Motherhood and Family Relationships in the Context of Displacement: The Case of Shingali Yazidis in Iraqi Kurdistan and The Netherlands

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Drawn by one of my participants

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Introduction

In the summer of 2014, the xenophobic extremist group ISIS committed genocide against the Yazidi people. Thousands of men were murdered, thousands of young boys were taken to be indoctrinated fighters, and thousands of women and girls were taken as sex slaves (Taha, Taib, & Sulaiman, 2021). Within a few days, over 200,000 Yazidis from the Shingal region of Iraq were displaced, and more than 9,900 were either kidnapped or killed (Taha, Taib, & Sulaiman, 2021:1; Kizilhan, 2017). Most fled to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Jaeger et al., 2019). Others have sought asylum in places like the Netherlands. Yet, the Yazidis' story did not begin or end in 2014. Yazidis have experienced 74 genocides in recorded history (Jaeger et al., 2019: 10). I will further contextualise Yazidis and why they have been so frequently under attack in Chapter 1. To this day, thousands of Yazidis still sit in IDP camps, and many still take the dangerous journey into Europe to find peace and safety. Therefore, many Yezidis rely on aid from governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Al-Ali, 2020; Yüksel et al., 2018). However, Yazidis are more than just genocide survivors; they are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters, and sons. Like everyone, they have their practices, values, societal structures, and own agency that shape their lives. It is important to understand Yazidi's past and their presently shifting social relationships to support them more effectively in the aftermath of the genocide.

I must confess, I did not even know that the Yazidi people group existed until about two years ago. I first heard about Yazidis when my parents decided to move to Kurdistan with their small NGO that works in development. The more I learned about them as a people and all the challenges they have faced, the more I wanted to understand them. Therefore, my research began by talking to aid workers who work with Yazidi women in Iraq, which I made through their connections to my parents. Some of them work with Shingali Yazidi mothers doing breastfeeding clinics and healthcare clinics. They expressed being sometimes frustrated or saddened by what they saw of how Yazidi women behaved and were treated within their own communities. I then wanted to understand how the mothers themselves perceive and experience their role. This then inspired me to research the topic of motherhood within the context of family structures. Family structures are the ways that families are formulated, who is present within a family and the dynamics between the family members (McLanahan &

Percheski, 2008: 258). After being gripped by this question, I went back to aid workers to ask if this would be a helpful topic; they said it would and gave me suggestions for questions. Such as suggestions from one aid worker who said,

"'when do they feel happy to be a mother? I feel like their place is so much in the home with constant exhausting work; do they accept this? Do they wish for more? Do they feel proud of their role in the community?' [1].

I incorporated some of their suggestion questions into my interviews. My hope for this research is that it can help some aid workers better understand the role of mothers, so that they can support them in that role. There is a significant power imbalance between myself and my participants, and I have only scratched the surface of understanding these individual women's experiences. With that being said, I hope that I can at least begin to shed some light based on the patterns I have seen around a mother's role within families and Yazidi society.

This leads to my research question: **What is the role and experience of mothers within displaced Yazidi families across time and space?**

In this research, I look at how the experiences, norms, and practices have changed in different spaces and temporalities. This research has focused on Shingali Yazidis as they are from the region of Iraq that was controlled by ISIS, and so the majority of displaced Yazidis are Shingali. Shingali Yazidis are in a time of social transition because their communities have been uprooted. The population of this research are displaced Shingali Yazidis from the diaspora across the Netherlands and two Yazidi villages containing IDP camps in Iraqi Kurdistan. Some women lived within the camps, and some lived around the camps, this distinction can greatly influence a mothers experience as I will later address. For the purposes of this research, I will use the shortened term Yazidi to refer to my research group when discussing cultural practices, social structures, and religion, and Shingalis when referring to displacement and spaces. However, keep in mind that there are differences between Yazidis from different regions; as well as differences between religious and ethnic groups from Shingal. The goal of this work is to understand the role of Yazidi mothers and how it has changed as a result of the displacement. therefore, time is categorised both within a person's life and between different generations; place includes different spaces within Shingal, Kurdistan, and the Netherlands.

[1] 14.3.22

Throughout this thesis, I look at how the spatial dimensions of family life shape the notions and practices of motherhood. This paper will be laid out parallel to the life trajectory of my participants in the Netherlands. However, this is not a linear process for the Shingali Yazidi community as a whole; people are simultaneously living in Shingal, Kurdistan, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. Furthermore, change does not occur at the same rate or in the same manner with all displaced Yazidi families. Chapter 1 discusses the group identity and history of the population of this research, and the normative family structure. Then I will move to how my interlocutors experience family life within displacement in Iraqi Kurdistan. Next, this thesis will journey onto the Netherlands, discussing the Dutch asylum process, and subsequently daily life in residential housing. The final chapter will be an overarching chapter that deals with a few topics related to bonds between mothers and children.

Theoretical Framework: Transnational Motherhood within Humanitarian Aid

Yazidis were relatively unknown to much of western Europe until the conflict in Iraq during the 2000s and 2010s. The studies during this period primarily looked at their oral traditions and religion (Kreyenbroek et al., 2009; Allison, 2001). Since 2014, there has been an explosion of research on Yazidis. The majority of this research has been on the genocide itself; specifically, the negative impacts it has had on issues such as people's mental health, especially that of sexual violence survivors (Taha, Taib & Sulaiman, 2021; Tippens et al., 2021; Taha & Slewa-Younan, 2020; Jaeger et al., 2019). However, there is much more that can be learned about and gleaned from Yazidi women.

In recent decades there has been a growing body of literature on motherhood and mothering practices and experiences. Motherhood studies seek to analyse "both the construction of shared meanings and the historical, cultural, and situational contexts out of which people act" (Arendell, 2004:1193). These studies began primarily due to feminist critique to analyse and question assumptions around "expectations of women and womanhood […] and challenges to the gender-based division of labour" (Arendell, 2004: 1193). There has also been a critique, in recent years, about the need for more inclusion of different races, ethnicities, localities, religions, and classes in the study of motherhood (Kawash, 2011). This empirical study with displaced Yazidi mothers seeks to add to the debates within this body of literature. Examining the experiences of these often-marginalised women can aid in understanding how the meanings and practices of motherhood are "multiple and shifting" (Arendell, 2004: 1193).

The practices of mothering and the expectations of their responsibilities also vary between different social and ethnic groups (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). A 1994 study comparing how Swedish, Italian, and American women define 'good mothering' practices found that there were significant differences in the normative goals and practices, which were influenced by the contexts such as family structure and norms around the division of labour (Welles-Nyström, New, & Richman). For example, Italian mothers were often expected to be the primary caregiver and considered "motherhood as an essential part of being a woman" (ibid: 84). However, their primary goals were more focused on physically caring for their

children through hygiene and feeding, with extended family members and friends expected to play a vital role in "socialising" infants (ibid: 84). This can also be seen within Yazidi mothering practices, as discussed in Chapter 1. Whereas, the Swedish participants, showed more of an emphasis on sharing parenting responsibilities between partners. Most Swedish mothers stressed that their "role as a mother [is] only one component" of their life (ibid: 84).

Yet, the expectations of motherhood and the practices do not always coincide. This is seen in Aboim's (2010) study comparing 22 European countries as to people's attitudes and practices around the gendered division of paid and domestic labour. They found that countries such as West Germany and Sweden highly advocated for the dual carer/earner model; yet, proportionally, most families still fit into the male breadwinner model (ibid). In other countries, however, they found it to be the reverse (Aboim, 2010: 188). Aboim (2010:191) found that individuals' attitudes around "the negative impact of women's employment on motherhood reveal the persistence of a troubled relationship between women's entitlement to paid work and their nurturing roles as mothers and homemakers." Throughout this research, I will look at the attitudes and expectations around the role of women within a family.

The mothers in this research have another layer of complexity to their roles and identities as being transnational. Motherhood is an "institution determined by social norms, cultural practices and religious structures" (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2016:10). The spatial context that a woman is in, can shape her experiences and feelings around motherhood and family. Transnational mothers must navigate a sense of belonging between the social, political, ethnic, and religious context that they are coming from and the one in which they currently reside (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2016). The norms of one's community and the context in which one's identities are performed influence how motherhood is practised in daily life. Due to negotiating the perspectives and beliefs of the two 'cultures', a 'theory of hybridity', as Gupter and Ferguson (2012: 11) discuss, is a useful framework with which to evaluate how 'culture' morphs and reproduces in different spaces. Transnational motherhood will be analysed as to how mothers navigate and cope with the various challenges, perspectives, practices, and responsibilities.

Transnational motherhood is connected to kinship and family structure. Women's roles as mothers "allow them to connect families by creating, reinforcing, and maintaining

networks and relationships" (Zaatari, 2006: 33). It is therefore valuable to understand the kinship networks of Yazidis to understand the developing diasporas in other countries. Yazidi families are structured within wider kinship networks that play a prominent role and responsibility in childrearing and motherhood (Greaser, 2018). Thus, this research must evaluate how kinship relationships and family structure shape the roles and responsibilities of motherhood and how this affects mothers' identities and experiences. This paper will evaluate how being a mother affects a woman's sense of belonging within her wider community and network. Such as some motherhood studies on the experience of Muslim mothers and their sense of belonging in the UK or Lebanon (Cheruvallil-Contractor & Rye, 2016; Zaatari, 2006).

Yazidis traditionally live in multi-generational extended households, as discussed in Chapter 1. Much of the research on multi-generational households focuses on grandparents and children. For example, Goodman and Silverstein (2002) looked at the well-being of grandmothers who contribute to raising their grandchildren within different family structures among three ethnic groups in the US (White, African-American, and Hispanic). As well as another study evaluating South Asian grandparents' well-being who live in multi-generational households in the UK (Burholt & Dobbs, 2014). Within Yazidi communities, it is not only the mother that plays a prominent childrearing role but also the mother-in-law (Greaser, 2018). Other studies looking at the role of the mothers-in-law in multi-generational households found that they can play a significant role in the decisions and practices of mothers (Simkhada, Porter, & van Teijlingen, 2010; Georgas et al., 2001). Qualitative research on the influence of mothers-in-law on Nepalese mothers going to antenatal check-ups found that mother-in-laws strongly influenced whether mothers attended their appointments (Simkhada, Porter, & van Teijlingen, 2010). However, the results varied considerably across the mother-in-law's education and social class. These power dynamics can have a significant effect on practices of motherhood. As reflected in Abiom (2010), family structure is linked to the division of labour, with family members expected to do the tasks culturally associated with their family role. In extended multi-generational family models, it is important to consider the division of labour among family members according to gender divisions, age, and position within the family (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002).

Another essential factor is generational differences in attitudes and practices between children, mothers, and grandmothers. Practices and meanings develop over time due to

various social, political, economic, and technological changes (Zaatari, 2006; Landolt & Wei Da, 2005). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that many studies have shown that motherhood also changes across generations. For example, Crivello, Boyden and Pankhurst (2019) note that childhood marriage and motherhood used to be the relatively unquestioned norm in Ethiopia. However, the discourses around this have now changed and young girls are told that they have more choice, even if it is more complex in practice (ibid). Moore's (2013) study on mothering across three generations in South Africa found that ideas around a 'good mother' have changed. Where older generations viewed mothering as being "a good provider and caring role", the younger generation put more emphasis on “personal goals” (ibid:151). What mothers today think and do is not necessarily what their mothers thought or did. However, as discussed previously, even if younger generations have different views about certain practices, their actions are often affected by the opinions of older women, such as their mothers-in-law (Crivello, Boyden & Pankhurst, 2019; Simkhada, Porter, & van Teijlingen, 2010).

Many studies about transnational motherhood look at mothers in ‘global care chains’ such as domestic work (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; García & De Oliveira, 1997; Millman, 2013). Mothers who migrate due to economic reasons often leave their children in the host country in the care of a relative (Landolt and Wei Da, 2005). These mothers migrate to find work in the hope of providing for themselves and their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Something that has been discussed in much of the literature about transnational motherhood is the notion of reciprocity (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997). Reciprocity is the concept of negotiating or trading between the mother and other family members in exchange for them taking care of her children (Pinazo-Hernandis, 2010:422). However, there is variation among cultures and societies. For example, “the role of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, as caregivers and educators of their grandchildren is well established in the Chinese family tradition” (Landolt & Wei Da, 2005: 646). In these contexts, reciprocity works differently because the expectation around the mother is not necessarily that it is her responsibility to raise the child; therefore, she does not need to negotiate with other people taking over ‘her’ role. These themes also appeared in my own research, as Yazidi grandmothers are expected to play a significant caring role for their grandchildren.

Most of the research on transnational motherhood has been on economic migrants. However, there has been little social research on mothers who migrate for security due to

conflict. Yet, they are also transnational mothers because their journeys, lives, families, and networks are spread over multiple locations. Mothers who are refugees differ from other migrant mothers in several ways: they often immigrate/flee with their children and sometimes their husbands, their lives are more shaped by government support and control, and as in the case of most of my participants, they do not necessarily work outside of the house (Hein, 1993). Korukcu et al. (2018) did look at the effect of being a pregnant mother while being a refugee from Syria in Turkey, and the extra stress caused by the responsibility to take care of their family, which often was laid on their shoulders without much support. Furthermore, little research has been done on motherhood practices while seeking asylum in another country or how family relationships develop through these experiences. Vervliet et al. (2014) did an intersectional study looking at adolescent unaccompanied refugee mothers during the asylum process in Belgium. They found that policies often did not take the categorisation of mother into account when addressing these women (ibid). Aching and Granato (2018) also did research with unaccompanied refugee mothers, and the importance of building a social network. Anderson and Ee (2019) looked at how the Dutch asylum system can better psychologically support mothers and children born of sexual violence. I also found research observing refugee mothers from the angle of the many barriers and challenges they face, such as in their relationship with their children's schools and English classes (De Gioia, 2015; Riggs et al., 2012). These studies are crucial and constructive. However, I think it is also important to put these women in context with their social relationships. I could not find much research on refugee family relationships and how they shape the experiences of displaced mothers. Nor could I find any comparative studies between the norms of mothering practices with a group in the host country and the receiving country. Therefore, this research seeks to look at displaced refugee mothers from the lens of transnational motherhood and family structures.

The topic of refugees is also connected to the debates within academic literature about the negative consequences of international aid efforts that come from the good intentions of policymakers (Ferguson, 2005). For example, Mosse (2006: 940) argues that aid and development projects are often assessed through 'success' and 'failures' based on what happened in practice versus the expected outcome. However, this form of assessment can sometimes obscure the aid project's social impacts regardless of whether it was 'successful' or not (ibid). Furthermore, being a refugee often means that mothers are in a situation where they are under the jurisdiction of different aid organisations, which might have different ideas

about the role of mothers and wives (Trapp, 2016). I discuss this further in Chapter 3. There has been much feminist critique about how women experiencing conflict and displacement are portrayed and conceptualised in the media and the wider public (Begikhani, Hamelink & Weiss, 2018). They are often presented as resistance fighters or simple victims (Begikhani, Hamelink & Weiss, 2018: 13). Although this is true to some degree, as Yazidis and other Kurds have been subjected to war and violence, reducing them to only victims with little agency can have negative consequences by disempowering women (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006).

As mentioned, there is much anthropological research about how aid workers often perceive the needs of the aid receivers differently than they do themselves (Wagner, 2018). Minwalla, Foster and McGrail (2020:1) found that the way aid organisations and media have discussed the genocide and sexual violence against Yazidi women can have detrimental effects through the "re-victimisation and collective stigmatisation of Yazidi women". Aid workers, government workers, and Yazidis often come from different ontological perspectives. Ontological dissensus involves different ways of conceptualising and arranging the relationships in the world (Littlejohn, 2020: 26). Therefore, aid workers can sometimes make assumptions about what is best for the people they are working with without asking them or trusting them to know what is best for themselves (Littlejohn, 2020). Part of the motivation for this work is to highlight the importance of common understanding between assisting groups and the groups that are being assisted. As many Yazidis are displaced worldwide and rely on external support, I hope my research will be relevant and beneficial to various aid workers supporting Yazidis in different locations. Particularly by encouraging them to question their own perspectives and consider those of the people they work with, even if the perspectives found in this study are not generalisable to all Yazidi individuals.

In conclusion, this study aims to contribute to the academic literature about transnational motherhood and kinship. As already mentioned, Yazidis have primarily been studied for their oral traditions and the genocide. Very few studies have examined average Yazidis social expectations, practices, and relationships. I will discuss both the structures and agency women have within their roles and around the division of labour. As well as add to the literature about motherhood in multi-generational extended households. Furthermore, there have been few Yazidi studies looking at the diasporas that are emerging around the globe, and even fewer directly comparing women's social practices in a European country and Iraq.

This paper will discuss how motherhood practices and attitudes vary between generations and across time due to changes in one's context. I examine the social structures in which motherhood is enacted and how they are shifting due to displacement. However, on a broader level, I hope that this research can contribute to filling the gap within the academic literature about displaced motherhood within their social context.

