The Exceptional Stories of the Women Who Got Away: A Case of Yezidi Wartime Rape Survivors

Cosmas Rebero, Veronica

The Exceptional Stories of the Women Who Got Away: *A Case of Yezidi Wartime Rape Survivors*

Master Thesis

Student: *Veronica van der Giessen-Cosmas Rebero*

Student Number: *s1111981*

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. H. van Meegdenburg

Second Reader: Prof. dr. P. Kopecký

Leiden University

Political Science: International Organisation

Hand-in Date: January 22, 2021

Word Count: 9,997

Executive Summary

In the last century wartime rape gained academic prominence as it was no longer seen as a byproduct of war. However, research on the sociocultural effects of sexual violence during conflict is limited. Moreover, little is known about whether or not local conceptualizations impact how survivors, their families and communities experience rape. This study analyzes how local understandings of rape shaped the reintegration of Yezidi wartime rape survivors of the 2014 genocide, from a social constructivist perspective and social identity theory. Following theoretical expectations of patriarchal societies, I assumed that the survivors would be stigmatized and exiled upon return. Based on desk-research and interviews with experts of Yezidi origin, or who have worked with the Yezidis, this thesis finds that local conceptualizations of rape mattered for the survivors' reintegration. Normally in the Yezidi community, rape survivors are considered to dishonor the family, with exiled or death as a result. These perceptions caused fear among survivors and propelled some stigma. However, it came as a surprise that the survivors were welcomed back in the community. Within this notion, religious ceremonial practices helped survivors feel purified, whereas the community rejected the children born of rape based on cultural grounds.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the corporation of the interviewees who were willing to share their experiences, insights and vulnerability relating to this very sensitive topic.

Furthermore, many thanks goes out to my thesis supervisor Dr. Hilde van Meegdenburg, whose continuous support, impeccable advice and guidance over the course of this research have been of great value to me.

Above all else, I would like to thank God for being my refuge throughout this challenging process. To my loving husband and son, whose prayers, encouragements and giggles, have been a pillar of encouragement, thank you from the bottom of my heart. Lastly, thank you to my family and friends, who have been a great help and support in different stages of my writing.

This thesis is dedicated to the Yezidis of Sinjar. To the ones who lost their lives during the unspeakable horrors they faced at the hands of IS, as well as the ones who survived to live another day. I applaud your courage and strength. I cried for you, and my heart goes out to you as a community. Doing this research has been my way of fighting for your cause towards awareness and justice.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FYF	Free Yezidi Foundation
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IS	Islamic State
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SIT	Social Identity Theory
UN	United Nations
YSSC	Yezidi Supreme Spiritual Council

1. Introduction

"*On August 2 we lived peacefully together with our neighbors. But the next day, those same neighbors joined the Islamic State and took away our wives and children*" (Yezidi survivor as cited in Stoter, 2019). In August 2014, the Islamic State (IS) launched an attack against the Yezidis living across the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq that would amount to genocide (Yazda, 2017). Within a 3-year period, thousands of women and girls were kidnapped and sold as *sabaya* (sex slaves), while others were forced into marriages, all of which resulted in mass-rapes and torture (Ayhan & Tezcür, 2019). Whereas the aftermath has left the majority of them killed or missing, there was still a group of escapees that managed to return to their families. Female survivors were hesitant to return to their community at first though, fearing rejection and ostracization, as it is forbidden for Yezidis to have sexual contact outside of the religion (Kaya, 2019).

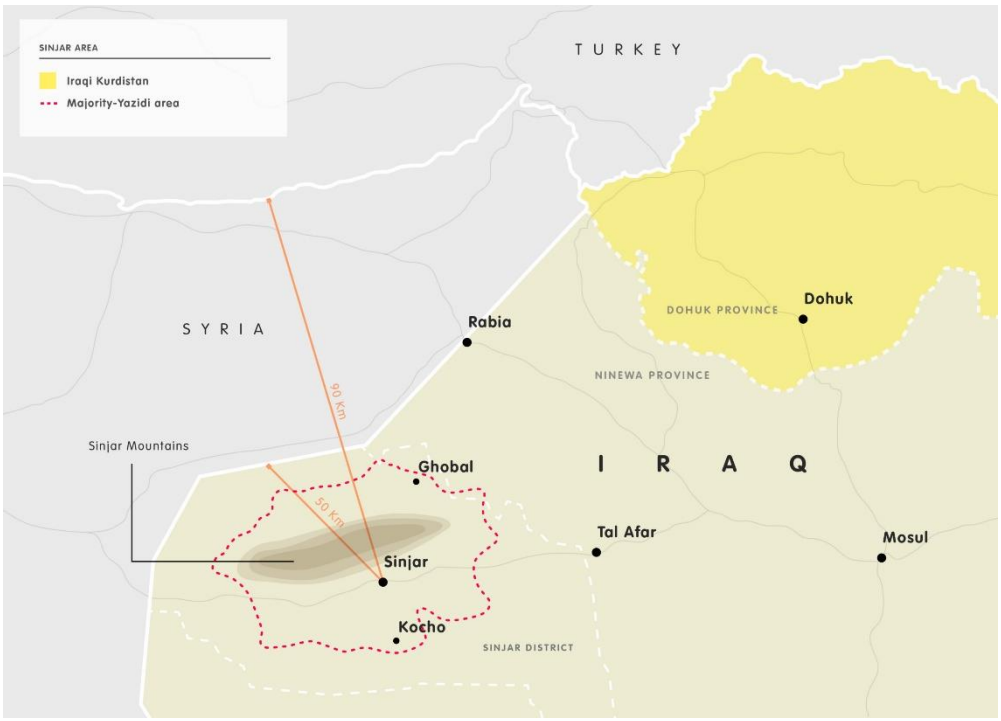

Figure 1: Map of Yezidi populated area in Northern Iraq.
(Source: Abouzeid, 2018).

The aim of this thesis is to examine how cultural norms and identities influence behavior. Guided by social constructivism and social identity theory (SIT), I expect that in a society that is typified by patriarchy, survivors will be blamed, shamed, and could sometimes even be exiled or killed. In view of the fact that men originally hold primary power in Yezidi society, this research will explore if and how local understandings of rape matter for the reintegration of

Yezidi wartime rape survivors, by examining whether or not such perceptions influence the community's behavior towards them. Therefore, the research question is: *How do local conceptualizations of rape shape Yezidi women's reintegration into their local community after the wartime rapes by IS?* In this study the definition of wartime rape builds on the works of Brownmiller (1975) and McDougall (1998), where rape is understood as an act of male violence perpetrated explicitly against women with the use of "force, coercion or duress", whereby objects, including but not limited to a penis are inserted into a victim's vagina. Although men too can be victims of wartime rape, in this particular genocide, however, women were strategically targeted by IS and separated from the men for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Next, the perceptions and understandings of rape are regarded to be local, in the sense that its occurrence together with the attributed causes and consequences are viewed differently throughout various communities, requiring their analysis within each context.

The question is interesting for research purposes, because the sociocultural consequences of wartime rape have not been overly discussed in the literature. More specifically, local conceptualizations of wartime rape have not been explored yet, nor have local conceptualizations been researched exclusively (Isikozlu & Millard, 2010). According to the theory, reality is socially constructed and identities are shaped, both through human interaction. Thus, cultural and social contexts are determinant of how collective understandings on social phenomena take shape (Adler, 1997). Local conceptualizations frame the way people experience and understand the world around them. This investigation could help overcome a potentially biased and western based understanding of conflict-related rape, by illustrating whether or not local conceptualizations of rape matter. In addition, the few studies on the societal consequences of wartime rape are mainly centered on African and Latin American countries. This makes the examination of the Yezidis in Sinjar a new case.

When looking at local understandings, from a political science point of view, I propose that this assumption can even go as far as to saying that they are not just confined to rape, but rather, local understandings might matter overall. According to Trounstine (2009), political science has undervalued social phenomena in local sub-divisions like cities, rural areas, and communities, while it is the foundation of many political outcomes.

It was completely unexpected to find a community-wide acceptance towards the rape survivors. The Yezidi Supreme Spiritual Council (YSSC) welcomed back all IS rape survivors into the community (Amnesty International, 2020). In the discussion, I will hint at cultural fluidity

forming the grounds of this welcoming, and point to ontological security for further research. Conversely, the report also showed that women and girls with children born of rape faced religious and societal coercion, pressuring them to be separated from their children.

