something you would like to share about Yazidis?
11) How does being away from your traditional homelands impact you and your people?
12) What does the future hold for Yazidis in Sinjar, Iraq? What about Yazidis oversees, specifically in Winnipeg?
13) How do you cope with challenges or hard times? What keeps you strong?