Methods of research

In this research, I primarily do interpretive ethnography while considering the critiques of postmodernists by getting feedback from key informants about my interpretations. Interpretive ethnographies combine participant observation and interpretation, which is vital for understanding how culture, "a complex set of signifying practices", influences how certain people construct the world (Kubik, 2018: 20). It is important to understand the meanings and practices of people as it influences how they form collective identities and differentiate themselves (Gupta & Ferguson, 2012: 7). Postmodern ethnography has played a critical role in questioning the assumptions behind other forms of ethnography, such as seeking to understand 'objective reality' and 'detached cultures' and questioning the authority of the researcher's interpretation (Kubik, 2018).

This research is also a global and multi-sited ethnography that studies the effects of the fragmentation and re-assemblage of increasingly interconnected and global systems (Tsing, 2015). This form of ethnography looks at population and commodity flows, and networks rather than confining structures or places (Tsing, 2015). Boundaries are fluid for Yazidi society because they have been dispersed around the world. This research was multi-sited because it involved in-person interviews and participant observations with migrant/refugee households around the Netherlands. On top of it not being fixed in one location in the Netherlands, my research also took place during one month in Iraq, where I visited two different Yazidi villages. In this thesis I map out where the network connects, intersects, and is located to better understand where and what the Yazidi community is across geographic boundaries.

I started by researching Yazidis and the topic of motherhood since I could not find any research combining the two topics. My research focuses on the Yazidis from the Iraq region most affected during the ISIS genocide: Shingal. I then established a network of Yazidis living in the Netherlands. It was challenging to find Yazidis because they are spread all around the country. There is no central place in the Netherlands where Yazidis gather regularly except on festival days, but they are all connected through community and kinship ties. Therefore, the only way to have contact with them outside of Iraq is by following a chain within a network of people through snowballing participants (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004). In

order to make contact and gain access to people, I interned with an NGO in the Netherlands that supports and gives aid to Yezidi refugees, called *NL Helpt Yazidi*. My official title is the 'project and community manager'. Volunteering for an NGO was more about access and giving something back to the community than as a method itself (O'Reilly, 2012:101).

The organisation's director and Yazidi activist, Wahhab Hassoo, was a key link for me to the community. On several occasions, he put me directly in touch with families for my research. This allowed me to build my network of interlocutors. My role as an intern was to support Yazidi refugees struggling with an issue during the asylum process. When we heard of a family, because it was often families who needed support or were new in the country, we would visit them. Visiting was also just a way of encouraging them during this difficult time, but I would also contact COA if the family needed assistance with something. I also was able to get involved in and support different projects that the organisation was working on, such as translating documents for their campaign against Big Tech companies for facilitating the genocide. Working with an NGO gave me some legitimacy when talking to my participants. On the other hand, my association with an NGO could cause issues around informed consent because my role might be confused with the other aid workers (Wagner, 2018). Although it can be a positive thing to be associated with a particular organisation, it can have drawbacks if people feel like they need to monitor themselves in the way that they believe the NGO wants them to behave to continue receiving aid (Wagner, 2018). Therefore, when I was on purely 'work' trips, I did not speak with people about my research, and I did not include any of their stories in this paper. However, I met several Yazidi families this way, which gave me some helpful insights into AZCs and the Dutch asylum process.

This snowballing effect allowed me access to a relatively wide variety of Yazidi families. It took some time because my initial contacts were often men, who then needed to get me in touch with women they knew. Plus, I always needed to make sure that someone could translate as most, but not all, mothers still struggle with the Dutch language. Most of my research involved going to people's homes, which included doing participant observation of how women interact with their home and their families and having unstructured interviews with both the women and their other family members. Participant observation allowed me to see how values and practices around motherhood play out in real-life situations (Shah, 2017).

Meeting women in their homes with their families present led me to conceptualise my participants in terms of families with the mother as the focal point. Although my focus was on motherhood, I had many conversations with husbands, uncles, and children about their own experiences with the women in their families, as well as their perspectives around values, traditions and societal changes in the norms and practices.

I have broadly two groups of mothers/families in my Dutch sample. One was a group of three mothers in their early 20s who were undergoing the asylum process. These families were at the same AZC when I interviewed two of them, but now they have been dispersed from one another. I had one interview with them that was several hours long. The third family in this group has been a staple in my research; I have been in regular contact with the husband and have visited the family around four times for several hours. This family consists of a 24-year-old mother, a father in his early 30s and a three-year-old daughter.

The second category of my Dutch participants are families who live in residential social housing. I will explain further in the Chapter 3 about social housing for refugees in the Netherlands. In this group, there were about eight families. However, three women were particularly influential interlocutors. I visited them on multiple occasions (average around four times) and maintained frequent contact with their family, primarily through teenage and young adult daughters. All eight women are in their late 30s and 40s**,** and all of them had somewhere from three to six children, with a mix of ages from young adults to young children. Many of the mothers I talked to had been here for extended periods, from around five to eleven years. However, I did speak to a few sisters-in-law of my participants who had been here for less time. Yet, they were often less open as it was usually a surprise to find me at their relatives' house. Unfortunately, this method, as discussed later, had limitations to the type of data I could collect. However, I was able to see on many occasions what that role looked like in daily life.

As discussed previously, this research was multi-sited because I wanted to understand the networks and assemblages of displaced Yazidi families. Therefore, this research also occurred during a one-month stay in Iraqi Kurdistan in March 2022. While there, I lived in the city of Duhok. Around Duhok, several Yazidi villages have refugee camps set up by the UN. I had several aid worker contacts before arriving through my parent's work with a small NGO in the region. Three of my parents' co-workers work or live in one such town called

Khanke. One contact, who is a foreign aid worker, took me on several extended home visits with her Yazidi friends and neighbours. Another is an OBGYN, and she allowed me to sit in her waiting room from 11 am to 6 pm on two occasions to interview/talk to her patients. This was surprisingly the ideal environment to converse with women: they had time while waiting for their appointments, and they were outside of their usual home environments, so they did not have the pressure of being a host, plus family members did not surround them. The third aid worker who facilitated my research worked at a community centre in Khanke. At the centre, they have classes for pregnant women and mothers with babies to support them in breastfeeding and caring for an infant. Plus, classes for mothers with children from six months to five years old. I was able to go to two of the breastfeeding classes and one of the parenting classes. Additionally, I went on around ten shorter home visits with the instructors of the classes, who are Yazidi women themselves. I also went to another Yazidi IDP camp in another town, called Shariya, due to contacts I had made in the Netherlands. There, I did a few home visits and met with the director of a community centre. Additionally, I had extended interviews with a Yazidi midwife and a Yazidi psychologist who work with women in their communities. During my time in Iraq, I was with Yazidis almost every day. These interviews gave me valuable insights into Yazidi communities in Iraq and life in and around the IDP camps, which several of my participants in the Netherlands also experienced.

In addition to doing participant observation in different spaces, I conducted several types of interviews: semi-structured, unstructured, life history, and a few group interviews. In much of my research, I did life history interviews, so I asked my participants to walk me through the topic of motherhood throughout their lives. Life history interviews are a "qualitative approach for understanding past and present contextual influences on people's […] perceptions and behaviours" (Goldman et al., 2012: 565). These interviews seek to comprehend how a theme is threaded throughout a person's life and how the practices and feelings around that theme might have changed over time (Goldman et al., 2012). For example, a woman's perspective about a certain practice connected to motherhood might be different from when she first became a mother and now after having teenage children. Yet, as our present thoughts and values can shape memories, life history interviews do not necessarily attempt to paint the reality of daily life but how people remember, perceive, and interpret their experiences (Rosenthal et al., 2015: 33). In these interviews we discussed how my participants described and remembered the norms of family life when they were growing

up in Shingal. Plus, their own experiences with their mothers and grandmothers and, in some cases, early motherhood before the displacement.

Also, I conducted a method between unstructured and semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions that followed along with the previous comment to give the interviewee more freedom to lead the conversation. I would use probes and prompt questions only if needed to start the conversation or bring the interview back to a relevant topic (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004). Through the unstructured/semi-structured interviews and life history interviews, I gained valuable insight into my participants' perspectives and experiences.

I also did some artistic research[2] with my participants, which seeks to understand and connect with participants through creating (Lesage, 2009). On one occasion that I sat in the clinic's waiting room, I took some paper and coloured pencils and drew with some of the women. This was then a practice that I continued with my interlocutors in the Netherlands. Asking women to draw something meaningful to them was a great way to open new avenues of connection and allow the women to share something important to them. Through the participant observation and interviews that I conducted, I was able to gain insight into the norms and practice of motherhood for displaced Yazidis.

A typical home visit to someone consisted of scheduling with someone in the family who speaks Dutch, often the husband or child. When I showed up, it was often difficult to have time to sit and talk with the mother. One issue was often needing translation, but she also was typically busy getting dinner ready and finishing up her household chores. So, I would often sit and talk to the rest of the family. At some point, usually after dinner, the mother would have time to talk with me about motherhood: her experiences and daily life. However, it was almost always with other people around: sometimes her teenage or young adult daughter, sometimes the husband would be there and sometimes the whole family would be present. Therefore, a limitation of this research is that I may not have gotten a sense of what a mother truly thought of her role, if she felt the need to be careful about what she said in front of her family.

[2] Appendix 2

Interviews were done with a translator in most cases. The translators for the participants in the Netherlands were either a family member or a Yazidi woman who was my collaborator in my tasks for NL Helpt Yazidi. She was a great help to my research in many ways, also outside our volunteering role. Although most of the interviews were conducted with translators, the women I spoke to had varying degrees of Dutch language ability, which affected the interview. Since many different languages and dialects are spoken in Kurdistan, most of the aid workers I met still use translators after being there for years. Through my aid worker contacts, I made connections to professional translators in Iraq. Some quotes throughout this paper were said through a translator, and some were said to me directly by interlocutors. Some quotes were also corrected for grammatical errors to promote clarity and comprehension. Having a translator affected the research in several ways: the participants might not feel comfortable saying certain things in front of another Yezidi or a family member, it was sometimes more difficult to establish rapport, and there were several occasions where miscommunication or misrepresentation occurred because the information must be interpreted before I received it (Berreman, 2012). I tried to learn some Kurdish during my research, but I could not speak or understand much. On one occasion, I understood parts of a conversation where I asked, "Are there practices or beliefs that you do differently than your mother?". The translator instead asked, "do you do things the same as your mother?" and the answer was simply "*yes*". These two questions have very different connotations and answers.

Disclosure about my analysis is essential to give the mothers agency and control over their narratives (Begikhani, Hamelink & Weiss, 2018). I have done this in the way of writing small summery stories which include many of my findings in a subtle way[3]. These are synthesized stories about a woman in different locations and temporalities based on the experiences communicated to me by my participants. I then went back with these stories to my participants and asked them if they thought I had missed something important or included something inaccurate. Despite my goal of not wanting to portray Yazidis simply negatively, I subconsciously, due to a negativity bias, fell into the trap myself. For example, in one of my stories about women in an IDP camp in Kurdistan, I wrote that the woman was allowed to continue her education but dropped out in her final year. These details were taken from an

[3] These three stories can be found in appendix 1: one of a teenage girl in Shingal before the genocide, one of a 22-year-old mother in an IDP camp in Kurdistan, and one of a 39-year-old mother in the Netherlands.

actual woman's story that I was told. Nevertheless, when I showed it to my participants, a few said that it was correct that this happens with some women for various reasons. However, including this in my story ignores all the Yazidi women finishing school and going to university in greater numbers than before the displacement. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2. Reading my participants these stories, allowed me to adjust my interpretations and focus to reflect the experiences of these women more accurately. I believe that an anthropologist's commitment to their participants should be that any knowledge produced should benefit the participants and attempt to understand their viewpoint as deeply and accurately as possible (Kennemore & Postero, 2021).

Despite challenges, this research offers valuable insights into the experiences of Yazidi motherhood and womanhood. These methods gave me insight into the perspectives, values, and meanings behind mothering practices (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004).

Ethics:

My research is guided by the five aspects of the Dutch anthropological ethics code: avoiding harm, informed consent, anonymity, integrity, and data management (DAA, 2019). Avoiding harm is essential for all anthropologists to keep in mind. One way this research could cause harm is by accidentally misunderstanding and misrepresenting my participants' perspectives. If I get this wrong, an already vulnerable people group will be misrepresented to aid workers who can affect certain aspects of their lives. Additionally, I need to be careful how I portray the Yazidi religion and culture as they have often been targeted for violence in their homeland of Iraq due to their minority religious beliefs. Religious beliefs were not the focus of this research. So, I will not go into great depth about religious beliefs or practices unless they particularly pertain to motherhood or give important background information about the Yazidis. Regarding any religious beliefs I mention, I had one of my interlocutors read over it to ensure I did not say anything incorrectly. As well as follow the following ethical steps to protect participants.

The second ethical value in anthropological research is confidentiality and informed consent. My research was conducted on an overt access basis, so my participants were informed that I am a researcher and were explicitly asked if the information could be included in the research (O'Reilly, 2012). Informed consent means continually asking if information can be used for the research throughout the entire process (O'Reilly, 2012).

Informed consent was at times complicated to achieve. Despite attempting to explain my research, some participants were still confused about what a master's thesis entailed due to language and educational barriers. Hospitality and generosity are important values in the Yazidi community, which I experienced in abundance throughout my research. Yet, due to these values, it was sometimes difficult to tell if people were saying yes to be generous or because they wanted me to use that information. Therefore, my participants are anonymised with no details linking specific people to places, statements, or family names. Some of my participants chose their own pseudonyms, and some of them were picked from Yazidi names that I was told are relatively common. Also, I did not include any information I was unsure if I had permission to use. Especially, as I am discussing family dynamics, it might cause harm not to anonymise my participants. That way if something they or I said makes someone in their family or community upset, it will not reflect poorly on them.

Finally, there is data management and ownership. I recorded a few interviews on my iPhone's voice memo app. These interviews were logged by date and with the first initial of the participant's name. They will then be deleted after the research project is completed in July 2022. All the information I collect and analyse will be anonymised when transcribed into Microsoft Word on my laptop. So, all the information about my participants will be completely anonymised, and the stories and quotes will not be able to be traced back to any one person. I will delete these transcriptions and notes from my laptop after the end of the project, but they will not be deleted from my iCloud in case I research this topic in the future and want to build on this project. The names and numbers of my contacts will only be stored on WhatsApp, but not in a way that indicates that they are part of my research or are Yazidis. Most of my research did not take place on that platform, but it was primarily used for setting up interviews. For integrity, I want to be open and honest about my research and methods, and I will try to do that to the best of my ability. However, I also need to remember that I am limited in what I can do with my research, and I do not have control over how the research will be used (Fassin, 2013; Tate, 2020). Although Yazidis are a vulnerable people group, and so I need to be conscious about how I portray them, I hope that people will be able to have open access to my work. I do not think that my research should be under an embargo because every person I spoke with wanted to talk to me with the express desire of wanting people to learn about and understand Yazidis. Yazidis often feel that the rest of the world has forgotten and misunderstood them, so they want people to know they exist and understand their experiences.

It is crucial to always be aware of the power dynamics and collaborate with my participants as much as possible, despite barriers such as language and educational differences (Tate, 2020). It was also important to collaborate with women and check in with them to ensure that I have understood their experiences and represented them correctly (Rappaport, 2008). Furthermore, it is important to be aware of who the audience is when publishing results from an ethnographic study, who the study benefits, and who you have a duty to (Fassin, 2013). I will be giving my research to a few aid workers, based on a few things I say they might feel attacked. However, I have great respect for their work and think that many, such as the doctors, do much good. Yet, I hope that something I say can challenge certain patterns of thinking which I encountered during my research. I have a duty to my participants and Yazidis, so I do not want anything I write to be used against them. I believe that the most considerable harm I can do to my participants is inaccurately or solely negatively portraying them. There are many things about Yazidi norms, practices, and beliefs which can be misunderstood and judged by people such as policymakers and aid workers. My goal is not to pass judgment on whether a practice or attitude is “correct” or “incorrect”, but instead to explain why or how Yazidi mothers do what they do to facilitate empathy and minimize misunderstanding between people coming from very different perspectives.

Chapter 1: "If you are born a Yezidi, you are always a Yezidi": Family in Shingali Society

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the context of many Yazidi families. It begins with contextualising the fundamental aspects of who the Yazidis are as a group: ethnically, religiously, and regionally. This story begins by discussing the geographic and social environment where most of my participants grew up. It then discusses the norms around family structure. Norms "describe collective expectations for the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity" (Katzenstein, 1996: 5). These norms are mainly related to how families were commonly structured before displacement when Shingalis still lived in Shingal. This story begins by discussing the geographic and social environment where most of my participants grew up. There has been much change over time, and it is important to understand the context that Yazidis are coming from to analyse both the changes and the continuation of certain practices.