This thesis is structured as follows. I will first outline how existing literature deals with wartime rape. Comprehensive studies predominantly focus on its prevalence, offer explanations of its occurrence or outline the physical and psychological consequences. Moving on, the theoretical framework will present social constructivism and SIT, based on which I expect that the survivors will be shamed and exiled. Methodologically, this thesis provides a case study to test these expectations. Data is collected through semi-structured expert interviews and is complemented by desk-research. Then, the analysis will present the results and discussion. Lastly, in order to answer the research question, I will draw conclusions based on the evidence.

2. Literature Review

The academic discourse on wartime rape rigorously deals with three dominant themes. Namely, an outline of the prevalence of conflict-related rape, its explanations, and its consequences. The literature on the effects of wartime rape is predominantly confined to the individual level. However, as its ramifications often transcend the individual scope, this study will focus on how wartime rape impacts the survivors, their families and the Yezidi community in the under researched Middle East.

2.1 Prevalence and Explanations

In this section I will discuss foci one and two, that is, the prevalence of wartime rape and its explanations. These are often discussed in the literature concerning wartime rape.

The vast majority of the literature on wartime rape deals with demonstrating its prevalence throughout history, as well as offer explanations for its causes. Although there is no archaeological evidence to support this claim, it is presumed that the act of rape in conflict has a history as long as war itself (Gottschall, 2004; Guilaine & Zammit, 2005). However, until the twentieth century, the literature dismissed sexual violence as a side-effect of war. It was only after the mass-rapes during the conflicts of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda that it gained academic prominence (Cohen, 2013; Isikozlu & Millard, 2010; Koos, 2017). In an attempt to explain its roots, feminists argue that misogyny in patriarchal societies accounts for the brutal behavior against women during war. Wartime rape is thus an inevitable result of institutionalized power structures and demonstrates the relationship between social norms and masculinity/femininity, and women's bodies (Brownmiller, 1975; Seifert, 1996). Related to this, is the strategic rape theory. This conflict-centered approach argues that rape is deemed a tactic of war used to instill terror, intimidate, displace, and to enforce political repression. It emphasizes violating the honor of the men of an opposing community, and/or the destruction of their culture, the ethnic and national identity. Since, women are considered its preservers, as they bring forth the future generation (Gottschall, 2004; Wood, 2018).

Nevertheless, while significant for a general understanding of wartime rape, the focus of this study rather lies on understanding its consequences, particularly, the sociocultural effects.

2.2 Physical and Psychological Effects

Public health scholars primarily deal with the ramifications of wartime rape. Research within this discipline is mainly confined to the physical and psychological impacts rape has on victims.

According to Filice et al. (1994) many women who have been the victim of rape frequently experience some sort of trauma. Scholars primary focus on harm inflicted by rape at the individual level, by elaborating on the physical injuries they suffer from. Examples include: reproductive health problems such as rectal and vaginal fistulae, tearing and bleeding, sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and AIDS, surgical problems like broken bones, psychological health problems like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and suicidal risks among many things (Kinyanda et al., 2010; Lončar et al., 2006). Focusing on the traumas experienced at the individual level is essential for understanding the level of brutality these survivors experienced, because their testimonies allow for more accuracy in "often-depersonalized theories of violence and aggression" (Milillo, 2006).

However, placing such emphasis on the individual reveals some shortcomings. Firstly, studies on wartime rape related traumas, indicate that its consequences also impact the societal level. For example, a study in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) indicated that family members were often forced to watch other family members get raped. This could sometimes result in the disruption of whole family structures through increased divorce rates and collective trauma (Kelly et al., 2011; Milillo, 2006). However, the ability of scholars to demarcate the physical and psychological effects of rape is still noteworthy, seeing that victims of sexual violence in warzones often deal with additional traumatic events such as forced migration, or watching their beloved ones die (Vlachova & Biason, 2005). Secondly, the way rape is perceived is also determined by the nature of the conflict (single or multiple attackers, the use of threats) together with its long-term consequences, such as forced pregnancy. Studies in Bosnia-Herzegovina on cultural sensitive counseling of trauma showed that, as forced impregnation was meant to blot out the national and cultural identity, this caused alienation, humiliation and hate among rape victims towards their children (Filice et al., 1994; Folnegovic-Smalc, 1995).

With much emphasis placed on the individual in wartime rape literature, this study seeks to examine how its ramifications are experienced and dealt with collectively.

2.3 Sociocultural Considerations

Unfortunately, relatively few studies deal with the sociocultural ramifications of wartime rape (Isikozlu & Millard, 2010; Koos, 2017). They continue by arguing that local dynamics and the role of the community are important research aspirations to acquire a full understanding of wartime rape and its consequences on victims, their families and the community. Survivors may run the risk of dealing with the complexities of societal rejection, as rape is perceived and experienced differently throughout various contexts. For instance, existing definitions in the literature do not take into account power structures of patriarchy, in which hegemonic masculinity attributes power, privilege, and honor to men. In addition, patriarchal cultural codes ascribed to women relating to sexuality do not differentiate between adultery and rape. This may hamper the reconciliation of wartime rape survivors at the community level (Dossa et al., 2014; Milillo, 2006; Seifert, 1996; Skjelsbaek, 2010). Furthermore, in geographical terms, studies on the effects of wartime rape are limited in the Middle East, while the region has dealt with rape on a large scale. For example, in war-torn Syria, women have been sexually violated by regime soldiers. In addition, IS uses rape as a tool of ethnic domination in Iraq (Crawford et al., 2014). These cases have considerably remained under researched as of yet, which is not surprising as these women might feel ashamed, and fear the societal consequences of sharing their experiences.

In conclusion, as the meaning and consequences of rape are largely influenced by the victim's sociocultural context, the main aim is to explore the communal attitude towards the Yezidi women upon returning to their community after the rapes by IS. The theoretical framework will build on social constructivism and social identity theory, in an effort to take into account the physical, psychological and sociocultural consequences of wartime rape on survivors.

3. Theoretical Framework

It has become clear from the literature that local conceptualizations of rape remain quite under researched. However, it is essential to recognize that various sociocultural factors such as ethnic values, cultural norms and identities, religious beliefs, and race are at play within different social contexts. Ignoring these factors could give an oversimplified picture, while the victim's stories are often met with strong disdain in certain social contexts. Therefore, this thesis will examine the social context of the Yezidis and local understandings through the lens of social constructivism. Within this framework, I will build on social identity theory (SIT) as a means to enrich the understanding of social perceptions of wartime rape and its consequences. Following this theory, I expect that the IS rape survivors, will deal with heavy stigmatization and rejection from their community.

3.1 Social Constructivism and SIT

From a social constructivist standpoint, I argue that the way people act and respond to social phenomena, is dependent on local conceptualizations. Social constructivists namely contend, that the way people perceive and interpret their reality is socially constructed, whereby the meaning people attribute to social phenomena is permeated with cultural and institutional assumptions, shared beliefs, norms, rules, and social values (Adler, 1997). According to Onuf (1989), in this "world of our making", collective cultures shape the identities of individuals and influence social behavior (Halperin & Heath, 2017; Leatherman, 2011). The fact that human attitudes and behavior are shaped by their social context, is a result of the biographical situation[1] people find themselves in (Schutz, 1962). Hence, people are not independent agents, "immune to the ideologizing influences of its social contexts" (Berger & Luckman, 1966), but the meaning behind their behavior and actions are rather socially constructed and institutionalized (Geertz, 1983). Furthermore, individuals interpret social phenomena, such as, family unit, marriage, sexual inequalities, gender roles, and in this case rape, according to the cultural, ideological and religious values shared in their own society and/or culture (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

As an extension of social constructivism, the theoretical underpinnings of SIT draw attention to the fact that societies are made up of social categories, that can eventually affect a person's

[1]The assumption that humans are located in a geohistorical given context, whereby commonplace practices in a social context determine one's view of the world around them (Schutz, 1962).

identity, purpose and role within society (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A social category is a collection of individuals who have one or more characteristics in common, such as gender or race, but do not necessarily interact. They become a social group when they start to interact with each other based on these similarities and they find a sense of belonging within the group, ultimately, leading to the formation of a social identity. Individuals identify better with a social group identity, as opposed to individual identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

When people strongly relate to their cultural identity, their personal values are usually consistent with those of the collective culture. In fact, a group's values and customs are transferred to each of its member's identity and become an intrinsic part of the self (Ellemers & Scheepers, 2019). This means that the group's culture, in part, determines who its members are and who they are not, and attaches a level of "emotional significance" (Tajfel, 1978). Group members aspire a positive social identity, that results in social comparison between groups, characterized by in-group favoritism and out-group inferiority (Ellemers & Scheepers, 2019). Following this logic, individual behaviors and beliefs are prompted by norms and values shared in a group, which strengthen the collective, socially constructed in-group/us and discriminate against the out-group/them (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Based on the theory, cultural identities influence the way people perceive and act in certain situations. Within the scope of this research, I will now look at what this implies for members of patriarchal societies when looking at local conceptualizations of rape. Considering that members within such societies share a cultural identity, whereby its communities are organized along patriarchal lines, the Yezidis pose as a qualified case.