F.1: The main image shows the political regions of northern Iraq. The darker grey is the autonomous region of Kurdistan, where many Yazidis from Sinjar fled to escape the conflict area. Duhok and the Netherlands, are where I conducted my fieldwork. (Adapted from: https://static.dw.com/image/61706292_7.png)

History and Identity

Yazidis are a Kurdish ethnoreligious group. It is unclear how many Yazidis exist, but guesses average around 1,000,000 worldwide (Caruso, 2021). It is difficult to know how many there are because they are spread across different areas and are not necessarily registered in other countries with emerging diasporas as Yazidis. This is true in the Netherlands, where on their identification cards it only says they are Iraqi and speak Kurdish. There are relatively few Yazidis left because they have historically been faced with violence due to being a religious minority in a region that has seen many conflicts over the centuries (Ackermann, 2016).

Yazidis have often been described as a minority group within a minority group (Jaeger et al., 2019:11; Ackermann, 2016:156). The Kurds are the largest minority group in the world without their own formal country (Albert, 2017). They are primarily spread across the mountainous regions between the countries of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, and the Caucasus (Chatty, 2010; Allison, 2017). Kurds are culturally and linguistically distinct from Arabs, and because of this they have historically and currently faced much persecution and discrimination in the region. For example, during the reign of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in the 80s and 90s, the Kurdish people faced genocide through the use of chemical weapons (Albert, 2017). However, the majority of Kurds are Muslim, and Yazidis have their own religion (Jaeger et al., 2019). Many Yazidis believe, with historical evidence, that most Kurdish peoples previously practised a similar belief to the Yazidis. However, due to various historical reasons, most Kurds were converted to Islam (Spät, 2018).

Although all Yazidis view themselves as distinct from other Kurds, some identify with being Kurdish more than others. There are several reasons for this. One is that Yazidis are not a homogeneous group among themselves. Yazidis live in different regions and have tribes with varying norms, practices, beliefs, and dialects. Some Yazidis were already living in Kurdistan, which has become an autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq due to the US designating it as a no-fly-zone during the reign of Saddam Hussein (Albert, 2017). However, around 400,000 Yazidis lived in the north-western region of Iraq called Shingal, or Sinjar in Arabic (Cetorelli et al., 2017:1). Before the genocide, most Shingali Yazidis lived as farmers in entirely Yazidi villages, surrounded by predominantly Muslim Arab neighbouring villages (Savelsberg, Hajo, & Dulz, 2010). It is the Shingalis who experienced the 2014 genocide first-hand. Although the genocide was a collectively traumatic event for all Yazidis, it was

the Shingalis whose villages and people were devastated (Six-Hohenbalken, 2019). When the 2014 genocide occurred, the Kurdish militia was guarding many Yazidi villages. However, the Kurdish militia then abandoned the Yazidis leaving many Shingalis feeling betrayed by Kurds who had promised to protect them.

Even before 2014, Yazidis were targeted for attacks by extremist groups like ISIS. The rise of these violent extremist groups was in response to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq (Kardaş, 2018). The US army deposed anyone who held a public office including everyone from top officers to low-level police officers (ibid). The dismantling of the military and political governance without effective solutions destabilised the country, creating an environment that facilitated the development of extremist groups like ISIS (ibid). Some Yazidis came to the Netherlands in the years leading up to the genocide because it was becoming less and less safe for them in Shingal. It will be eight years this summer since the genocide, and ISIS has been dismantled and gone underground. Nevertheless, many Shingalis still feel they cannot return to their homes. Not necessarily because of the threat of ISIS, but due to fighting between different militias from political groups trying to take over the land that was left in a vacuum of control, making the region still unsafe (Spät, 2018).

Religion

As mentioned previously, Yazidis are an ethnoreligious group. Individuals in ethnoreligious groups inherit their religion from their families, and it is not possible to convert to Yazidism (Greaser, 2018). Marrying outside of the religion and conversion outside of the faith is strictly forbidden. As one of my interlocutors explained, "*if you are born a Yazidi, you are always a Yazidi*"[4]. Yazidism is believed by some to be an ancient religion, but there are debates about this within the literature (Usman, 2021; Savelsberg, Hajo, & Dulz, 2010). It is difficult to know the exact history of Yazidism because there is no holy text. Instead, it is passed down orally (Greaser, 2018).

One of my interlocutors explained it as, "*Yazidism is not about following rules, but about traditions and community*"[5]. Communal religious life is centred around celebrating festival and fast days together. Although Yazidis pray and perform ceremonies, their practice is not centred around places of worship such as mosques or churches (Savelsberg, Hajo, &

[4] 24.11.2021
[5] 24.11.2021

Dulz, 2010). They believe in a creator God represented by the sun. Yet, their principal and predominant holy being is the peacock angel, Tawuse Melek (Kreyenbroek et al., 2009). Yazidism supports the belief in the spiritual realm, with a fear of evil spirits that can cause harm and good spirits who can help, as well as a belief in reincarnation.

The first records of Yazidism are by a Sufi Muslim Sheikh Adi around 1100 AD (Savelsberg, Hajo, & Dulz, 2010:2). Sheikh Adi was an extremely influential figure within Yazidism, as he was the first to organise the tribes into a formal religion. His grave at Lalish is considered one of the holiest and most important places for Yazidis today. Sheikh Adi developed a strict three-tiered caste system among Yazidis, where his own lineage became the priestly cast (Sheikh), the nobles were another caste (Pier), and then the rest of society (Mirid), with some distinctions also among those (Allison, 2017). Not only can Yazidis not marry outside of their religion, but they are also not allowed to marry outside of their castes. All members of the laity or non-religious caste are connected with a specific member of the religious castes. One's Sheikh or Pier helps them with their spiritual life by teaching them the religion and presiding over marriage, birth, and funeral ceremonies (Allison, 2017). The religious leader is in turn rewarded with alms, as is done in other religions. The caste system is extremely important to Yazidis. One of the first questions they ask upon being introduced to each other is about their caste. Castes are related to people's roles and prestige within the society, but they do not necessarily correspond to socioeconomic status. There are some differences between the attitudes and practices of the castes, such as people from the religious castes tend to be more conservative. However, within the confines of this research, I was not able to find any clear distinctions between motherhood and family practices between the castes.

Historically, many Yazidis did not have access to schools due to discrimination and living in rural areas. They have also been discouraged from going to school for reasons such as needing to work on the farm and a fear of being forced to convert to Islam. The Yazidi religion is relatively private and was not written down because they feared their religion being misunderstood and used against them, a fear validated by the 2014 genocide. Yazidis were simultaneously called by ISIS both non-religious for not being 'people of the book' and 'Satan-worshipers' (Savelsberg, Hajo, & Dulz, 2010: 2). Tawuse Melek has been mistakenly confused with the figure of Satan in the bible and Koran because he is an angel who came

down to earth despite god's wishes (Kizilhan, 2017). However, instead of bringing destruction, he came to bring peace and guidance to humans.

The aftermath of the genocide has made practising certain religious traditions, such as visiting Lalish every October, more challenging as it has led many Shingalis to live outside their ancestorial homeland. This displacement and trauma have left Shingalis in a position where they have had to reconstruct what it means to be a Yazidi. This reconstruction is shaped by and is enacted within family relations (Ackermann, 2016: 157).

Family and Society

Community is the base around most norms and practices within the family and is linked to motherhood. I have heard from several of my interlocutors that people trust their community with their children. One said, "*in a village, we were like all one big family*" [6]. This community expectation significantly influences how children are raised. For example, children are often freely allowed to go outside and play. Mothers trust that they will be okay because they trust the other community members to instruct and watch their children. After I had asked a group of women in Iraq if they had spent much time with their mothers growing up or if they spent much time with their own children, one young woman that was translating for me said, "*the thing is with Yazidis, we do not have this thing where we spend time with our parents, we go in the streets and run around*"[7]. However, despite parents often feeling comfortable to let their children go out, time and distance shapes people's perspectives. Some of my participants had a very positive view of how life was in Shingal before the displacement, but a negative view of Iraq as a whole and felt that it was safer for their children to roam around in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, if a person or child does something socially unacceptable, that reflects poorly upon the parents. It is perceived as a failure because they "*did not teach them respect*"[8]. During my research, the word respect repeatedly appeared, indicating the notion to be a fundamental value. When I asked mothers what they viewed their role as, they often said, "*to teach my children respect*"[9], or "*I trust my children to go out because I know that I*

[6] 4.5.22
[7] 10.3.22
[8] 1.6.22
[9] 10.3.22

have taught them respect"[10]. If someone did something that my participants disagreed with, they would often say that that person was not showing respect: respect elders, respect other people's beliefs, respect your parents, respect your husband or wife, respect your host or guest, and respect for traditions. One interlocutor told me that she knew many women before the displacement who wanted to leave their husbands, but "*they did not because they didn't want people to talk badly about their parents, saying that they did not teach her respect*"[11]. She added that this was shifting to some degree in relation to many societal changes discussed in Chapter 2.

This idea of respect points to living in an honour-shame society. Honour-shame cultures often occur in societies based around the community rather than the individual; where something good in the eyes of the community brings honour, and something negative in the eyes of the community brings shame. As Pierre Bourdieu (1966, as cited in Cairns, 2011: 21) explains, "the point of honour is the basis of a moral code of an individual who sees himself always through the eyes of others, who has need of others for his existence, because the image he has of himself is indistinguishable from that presented to him by other people". The themes of respect, honour and shame play a prominent role in Yazidi family and community dynamics.

Marriage

In the first short story that I showed my participants to get their feedback, a sixteen-year-old girl is soon to be engaged to her cousin who lives down the road[12]. When some of my participants heard this, they quickly pointed out that I had fallen into the same trap as some journalists, researchers, and aid workers by depicting Yazidi women as lacking agency. One couple who listened to my story said, "*why are you discussing her marriage in this way? it is like her family simply gives her away, and she has no say or feelings about this*."[13]. They then reminded me that there are three ways of getting married in their community.

One is that families arrange it. This can be either because the couple liked each other and the parents approve, or the parents set up the couple to promote family ties. It is common within the Yazidi community to marry an extended family member, especially among the

[10] 24.11.21
[11] 25.05.22
[12] See appendix 1a
[13] 23.05.22

religious castes that make up a small percentage of the population. The second way is that if someone gets married, then the family might also ask that one of the husband's sisters be given to a brother of the wife. These ways are intended to strengthen ties between families.

The third is that a couple likes each other, yet due to different societal reasons their family does not desire the match. For example, this may be because the couple are of different socioeconomic status, the parents may want their child to marry someone else, or the parents do not want their child to get married yet. The couple will secretly go to a friend's house and stay together. Because they have run away together, the family has no choice but to eventually accept them.

My research participants were all divided among these groups as to how they got married. Some had secretly eloped and some married through their family's arbitration. Before the genocide, this second practice of siblings marrying into the same family was widespread, and now it is quite uncommon. Several of my participants, as well as the Yazidi Psychologist whom I spoke with, told me that more and more couples, especially those getting married young, are choosing to get married by elopement. Additionally, one young woman I spoke with in the Netherlands told me that her family had wanted her to marry her cousin; but she managed to convince her parents to not force her into it. This is less common in Iraq, but it is happening more than it did in the past. Although Yazidi women are expected to play a specific role and can be limited in their life options depending on their family's standpoint, they still have agency in their actions and how they respond to events in their lives.

Patriarchal society

Like many middle eastern cultures, Yazidi society is structured around kinship ties (Zaatari, 2006:35). Kinship is the relationships between individuals to form a collective family network, which can be organised in many ways depending on social, political, cultural, biological, and historical factors (Levinson, 2012; Hamberger, Houseman, & Douglas, 2011).

Yazidi society is patriarchal. This is reflected in two main ways: family lineage and division of labour. There are strict roles for men and women, with men being the head of the family and the community. It is a patriarchal lineage society, meaning that the last name of a child is the father's first name, the grandfather's name, and so on, continuing to a few

generations (Tezcür, Kaya, & Sevdeen, 2020). Some aspects of the Yazidi religion reflect the patrilineage nature of their society. According to Yazidi tradition, their origin story, with some variations, goes as follows:

"Adam, irritated by Eve's claims that all their children belonged to her, asserted that it was the father who gives life to his progeny. In order to prove this, he challenged Eve to a contest. Both deposited their seed in separate jars. After nine months, Eve's jar contained only worms and insects, but Adam's brought forth Shehîd. The latter subsequently married Ahouri from Paradise, and the Yezidis are descended from this union." (Ackermann, 2016:158).

This story highlights a crucial aspect within Yazidi custom: children are believed to come from the father. This means that children belong completely to fathers. The consequences of this belief can be seen in two instances.

The first clear instance of this is with mothers who were subjected to sex slavery by ISIS members and then had children from the rape they endured. These children are, therefore, not welcomed into Yazidi society because they are not considered true Yazidi because their father was a Muslim (McGee, 2020). The child is considered a marker of the shame that the mother and community endured from ISIS (Greaser, 2018). This is even validated by Iraqi law, where these children are considered stateless since their father's religion will be put on their official documents at birth (ibid). Therefore, the children do not belong to any community. Some mothers stay with their children despite the highly unsafe and challenging circumstances. However, most mothers leave their children in orphanages as they do not want to be ostracised from their communities and families. The second situation occurs more frequently: if a father dies or divorces a mother, then her children do not belong to her, they belong to his family. This leads some mothers to be faced with an 'impossible choice' as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Division of Labour

F.2: These images were taken in the Duhok area. They illustrate the size of many houses, which are made to accommodate large extended families.

Within each society, there is a normative family structure. In much of the West, the normative family model is the 'nuclear family unit' made up of two parents and their children, with anyone outside this unit considered extended family (Georgas et al., 2001). This can even be seen in the Dutch language between 'gezin' meaning nuclear unit and 'familie' meaning extended family. I primarily spoke Dutch with my interlocutors in the Netherlands, and even among those who spoke Dutch exceptionally well, I never heard them use the word 'gezin'. This points to nuclear families not being a part of the Yazidi mentality around family structure. One of my participants laughed when I asked about this and confirmed, "*yeah, we don't differentiate family in that way*". When they described their upbringing, most of my participants talked about living in large multi-generational households with extended families all living as one unit. Some of my participants lived in houses with as many as 25 people.

Yazidis traditionally live in patrilocal extended families: when a woman gets married, she leaves her parents' home and typically moves into the house of her husband's parents (Allendorf, 2013: 854). This family structure usually consists of grandparents as the heads of the household in their varying roles, many of their sons, their sons' wives and children, and any unmarried children. The grandfather is the head of the family, and the grandmother is the head of the household. Sons are expected to be the breadwinners, and women, in most cases, rely on the men in their lives for economic support.

In Yazidi custom, the mother-in-law is responsible for how a household is managed and the allocation of tasks (Jager, 2019). The primary role of mothers/daughters-in-law is not seen as childcare, but to take care of the home: cooking, baking bread, cleaning, and all that involves. These domestic tasks, carried out chiefly by women, were always referred to as work by my participants. It was not viewed in the light of chores or something that women did on the side but as being on the same level of responsibility as a paid job. In a patrilocal extended family, daughters-in-law "occupy the bottom of the gender and generational hierarchies of the family" (Allendorf, 2013: 854). However, this is compared to the relative "ease and power of the mother-in-law position that they hold later in life" (Allendorf, 2013: 854). These power dynamics between the mother-in-law and mother can lead to hardship for young mothers; yet, it is a system that reproduces itself as mothers-in-laws tend to treat their daughters-in-laws the way that they were treated.

The role of the grandmother is typically to oversee and care for the children by feeding them, playing with them, cleaning them, etc. Several families I spoke with said that in Shingal, the children were only with their parents at night when it was time to sleep. If the grandmother has already passed away, it is often another family member's responsibility, such as an aunt, older children, or niece. The younger mother's hands are often full with all the household responsibilities of caring for a large family.

However, there can be variations with the expected role of women and what happens in practice on an individual basis. For example, on one occasion during a group interview with some women at the OBGYN clinic[14], a woman in her fifties, started talking about how she doesn't particularly like taking care of babies as she easily gets headaches; she prefers to do the household chores and let her daughters-in-law take care of their children. Shocked, a younger unmarried woman started arguing with her that she is old and not in good health, so she should not 'work' but should let her daughters-in-law do the household chores. This conversation exemplifies the norms and expectations around women's work based on their age. The assumption was that caring for children was easy and enjoyable so older women should do it, while younger women should do the household tasks.

In my research, there was much overlap between the role of a wife and the role of a mother. All Yazidi wives are expected to have children. When I told my participants that I

[14] 15.3.22

had also been married for about two years now, the first question they always asked was if I had any children. I even had men teasing me at times about why I did not have children yet. One joked, "*if you were in Iraq, you would have two or three already*"[15]. The role of young mothers does not necessarily significantly change after having a baby. One man translating for his wife told me that for women, life changes more after they get married than after they have a baby. He said, "*a few months after the baby is born, it is like they don't have a baby at all*"[16]. He did not mean that she forgot about her baby. He meant that after a few months, her daily routine returned to being relatively the same as before she had the baby.

One aspect that reflects the relationships between family members is the names they call each other. Some children call their grandmother and grandfather 'dayike' and 'babu' out of respect, and they call their own parents by their first names. Dayike means mother, and babu means father in Kurdish. One man I spoke with said that his grandmother and grandfather were still alive when his brother was growing up, so he called them dayike and babu and his parents by their first names. Since he was younger than his brother and his grandparents had already passed away by the time he was growing up, he called his parents dayike and babu; yet his brother still calls them by their names to this day. However, families deal with the naming slightly differently. For example, some families do call both the grandparents and parents dayike and babu, but they then often do not live together. Alternatively, some families call the grandparents the Kurdish names for mother and father, and the Arabic names of ‘mama’ and ‘baba’ for the parents. However, most of my participants called grandparents mother and father, and the parents by name.