3.2 Patriarchal Societies

Although it is quite common for rape victims to be blamed for their rape throughout many societies in both war and peacetime, the level of stigma a victim is faced with is heavily determined by cultural factors (Clark, 2014). As a means to answer the research question, I will examine rape through the prism of patriarchy, where a woman's chastity and family's or husband's honor are considered highly valuable, as married women are considered their husband's possession (Diken & Lausten, 2005; Skjelsbaek, 2012). For example, a wartime rape survivor in DRC quoted her brother when she said "*the family had done everything to raise me properly, and now I had paid them back by letting myself be raped*" (Dossa et al., 2014). Moreover, patriarchy would label children born of wartime rape as 'other', a bad

memory left by the enemy which could eventually pose as a future threat to the community because of the genetical relation to their fathers (Carpenter, 2000; Ohambe, 2005).

I will examine the Yezidis to test the hypothesis that local conceptualizations matter for the reintegration of IS rape survivors. I argue that the way individuals in the Yezidi community perceive rape is defined by their community's conservative culture and religion, Yezidism, which is "imbued with tribal divisions and caste-like structures" (Kaya, 2019). Consistent with research on patriarchic cultures, it is very likely that the societal ramifications of wartime rape could destruct the Yezidi in-group cohesion. According to SIT's presumptions on condescending behavior towards the out-group, I believe that in terms of rape, their bodies and rape-related children might be considered contaminated by the 'other'. Consequently, victims could become an object of blame, shame and dishonor. Therefore, I expect that the rapes by IS might hamper their reintegration, because upon return, this could impact their ability to live their lives as full members of the community or even result in exile (Clark, 2014).

This might interest political scientists, as Trounstine (2009) argues that all politics is local, since local level activities can have political implications. For instance, social phenomena occurring within local contexts such as cities or communities are able to "affect the world beyond their borders". In the case of this thesis, a communal decision to exile Yezidi women from the community can result in an influx of Yezidi refugees worldwide.

In the next chapter, I will give an account of the research design and how I aim to retrieve data to carry out my research and find out if my expectations are correct.

4. Methodology

The theoretical framework presented the inference that Yezidi rape survivors would deal with heavy stigmatization and rejection from their community. This premise was based on how social constructivist theory explains that social behavior is shaped by the cultural and social context within which humans are placed, and the way SIT posits that each socially constructed reality within a collective culture, gives meaning to one's identity, purpose and role. In this section I sought to justify the case study as a research method. I used semi-structured interviews and desk research to gather evidence to see if my theoretical expectation was correct.

4.1 Research Design

I opted for a single case study that intended to apply an existing theory to new cases (Halperin & Heath, 2017). The research design employed a qualitative approach as a means to collect and analyze data, allowing me to comprehend the meanings and beliefs that people attribute to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach helped me to closely examine individuals within their "real-world context" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Gerring, 2004; Yin, 2018). In this thesis a case study was defined as an intensive study of a group of people, whereby empirical data was used to draw conclusions on the correctness of the stated theoretical expectations and sought to make inferences for similar cases in other contexts (Gerring, 2004; Halperin & Heath, 2017). Yezidis live in a conservative society, in which their culture is deeply patriarchal (Ayhan & Tezcür, 2019; Kaya, 2019). Local conceptualizations of rape by the 'other' will then comprise of attitudes of contempt, shame and disapproval. Therefore, this case is a sufficient representative for illustrating that similar patriarchic communities that have corresponding conceptualizations of rape will reject and eventually exile rape survivors (Gerring, 2008).

However, at the same time I took into account that in dealing with local understandings, I cannot say with certainty beforehand that the conclusions drawn from this case are directly applicable in another case. So, as "the real probability of the outcome is always equal to its ex post probability, which is 1 or 0" (Mahoney, 2008), the way local understandings of rape shape the reintegration of survivors can only be answered with certainty after the study.

The next section addresses how I gathered data to answer the research question.

4.2 Data Gathering

I collected data from multiple sources, as this triangulation of evidence allowed me to shed light on my findings from different perspectives, providing corroborative evidence for my arguments from various interviews and extensive desk-research (Halperin & Heath, 2017; Yin, 2018).

4.2.1 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews for this research. In considering ethical implications, given the trauma experienced by the women and the sensitivity of the study, I conducted remote expert interviews. The specialized knowledge of the interviewees on the genocide or their relation to the Yezidis, such as being a Yezidi by origin or having worked with them, makes them uniquely informative (Maxwell, 2013). I did semi-structured interviews, because of the highly charged topic I thought it best to start off each interview with inquiring about their knowledge of the Yezidis. This was followed by more complex and professionally tailored questions. To follow up on their response, I asked supplementary questions to probe deeper into their experiences, (Halperin & Heath, 2017). Furthermore, during the interviews I performed the snowball technique. I asked the interviewees if they could link me to other relevant organizations or key actors. I then contacted these people and repeated this process until I reached the desired sample size (Ohambe, 2005). In the end, I consulted six experts (see table 1). A shortcoming to this technique however, was that I could only interview a small sample because it was time-consuming. Even if the sample mostly existed of secondary sources in relation to the IS rapes, their arguments and impressions were very relevant, as they were based on the recollections from actual survivors, family or community members, as well as their own observations and expertise.

Language	Name	Profession	Date	Source type
Dutch	Brenda Stoter	Author, freelance journalist	10/27/20	Secondary
Dutch	Dalal Ghanim	Yezidi human rights activist	10/28/20	Primary & Secondary
English	Farhad Shamo Roto	Yezidi President of Voice of Ezidi	11/06/20	Primary
English	Anonymous	President of an international NGO	11/06/20	Secondary
English	Pari Ibrahim	Yezidi Executive Director Free Yezidi Foundation	11/17/20	Primary & secondary
English	Anonymous	Counseling Psychologist	12/08/20	Secondary

Table 1: Name and/or professional details of interviewees.

4.2.2 Desk-research

The recently published Amnesty International report: 'Legacy of Terror: the Plight of Yezidi Child survivors of ISIS', was key for this research. It contains factual information, as well as interviews with several Yezidi wartime rape survivors. In addition, I used several books which helped me understand the Yezidi culture and religion better, newspapers dedicated to the social consequences of the rapes, reports from research centers, the UN and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like the Free Yezidi Foundation, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Yazda. In retrospect, I was not able to retrieve the full scope of data due to language limitations, as several relevant articles were written in Arabic and Kurdish.

Next, I explain the data analysis process which helped me to find the story from the data to answer the research question.

4.3 Analysis Process

Figure 2 illustrates the data analysis process. From the empirical evidence I looked for patterns and relationships concerning the experiences of survivors, their families and the community on the mass-rapes of IS, in order to back my theoretical expectations. The discussed themes in

chapter 5 are thus the result of interview questions which were steered in the direction of the Yezidis' perception of rape, their religious identity, and the experiences of rape survivors after the genocide.