As mentioned, calling someone mother and father is a sign of respect in Yazidi culture. I met a woman in her fifties, who raised her children primarily in Shingal living with extended family members. They did not live with the grandparents when her children were younger, so she had initially taught her children to call her dayike. However, their family lived with the brother of her husband and his two wives, but the brother was infertile. Since they had no children, her children switched to calling the uncle and two aunts' father' and 'mother' to honour them and called their own mother by her name. I asked the mother how she felt about her children calling them father and mother instead of her; she said, "*I feel proud. I was the one who taught them to do that; I said, 'they are your father and mother*

[15] 5.6.22
[16] 24.1.22

too"[17]. Sometimes if people cannot have children or if grandparents need help in the house, they will send one of their children to live with other family members as if they are their new mothers and father. One participant told me, "*It is not because they do not love their children, but because they love the family member who has no children as well* "[18]. The use of the name dayike and babu can give a glimpse into the Yazidi mentality around family structures.

I showed one of my participants the second story[19] where it discusses the child being often with their grandmother and asked her what her experience was. She said, "*but that is just how it is, all of the women in our community are like that; the mothers love the grandchildren even more than us*". When I asked why that was, she said she did not know. My theory is that grandmothers want to hold onto and care for their grandchildren so deeply, since they could not do that with their own children as they had to work. When I asked one of my male participants, what they thought about this theory, they considered it a moment and then responded,

"*That might be, my mother had ten children. I was raised primarily by my aunt; she was like a mother to me because my mother had to work all the time. So, maybe now, when my mother wants to be always with my daughter, she is thinking of me. It could be*."[20].

Woman's Domain

As discussed, the traditional Yazidi family structure is that people live in big multi-generational homes. The men often stay with their parents, so it has been common to have multiple brothers' families living in the same house. However, this could possibly go on indefinitely. When talking to a participant in her late 30s who grew up in such a home, I asked her how families break off to start a new household. She said, *"it is often the women who decide"*[21]. She then explained that it depends on the relationships between the sisters-in-law and mother-in-law, whether they can get along and work well together. Alternatively, if there is not enough space in the house, one of the wives might persuade her husband to move out and get their own place.

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[17] 17.3.22
[18] 23.5.22
[19] See Appendix 1b
[20] 23.5.22
[21] 25.5.22

Within Yazidi society, polygamy has also been relatively common (Arakelova, 1999). However, having more than one wife in a house can cause tension and divisions between the family units. For example, another participant told me about her brother who had two wives in the house while she was growing up: the older one who she liked and the younger one who she did not[22]. The younger wife convinced the husband to take her and her children to Armenia. However, he could not immigrate with more than one wife, so he left the older wife and her children behind with his family. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Marud's book, also talks about how her father married a second wife, and the two wives conflicted with each other (Murad and Krajeski, 2018). Her father built a separate house for her mother and her children. Her mother essentially lived as a single mother (Murad and Krajeski, 2018).

However, even without polygamy, women need to share the household tasks, which can become an issue if one feels that she is doing more work than the others. They also have their children all living in the house, and so there can sometimes be a conflict between children or differences in opinions about how children should be raised. Aunts and uncles play a role in instructing and disciplining children. When I was going on a few house visits for the breastfeeding classes, we visited two mothers who were sisters and lived across the path from each other. The two women were married to two brothers, and the mother-in-law lived with the first woman. The nurse I was with asked the second woman why they did not live together; she said it was because she and her sister had gotten into an argument a few years back, so they needed to move out. When talking to a participant about this topic, she said in her opinion it is better now than before. She said,

"Now it is more common for sons to plan to move into a new house with their wife, and that means that they can make plans over a long period. Rather than just waiting until a disagreement happens"[23].

The topic of the shifting norms of the household will be discussed further in Chapter 2. Regardless of any shifts, the house is considered the woman's domain. As one participant stated, "*a husband is like a guest in the house*"[24]; he comes and goes as he pleases and is served when home, but the women are the ones who manage how the household is run.

[22] 18.3.22
[23] 25.5.22
[24] 17.3.22

F.3a and F.3b: Old Yazidi woman making bread. Her two daughters-in-law were helping her, and there were several children running in and out of the room.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to explain some of the norms and social structures within Yazidi society, which affect how family dynamics and motherhood are enacted. Yazidi motherhood traditionally occurs within patrilocal extended families; multiple generations and branches from the same family tree live together in one house. Although there have been some shifts within Shingali Yazidi society, the division of labour is still primarily split between men being expected to work outside the home and women being expected to work within the home. History and religion play an important part in shaping the identity of the Yazidi community. The community, in turn, shapes a family by influencing their expectations and practices. Such as how the fear of shame and respect for elders are fundamental values that mothers teach their children. The respect for elders also affects the roles between mothers and mothers-in-law. Mothers-in-law are still expected to be the heads of the household if they live with their young daughters-in-law. The division of labour is often divided by age and gender. Contrary to some cultures, mothers' primary function is not typically seen as emotionally caring for children. Instead, their role is to make sure their children are provided with what they physically need while the grandmother watches over the children. A mother's context significantly affects her role within a family, owing to the expectations and responsibilities they put on themselves and are put on them by those around them.

Chapter 2: “Positives and Negatives”: Displacement in Kurdistan

When you talk to Shingali Yazidis about their communities and practices, they often reply with ‘before’ and ‘now’. In response to almost any question I asked, people would say, 'before we did and thought this, now we do and think this' or ‘we do this, but things are changing’. Before can mean a variety of things, but it primarily meant before the genocide and displacement. However, 'before' could also refer to living back in Iraq or the 2000s' as people's perceptions were already shifting due to social media and socio-political factors. Shingali Yazidis live in a time of immense societal transformation and adjustment. This chapter will discuss life within and around the IDP camps of Kurdistan. After reading one of my participants the second example story[25] they said, “*everything that you say in this story is true, however, you need to look at both the positives and the negatives*."[26]. Therefore, this chapter will discuss both the positive and negative outcomes of the Shingali displacement on families, communities, and the role of women.

Negatives about Life in the Camps

The genocide and following displacement have had a detrimental impact on the lives of Shingalis. Many people had their friends and family members murdered or abused, they lost their homes, they lost their livelihoods, and they lost their way of life. The many genocides that Yazidis have experienced has led to collective trauma, that is passed down through generations and can have negative consequences on people’s mental and emotional health (Six-Hohenbalken, 2019; Riedel, 2020).

As previously mentioned, Shingalis needed to flee into Kurdistan to escape from ISIS. The UN then set up IDP camps within pre-existing Yazidi villages in Kurdistan, whose inhabitants are called Walatees (UN, 2021). Despite both Shingalis and Walatees being Yazidis, they have slightly different customs and beliefs, and they have prejudices and stereotypes about the other group. I had one participant who is Walatee. She is married to a Shingali man and raised her children in Shingal. Her daughters, who have lived in the Netherlands for the past few years, talked about the stereotypes between the groups saying that people did not take them too seriously. Her mother offered her own perspective, saying

[25] Appendix 1b
[26] 23.5.22

that the tensions were real, but "*in the end we are all Yazidis, and when they needed help, they opened their door for Shingalis*"[27]. Some Shingalis have managed to get houses in the Walatee villages outside of the camps; however, most still live in IDP camps.

Within the camps, many people now live in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions with a lack of necessities such as clean water. There is a constant risk of fires as houses are made of tarp and concrete and packed closely together. Everything that they have built up can be gone in an instant. They are stuck in limbo with little ability to build a life for themselves and do not have much hope in going back to their villages that were destroyed by ISIS (Jaeger et al., 2019). Some Shingalis have returned to Shingal to try to rebuild their lives. However, most have not returned because it is still unsafe due to fighting between militias, few amenities and opportunities, and due to the traumatic memories that haunt them when they return to the villages in rubble.

Sadly, a consequence of the traumatic and difficult experiences is that suicide is prevalent among displaced Yazidis (Jager, 2019). One woman told me that the day before I visited her, someone she knew in Iraq had a sixteen-year-old daughter that committed suicide by burning herself[28]. She said that the woman had lost her husband due to ISIS, and now one of her four children was dead. The same interlocutor also told me that she had a cousin who committed suicide this year because his wife, who was only 20 at the time, had died due to an illness. However, one change that has come of this trend is that it has become more socially acceptable to seek help about mental health. Because of the prevalence, it has become more normalised and is less of a taboo.

It is also difficult for many people to find stable work in displacement. Consequently, many people live in poverty and struggle to provide for themselves and their families. I spoke with one Yazidi psychologist, who told me that poverty has had detrimental effects on mothers' mental health. She said,

"*She is responsible for the family and the children. So, when her child asks her for something, if the mother cannot afford it, she might think why did I make this child; she feels*

[27] 1.3.22
[28] 25.5.22

guilty, and she feels sorry. When she feels like that, it develops until she is depressed. So, now there are many suicide cases of mothers."[29].

Insecurity, both financially and about their future, can have an extremely negative effect on the family, especially regarding mental health. Although many Yazidis were poor before the displacement, they were often able to support themselves through the family farms that provided them with many of the necessities. Due to the displacement, many people do not have much to support themselves or their families.

F.4: Khanke IDP camp

Positives Shifts

Although the displacement has had many negative effects on Yazidis, there have also been some unexpected benefits. I had at least two people on different occasions, a young Yazidi woman who was my translator and a man in his thirties who was a community leader and activist, directly say to me, "*the genocide was horrific, but it has had some positive outcomes for our community, particularly for women*"[30]. Women have gained more opportunities and it is becoming more acceptable to do things that were previously not allowed. It is becoming more acceptable for women to work, go to school, and even play sports. Many mothers I spoke with had dreams of one day working. When I asked them if they had wanted that when they were young, several said that they wanted it but never thought it would be possible, but now they have hope.

[29] 23.3.22
[30] 9.3.22; 17.3.33

This results from various factors, such as coming more into contact with NGOs, modern multicultural cities, living abroad or having relatives abroad, and social media (Dulz, 2016). A few of my participants have said that in Shingal, Yazidis lived amongst conservative Muslim villages, so they looked to their neighbours and were influenced by their norms and practices. This is part of living within a society, we are influenced to some degree by the norms and practices of others around us (Durkheim, 1994). In Shingal people lived in small villages that were relatively closed, and they were not exposed to many other ways of thinking. However, after the displacement, Yazidis, particularly younger people, saw that there were other ways of doing things and instead looked to aid workers, city dwellers, and social media. These changes have happened in a relatively short period of time because they were forced out of their usual context, as well as having their lives shaped by their interactions with aid workers.

In Shingal many people did not have access to schools, but there is a school in every IDP camp set up by aid workers (UN, 2021). Many mothers taking part in my research never went to school past primary school and some were completely illiterate. Several people I talked to stated that in Shingal, "*it was not that important to go to school, especially for girls, because they would just need to know how to run the house and work on the farm*"[31]. Even boys who went to school sometimes struggled to find jobs outside of farming. However, people do not have their farms anymore, and getting an education is seen as essential for providing one with more possibilities to support themselves.

Many people I spoke with both in Iraq and the Netherlands greatly valued their children going to school. A few women who did not have education themselves even said that they thought mothers who were educated knew how to better care for their children[32]. One mother told me about how she once went to the hospital in Iraq. She was so overwhelmed and lost because she could not read the signs, and she said that she did not want her children to have that experience[33]. Several mothers I spoke with said that encouraging their children to say in school was one of the most important things they could do as mothers.

[31] 4.04.22
[32] 10.3.22
[33] 15.3.22

With more women getting an education, they can show how capable they are which can further influence perceptions around women.

F.5a and F.5b: These images were drawn by a mother (40s) and daughter (early 20s). The mother drew a goat herder (left), and the daughter drew a tree (right). The mother said that this was her first time ever drawing since she had never gone to school, whereas the daughter had the opportunity to go all the way through high school in the camp.

However, this change has not happened uniformly across society. When speaking with one of my participants, a teacher, he told me that one of his students had to drop out of school to do domestic work[34]. Despite my interlocutor begging her father to let her stay in school, he never allowed her to go back. Furthermore, life in the camps is difficult. In the second story I read to my participants, I said that Wajida decided to get married and drop out of school in her last year because she did not feel much hope for the future[35]. Despite this being based on what a young woman in Iraq told me was her experience, most of my participants did not agree with this part of the story. One participant said that instead of just saying that Wajida stopped school because she could not see a future for herself, "*say that she stopped going to school because life was difficult and they did not have money, or she needed to take care of her mother-in-law, or because she simply wanted to get married and have a child*"[36]. Another stated that it is not correct anymore that a woman must stop going to school once she is married. One woman in her early 20s told me that she had married at 16, and after getting married, continued her education. However, when she was around 18 years old and became pregnant, her parents-in-law did not want her to keep going to school after she had her baby[37].

[34] 23.5.22
[35] Appendix 1b
[36] 23.5.22
[37] 31.1.22

Another reason why perceptions around women have shifted is because of what many women experienced during the genocide. The Yazidi genocide has become known because of ISIS' enslavement of thousands of women as 'ISIS brides' (Al-Ali, 2018). The survivors of the sexual violence have become the face of the Yazidi genocide, like the previously mentioned activist Nadia Murad. Several of the survivors have written books talking about their experiences and campaigned in the fight for justice[38]. Particularly before the genocide, women were blamed and often even honour-killed if they were raped. Honour killings are when someone is killed, often by a male family member, because they have done something that is considered shameful (Gill, 2013). However, after the genocide the Yazidi religious elders made a public statement that the women and girls were not to blame and should be welcomed back into the community. The women still experience a lot of shame and PTSD from their experiences (Greaser, 2018). However, I believe that some of these women being so vocal and representing their community to the international stage, has in some way added to the developments in the perceptions around women within Yazidi society. Men represent Yazidis within their society, women now represent Yazidis to the rest of the world.

Work in practice

There is a great need for more sustainable aid programs to support and empower people by creating jobs. Within humanitarian models, the first five years after a disaster are classified as relief, which is where most aid efforts and funding goes (Kovács & Spens, 2007). However, during the relief phase, the aid often involves giving out the necessities without working to set up sustainable ways for people to move forward to the rehabilitation stage (ibid). It has been eight years since the genocide, therefore much of the aid going into the camps to support Shingalis has stopped. Some aid workers told me that their funding was cut, so they have had to reduce the work they do[39]. This is despite the WHO making a statement that Iraq was still in crisis and needed more programs to help internally displaced mothers and children (WHO, 2020: 5).

Some programs set up by aid workers have trained women in a skill, such as knitting or sewing. One woman I spoke with said she wants to do embroidery in the future because she went through a training program. However, her husband does not have stable work, and

[38] *The Last Girl* by Nadia Murad and Krajeski; *What Comes with the Dust Goes with the Wind* by Gharbi M. Mustafa
[39] 29.09.21

she cannot afford to buy the materials to practice, much less start a business[40]. Another mother I spoke with had the same problem. She loves baking and dreams of one day starting a bakery, but she cannot afford to begin one[41]. Furthermore, it is an issue linked with the division of labour. I talked with one aid worker and saw first-hand that many programs seek to train women to do a skill, but fewer programs support men. This is connected to the perception and portrayal of Yazidi women as victims, and so needing to be supported (Minwalla, Foster and McGrail, 2020).

Although these programs have good intentions and can indeed do much good, simply training women is not enough. Women are culturally still expected to do the domestic work. Therefore, in practice, this can mean that some women are trained but cannot work afterwards, or they need to provide for their families on top of doing the domestic work. The latter can then be an extra burden on a woman and can leave men feeling disempowered and emasculated, which can lead to depression or even domestic violence[42] (UN, 2021; Lafta et al., 2016). It is becoming more socially acceptable for women to work, but this is at times bitter-sweet. As one woman who had three daughters told me,

"*I want my daughters to stay in school, and my husband cannot find work, so I serve tea during the day to make money for us, and in the evening, I do the housework. Maybe if I had a son, I would not have to work so hard*"[43].

Organisations need to take a closer look at the societal context in which Yazidi IDPs live and seek to develop programs and projects that empower the people they are seeking to help.

There is a difference between what is said and what is done in practice. Several Yazidi men whom I spoke with, especially younger educated men, said they support their wives if they want to work. I also had a few women tell me that their husbands support them in wanting to work. However, in practice, this is much more difficult. This expectation that women will do the domestic work is one that is put on women by their family and community, and it is also something that women expect of themselves. They often view it as their role and responsibility, since that is what they have been told their entire lives. Several of my participants wanted to do other things such as work or study in the future, but their

[40] 13.5.22
[41] 22.3.22
[42] 23.3.22
[43] 10.3.5

priority was taking care of their children. One woman who had gone to university in Iraq and whose husbands said he supported her in working, told me that she did not want to work because it gave her joy to raise her child and she did not like being away from her baby[44]. Although there are societal shifts towards women having more opportunities to work, relatively few married women do because not all families have the same mindset or situation, and not all women have the same goals and aspirations.