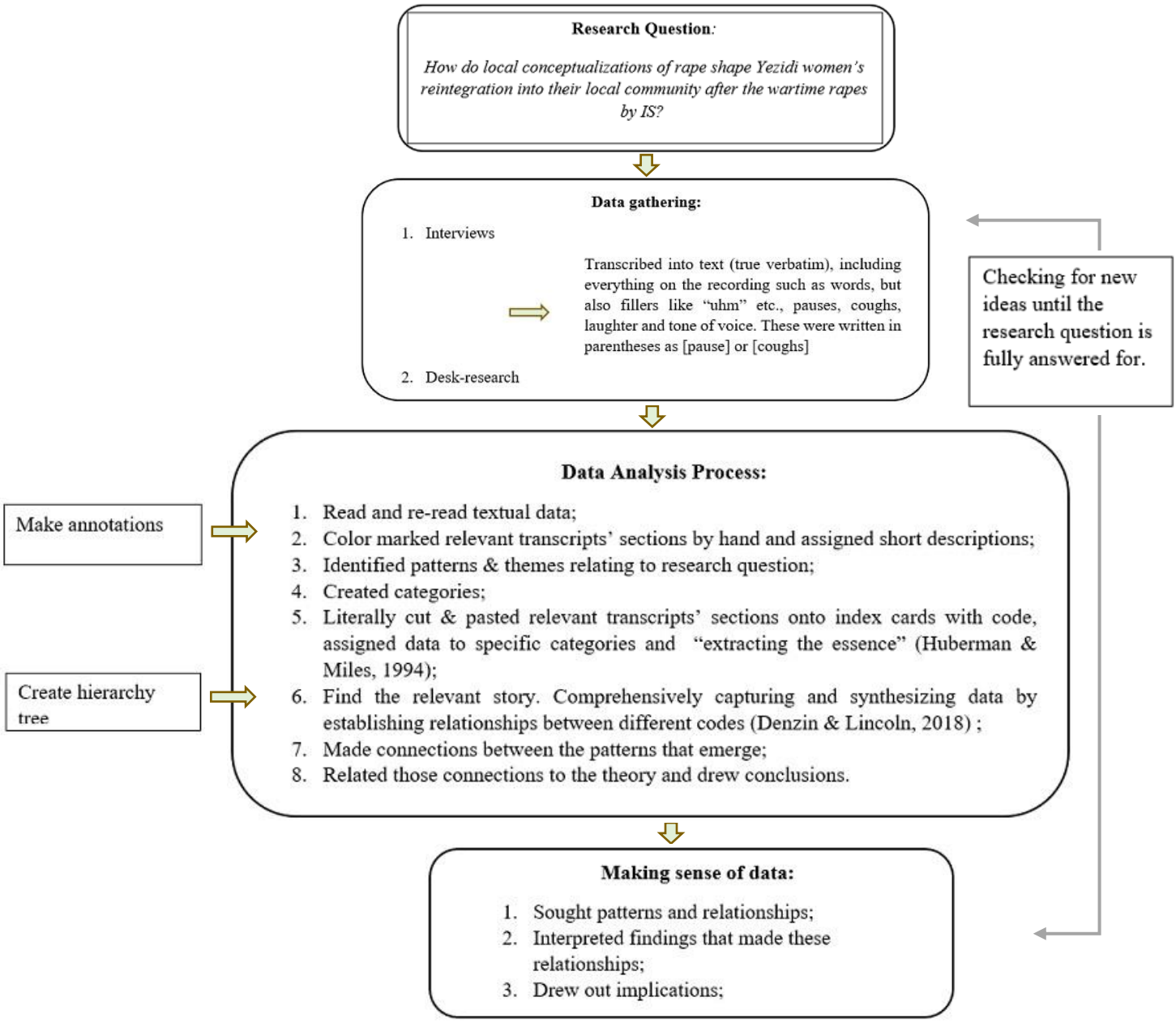

Figure 2: Data Analysis Process. Based on (Wong, 2008, p. 15).

In phase 3 of box three, I initiated the coding process by color marking important sections in the transcripts and adding descriptions. I gave different colors and codes to various subjects. For each transcript I used the same color for information that touched upon the same issue. After labeling the first transcript, a coding-list was realized, which I then used for all the

following transcripts to link ideas. I then put together the entire coding list and created a hierarchy of codes within each theme by putting together similar and useful codes and merging those with the same meaning to a category. For instance, codes as ‘in-group belonging’, ‘in-group protection’ and ‘pure Yezidi bloodline’ became ‘self-preservative identity’. See coding scheme in Appendix B. Then, I deleted irrelevant codes, all based on the research question’s narrative.

The following three categories were eventually established to answer if and how local conceptualizations matter for the reintegration of survivors: 1) self-preservative identity; 2) a man’s world; 3) community response. These will be elaboratively addressed in the next chapter.

5. Analysis

In this section the most relevant findings on whether or not local conceptualizations of rape matter for the reintegration of Yezidi wartime rape survivors are presented. First an introduction to the Yezidi culture, history and religion is given, as this is the foundation of several developments concerning the community's response to the (mass)-rapes by IS. Subsequently, I elaborate on the three categories which were discussed during the interviews and in other sources, namely: self-preservative identity, a man's world, and community response.

5.1 Culture, History & Religion

The Yezidis are among the oldest ethnic and religious indigenous people within the rich cultural mosaic of the Middle East (Açikyildiz, 2010). Nowadays they predominantly live in the Nineveh Province of Northern Iraq, but they are also spread out through Armenia, Iran, Syria, Turkey and western countries like Canada, Germany and the United States (Açikyildiz, 2010; Kaya, 2019). This thesis focuses on the Yezidis in Sinjar. Figure 3 shows that the Yezidis are the second-largest religious minority group in Iraq. They have a historical connection to the Kurds and predominantly speak Kurdish (Salloum, 2013). It is estimated that the total Yezidi population in Iraq numbered half a million before 2014 (Kaya, 2019).

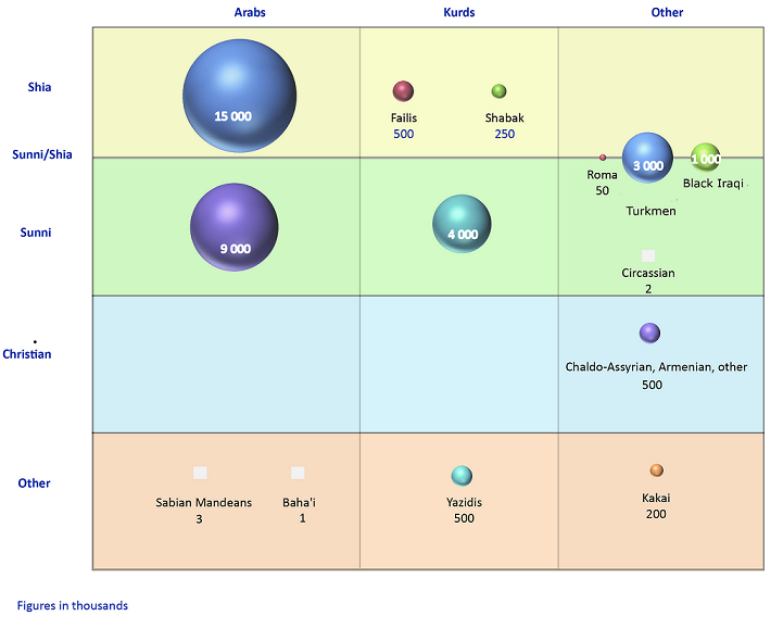

Figure 3: Ethnic and religious composition of the population of Iraq
Source: European Parliament Research Service, 2016

Yezidism is an ancient, monotheistic and syncretic religion, which constitutes elements from Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism, and is predominantly passed on through oral tradition (Henne & Hackett, 2014). There have been several misconceptions about Yezidism, one of them being that Yezidis are believed to be devil worshippers. Such ideas have been connected to the discrimination and Islamic persecution they have faced throughout many centuries (Stoter, 2019).

In the next section, I will elaborate on how these persecutions have shaped the Yezidi identity.

5.2 Self-preservative Identity

Over the years, the community's exposure to devastating circumstances have played a role in strengthening their cultural identity. The Yezidis' cultural values, religious norms, and customs of togetherness appear to have been transferred to the Yezidis' identity.

According to the Yezidis, the genocidal campaign by IS in 2014 marked the 74th *farman* (genocide) the community endured (Tsurkov, 2019). It is difficult to determine the accuracy of this number, but according to Mr. Shamo Roto, Yezidi survivor of the recent genocide, fact remains that these massacres only had the "*extinction of this society*" in mind (in interview). In response to these persecutions, the Yezidis have developed a "communal sub-conscience of protection" over the years, a kind of survival mechanism established with the means to preserve their culture (Açikyildiz 2010; Stoter, 2019). Whereas Ms. Stoter, author and freelance journalist specialized in the Middle East, considers the Yezidis to be "*surprisingly open*", Ms. Ghanim, a Yezidi-born human rights activist, maintains that, originally, the Yezidi culture is a "*closed and conservative"* one (both in interview). Correspondingly, the Yezidis' adherence of a caste system which divides the community into sheiks, pîrs and murîds[2], and also forbidding conversions and marriages with non-Yezidis, are all the legacy of their insularity (Kajjo, 2019; Salloum 2013). A counseling psychologist[3] who has been working with Yezidi survivors in Duhok, the Kurdistan region of Iraq, since 2018 said the following: "*The Yezidi identity is very tricky. They have been a minority under very difficult circumstances*", referring to the numerous genocides, "*and still hanging on to their identity, and so that means that they have very strict rules. The more genocide they experienced, the more they became strict in their definition of their identity*" (in interview). In other words, the Yezidi identity and the community's traditional narrative have predominantly been shaped along the lines of prosecutions at the hands of their Muslim neighbors. As a result, traditions like endogamy[4] lie at the heart of the Yezidi identity (Açikyildiz, 2010).