However, there is also a difference between married and unmarried women around work. There are more young unmarried women who are working and supporting their families. Both my contacts who were a Yazidi midwife and psychologist are examples of such women in Iraq. This is likely due to a combination of factors. One is that as they are younger, they had more opportunities to take advantage of these changes than older woman, so they were able to further their educations and begin work. The second aspect is that they might be getting married relatively later than some other women because they are choosing to focus on their careers.

To end this section on some hope, I will share a story from the midwife, Haija*. Haija told me that she was recently assisting with a birth, and when the woman saw that her baby was a girl she cried[45]. The woman was being abused at home, and she cried because she did not want her daughter to end up in the same situation as her. Haija, said to the woman look at me I am a Yazidi and look at all I have done; I have gone to the university, I am working, and I am free to go where I want. The woman was given hope by this and named her daughter after the midwife saying that she hoped that she would be like her when she grew up. Both in the Netherlands and in Iraq, there were many working unmarried women who I met, and it will be interesting for future research to see how this will develop and what will happen when this generation gets married. Will they keep working, will they stop, will they do a combination?

Medical treatment in Iraq

At some point in their lives, everyone needs a doctor. Women have more access to doctors, medical aid workers, and hospitals than they did in Shingal. This has given more

[44] 16.3.22
[45] 20.5.22

women more access to health care, such as contraceptives to have more control over their bodies[46]. However, many women are still in need of medical assistance. Several women I spoke with were concerned for their family members' health or were burdened by their own health issues, which shaped their experiences of motherhood.

Many people in and around the camps could barely afford enough food, much less go to the doctor. One mother I spoke with in the waiting room of the OBGYN clinic told me that her eleven-year-old daughter, who she was with, had type two diabetes[47]. Every week they had to buy insulin for the girl. The mother told me that she had four other children at home. Her husband had irregular work, and all the money they had went directly to buy the girl's insulin. She worried greatly about her daughter and family.

Another change that has occurred due to the displacement is the delivery of babies. Before, when people were in Shingal, there were few doctors, so most babies were born at home with a midwife, or 'old woman' as some called it, who was a midwife from experience. Now most women in the IDP camps have their babies in hospitals. In some ways, this is good because if there is a complication, the women are in an environment where they can get help. There are many possible complications during childbirth, such as breached births and vaginal fistulas or tearing of tissue (Eze et al., 2020). However, going to the hospital has created a new problem. It has become widespread for women to have a caesarean section (c-section), even if unnecessary.

Two aid workers and a midwife told me Iraqi doctors would not often assist in natural births for two reasons. Many doctors are not trained in the procedure for a natural birth, but they are only trained in how to perform c-sections. Therefore, they feel most confident with this method. The second reason is that c-sections are more expensive since they are a more in-depth procedure. It is also more time-efficient for doctors to perform a c-section and then be done. However, performing c-sections, even when it is necessary, can create issues. For one, as mentioned it is more expensive, which is difficult if a family is already struggling to make ends meet. Also, c-sections are considered a major surgery that involves opening the abdomen and removing the baby from the uterus. It has all the associated risks of major

[46] 15.3.22
[47] 10.3.22

surgery, such as an increased risk of post-delivery pain and infection, longer hospital stays, future complications with pregnancies and an increased likelihood that a c-section will be necessary for subsequent deliveries (Iyoke et al., 2014: 442). One study from 2006 in France found that mothers are 3.6 times more likely to die during a caesarean delivery than a vaginal birth, due primarily to blood clots, infections, and complications from anaesthesia (Deneux-Tharaux et al., 2006: 451). However, this may be affected by confounding factors, such as women who have c-sections are often in a more precarious situation to warrant one. Additionally, some studies have also found that women are less likely to start early breastfeeding[48] who have had c-sections because of not having initial skin-to-skin contact (Iyoke et al., 2014; Prior et al., 2012).

One woman named Jian*, who I visited on several occasions in Iraq, is a prime example for the hazards of childbirth. She has two children, both from c-sections, which were necessary because she struggled with pulmonary embolisms and blood clots during both pregnancies. She was at significant risk of dying. The doctor had given her injections each week, which she took for a while but stopped because she could not afford the treatments. She did not work, and her husband was only able to work sporadically. When I visited Jian, it was several months after she had her second baby, and something had gone wrong at the site of the c-section. She mentioned it on the first occasion, but it was especially evident on the second visit. She was clearly in pain, struggling to walk comfortably and frequently wincing at the pain in her abdomen. However, she said that she could not afford to see her doctor again, as she sometimes had barely money to buy baby formula. The aid worker I was with offered to take her to a doctor she knew, but Jain was hesitant. Yet, what was on Jain's mind was her own mother. Throughout both visits, she frequently spoke about her mother and her worries for her, as she needed a surgery unavailable to her in Iraq. This example speaks to both the limited medical access that some people have in Iraq as she and her mother had medical problems that they were not able to get treatment for; as well as how health issues can shape the relationships and experiences between mothers and children.

Move from Multi-Generational to Nuclear

[48] Breastfeeding will be discussed in Chapter 4

The genocide has had a considerable effect on family structures. Many people in Iraq still live in multi-generational households, but increasingly families are being divided into more 'nuclear family units'. One cause of this are smaller housing spaces both in Europe and in the IDP camps, which means that it is not practical for extended families to live in one house together. The second reason is simply that due to the displacement families have been dispersed around the world. More brothers who previously lived together with their parents are now living separately. There might be one in one town in Kurdistan and another in a different town, one might be back in Shingal, while the other is abroad. A few of the Shingali mothers who I visited, who had managed to get out of the camps and get a home for themselves lived in relatively big houses but did not live with their extended family members. Either because their mothers-in-law had passed away or because the family had dispersed to all different areas.

This change has been particularly difficult for older generations because there is less family available to take care of them and it can be difficult to have less contact with their grandchildren and children (Burholt & Dobbs, 2014). I spoke with an elderly woman in the doctor's waiting room, who told me she lived alone with her husband and both had health problems[49]. I asked if she had any children, and she said that she did but that they lived in a different camp. I asked why they did not live together, and she said that her sons did not want it because their wives wanted to have their own homes. She expressed feeling abandoned by her sons when she needed them to care for her.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, daughters-in-law are often the one who persuade their husbands to move into their own home if there is no space or conflicting ideas between the women in the house. However, many younger mothers prefer the changes because it gives them more freedom and autonomy. Mothers-in-law are the heads of the households and daughters-in-law are expected to respect and obey them. In a more nuclear family setting, mothers have more control over what they do with their children and home, and mothers are increasingly becoming the primary caregivers to their children. One interlocutor told me that "*before women were afraid to say their opinions, but now they feel that they can say what they think*"[50]. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, a few of the

[49] 10.3.22
[50] 1.6.22

mothers who I met that lived in houses outside of the camp in nuclear family homes, were more isolated. Crucially, extended families still play an important role in families' practices and decisions, but power dynamics shift with the move to a more nuclear family household (Allendorf, 2013).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I touched on some of the changes caused by the displacement on Shingali mothers and families in Iraq, some negative and some positive. There is a lack of necessities both within and around the camps, such as health care, stable jobs, and stable environments. However, due to encountering more perspectives and ways of life, there have been some shifts within Yazidi society to allow women more freedom and opportunities. Even though these changes sometimes occur slowly in practice and do not apply to everyone. As some families still do not allow their teenage girls to go to school, and many still live with the traditional family structure. Yet, many families now highly value their girls getting a good education and see it as necessary for ensuring their children's future.

Chapter 3: In Search of a Brighter Future: Motherhood in the Netherlands

As discussed in the previous chapter, many displaced Shingalis in Kurdistan live in much insecurity and uncertainty. Some people I spoke with in Iraq did not want to leave despite the struggles because Iraq was their home. However, many people do not feel that there is a future for them or their family in Iraq due to a lack of opportunities and stability. This chapter discusses mothers' role within families in the Netherlands and how it compares from motherhood in Yazidi society in Iraq. The first section concerns migration to the Netherlands and the process of seeking asylum. The second section discusses family life and mother's experience once they are in residential housing.

Chain Migration to the Netherlands

Conflict in Iraq and the rise of extremist groups over the last two decades has threatened the lives of millions of people: not only Yazidis but Shia Muslims, Jews, Christians, Mandaeans and other minority religions (Taneja, 2007). Already before 2014, some Shingalis were starting to leave because it was not safe for them in Iraq. For example, in 2007, there was a large-scale attack by Al-Qaeda that killed over 500 Yazidi civilians (Boyle, 2009). Those that were particularly in danger were people who had helped the US military during the US occupation of Iraq. The US government had promised that these people had a right to seek asylum in the US. However, they needed to stay in Iraq to wait for their green card visas to come. Unfortunately, due to the discriminatory and dysfunctional immigration system in the US, many people were not granted their green cards before it became too unsafe to stay in Iraq (Rikoski & Finer, 2009). I met several Yazidi families that came to the Netherlands for this reason. Covid-19 has caused even more delays in this process, and I spoke with a few people who are still in IDP camps in Kurdistan waiting for their US green cards.

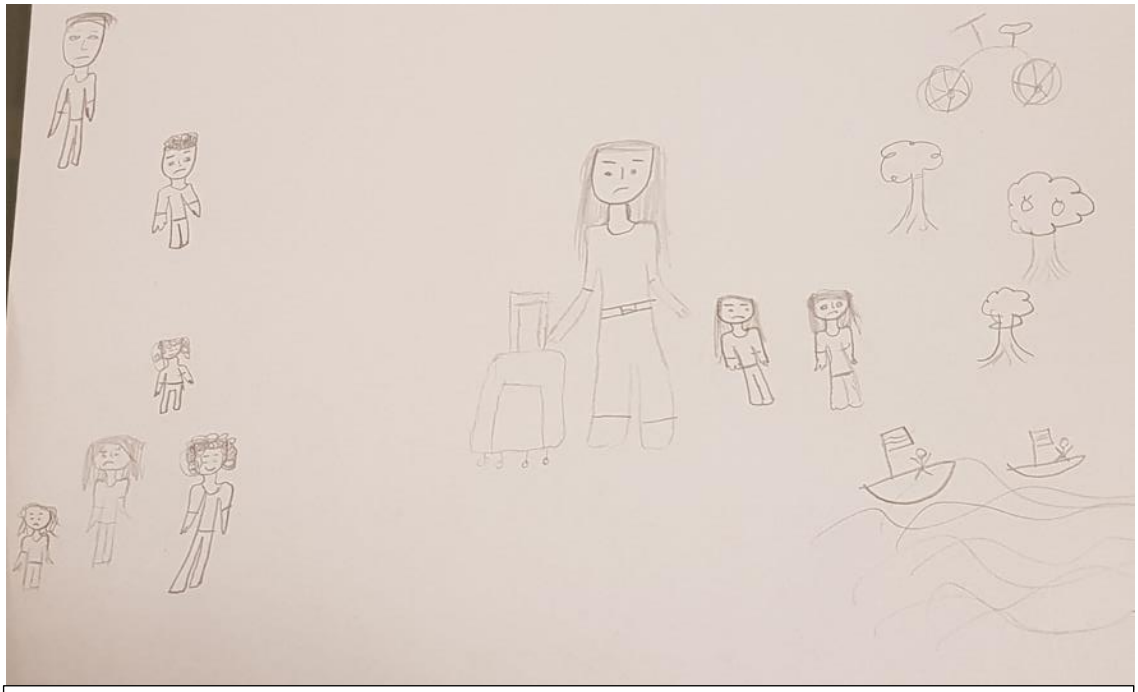
Within a few months after the 2014 genocide, there was a mass exodus of displaced people. Most people went to Kurdistan, which was relatively safe. However, thousands of people further immigrated to other countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Jordan, Canada, Denmark, France and Australia. Something that became evident throughout my research is that people are primarily arriving in these countries through chain migrations.

Chain migration is where one person migrates, who then inspires other friends and family to follow them to the same location. These people in turn apply for their own family members to join them creating a loop that repeats itself (Haug, 2008: 590). People wanting to get out of Iraq are using their social networks to determine the place and means of going. These kinship migration chains facilitate and shape the growing Yazidi diasporas around the world.

These chains have made the distinction between refugees and immigrants at times difficult to separate (Hein, 1993). What I have seen in my research agrees with what Hein (1993: 43) found: that refugees and immigrants "both organise their migration through social networks", but "the state plays a greater role in the adaptation of refugees". When my participants were in AZCs, it was easy to see that the refugee process and system shaped their experiences. However, after several years of my participants living in residential housing, their children are going to school and working, and they develop a sense of community. It is tough to distinguish how their daily life is much different from other immigrant families who came to the Netherlands hoping for a better life for their children.

Within the Yazidi community, there is a mix of asylum seekers and immigrants. The journey of one family with whom I had frequent contact during my research perfectly exemplifies this chain migration and blurred line. In the years leading up to 2014, the Shingal region of Iraq was becoming increasingly hostile to Yazidis. In 2010, one Yazidi man immigrated to the Netherlands with a few other men to try to find job opportunities and safety. Then this man's younger brother, who was 18 at the time, lost one of his best friends who was captured and killed by ISIS. This younger brother then decided to illegally immigrate to the Netherlands to join his brother. When 2014 came, the rest of his village was destroyed and emptied of its inhabitants. The oldest brother of both these men, fled with his wife and four children to Kurdistan. They stayed with relatives outside of a camp for two years. Yet, the children were not even able to go to school at that time due to discrimination, and not having gone to school in Kurdish but Arabic as was typical in Shingal. However, the family had enough resources that in 2016, the mother and four children of the oldest brother were able to take the long trip across Europe to arrive in the Netherlands and apply for asylum. The mother and children stayed in an AZC for around nine months before receiving asylum and moving into residential housing. After two years of separation, the father/husband was finally able to join his family in 2017 through a family reunification visa. Reunification visas allow nuclear family members, spouses and children, who have

permission to stay in the Netherlands to sponsor a family member (Croes & Hooimeijer, 2010). This family's story illustrates how migrating Yazidis often pick where to go and what process they use to achieve that. Migration often occurs by following their kinship networks: one person goes somewhere, and then some family members follow them.



F.6: This is an image drawn by one of my Dutch participants. It represents when she left her family and friends in Iraq and journeyed by boat with her two daughters to the Netherlands, which was felt like a whole new world.

Asylum

Most Yazidis from Iraq who migrate to the Netherlands apply for asylum. People are more likely to immigrate if they have the money and the connections to get through the process. This means that people who leave Iraq often have more economic resources and social connections within the Yazidi community in Iraq (Jagar et al., 2019). There are individuals and organisations who support and inform the asylum seekers about the process and what is required and expected of them (Koser, 1997). For example, I was told by one aid worker that, in some cases, people need to take Dutch lessons in Iraq before being able to get a reunification visa granted in the Netherlands[51] (Van Tubergen, 2010). Therefore, the connections and resources that people have shape their decisions and the strategies they use to reach their goals.

[51] 9.10.21

My participants and their families came to the Netherlands via any strategy they thought they had the best chance at getting asylum. For example, Yazidi women and children were/are more often able to get their asylum pleads granted. Some studies have found that women of colour who immigrate are disadvantaged over men in Dutch family reunification policies because they are often in more marginalised jobs (Croes & Hooimeijer, 2010). However, the discourse around women coming from conflict areas is more likely to portray them as victims, whereas men can be more often suspected of being threats (Begikhani, Hamelink & Weiss, 2018; Commissie voor Buitenlandse Zaken, 2021). Therefore, in some families, women and children came to the Netherlands first by themselves and left their husbands in Iraq until the time that they hoped he could join them through the reunification process. However, in other cases, husbands will make the arduous journey first and go through the process alone, or as more often is the case, with a few other men. Then apply for their wives and children to join them afterwards. The people in my sample who fled before 2014 more often had men coming first, and those who came after often immigrated with the mother and children first or as a whole family. However, this is not a black and white distinction, it is primarily based on each family's decisions about what they thought was their best option. Sometimes, children are even sent by themselves because if they are below eighteen, the child can apply for their parents and siblings to join them once they get their asylum granted, since they are still considered dependents (Van Heelsum, 2017). Unaccompanied minors often get placed in a family by the Dutch government[52]. Often Yazidis will have a family in mind with whom they have made arrangements with before sending the child. In 2021, a Dutch study looking at asylum strategies with Iraqis, Afghans, and Syrians confirmed everything that I was seeing from my participants (Dubow & Kuschminder). It found that,

"Refugee families negotiate the physical and financial barriers to their movement—often by separating, which emerges as a key adaptive strategy. Second, concomitant with the decision to separate, family reunification policies become important in shaping—and determining the outcomes—of these asylum-seeking trajectories." (Dubow & Kuschminder, 2021: 4262)

Many families choose to be separated for a time in the hope of then being reunified in a place where they have a hope for safety and security.