The Yezidi identity can be viewed as a combination of ethnocultural, genealogic and religious elements. According to Mr. Shamo Roto: "*In the Yezidi society, married to non-Yezidi you*

[2] Murîds are the common people, the pîrs and sheiks consist of the clergy (Kaya, 2019; Stoter, 2019).
[3] Interviewee requested anonymity.
[4] The practice of only marrying someone within the same cultural, ethnic, religious, or tribal group.

directly give up your identity being Yezidi and you have no option to come back" (in interview). Moreover, the consulted psychologist said: "*You can only be a Yezidi if your father and mother are Yezidi, and there is a bloodline*" (in interview). Besides having to be born Yezidi, each individual is required to participate in several official rituals and ceremonies from infancy onwards, upon which their acceptance in the community is dependent (Açikyildiz, 2010; Graham-Harrison, 2017; Stoter, 2019). The Yezidi sense of a communal identity seems to have been strengthened after the 2014 attack by IS (Ayhan & Tezcür, 2019). Moreover, the president of an international NGO[5] (the president) recalled: "*Whether they believe in their religious aspects of Yezidism or not, there is ethnic strength in being a Yezidi*" (in interview).

In the next paragraph, I will discuss how the role women play in the Yezidi society reflects patriarchal characteristics.

5.3 A Man's World

Generally, in Yezidi society a woman's position was confined to domestic spheres. They are predominantly excluded from educational opportunities, political aspirations, and labor. Besides gender inequality in the community, inequality in terms of sexuality is also not uncommon. Women are required to be virgin, and their (sexual)relationships with non-Yezidis brought shame and dishonor to the family.

When referring to the Yezidi society, the psychologist said: "*It is a patriarchal society*", in which "*the women are married from a very early age and they are the main care givers of the family*" (in interview). As a result, they are financially and socially dependent on their husbands (Ayhan & Tezcür, 2019). The president elaborated: "*Sometimes, the woman is to be seen and not heard, and sometimes the woman is very much part of the decision-making*" (in interview). Interestingly enough, in Ms. Ghanim's experience "*The position has changed tremendously in recent years, because it used to be a man-centered culture*" (in interview). After the genocide, an increasing amount of women have left Iraq to live abroad, pursue an education and are more politically involved. This is quite a step forward for a conservatively, closed society (Ensler, 2016; Stoter, 2019). Ms. Ghanim made out the following: "*In general, with masculine cultures, the transition requires a revolution, but this revolution did not come from the women, but, the circumstances allowed for such a thing to happen*" (in interview).

[5] Interviewee requested anonymity.

The 2014 genocide also challenged the community's traditional way of thinking about rape. In general, just as in many other Middle Eastern countries, chastity and honor seem very important in the Yezidi culture. Women are required to be virgins until marriage, while this is expected to a lesser extent from men (Stoter, 2019). Yezidi executive director of the Free Yezidi Foundation, Ms. Ibrahim illustrated it as follows: "*Men have like a Dutch or German or American girlfriend and its fine and no one says anything about it. Why? Because they don't have to show their virginity at the end. They can do whatever they want. The girls are being exiled out of the community*" (in interview). This banishment even involved sexual intercourse against their will (Graham-Harrison, 2017; Kaya, 2019). According to the psychologist: "*When you are raped by somebody, Yezidi or not, it is the women's shame. So it is always kept a secret. I worked with victims of rape [before the genocide], within the community as well, but they did not even share it with their moms and dads, because you they were scared that their brothers or dads would kill them*" (in interview). In agreeance, the president mentioned: "*rapes did happen, but they were kept very, very secret, because if it was not kept secret, there was ostracism*" (in interview). Other times, repercussions were more severe than ostracism. She recalled such an incident: "*There was a Yezidi woman who fell in love with a Muslim man in college, and her family, her tribe killed her publicly*" (in interview). The stoning to death of the girl in question was an 'honor killing', because her actions had shamed her family (Cockburn, 2010; Graham-Harris, 2017; Tawfeeq & Tod, 2007).

Yezidi women appeared to have been inferior to men and the traditional way of looking at rape implied that women shamed the family, causing fear of ostracism and sometimes even death. All of which is in line with the theoretical expectations. In the next paragraph, I will outline the community's response to the mass-rapes of the 2014 genocide.

5.4 Community Response

The identity formation can be said to have answered for in-group favoritism after the latest genocide, and explain the out-group hostility towards the children born of rape.

On 3 August 2014, IS, also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh, launched a coordinated attack against the Yezidis living in the Sinjar region (Amnesty International, 2020; Graham-Harrison, 2017; Henne & Hacke, 2014). The United Nations (UN) dubbed the attack a genocide. Mr. Shamo Roto, recalled that "*They bombed our farms, they entered our villages*" (in interview). Within a short period of time, approximately 3,100 Yezidis were killed and 6,800 were

kidnapped (Cetorelli et al., 2017). IS created a system, whereby they separated women, girls and children from the men and teenage boys (Amnesty International, 2020). While the men were enslaved to do forced labor or publicly killed (Kaushal, 2020), women and girls awaited another fate. It was on slave markets that many Yezidi women and girls, could be purchased through auctioning, to be gifted or traded as *sabaya*, (sex slaves) between jihadists. Others were forcibly married off and sometimes even subjected to forced pregnancy. During their capture, women and girls were sexually exploited through (gang)rape, regularly beaten, converted and subjected to other forms of (sexual)torture (Amnesty International, 2020; Ensler, 2016; UN, 2016; Yazda, 2017). One survivor was the property of seven IS fighters and was repeatedly raped. She said: "*Sometimes I was sold. Sometimes I was given as a gift. The last man was the most abusive; he used to tie my hands and legs*" (as cited in HRW, 2015).

Following their captivity, approximately 3,000 female survivors managed to escape or were ransomed by their families. However, despite their freedom, the majority of them feared to return back to their community as they believed their homecoming would be followed by cultural ramifications (Ayhan & Tezcür, 2019; Ensler, 2016; Kaya, 2019). A survivor said: "*I was afraid to be ostracized*" (as cited in Stoter, 2019). Nevertheless, the 2014 genocide was something the Yezidis had never witnessed before as it prompted a striking community response (George, 2015). Ms. Ibrahim observed: "*A lot of these women were sold as sex slaves and they came back, and they were raped. They were not the virgins anymore that Yezidis require girls to be when they get married. So this was new. It was very public. So it needed a public resolving of the problem*" (in interview). Events took an unexpected turn when Yezidi religious leader, Baba Sheikh, issued a statement, welcoming back women survivors of the genocide in September 2015. He declared that they remained pure Yezidis and called upon the community not to dispute their Yezidi faith. He urged the community to support these women (Amnesty International, 2020; George, 2015; Tsurkov, 2019). This declaration has been beneficial in protecting Yezidi women and girls from harm when coming back to the community (HRW, 2015), and allowed for courage among survivors to come forward with their stories (Stoter, 2019). Women were brought to the holy site Lalish, to undergo a religious baptism ceremony, symbolizing their purification (George, 2015; Graham-Harrison, 2017). A survivor referring to the baptism: "*For us, our tradition is the most important thing. I was just so happy, because I had been hurt. I wanted to be clean again*" (as cited in George, 2015).

The psychologist explained this trailblazing move as follows: "*Being sold as a slave, and being raped multiple times, from multiple perpetrators, with a big number we are talking about*

hundreds of Yezidi girls here, I think it might have changed their attitude to rape for good. And realizing that actually, this is not the fault of our girls" (in interview). This was affirmed by Ms. Stoter: "*These mass-rapes were something they had never experienced before. So they questioned how to deal with the magnitude of the victims. They did not see another way of dealing with it then to support them and accept them back into the community*" (in interview). Despite most of the community's surprisingly accepting attitude, the sudden change was also met with resentment from a small group of conservatives (Graham-Harrison, 2017; Kaushal, 2020). The psychologist said that these girls are sometimes seen as: "*Damaged goods. There is this, both welcome and respect and also some stigma, because, they have been raped*" (in interview). Moreover, Ms. Ibrahim noted: "*They are seen very differently. They are not virgins. A lot of the families do not accept that. They would not marry their sons to one of those girls*" (in interview).

The largely warm welcome that the Yezidi women awaited was in sharp contrast to the community's attitude to the children born of rape and the mothers who wanted to keep them (Kaushal, 2020). The arrival of these children into the community has been strongly discouraged and they have been the victims of controversy and stigma (Amnesty International, 2020; Ayhan & Tezcür, 2019; Chulov, 2020). It seems as if the existence of the children born from jihadists challenged the Yezidi identity in multiple ways. First, the community believes that as these children carry the DNA of Daesh, they are capable of harming the community later. Ms. Ibrahim argued: "*The community cannot accept these children because they have the idea that the child has blood from the enemy, from IS. This idea of pure, pure Yezidi, is always something Yezidis fought for*" (in interview). The president recalled a conversation between Yezidis where they referred to them as "*the seed of Daesh.*" (in interview). Secondly, there are legal implications as well. Namely, under Iraqi law, a child with a Muslim or unknown father is automatically identified as Muslim, meaning they can never be Yezidi despite pressure from the international community to accept them (Amnesty International, 2020; Kajjo, 2019). Lastly, these children are also a reminder of what IS did to the community (Amnesty International, 2020).

These complexities have left these mothers torn between the community or a life in exile with their children in other regions of Iraq or abroad (Amnesty International, 2020; Kaya, 2019). Four unrelated survivors conveyed this clearly when recalling their experiences after their escape: "*I knew they might separate me from my daughter. I went to al-Hol camp, and I tried to hide myself and my identity*". Others who did return said: "*I was told, 'if you want to see your*

father and mother, you will never see your children again"', another about her daughter: "*They say she is from IS. She is not from IS. She is part of my soul, I have a right to be with her. Why don't they have mercy on me*?" (as cited in Amnesty International, 2020). Another survivor was threatened by her father: "*If you talk about that child ever again then I will kill you*" (as cited in Stoter, 2019). There are nearly hundred orphans (Chuvlov, 2020), as some mothers have left their children at orphanages in Baghdad, Mosul or regions in Syria, and have never heard from them again.

In the next paragraph, I will discuss the findings.

5.5 Discussion

With this study, I seek to answer the following research question: *How do local conceptualizations of rape shape Yezidi women's reintegration into their local community after the wartime rapes by IS?* By reflecting on the way Yezidi survivors, their families and the community experienced the mass-rapes by IS and dealt with its ramifications, the purpose of this section intends to show that local conceptualizations matter. For, it is highly probable that cultural norms and the Yezidi identity prompted the community's response.

The data indicates that Yezidis pride themselves in the survival of their ancient culture and religion, considering the oppression they endured throughout many centuries. All evidence consulted for this research, maintained that in order to conserve the community, Yezidis created cultural and religious self-protective mechanisms, such as endogamy and initiation rites. These seem to reflect honor and pure bloodlines, and tend to be intertwined with the Yezidi identity. The psychologist highlighted that the community's customs and overall austere way of life, could deem non-compliance as giving up ones group-membership. Moreover, to echo the interviewed president, Yezidis find ethnic strength in being a Yezidi. This might hint at an ethnical bond between the Yezidis that has become a relatable part of themselves, establishing a closely-knit community and giving them a sense of belonging. Thus, it appears as if their cultural context influences how community life is experienced, based on the understanding of what it means to be Yezidi. With regards to their understanding of rape, all the evidence shows that Yezidis see it through the prism of patriarchy. For instance, the interviewees all conveyed the community's antagonism towards rape survivors in previous *farmans* or in non-conflict situations. These women were commonly blamed for shaming their family, and giving up their Yezidi identity, both with exile or honor killings as a result. In terms of the community's

response to the 2014 genocide, the results revealed a dichotomy between the rape survivors with children born of rape and those without. I argue that local conceptualizations of rape matter in relation to the community's behavior towards both groups.

All the consulted data referred to the unprecedented nature of Baba Sheikh welcoming back the survivors back into the community. The way local conceptualizations appear to come to the surface is two-fold. Firstly, Ms. Ibrahim mentioned that some families still seemed to view the survivors' loss of their virginity as something to take offense at, especially in terms of marriage, prompting stigma towards them. It is likely that the cultural values of chastity played a role in these families' interpretation of marriage. In which, sexual acts before marriage (with or without consent) are deemed as immoral. Moreover, the community's way of dealing with rape cases in the past, may have caused the fearful predictions among survivors concerning their homecoming. In contrast, there appeared to be a large sense of empathy from the community, which might infer the following. All interviewees mentioned that the extensive consequences of the genocide affected all Yezidis in some way. This could mean that the magnitude of the genocide, may have reached a certain threshold which prompted a cultural fluidity within a conservative community. Ms. Stoter and the psychologist both referred to the enormity of the crisis accounting for the community-wide acceptance. What has become visible in the aftermath of the 2014 genocide, is that the Yezidis were able to reconceptualize their perception of rape. For, if they would hold on to their traditional conceptualizations, the community might no longer have existed.

Within this reconceptualization, evidence shows that cultural and religious norms and practices gave meaning. For instance, introducing the traditional rebaptism ceremony seems essential, as it symbolized the survivors' purification which made them feel clean again. In addition, it appears as if Baba Sheikh's decision, in relation to the rebaptism, was charged with legitimacy, seeing that the overall attitude of the community appeared to be supportive. It was local in the sense that it offered an exceptional pardon, which was formulated within the Yezidi community, gave meaning to the Yezidi survivors and is only intended for the rape survivors of IS. It looks as if their notion of rape within this reconceptualization, was tailored to fit the extremity of the violence the rape survivors, their families and the community endured. Scholars like Kinvall & Mitzen (2018) and Greve (2018) go into explaining that conflict resolution is often governed by a sense of anxiety and ontological insecurity for one's existence, as a response to emerging conflicts that threaten a community's survival. Therefore, decision-makers within communities

are more inclined to make concessions considered to guarantee the community's existence, which opens the prospect for change, and in turn, consolidates their ontological security.

Nevertheless, it tends to be much more complicated for Yezidi women with children born of rape. All evidence suggests that Yezidis find it hard to accept a child that is not of pure Yezidi blood. Since the religion requires both parents to be Yezidi, a child in the community that is part Muslim seems to go against their principles. Moreover, being confronted with these children appears to trigger their trauma, maybe even more so considering their difficult history with the Arab Muslims. Thus, even in such devastating circumstances and under pressure from the international community, it appears that the Yezidis firmly adhere to their cultural and religious values by not accepting the non-Yezidi children born of rape back. This illustrates that cultural contexts might indeed be relevant, as some values appear not to be universal.

It is worth noting that the effects of the genocide reflect a cultural shift. It introduced this belief among the community that these women and girls were not different, challenging endogamic norms. Now, rape survivors are being heard instead of silenced, and embracing them in the community is a precedent that has been set, which might be a seed of change for future rape cases.

In answering the research question, the analysis depicts a relationship between local conceptualizations and the reintegration of the Yezidi wartime rape survivors. The YSSC established a reconceptualization of rape which allowed the women and girls to come back. The rebaptism was a cultural symbol and its meaning seemed to help these women heal, as well as generate a community-wide acceptance. This religious change and its implications did not go beyond the community, hence, it does not reflect universality. Conversely, children born of rape were met with such hostility by families and the community as they were not considered Yezidi. It appears that their cultural and religious rules and values of being a Yezidi governed their decision-making, notwithstanding the repercussions. This shows that the parameters within this reconceptualization are still bound by culturally fundamental beliefs and norms.

6. Conclusion

This research investigated how local conceptualizations shaped the reintegration of Yezidi women into their local community after the wartime rapes by IS. In the literature review it became clear that sociocultural consequences of wartime rape remained an under researched topic, particularly in the Middle East. Since, most scholars focus on the prevalence of wartime rape, its explanations, or the physical and psychological aspects. In the theoretical framework I introduced social constructivism and SIT as the basis for my expectations that local conceptualizations mattered for the reintegration of these women and girls. This argument was based on the assumption that the cultural context of the Yezidis and its attributed norms and values, would shape how Yezidis perceived the wartime rapes by IS. In addition, the Yezidi cultural identity would shape individual behavior and explain community behavior, which promotes in-group favoritism and out-group hostility. As the community is characterized by patriarchic structures in which chastity and male honor are interconnected, I expected that Yezidi survivors would deal with heavy stigmatization and ostracism. Contrary to my expectations however, survivors were rather accepted back. According to the theory, there are still clear structures of in-group and out-group behavior. The community's response to the women resembles behavior of in-group favoritism. The children born of rape, the out-group, were met with aversion. The Yezidis appeared to compare the in-group favorably, based on the survivor's pure Yezidi blood, which may reveal strong emotional ties to the in-group.

It seems the Yezidis were able to create and support a narrative, in which they as a whole were strategically targeted by IS. Literature on ontological security would be an interesting point for further research in this direction.