[52] Nidos: Organizations that works with the Dutch Central Ministry of Asylum Seekers (COA) to protect the rights of refugee children. https://www.nidos.nl/en/voor-jongeren/je-asielprocedure/

Several participants in my research and some of the people I worked with during my internship were in the process of seeking asylum. Therefore, I learned about the asylum process over several months through their stories and experiences. To begin the asylum process, a person must go to Ter Apel to apply. I went to Ter Apel to meet with one of my participants. It is in a remote area and does not have a bus stop close to it, so I needed to walk thirty minutes on the cycle lanes next to a highway because there was no other path. Once someone applies at Ter Apel, they will likely be relocated to another 'noodopvang centrum' (temporary asylum centre) or 'azielzoekers centrum' (asylum centre; AZC). The person or family will either stay there for several months or will be moved around to different facilities, while they go through the interview process and wait for a verdict to come about their asylum application.

The asylum process involves filling out an application and having several interviews to show one's documents and explain one's circumstances as to why they are seeking asylum in the Netherlands. Then refugees wait for the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) to review their case and decide whether they think that the people's situation is unsafe enough for them to not be able to return (Hengst, Smid, & Laban, 2018). In the meantime, people live in a lot of instability as it is common for asylum seekers to be moved from one centre to another for various bureaucratic reasons, such as a temporary camp being set up and shut down (ibid). The time for a verdict on someone's asylum application to be reached can vary depending on several factors, such as their country of origin, their situation, and the capacity for asylum seekers and social housing at that time (Laban et al., 2004). Due to the well-known conflict in Iraq, these refugees can get asylum granted more quickly than people from some other countries. For people coming from Iraq, it usually takes someone between six months to two years for a verdict to be reached (Laban et al., 2004). If the verdict is negative, a person can appeal, and they might be deported from the country if they are still denied asylum.

The experiences throughout the process of seeking asylum can significantly impact how motherhood is played out daily. One main reason why parents choose to leave their families and country is to provide their children with safety and more opportunities for their future. I had one mother tell me that if it was only about her, she would go back to Iraq, but

she chooses to stay in the Netherlands for her children[53]. A study that looked at refugee mothers in the Netherlands found that there were gaps between mothers and migration policies' categorisations: "the mothers not only define the categories differently but also set other priorities as they identify themselves first as mothers, while the policies prioritise their status as refugees" (Vervliet et al., 2014: 2023). I spoke with some women who first came to the Netherlands only with their children who were all below the age of 12, and they talked about how much of a challenge it was for them because they "*had to do everything alone*."[54]. They did not have their husbands or family networks around them to support them. They had to learn the language and the customs to make sure that their children were safe and being properly taken care of. This is difficult in a stressful environment with little control over your movements, where you stayed and for how long, and what your future would hold.

Food is also a concern in asylum centres. It is unfamiliar and often of poor quality. A few people I asked what the most challenging thing was about living in an AZC half-jokingly said, "*the food*"[55]. This can be especially difficult when you have children. One of the families I was working with told me that in the temporary asylum centre, people did not have access to a kitchen or even microwaves. So, they have very little choice as to what they could eat. In one instance where both parents and their three-year-old daughter travelled together, the parents became extremely worried about their child because she hated the food so much that she did not eat much for three days. The father became understandably frustrated and asked the workers to provide a microwave so that he could get food his child could eat. At first, they did not agree, but after a while, they relented and put a microwave out for the refugees to use.

Other studies looking at food given to refugees also found that it is commonly food that is not pleasant for the refugees to eat (Trapp, 2016; Wagner, 2018). This is because policies and practices around aid to refugees can often evolve around ideas of providing just the necessities to survive, for which people should be grateful (ibid). Only having access to low-quality food can have a negative effect on people's morale and well-being especially over an extended period (ibid). A study on Iraqi refugees in the Netherlands found that asylum seekers in centres for two or more years have considerably worse mental health than

[53] 24.11.21
[54] 19.1.22
[55] 24.11.21; 5.6.22

those who only stayed at a centre for six months (Laban et al., 2004:844). This statistic is not only because of food; however, it is an example of how differences in conceptualisations between refugees themselves versus aid workers can have negative effects on mental health and shape the experiences of motherhood within the asylum system.

The Dutch Government makes decisions from a universalist approach, which has the goal of integration and assimilation (Van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). It involves using a 'colour-blind' system, where people's different backgrounds are excluded when making decisions about their care to avoid bias (De Koning and Ruijtenberg, 2019: 5). Asylum seekers and immigrants are treated as homogenous, despite them coming from all different experiences and perspectives (Slobodin, Ghane, and De Jong, 2018: 86). The policies intention is not to make decisions based on stereotypes or give unequal treatment. It can be easier to use a 'colour-blind' approach in asylum centres where many people from different backgrounds live together and are frequently moved from one centre to another (Slobodin, Ghane, and De Jong, 2018). However, this approach can have some negative consequences.

This universalist approach can be seen in social housing decisions (Koster, 2015). When an asylum application receives a favourable verdict, refugees then begin the process of getting a 'verblijfsvergunning', which is a permit allowing them to stay in social housing. The person or family can request to stay in a specific 'gemeente' or municipality to be able to study or to be close to family members (ibid). They are put on the waiting list for social housing in that 'gemeente' until they are assigned a house. If people do have family, they can usually move relatively close to their families but often not in the same town. If they do not have family, they will be randomly located without any intention to put them close to other Yazidis[56]. It is the luck of the draw with housing, and people do not have much opportunity to say no if they do not like the housing offered or if it is not in their desired location (Van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). This way of doing housing often means that Yazidis are spread out across the Netherlands, which shapes the daily life of family and mothers as we will discuss in the second part of this chapter. Despite the good intentions of certain assimilation policies, they might cause some people to become excluded from the Dutch society or 'samenleving'.

Language

[56] 24.11.21 and 14.10.21

One aspect that came up in many of my discussions with mothers was language. This was for the obvious reason of often having difficulty communicating with others in their surroundings. A few of my participants said that the language barrier was the most difficult aspect of living in the Netherlands[57]. Women not being able to speak the language often meant that they were quite isolated.

One of my interlocutors living in an AZC said that she often feels very alone because she cannot speak Dutch, English, or even Arabic, and there are no other Kurdish people in the AZC where she is now. So, the only people she can talk to are her husband and child. She is constantly with her child which gives her some comfort, but it is still very difficult for her. When refugees come to the Netherlands, they must take a certain level of Dutch classes. These classes are a challenge for everyone, but some people are more motivated and able than others to learn. For some women this is doubly a challenge as they are illiterate and so have never been taught how to read or write in any language. Many women I spoke with wanted to master the language so they could take advantage of the opportunities they believed the Netherlands offered them, such as finding a job or going to school. However, many women struggled with this has they did not get many opportunities to practice since they spend much of their days at home doing domestic work.

Most women I spoke with had some contact with their Dutch neighbours by sharing pleasantries or bringing each other food, however, due to the language barrier their contact was limited. The majority of the social contact that women had were with their families or other Yazidis that they visited, which can vary in frequency. On a daily basis, while their children are at school and their husbands might be out, women might feel excluded from fully taking part in Dutch society. The Dutch government localised the support of refugees by putting the responsibility in the hands of the community and volunteers from the municipality (Vollebergh, de Koning, & Marchesi, 2021). One of my participants was called by a volunteer from the city council to ask if the mother had contact with any Dutch people now that she had stopped with language classes. The young brother-in-law who was speaking on the phone answered yes, she has a Dutch neighbour who visits her. That Dutch neighbour was me. Which I found very endearing but sad because I only visited this

[57] 24.2.22

woman once or twice a month during my fieldwork, and we never spoke in Dutch because she was embarrassed to practice in front of her family. Yet, without a family member we could not communicate even on a basic level.

Difficulty learning the language also meant that the children who can speak Dutch often need to help their parents take care of various paperwork and appointments. Reversing the standard role of the parent taking care of the child, the child is now responsible for assisting their parents. This can be a challenge and burden for both the children and the parents. Several teenage children told me that this added responsibility was at times stressful and heavy for them, especially when they are still learning both Dutch and the system themselves. Parents can also feel disempowered, frustrated, and guilty by needing to rely on their children in this way.

However, language barriers do seem to improve over time. The longer my participants were in the Netherlands, they were less isolated and more comfortable communicating in Dutch. Yet, this greatly depended on their context and access. For example, one woman had mobility issues and cannot easily get out to go to the classes. Also, some women are simply older, and it is more difficult for them to get a grasp on the language. Despite it being an obstacle for every mother I spoke with, many women sincerely wanted to learn the language and actively worked at it so they would not feel so isolated or dependent. One of my participants in her late 30s has worked for years going to Dutch class every week, and she could speak it quite well. Another woman volunteered at a charity clothes shop twice a week to get more access to the language, despite finding it a challenge to communicate at times.

Residential homes

F.7: This image was drawn by a mother who has lived in the Netherlands for about six years. She said she drew this picture because when she was young, she would often draw a picture of a big nice clean house and image that she lived in it. However, she was relatively poor and did not think it would be possible, but now that she is living in the Netherlands her dream has come true.

Because the Yazidi are spread all around the country, people rely on their kinship networks to create a sense of community. When their asylum requests were processed and accepted, they moved into the available residential social housing throughout the Netherlands. Social housing is subsidised by the government and is, therefore, more affordable housing than those privately owned (Koster, 2015). It is often in urban centres in poorer neighbourhoods where many people from a migrant background live, such as Den Haag's Schilderswijk (Van Bortel and Elsinga, 2007). However, this is not always the case, especially as many Yazidis have large families and so need larger houses. The social housing level can vary depending on the area and family size. Some social housing that Yazidis live in is in small towns, not surrounded by many other refugees and in well maintained houses that look as nice as any other on the block (Van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). There are certain areas where there are more Yazidis relatively close together, which means that people visit regularly. Even if they are an hour or so away from each other, they try to visit when they can. However, this is still a significant change from having a whole community surrounding you rather than a brother and his family thirty minutes away.

Religion in the Netherlands

Yazidi religious practice is not centred around a building such as a church or a mosque where people can come together at a certain time to perform rituals or worship. In Iraq, there are buildings that my participants referred to in Dutch as 'Yazidi houses'. These buildings, which are usually one room structures, are where religious ceremonies can be held but they are primarily a place where community elders can gather and make decisions. There is one Yazidi house in Germany, but up until now they do not have these structures in the Netherlands. Therefore, there is no central place where Yazidis can gather to have ceremonies and make decisions as a community. The only time that large groups of Yazidis gather in the Netherlands is on important festival days. On festival days, a group of men often get together to organise a large hall for people to celebrate. This can usually occur about twice a year, once in April and once in December. However, there were several years where these festivities did not take place, mainly because many people were still in mourning after the genocide. Then the past two years, large gatherings were not allowed due to Covid.

Luckily, this year the festival was able to happen, and I was fortunate enough to be invited to the Yazidis New Year celebration in April. There were three locations across the Netherlands where people gathered. I went to one in Arnhem, an area of the Netherlands with relatively more Yazidis. In the hall, which was a Turkish wedding hall, there were over three hundred people. The hall was set with large tables for families, where people brought their own food that the mothers and daughters had spent all day making at home. The women wore their traditional Kurdish dresses, and some men wore traditional clothes. The children ran around freely, the parents trusting that their relatives and friends would take care of them. Most children seemed comfortable and open, even with people they did not know. Throughout most of the night, there was also dancing and loud music. Dancing happens by people holding hands or pinkie fingers and making a circle surrounding the hall. The whole atmosphere felt like one massive family reunion.

Community in the Home

Women play an essential role in rebuilding their homes in displacement and develop strategies to safeguard themselves and their community (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006). For example, women often create ‘spaces of belonging’ for themselves and other members of their communities to cope with and heal from the trauma that they have faced (Ibid: 134).

Throughout my research, I found that the way the Yazidi community is preserved in Europe is in the home. Women shape and create a space for other Yazidis to gather. They facilitate the continuation of some cultural practices, beliefs, and values, despite living far away from their ancestorial homeland. For example, mothers cook traditional food and speak the language to their children. Furthermore, religion is practiced in the home; ceremonies often take place in homes, but also in daily ways of parents teaching their children the stories and traditions.

Within Yazidi houses, you often see peacock motifs to represent Tawuse Malek[58]. This is similar to how a Christian might have a cross or a picture of Jesus hanging on their wall. There is also often a type of alter piece made of cloth that is hung on the wall in the home, which holds holy stones from Lalish[59] and is used for prayers and blessings. I had a man tell me cheekily when showing me their alter piece, that it should always be in a clean place like a laundry room and never a bedroom because that is where 'unclean' things happen[60]. It is the mother's task to keep the house clean and pure.

Yazidis need a place to feel a sense of belonging in the Netherlands as they are often not living with many other Yazidis around them. Instead, they are often surrounded by white Dutch people who have not experienced displacement and might not always be understanding or accepting of immigrants. Otherwise, they are surrounded by other migrant groups, the majority of whom are Muslim. However, they do not necessarily have the same practices or beliefs as other groups who have also experienced immigration to the Netherlands. Among my participants people have mixed feelings about living among Muslims. I had one teenage boy tell me, "*People think that we hate Muslims, but that is not true; most of my good friends are Muslims*"[61]. Many people I spoke with in the Netherlands said that they respect all people's cultures and beliefs. However, my participants, especially older ones and ones who more recently came to the Netherlands, expressed feeling fearful at times being surrounded by Muslims because of everything they had experienced. The mother of the same boy told me that when she first moved into her house, she had a neighbour who had a long beard and looked to her like someone who could be a member of ISIS. Every time she would see him,

[58] The peacock angel, who is a guide and protector for people.
[59] A Yazidi holy place
[60] 19.1.22
[61] 24.11.22

she would feel afraid and go back into the house. Although my participants often discussed getting along well with their Dutch and other migrant background neighbours, they do not entirely belong to either of these groups. So, it is vital to create a sense of belonging and safety for Yazidis in the home.

The norms around family have slightly shifted from being in the Netherlands, having both negative and positive consequences. Most Yazidi families in the Netherlands live in nuclear family units, as there is not space in the house for more and extended families are spread out. Several women expressed to me disliking being stuck at home isolated. When I asked one of my participants who has been in the Netherlands for five years whether they felt lonely at times, she said, "*some days I wake up, and I am just mad at everything because I feel so alone, but in general I am used to it*."[62]. Living in nuclear family units, was seen by some women as a lifting of a burden as they had less people to care for and for others it was more difficult because they did not have support. However, a positive shift is that several women and girls said they felt more freedom in the Netherlands to do things considered somewhat unacceptable in Iraq. For example, one teenager who was seventeen at the time told me, "*Sometimes people say to my mother and father, why are you letting her work, it is not good to let a girl work, but my mother doesn't care anymore*"[63]. Another woman, who has lived in the Netherlands for eleven years, said, "*after the conflict, people begin to care less about what other people think about them*"[64]. This is for two reasons. One is that having more distance between themselves and other Yazidis in the Netherlands, means they have a bit more space without people socially monitoring them as closely. The second is that people's perceptions can change when they encounter other cultures' practices and beliefs.

I had several conversations with mothers about raising children in the Netherlands. Some mothers I spoke with said they worry about raising their children in the Netherlands because they are being shown many ways of life that are not in line with Yazidi values. It was interesting that in one context where I was speaking with two women whose husbands were present, they and their husbands brought up that they were worried about their children learning negative things from the society around them. Conversely, when I let two other women, one on one and the other with her 18-year-old daughter, listen to the part in the third

[62] 5.6.22
[63] 19.1.22
[64] 25.5.22

story about being worried about their children growing up in this society, they objected to this statement[65]. One woman said, "*I don't worry about that because I know I have taught my children right from wrong*"[66]. Another woman said, "*I disagree, I think that it is good for my children to go out and meet with other people because then they can learn from each other*". I then asked what the most essential thing your children need to do to be a good Yazidi despite learning from others. She replied, "*for me, the most important thing is that they marry a Yazidi*"[67]. Based on my participants responses, it seemed that the normative attitude was to be worried about the influence that growing up in a Dutch society would have on children; however, not all mothers personally felt this way.

Before the third conversation mentioned here, we had previously been talking about honour killings due to marrying outside of one's caste or religion, which is not uncommon in Iraq among different religious and ethnic groups (Allison, 2001). This can often happen in cases such as an unmarried woman losing her virginity. In Gill's (2013:242) study, she notes that "in modern Kurdish[68] communities, men are responsible for acquiring honour for their families, while women are seen as potential producers of shame". In order to protect the rest of their family from that shame, people might feel the need to kill the person who brought that shame. My participant said that she would not want that to happen to one of her children.

This exemplifies how important it is perceived for Yazidis to marry other Yazidis. However, this becomes more difficult in the Netherlands when the community is dispersed, and young people are surrounded by non-Yazidis. Some children fall in love outside of their religion, but then they often face negative consequences from their family and community. Most Yazidis have it engrained into them that they need to marry a Yazidi, so social media plays a large role in finding a partner. Parents either arrange marriages with their connections or young Yazidis might meet at the festivals and stay in contact through social media. One of my interlocutors told me that before it was relatively common for someone to get married to someone who they have never seen because their parents would arrange it. However, now this hardly ever happens because the couple can see each other and communicate through social media while they are engaged.

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[65] Appendix 1c
[66] 25.5.22
[67] 5.6.22
[68] This is both Muslim and Yazidi Kurds.

Shingalis in the Netherlands now live transnational lives where they are in close contact with both family members in Iraq and elsewhere. I asked several of my participants if they wanted to do more to meet more regularly with other Yazidis, but nobody I asked was enthusiastic about this idea. It is complicated and takes significant effort when people are spread out. Once in residential housing where they have more freedom of movement, people have busy lives. Children go to school and work. There is a difference between mothers and children regarding the expectation of work. Many of the mothers stated a desire to work one day, whereas many of their daughters actually do work. Women often do not look for paid work while they have several children at home, but some attend language classes. It is difficult for many men to find jobs in the Netherlands, due to language barriers, not having the Dutch education or training qualifications, and discrimination in hiring practices (Van Liempt & Miellet, 2021). However, some fathers are able to find paid work once they become more settled after getting through the asylum process. People who cannot find work often rely on a mixture of income from older children working, government support, and family support. Also, Sheiks who are a part of the religious caste are also often paid by the majority caste Mirid to perform religious ceremonies for them. Regardless, people have responsibilities which fill up their days making it difficult for them to have time to go to organised events.

On top of people having busy lives, Yazidis already put in the effort to visit their relatives. Extended family members that live in the Netherlands often visit each other on the weekends. This seemed to satisfy many people's needs to have community with other Yazidis. People also expressed feeling connected to their community and family through social media as they called regularly, sometimes every day. For example, one of my participants in the Netherlands told me that they recently had an extended family member who died in Iraq, and his relatives in the Netherlands had a service for him here. Despite the distances, the families still grieved together.

Conclusion

Moving to the Netherlands is a big transition that shapes family life and, by extension, mothering practices. When participants are in the asylum centres, the state has considerable control over their lives, which can frequently cause stress as they wait for the verdict on their

application. People also often must eat terrible food, have a lack of privacy, have a lack of control over their lives, and often struggle with language barriers. Yazidi women often go from living in a house with many family members and being surrounded by their communities to being relatively isolated. This shapes their experiences as mothers, as their children and any other family members in the Netherlands make up the bulk of their social life. Women play a large role in facilitating social connections between Yazidis, which creates a space for Yazidi belonging, religion, and traditions. Community is often maintained through extended family ties. This greatly affects the bonds between mothers and children, as discussed in the following chapter. Location and time shape and change family relationships. This can be seen through what mothering practices were like in Iraq, how the state and the new context influenced them, and how they developed going from AZC to residential housing.

Chapter 4: 'A Mother's Love': The Bond Between Mother and Child

This section addresses the relationships between mothers and their children, and how they might change across different times and contexts. Two recurring sentiments throughout my research were 'I did not spend much time with my mother growing up' and 'my mother was a good mother'. Due to women's role in the house and her lack of rights to her children, a few aid workers I spoke with suggested that Yazidi mothers are not emotionally attached to their children. However, based on my conversations with women, this could not be further from the truth. Yet, it might look different from how mothers are typically expected to show love based on the mentality of some aid workers. Here I explore the question of how a mother shows her love to her children, and what effects the constraints on quality time might have on bonds between mothers and children.

Mother-Child Relationships: Differences between the Children

One finding that continually came up in my research was that mothers typically have a different relationship with children of different birth orders. Other studies have also found that birth order can influence how much time mothers have for each child (Price, 2008). Due to the traditional division of labour in the multi-generational households of Yazidis, mothers tend to spend less time with their oldest children when they are younger and more time with their younger children. The main reason is that older children typically grew up with young mothers who were expected to do all the household chores while their grandmother typically cared for them. By the time the youngest children are born, the grandmother/mother-in-law is likely to have passed away. The mother may also have older daughters and daughters-in-law who can help with the household work, giving her more time to care for her youngest children. Contrary to most of my participants who were oldest or middle children, my participants that were the youngest children discussed how they spent a lot of time with their mothers and had very close bonds with them. One youngest child said, "*we were always together, my mother took me everywhere she went*"[69].

Another topic I frequently discussed with my participants, was whether people preferred to have boys or girls. This was a question brought up by an OBGYN aid worker,

[69] 4.6.22

who says that many women ask her for help with having a boy, but she has never had a woman ask her for help to have a girl. When I asked women, they gave a more nuanced perspective. The desire is linked to the division of labour. Most women said that "*both are equally a blessing*"[70], but then proceeded to elaborate on preferring one over the other.

When I asked mothers what they wanted, most said that they preferred girls because "*girls are sweeter*", "*girls can be like a friend to you*", "*girls can keep you company*" and "*girls can help you with your work around the house*"[71]. However, when I asked whether they thought more people prefer to have boys or girls, most said that people generally prefer boys. When I asked why, several people told me, "*if you do not have a boy, then your husband will leave you or marry another wife*"[72].

I did meet people whose experiences supported the claim that a husband will remarry if his wife does not have a child. Two of my participants told me about their infertile family members that had two wives; that is how they knew it was him and not the wife. People now have more access to doctors, so they often go and get tested. One nurse leading the parenting classes at the centre said,

"*If a couple cannot have children, they will go to the doctor. If it is the woman, the husband will get a second wife, and if it is him then he will stay with his wife*"[73].

However, this is not always the case. I spoke with one woman in the waiting room of the OBGYN clinic who desperately wanted a child. She lived with her husband in a house outside of an IDP camp[74]. She spent most of her days alone at home because her husband was often out working. Nevertheless, she had been married for over eleven years with no success in having children, and her husband still did not leave her or marry a second wife. However, this was a fear many women had in their minds, as it was the cultural expectation.

As to why specifically boys, one participant said that "*especially before, people preferred boys because a family that only had girls would be poor*"[75]. Sons are considered an honour and security because they are expected to be breadwinners and will carry on the

[70] 10.3.22
[71] Said by different women in the clinic waiting room; 10.3.22; 15.3.22
[72] 15.3.22; 20.3.22
[73] 15.03.22
[74] She drew the floor plan of her house, Appendix 2a
[75] 25.3.22

family name. When a woman gets married, she moves into her husband's home, so older parents with no sons might be less cared for and secure. Also, as it is an honour shame culture. Both a father and his family may be looked down on for not having any sons. A family with more sons is often a "*more powerful*"[76] and influential family. Due to these reasons, family members might pressure husbands to remarry if they cannot have a child, particularly a boy. Therefore, I found that many mothers prefer to have girls for personal reasons such as having a companion and support, but they feel societal and family pressure to have boys.

Children are, in general, considered a blessing and necessity. In Lalish[77], there is a tree covered with ribbons that women tie around it and pray for a child or a baby boy. During the parenting and breastfeeding classes I attended, several mothers asked how they could have twins because they thought it was "*beautiful*" and a "*double blessing*" to have many children[78]. Children are seen as a marker of strength and wealth for a family. Especially previously, as children were needed to take care of and work on the family farm. It was clear from women's answers that although both boys and girls might be valued, they were not viewed equally. I spoke with one aid worker, who implied that women often do not love their girls since they will leave them, they just see them as useful. Although this might be the case in some families, this is not what I saw with my participants. In some ways one might argue that boys leave their mothers, as they come and go from the house working, playing, visiting, while girls spend much more time with their mothers before getting married. Boys and girls are both useful in different ways, but it does not mean that their mothers do not love and value them.

[76] 23.3.22
[77] Yazidi holy place
[78] 15.03.22

F.8a and F.8b: This is a tree at Lalish covered by ribbons tied by women praying a child, particularly a boy.

Emotional Intimacy

The bonds between mothers and children are complex and variable. Many Yazidi social norms can create barriers between children and mothers. Due to mothers, especially young mothers, often having to work tirelessly doing domestic labour they are not able to spend much quality time with their children. Some mothers such as the one mentioned in the section about 'work in practice'[79], in a sense, 'sacrifice' themselves to be overworked to keep their children in school.

Children who are raised by their grandmothers, often develop deep emotional bonds with them. This is also due to children being seen as always belonging to the husband and his family. One mother told me that when her baby was born, he was completely taken away from her for the first four months of his life to be with the paternal grandmother. I had previously met the grandmother who lived with the woman's sister-in-law. The grandmother told me several times how happy she was to have a baby again; "*I had two boys, and my husband died in the Iraq-Iran war; so there has not been a baby in the house for more than 32 years*."[80]. She said this smilingly while feeding one of her grandbabies. This is also true

[79] Chapter 2
[80] 15.3.22

for another one of my participants, who has four children. The mother and daughter told me that the children would go to their grandparents every day, but the oldest son lived full time with his grandparents and even slept by them.

The psychologist I spoke with talked about one problem within their community being that mothers do not know how to talk to their children about their thoughts and feelings. She said that her own mother always asks her if she is hungry or needs to bathe, but her mother never asks her how she is doing and what is happening in her life. This is because many mothers did not have emotional support from their own mothers because of shame and having to work, therefore they have not been shown how to emotionally support their own children. An example that the psychologist used when talking about the negative consequences this can have, was around children (14,15,16) getting married. Many teenagers are getting married sooner without their parents' permission than previously because children are being more exposed through social media and school. The psychologist thought it was because children do not feel comfortable sharing with their parents, so they do not get their advice and then make mistakes.

One mother told me that she wants to spend more quality time with her children, but during the day, when she can have a bit of a rest, they are at school; as soon as they get home, she has much work to get food and such ready, so she cannot sit down and talk to them[81]. Several of my participants in the Netherlands whose mothers were still alive stayed in close contact with their mothers back in Iraq. One participant said that she called her mother every week, but she would not tell her anything negative because she would not want to worry her. From what I saw and heard from my participants, it seemed like many people, though not all, felt that their mothers loved them, but they did not always know how to express their emotions to each other. The mothers and children, I spoke with often viewed a mother as one who shows love and care to their children by ensuring they have food and clean clothes.

In comparison to mothers in Iraq, the Yazidi mothers in the Netherlands rely considerably on their bonds with their children for comfort and social connectedness. The relationship between mothers and their children has changed, since in Iraq other family members would play more of a role in childrearing. Mothers are now the primary caregivers.

[81] 15.3.22

One mother talked about how the relationship between she and her teenage son was complicated and difficult at times because it is now her responsibility to raise him, whereas he lived full-time with his grandmother in Iraq. Several daughters I spoke with talked about how they had a closer relationship with their mothers now that they are in the Netherlands. They feel that they can be open and share things about their lives with them. This is something that I observed much more in the Netherlands than in Iraq. My theory is that because of everything families have gone through, leaving behind everything they knew to seek asylum together, and being different to many other people around them both linguistically and culturally, it has led them to cling more to each other as a security. These close bonds between mothers and children are undoubtedly not the case with everyone, but it was something that I observed with most of my participants in the Netherlands, particularly between mothers and daughters. This is a prime example of how the change across time and space greatly influences the practices and experiences of motherhood.

Physical affection

The topic of physical affection came to my attention during the first breastfeeding class I attended. The instructor, a young Yazidi woman who had lived in the IDP camp, repeatedly emphasised to mothers that they needed to hold their babies. She said mothers needed to make skin-to-skin contact with their babies as soon as they are born to promote the mother-child bond, the child's health, and facilitate breastfeeding. I then learned that this was something that women needed to be told to do because it was not the usual practice. Traditionally when babies are born, they are often given immediately to the grandmother, and they often spend much of their first few days tightly strapped into a cot without going outside. These practices also influence breastfeeding, which I discuss in a later section. After hearing this, I started asking my participants about physical affection with their parents. Especially as almost every young child I saw was constantly being hugged and kissed by their mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, and grandmothers. Therefore, I wanted to understand the dichotomy between what I was seeing and hearing.

The response I heard was one of the many 'before and afters' within the last generation. People in their 20s and 30s often told me their parents were rarely physically affectionate. They would often say things like they did not know how because this is the way they had been taught. It always went back to shame. The word for shame in Kurdish is the

same word used to describe ‘shyness’ and ‘embarrassment’. It has been considered shameful, especially for older generations, for Yazidi parents to show physical affection to their children. A few mothers told me that in front of their parents-in-law, they would feel embarrassed to be affectionate with their babies but would hug and kiss them when they were alone. On one occasion, I spoke with a mother in her 40s and her 24-year-old daughter, who was translating for her. I asked a question about physical affection. She then told a story to which she and her daughter laughed slightly. Her daughter then said, "*mama just said that the first time that my father held me, I was eight months old*."[82]. He had felt ashamed to do it in front of his parents because they were older and very traditional. One day he went out to the fields where the mother was working with her baby, and he held her.

However, as I said, this is a before and after story. Since I had seen many parents that were affectionate with their children, I asked if the shame around this was changing. Everyone said yes to some degree or another. One reason they said it was changing was the exact reason for many other changes. Yazidis, due to the displacement, have encountered many different societies and perspectives and are becoming more “*open*” to use their word. One participant who has been in the Netherlands for six years said, “*yes, maybe in Iraq people still do it, but here it has completely changed*”[83]. The reason was that people had encountered a different perspective but were also free to do what they wanted without elders telling parents how to behave.

However, this is also something that is shifting in Iraq. I spoke with one 25-year-old woman, named *Shareen who has a three-year-old daughter that lived just outside of a refugee camp in a house with her husband and sisters-in-law. She was very affectionate with her daughter. Shareen spent many of her days alone in the house with her daughter as her husband and sisters-in-law, who were unmarried, worked. She did not have much to say about her mother, but she spoke warmly about her father, whom she clearly adored. She said that her father always loved having girls, even more than boys. I asked her if her father ever was physically affectionate with her. Shareen said that she thought her father wanted to hug her more but that he did not know how and was embarrassed. Yet, she said that she always felt loved by her father because he showed it in other ways, such as buying them nice gifts

[82] 4.4.22
[83] 9.4.22

and giving them compliments. Since I saw how affectionate she was with her child, I asked if she thought this was changing, and she said, "*definitely*". I asked if that now changed with her father, and she said, "*yes a bit, I remember the first time my father hugged me, I was around 20 years old, and he was sad to say goodbye to me when I was leaving*"[84].

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding tells a lot about a society, as it is shaped by and influences the relationships mothers have with their child, family, and community. As Di Giovanni and Fantauzzi (2017: 204) state, "breastfeeding brings with it beliefs and knowledge typical of any culture, prohibitions and concessions that protects the [mother] and the newborn through the ritualization of the biological act".

Breastfeeding in the Yazidi community has become less common in the past several decades. One old woman told me that this began when she was younger in Shingal, and people started to receive baby formula through school programs. The most common thing that women said, both in our conversations and from my midwife contact, is that many mothers believe they do not have enough milk. It is true that some women have medical issues that make it difficult for them to produce enough milk to sufficiently breastfeed. However, one of the primary obstacles to women breastfeeding is a lack of education. For example, a woman might not know how to hold the baby or massage her breast in the right way to make milk come out, so they think they do not have enough.

Mothers often do not breastfeed their children the first few days after they are born. If a woman struggles to have milk at first, she often thinks or is told by other family members that she should wait and try again in a few days. Also, many believe that the yellow milk at the beginning is bad for the baby, despite it being full of vitamins and nutrients (Di Giovanni & Fantauzzi, 2017) It is common for mothers to feed their babies water and sugar their first few days, which is detrimental to their health. Furthermore, waiting only worsens the issue because the way breastmilk works is that the more you use, the more you produce. Therefore, the chances of not having enough breastmilk increases.

[84] 16.3.22

Many mothers are also told that feeding their children baby formula instead of breastmilk is healthier. However, feeding children baby formula can have several negative consequences. Crucially, in this case, the formula is expensive. Many of the women in the refugee camps struggle financially, and a substantial part of their money goes towards getting baby formula. Due to the inability to afford formula, some mothers do not put enough formula in the bottles causing the baby to become malnourished. Plus, there is a lack of clean water in many of the IDP camps; it is not uncommon to put unfiltered water in the bottle, which can make the infant ill[85].

F.9: I saw this same advertisement repeated five times on the journey from Duhok to Erbil.

The third issue is that studies have shown that breastfeeding can facilitate bonding practices between mother and child (Faircloth, 2009; Deneux-Tharaux et al., 2006). Children primarily being with their grandmother can also make it difficult for mothers to breastfeed their children. Some mothers are even expressly discouraged from doing so by their mothers-in-law or husbands. This is because if the baby is crying, the mother then needs to stop and go through the steps of breastfeeding. An added obstacle is that many women feel that they need to breastfeed in private or at least without men around to be modest. It is therefore easier and quicker to get the baby to stop crying with a bottle that can be fed by anyone, rather than getting the mother, who is often in the middle of doing her work, to breastfeed. One woman told me that if her baby cried, she would need to finish her domestic work before attending to the baby. I am not sure if this was something that she felt within herself or the more likely option that it was put on her by her mother-in-law. The mother doing her household chores can sometimes be seen as more important in the eyes of her family than directly caring for her baby. Sometimes mothers want to breastfeed to connect with their

[85] This is information told me by aid workers, nurses, and the midwife.

babies because they have the milk, and their families do not support them. Other times mothers themselves do not want to breastfeed because it is another burden on top of their other domestic work. Regardless, many mothers either by their choice or their families bottle feed even if they are capable of breastfeeding.