So to answer '*How do local conceptualizations of rape shape Yezidi women's reintegration into their local community after the wartime rapes by IS?* I conclude that local conceptualizations mattered. For, within this reconceptualization, that was limited to the community, Yezidi norms and practices likely shaped the survivors' and community's way of looking at them(selves) as rape survivors and determined their behavior. The community's conventional perception of rape caused fear among survivors to return, causing some to hide themselves in other regions. Them going into hiding elsewhere, might reflect their expectation that rape conceptions were different in other regions. For the returning survivors, the traditionally religious rebaptisms seemed to symbolically give meaning. Furthermore, the Yezidis held onto the local perception of what it means to be Yezidi, which is seen in them rejecting the children born of rape. They

were indeed seen as ‘other’, a bad memory and a potential future threat to the community. This image seems only to live within the community, as international pressure to accept these children appears to be in vain. Consequently, the survivors with children born of rape had to go into exile, or leave their children in orphanages. Creating an influx of Yezidi orphans, displaced women and refugees.

The Yezidi case shows that the local context is indeed able to frame how rape and its ramifications are experienced and understood. Also, that the local level can cause grand-scale consequences, which tells me that local conceptualizations deserve a more esteemed position within political science.

7. Bibliography

Abouzeid, R. (2018). *When the weapons fall silent: Reconciliation in Sinjar after ISIS.* Retrieved from: https://ecfr.eu/publication/when_the_weapons_fall_silent_reconciliation_in_sinjar_after_isis/

Açikyildiz, B. (2010). *The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion*. London, UK: . I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

Adler, A. (1997). Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World politics. *European Journal of International Relations, 3*(3), 319-363.

Amnesty International. (2020). *Legacy of Terror: The Plight of Yezidi Child Survivors of ISIS.* Retrieved from: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/2759/2020/en/

Ayhan, T. & Tezcür, G.M. (2019). 5 Years After Islamic State Massacre, an Iraqi Minority Is Transformed by Trauma. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/5-years-after-islamic-state-massacre-an-iraqi-minority-is-transformed-by-trauma-126917

Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* London, UK: Penguin Books.

Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against Our Will Men, Women and Rape*. London, UK: Secker & Warburg.

Carpenter, R. C. (2000). Surfacing Children : Limitations of Genocidal Rape Discourse *Human Rights Quarterly*, *22*(2), 428–477.

Cetorelli et al. (2017). Mortality and kidnapping estimates for the Yazidi population in the area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A retrospective household survey. *PLoS Med 14*(5), 1–15. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297

Chulov, M. (2020). After Isis, Yazidi women forced to leave their children behind. *The guardian.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/16/after-isis-yazidi-women-forced-to-leave-their-children-behind

Clark, J. N. (2014). A Crime of Identity: Rape and Its Neglected Victims. *Journal of Human Rights*, *13*(2), 146–169. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2014.886952

Cockburn, P. (2007). The death sentence that drags Dua back into a bloody feud. *Independent.* Retrieved from: The death sentence that drags Dua back into a bloody feud | The Independent

Cohen, D. K. (2013). Explaining Rape During Civil War: Cross-national Evidence (1980-2009). *American Political Science Review*, *107*(3), 461–477. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000221

Crawford et al. (2014). *Wartime Sexual Violence is Not Just a 'Weapon of War'.* The Washington Post. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/24/wartime-sexual-violence-is-not-just-a-weapon-of-war/

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, I.S. (2018). The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Diken, B. & Laustsen, C. B. (2005). Becoming Abject: Rape as a Weapon of War. *Body & Society*, *11*(1), 111–128. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X05049853

Dossa et al. (2014). Social Consequences of Conflict-related Rape: The Case of Survivors in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *Peace and Conflict*, *20*(3), 241–255. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000044

Ellemers, N. & Scheepers, D. (2019). Social Identity Theory. In K. Sassenberg and M. L. W. Vliek (Eds.). *Social psychology in action: Evidence-based interventions from theory to practice* 129-143. Springer, Cham. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13788-5_9

Ensler, E. (2016). Yazidi Activist Nadia Murad Speaks Out on the 'Holocaust' of Her People in Iraq. *Time.* Retrieved from: https://time.com/3598353/tragedy-on-mount-sinjar/

European Parliamentary Research Service. (2016). *The Yazidis: An ongoing genocide*. Retrieved from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_ATA%282016%29595842

Farwell, N. (2004). War rape: New Conceptualizations and Responses. *Affilia - Journal of Women and Social Work*, *19*(4), 389–403. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109904268868

Filice et al. (1994). Women Refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina: Developing a Culturally Sensitive Counselling Framework. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, *6*(2), 207–226. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/6.2.207

Folnegovic-Smalc et al. (1995). Rape, Torture, and Traumatization of Bosnian and Croatian Women: Psychological Sequelae. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *65*(3), 428–433. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079656

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local Knowledge.* NY, NY: Basic Books.

Gerring, J. (2004). What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For? *American Political Science Review*, *98*(2), 341–354. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404001182

Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0028

George, E. (2015). Yazidi women welcomed back to the faith. *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.* Retrieved from: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2015/6/56ec1e9611/yazidi-women-welcomed-back-to-the-faith.html

Gottschall, J. (2004). Explaining Wartime Rape. *Journal of Sex Research*, *41*(2), 129–136. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490409552221

Graham-Harrison, E. (2017). 'I was sold seven times': the Yazidi women welcomed back into the faith. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jul/01/i-was-sold-seven-times-yazidi-women-welcomed-back-into-the-faith

Greve, P. (2018). Ontological security, the struggle for recognition, and the maintenance of security communities. *Journal of International Relations and Development, 21*(1), 858–882. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0108-y

Guilaine, J. & Zammit, J. (2005). *The Origins of War: Violence in Prehistory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Halperin, S. & Heath, O. (2017). *Political Research Methods and Practical Skills.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Henne, P. & Hackett, C. (2014). Iraqi Yazidis: Hazy population numbers and a history of persecution. *Pew Research Center.* Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/12/iraqi-yazidis-hazy-population-numbers-and-a-history-of-persecution/

Huberman, A. M. & Miles, M. B. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Human Rights Council, *They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis*, Human rights situations that require the Council's attention, 32nd sess, Agenda Item 4, UN Doc A/HRC/32/CRP.2 (15 June 2016).

Human Rights Watch. (2015). *Iraq: ISIS Escapees Describe Systematic Rape*. Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/14/iraq-isis-escapees-describe-systematic-rape

Isikozlu, E. & Millard, A. S. (2010). Wartime Rape : Identifying Knowledge Gaps their Implications. *Security & Peace, 28*(1), 35–41.

Kajjo, S. (2019). Yazidis Divided Over Children Born of IS Rape. *Voice of America News.* Retrieved from: https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/yazidis-divided-over-children-born-rape

Kaushal, A. (2020). *Reintegrating Yazidi Women and Girls Back Into the Community.* Retrieved from: http://www.developmentinaction.org/reintegrating-yazidi-women-and-girls-back-into-the-community/

Kaya, Z. (2019). *Iraq's Yazidis and ISIS*. London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE): Middle East Centre Report. Retrieved from: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/102617/

Kelly et al. (2011). *Hope for the future again: Tracing the Effects of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Families and Communities in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.* Retrieved from: https://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/hope-for-the-future-again.pdf

Kinvall, C. & Mitzen, J. (2018). Ontological security and conflict: the dynamics of crisis and the constitution of community. *Journal of International Relations and Development, 21*,(1), 825–835. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0161-1

Kinyanda et al. (2010). War Related Sexual Violence and It's Medical and Psychological Consequences As Seen in Kitgum, Northern Uganda: A Cross-Sectional Study. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, *10*(1), 1–8. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-698X-10-28

Koos, C. (2017). Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts: Research Progress and Remaining Gaps. *Third World Quarterly*, *38*(9), 1935–1951. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1322461

Leatherman, J.L. (2011). Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Lončar et al. (2006). Psychological Consequences of Rape on Women in 1991-1995 War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Croatian Medical Journal*, *47*(1), 67–75.

Mahoney, J. (2008). Toward a Unified Theory of Causality. *Comparative Political Studies*, *41*(4–5), 412–436. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414007313115

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

McDougall, G. J. (1998). *Systematic rape, sexual slavery and slave*. UN: Economic and Social Council. Retrieved from: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f44114.html

Milillo, D. (2006). Rape As a Tactic of War: Social and Psychological perspectives. *Affilia - Journal of Women and Social Work*, *21*(2), 196–205. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109905285822

Ohambe et al. (2005). *Women' s bodies are not a battleground*. Retrieved from: https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/4949/4053.pdf

Onuf, N. G. (1989). World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations. In *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203722428

Salloum, S. (2013). A Guide to Minorities in Iraqi Memory, Identity and Challenges. *Masarat for Cultural and Media development*. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/13266038/Minorities_in_Iraq_Memory_Identity_and_Challenges

Schutz, A. (1962). Collected Papers I. *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *3*(3), 465-473.

Seifert, R. (1996). The Second Front: The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *19*(1-2), 35–43. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(95)00078-x

Skjelsbæk, I. (2010). *The Elephant in the Room: An Overview of How Sexual Violence came to be Seen as a Weapon of War*. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Retrieved from: https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=4490

Skjelsbæk, I. (2012). *The Political Psychology of War Rape*. London, UK: Routledge.

Stoter, B. (2019). *Het vergeten Volk: Het verhaal van de Jezidi's over de laatste genocide*. Amsterdam, NL: De Arbeiderspers.

Tajfel, H. (1978). Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparisons. In H. Tajfel (Ed.). *Differentiation between social groups* 61–76. London: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1986). *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior*. Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall.

Tawfeeq, M. & Tod, B. (2007). Four Arrested in Iraq 'Honor Killing. *CNN*. Retrieved from: Four arrested in Iraq 'honor killing' - CNN.com

Trounstine, J. (2009). All Politics Is Local: The Reemergence of the Study of City Politics. *Perspectives on Politics, 7*(3), 611–618. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592709990892

Tsurkov, E. (2019). Yazidi Community Struggles to Grapple with Children Born of Rape. *The Forum for Regional Thinking*. Retrieved from: https://www.regthink.org/en/articles/Yazidi-children-ISIS

Vlachova, M. & Biason, L. (2005). *Women in An Unsecure World: Violence Against Women, Facts, Figures and Analysis.* DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. Retrieved from: https://www.dcaf.ch/executive-summary-women-insecure-world

Wong, L.P. (2008). Data Analysis in Qualitative Research: A Brief Guide to Using NVIVO. *Malaysian Family Physician,* 3(1), 14 –20. Retrieved from: http://www.ejournal.afpm.org.my/

Wood, E. J. (2018). Rape as a Practice of War: Toward a Typology of Political Violence. *Politics and Society*, *46*(4), 513–537. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329218773710

Yazda, (2017). *An Uncertain Future for Yazidis: A Report Marking Three Years of an Ongoing Genocide*. Retrieved from: https://354a2745-cd89-499d-8ac2-0340313e364f.filesusr.com/ugd/92f016_230c3d32aa44498db557326046ad5ca7.pdf

Yin, R.K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

8. Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form Expert Interviews

Many thanks for your willingness to partake in the research project titled: *The Exceptional Stories of the Women Who Got Away: A Case of Yezidi Wartime Rape Survivors.* This thesis is conducted by me, Veronica van der Giessen-Cosmas Rebero, a Political Science Master student at the Leiden University in the Hague.

Purpose Study

The study explores conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated against the Yezidis by IS. More specifically, I am curious to find out how local conceptualizations of rape have shaped community reintegration of Yezidi women with children born of wartime rape. The purpose of this study is to understand in what way cultural values and social identity influence the level of acceptance and/or rejection of Yezidi women into their community. In the end, the hope is that this study can bring about relevant insights in order to create appropriate reconciliation strategies for deeply traumatized people.

Relationship Interviewee

You have been chosen as an interviewee because of your relevant work in the field. Your acquaintance and experience with the Yezidi rape survivors are considered to be highly valuable for my understanding of what these women have gone through upon their return to the community. The results of the interview will be used as additional information to the desk-research I have performed in order to fill any gaps.

General information

You are allowed to stop or withdraw from the interview at any given point. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. With your permission the interview will be recorded, allowing me to accurately capture your ideas and views, and a transcript will be made. Moreover, the research will contain paraphrases and/or direct quotations from this interview. By taking into account your confidentiality, would you please state how you would like to be referred to in the interview [*anonymous, by function, or by name*]. Lastly, access to the interview transcript will be confined to me, my thesis supervisor and my second reader, also a University staff. I will ask you to give your oral consent if you agree with the aforementioned.

Appendix B: Coding Scheme

Theme	Codes	Description	Examples
Self-preservative Identity	In-group belonging	Beliefs, customs and values that enhance the sense of togetherness among Yezidis	1. "*It's a religious tradition that we as Yezidis get baptized*" (Ms. Ghanim); 2. "*I personally believe that is the strength of the Yezidis, they are broken and traumatized, but their unity saved them. This sense of unity was also extended to the rape survivors*" (Ms. Stoter).
	In-group protection	Acts and behavior of cultural, religious and identity preservation	1. "*This whole idea of pure, pure Yezidi.. Is always something Yezidis fought for.. Their identity. To be who they are*" (Ms. Ibrahim); 2. "*They have become a victim of persecution so many times in the past, that is why they have this strange, if I may say so myself, rule that they cannot convert even under coercion*" (Ms. Stoter); 3. "*After all the genocides the Yezidis have strived to conserve their identity and protect it from others*" (Ms. Ghanim).
	Pure Yezidi bloodline	The framework of what it means to be a Yezidi	1. "*It is difficult for Yezidis to accept the idea that a child is walking around them who is not from pure blood*" (Ms. Ibrahim); 2. "*The way they were able to hang on to their religion was that, you know, it's just, you can only be a Yezidi if your father and mother are Yezidi, and there is a bloodline and there is no conversion. So that is what Yezidi identity is*" (Psychologist).
A Man's World	Chastity and non-Yezidi sexual relationships	The perception of rape within the Yezidi community pre-conflict	1. "*Women who were raped would lose their dignity and were seen as less than*" (Ms. Ghanim); 2. "*If a Yezidi girl has sexually intercourse with her consent or without her consent, with a non-Yezidi man, that girl is ex-communicated*" (Psychologist); 3. "*In the past if Muslims you know, came and grabbed a Yezidi girl and raped her, she was not a Yezidi, she was now Muslim*" (The president).
	Female dependency	The degree to which a Yezidi woman or girl can strive for independence and self-actualization within the community	1. "*They have not been to formal schooling, the majority of them have not been to formal school*" (Psychologist); 2. "*If you compare a Dutch woman who is very independent, and is a single mom.. You can't compare them to a Yezidi woman who has a child. Because she is dependent on her family. She can't go anywhere*" (Ms. Ibrahim); 3. "*They are often just a mother or a housewife*" (Ms. Stoter).

	Patriarchy	The way women are seen within the Yezidi society and their contribution in decision-making processes	1. "*A woman's position has changed a lot over the years, before it was a man-driven culture*" (Ms. Ghanim); 2. "T*he husband makes the final decision normally*" (The president); 3. "*And then again you have inequality between women and men*" (Ms. Ibrahim).
Community Response	Genocide of unprecedented nature	A shocking crisis for the community which generated trailblazing responses	1. "*This is the first time that they have experienced such a thing. It was their first time being confronted with such mass-rapes*" (Ms. Stoter); 2. "*This genocide is completely different. They are coming into a community that does not know how to handle a rape victim.*" (The president).
	A welcome cleansing	As a token of the acceptance of the rape survivors, the women and girls were rebaptized in the holy waters of Lalish (one of their holy sites)	1. "*All Yezidis are baptized in the holy water of Lalish because this would give them a clean soul. This has also been introduced for the women to give them a feeling of safety and that they are not seen differently within the community*" (Ms. Ghanim); 2. "*They were welcomed in Lalish with a religious ceremony of repurifying them you know. By religion, blessing them by pope and welcome them in the society*" (Mr. Shamo Roto).
	Preconceptions of rape and its impact Post-conflict	The effects of the local perceptions of rape on IS rape survivors	1. "*Walking around with the thought that they would be seen as worthless, cursed, and being raped by a leader of IS has done a lot of damage to the women*" (Ms. Ghanim; 2. "*The traditional way of thinking of rape is, it is the, it damages the women. It is the blame goes to women. So, yea there is this, both welcome and respect and also some stigma, because, they have been raped*" (Psychologist).
	Out-group hostility	The way children born of rape were seen and treated by the Yezidis. Since they are not purely of Yezidi blood, they are not considered part of the in-group, but rather as enemies and outsiders	1. "*I am not proud of rejecting of children*" (Mr. Shamo Roto); 2. "*These children are not accepted in the community. Because, the Yezidi religion does not accept children that are born, you know without a Yezidi father*" (Psychologist); 3. "*In many cases the children are taken away from them and are in orphanages or put up for adoption, without the knowledge of the mother*" (Ms. Ibrahim); 4. "*I know of forced abortions. I know of people who were told to leave their children if they wanted to be allowed back into the community*" (The president).