Another factor that deters mothers from breastfeeding is a spiritual one. Shingali Yazidis believe in 'Ranim', an evil spirit or gen that can pass from the mother to the baby through the breastmilk. If a child becomes ill, then people might say it is because of 'Ranim', so the mother might stop breastfeeding as not to risk something terrible happening to her baby. Mothers often will not start breastfeeding early because they feel they need to have the milk blessed through a ceremony to ensure that they do not have an evil spirit. If the mother cannot get the blessing done in time, the mother's milk might dry up, and she will not be able to breastfeed her child. This caution around the spiritual realm can put much pressure on mothers, as they might feel that their body is responsible for their child's illness as it is through them that they got 'Ranim'. Therefore, if a breastfeeding baby dies the mother might not breastfeed her second child out of fear.

It is also relatively common for children to be breastfed by more than one woman. One mother laughingly told me that her daughter, who was translating, was breastfed by around eight different women. This was when they lived in Shingal and did not have access to baby formula. If a woman is unable or unavailable to breastfeed it is common for a sister, sister-in-law, or neighbour to breastfeed the baby. It was often spoken about in terms of practicality. One man, who was translating for his wife, half-jokingly mentioned that he and his daughter were brother and sister because his daughter had been breastfed by his mother while his wife was away visiting some family. This phenomenon is something Di Giovanni and Fantauzzi (2017) refer to as the law of 'kinship of milk'. 'Kinship of milk' is the belief that if two children breastfeed from the same woman, they will be spiritually bound as siblings, and cannot get married (ibid). The same man who made this comment said that he knew people who wanted to get married, but when they told people they said that they could not because they had been breastfeed by the same woman. This is a belief within Islam, but as Shingali Yazidis lived among Muslims for centuries, the belief has also been incorporated into their own practices (Di Giovanni and Fantauzzi, 2017). However, the midwife I spoke to said that the belief in 'kinship of milk' was decreasing slightly among the younger generation. The law of 'kinship of milk' points to an interesting aspect in the mentality

around the role of mothers: children can be spiritually and emotionally bound to more than one mother figure, which again demonstrates that the mentality of a nuclear family is outside of Yazidi custom.

Impossible choice

One day while in Iraq, I was having lunch with a group of aid workers. One aid worker asked me what I was doing in Iraq, and I said I was doing a research project on motherhood with Yazidi women. The aid worker then proceeded to definitively tell me how Yazidi mothers are. She told me, "Yazidi mothers don't love their children, they can't because their children don't belong to them; so, to protect themselves, they emotionally detach from their children"[86]. She then gave an example by saying that her neighbour, a Yazidi, abandoned her seven children to get remarried. She said, "Yazidi women are seen as worthless if they do not have a husband, so they would rather leave their children so that they can get some validation and feel a sense of worth". Her argument was essentially that it was not mothers' fault for not loving their children, but it is a protective strategy because they are oppressed. This conversation was frustrating and concerning. I am not sure how many aid workers hold these views. It is true that there are obstacles for women being attached to their children or caring for them because of social structures both within and out of their control. Some mothers likely due emotionally detach from their children as a coping strategy. However, based on what I saw and hear from my participants, most Yazidi mothers do love their children. Therefore, I think it is crucial to address this issue of women forsaking their children, which occasionally occurs in the Yazidi community.

Family passes through the male line. When two people get married, they join their two families together, but if a couple is then separated through death or divorce, the families are then divided. In some countries, such as Israel, when there is a separation between a couple the mother typically is expected to take full caring responsibilities of the child (Hacker, 2005). However, in Yazidi society and Iraqi law, children belong to the father (McGee, 2020). When the families are connected, the children are a part of the mother's family, but if the families become separate the border between the families is drawn between the mother's family and her children. Therefore, mothers are faced with the choice to stay

[86] 19.3.22

with their ex-husband or ex-husband's family and financially rely on them to support her. This is also the case when a husband dies. Alternatively, she can leave her children to move back into her parents' home, so that she can remarry. Two Yazidi women described it as "*impossible*" for a mother to take her children with her if she leaves.

Mothers often need to rely on their family-in-law to take care of them, but that does not always happen. I have been told that sometimes the family of the husband abuse or neglect the mother. Some do not give the mother any money, so she cannot even provide food for herself or her children. Sometimes, the families of ex-husbands will kick the wives out and not allow her to stay with her children. In that case, it is not even a choice. The mother, at least in Iraq, has little hope of supporting herself or building a new and better life for herself if she stays with the ex-husband's family.

Even if women in this position are given provisions to take care of themselves, it is still challenging. One woman in her 50s, named Ragda*, told me that her husband decided to leave her and marry a new woman. She said that there was nothing she could do about it. She said, "*I even helped plan the wedding*"[87]. Afterwards, Ragda moved into a shed in the back of his house with her children. Ragda told me that her father begged her to leave her children and remarry, but she refused to do it. When Ragda was telling this story, it was me, my translator, she, and her close friend/neighbour. After Ragda had said this, her friend said, "*there is someone from my village who left their children behind because they were being mistreated by the ex-husband's family, but most choose to stay with their children*"[88]. What Ragda's neighbour said is an extremely crucial point. Women who abandon their children during this impossible choice are the stories that are most talked about because they are shocking and sad, especially to ex-pat aid workers. However, this disregards the many mothers who choose to stay despite the difficult circumstances.

I mentioned earlier that Ragda told me that even her father put a lot of pressure on her to leave her children. I then asked around if this was common and why this might be. I was told that in this situation, it is prevalent for the mother's parents to encourage her to leave her children. There are several reasons for this. One is that her parents love their child. A father,

[87] 15.3.22
[88] 15.3.22

it was often a father being discussed in these conversations, might see his daughter is being mistreated or not being provided for, and wants to see her taken care of. A second reason is, again, shame. A woman who does not have a husband and is not being taken care of can be seen in a shameful light, which can then extend to her whole family. So, a father might try to get his daughter to leave her children and remarry to get her out of a shameful situation.

Another aspect is that the two families have been separated, and the children then are not considered to fall under the category of the family for a mother's parents. I had a long conversation with a female therapist in a Yazidi village in Kurdistan, who has worked with women in this situation. Some of her patients, left their children and moved back into their parents' house. She said that these women often grieve their children very much, and it is difficult to be away from them. She also said that in some instances, mothers want to contact their children, but their families do not allow them to do so because the connection between the two families is "*broken*"[89].

I once spoke to a young woman whose mother had abandoned her and her younger siblings when she was about thirteen. Tearing up slightly, she told me about her experiences which were extremely painful for her. Yet, she said, "*I think my mother loved me, I think so… but she had no hope; maybe if I was in her situation, I would have done the same thing*"[90]. Taking together these stories it becomes clear that it is not that Yazidi mothers do not love their children, but that they are often faced with an impossible choice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed bonding or disconnecting cultural practices and attitudes between mothers and their children. The bonds can be strained by the division of labour. Many mothers were also not given an example of or education about how to emotionally support their children or the benefits of breastfeeding. Every mother has a slightly different relationship with each of her children, some have closer bonds than others. However, all my participants in one way or another acknowledged that their mothers had a difficult time when they were growing up, and she was just trying to do the best that she could with what she knew. The adult children often expressed respect for their mother's tireless work to take care

[89] 23.3.22
[90] 20.3.22

of the house and make sure her children had food. Also, there are small positive shifts that are happening, such as the younger generations feeling more comfortable to be physically affectionate with their children. Furthermore, mothers living in houses where they are the primary caregivers can be at times challenging, but it can facilitate bonds between mothers and their children.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed family structure and its effect on the role of motherhood with displaced Yazidis in Kurdistan and the Netherlands, and how it has developed in different contexts and across time. This study was from the onset exploratory, as there has been little research done on the family structures and practices of motherhood with Yazidis. During my research I observed and was told about the normative patrilocal extended family structures in which Shingalis traditionally live: with several generations and branches of the family tree living in the same household. The grandfather is the head of the family, and the grandmother is the head of the household.

The domestic sphere is primarily seen as women's domain and responsibility. The division of labour between family members has a large effect on motherhood. It is expected that young mothers will do the domestic work, while the grandmother watches over and cares for children. This dynamic can have a significant influence on the mothering practices and the bonds between mothers and children, as mothers might face obstacles to breastfeeding and might not know how to emotionally support their children. Despite this, I found that many of my interlocutors have a profound love and respect for their mothers, as they felt loved by her through her physically providing for the needs of her children. My findings are primarily related to the division of labour between gender and age, and how the roles of family members are evolving due to the environment in which they are performed.

Yazidi mothering practices have developed over time because of key changes that come from displacement as well as exposure to customs different from their own. A prime example is the change within a generation around physical affection with one's children. It changed from being something that brought shame to being normalised in a relatively short period of time. These changes do not move uniformly across all of Yazidi society, yet they are pronounced enough that everyone I spoke with felt that there has been a great change between now and before. I was greatly surprised to find that similar changes were occurring in the displaced Shingali communities both in Kurdistan and the Netherlands. In both locations, more women are getting an education and there is a shift from extended multi-generational households to nuclear family units, although to varying degrees.

These developments are due to shifts in the perceptions of women and new challenges from what was experienced in Shingal. Perceptions and practices have been influenced by increased social media and contact with the west, larger cities, and NGOs. Getting out of closed communities has allowed many women to exercise more agency and has given them more opportunities. My participants live transnational lives because with the help of social media they can stay in frequent contact with their family members around the world. The frequent contact with family members has influenced the shifts and perspectives within displaced Yazidis society across geographic boundaries, in both directions.

Regardless of some positive shifts, the displacement and genocide that Shingalis have experienced has been traumatic and heart-breaking, and many Yazidis still suffer from mental health issues and financial insecurity. Also, as Yazidi society still revolves around patriarchal structures, the options for women can be limited and bring new obstacles. For example, more women are now able to divorce their husbands. Yet, as children are not seen as belonging to the mother, she cannot take her children with her. Additionally, finding work for women in practice can be complicated. More women now need to work to support their families. Yet, despite it being more acceptable for women to work outside of the home, women are still expected to do the bulk of the domestic work.

Furthermore, the changes have not benefitted all women, as these shifts are more difficult for older women than younger women. It is difficult for mothers to be away from their children who might be dispersed all around the world. Older women also often want to be close to their grandchildren, as they may view it as their responsibility and joy to care for them as a reward for the hard work they did earlier in life. Some older women, although certainly not all, might also have less support in their older age because their children have moved into their own homes. The change in environment, cultural norms, practices, and language are also more difficult for older people to adjust to as they have lived their whole lives in one way.

In many instances, motherhood practices and shifts overlap between the two contexts, except the shifts are accelerated in the Netherlands. One of the primary and overarching differences which shapes motherhood practices between Iraq and the Netherlands is community. In Iraq, Yazidis are still surrounded by their extended families and Yazidi communities. In the Netherlands, women are more isolated because the Yazidis are spread

out across the country. Yazidi community is principally maintained through kinship ties. This lack of a centralised community means that the reproduction and continuation of Yazidi traditions, social practices, and religion take place in the home.

Yazidi women being more isolated within the homes influences the relationships they have with their children. Several women described an increased intimacy with their children in the Netherlands than when in Iraq. This is likely a result of the experiences that the family share through seeking asylum and having fewer Yazidis around who can relate to their experience. Many women I spoke with expressed mixed feelings about not living within Yazidi community. It was challenging to not have the support of other women in their families to keep them company and help them in their responsibilities. Yet, they enjoyed the autonomy that they experienced by living in a nuclear family household and the freedom to care slightly less about what others thought of their choices.

The change of practices and loss of a way of life from Iraq to the Netherlands has been extremely difficult for Yazidis, particularly for parents who grew up there. My participants often talked to me about family members who they dearly miss and have not seen in many years. However, despite the challenges of living in the Netherlands, my Dutch participants expressed no regret about their decision that allows them to live in more safety and stability. The difficulties in Iraq and the search for a better future abroad have created a chain migration effect of other Yazidi family members seeking asylum in the places where their relatives live. It will be interesting to see how Shingalis, particularly women, continue to adjust, reconstruct, and develop in this transitional time in their society.

Future Research

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a gap in the literature about displaced refugee mothers particularly within their wider family context. This study can add to our understanding of how motherhood develops and changes during and after seeking asylum. Through the comparison of motherhood practices in both the host context and receiving country of asylum, it is possible to compare the practices and experiences of mothers. Gupter and Ferguson's (2012) theory of hybridity is relevant in this context. However, as the displacement was relatively recent, the diaspora in the Netherlands is not developed enough to know how the practises will further hybridise.

There are several areas where further research around these topics could be immensely valuable. I touched on the use of social media, however, this could be studied in much more detail. I believe that it has had more profound positive and negative consequences on Yazidi society than was able to be assessed within the confines of this study. Further research could also look at the practices of fatherhood within Yazidi society. The displacement and societal changes which have influenced motherhood practices have surely also affected fatherhood. There is also a need for more research into displaced motherhood in general, as there are millions of mothers around the world living in displacement. More research is needed to better understand these transnational mothers' experiences to know how best policies and aid can support them.

F.10: Drawing by a participant of a house.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Stories

Fictional stories based a combination of details from different participants lives, used as a summary and a research method of getting feedback from my participants.

1. **Picture of Yazidi family life in Shingal before the genocide**

   Ghazal is sixteen and unmarried. She lives in a small village in Shingal, the north-western region of Iraq close to Sinjar Mountain which is considered sacred. Approximately a thousand families live in her village, and they are all Yazidis. Not too far away are other Yazidi villages, but the villages immediately surrounding her are Muslim Arab villages. Her family has good relationships with their Muslim neighbours, but things have become more tense in the past few years. She was given a Muslim godparent when she was born, but now they don't see each other very often. The people in her village used to be like family to her, everyone knew each other and trusted each other to watch out for each other. Many people in her village are poor like her family, but most people have their farms to provide them with everything they need. Ghazal's family has a small vegetable patch and hundreds of sheep and goats, and a cow. She lives in a big house with many rooms for her big family, as do most of the people in her village. In her house, there is her grandmother and grandfather, and four of their sons and their youngest daughter. Their other two daughters, her aunts, have already gotten married and moved into their husbands' family home. The oldest son, her father, lives there with her mother, Ghazal, and her four younger siblings. The second son lives there with his two wives, one of which has three daughters and the other one has a son. Their third son is a taxi driver around Iraq, he is therefore away a lot, but lives in the house with his wife who does not have children yet. Her youngest uncle and aunt, who are around her age, are still not married. In total, she lives with twenty people. When she was a child she spent much of her time with her grandmother, who she calls 'mother', and would usually only spend time with her mother in the evenings. Her grandmother took care of her when she was little and taught her right from wrong. But now that Ghazal is older and has stopped with school, she can help her mother and aunts with their tasks around the house and farm. She knows that she will be married soon, probably to her cousin down the road. That would be nice since she would live relatively close to family, she

does not want to be far from her mother or grandmother. They played together as children so she hopes that he and her aunt (his mother) will take good care of her.

2. **A picture of daily life for a young mother in an IDP camp in Kurdistan:**

   Wajida is 22 years old; she lives in a refugee camp in Kurdistan, Iraq. She and her family have been living in this camp for over seven years, ever since they were forced to leave their homes in 2014. She was fourteen when ISIS destroyed her village. She and most of her immediate family were able to get out in time, but her cousin who was living in another town was killed. In the camp, Wajida lives in an overcrowded space with small dark homes made of cement and tarp, closely set up next to one another. She lives in constant fear of fires. She knows others in the camp who have died or lost their homes due to fires. Wajida was fortunate enough to have gone to primary school, so when she got to the camp, she was able to continue her education. She had previously been told that when she got to high school, she would have to stop so that she could start taking over household jobs. Then everything changed and her parents encouraged her to stay in school in hopes for a better future for herself. She had almost finished with school but in her last year, when she was 20, she got married. She didn't see the point in staying in school when she could not imagine what her future would look like. She used to live in a big house with many of her relatives, but now she lives in a tent with her mother-in-law, her husband, her husband's younger sister and her new baby. Her husband's brother and his wife and their three children live next door. Her own parents are still in another camp in Zakho, her sister has moved back to Shingal, and two of her brothers now live in Germany. She doesn't know when she will ever see them again, but she stays in close contact with them, especially her sister in Shingal. Her own husband does not want to move back to Shingal despite it being home because it is still unsafe, the village is still in rubbles, there are very few job opportunities, and the memories are haunting. Wajida

spends much of the day cooking and cleaning. Her younger sister-in-law is in school most days, so she cannot help her. Her mother-in-law is older and can't work, so she takes care of the baby. Wajida looks forward to the few minutes when she can play with her baby once she is done with her work. She tries to be respectful to her mother-in-law though and not disagree with her over how to take care of the baby. Wajida and her husband are hoping for the day when they can join her brothers in Germany. Wajida feels mixed emotions about going because all she has ever known is Iraq, but she is excited for the possibilities that Europe holds. She looks to her child and hopes that they can live in peace and safety one day.

3. **A picture of Yazidi woman's life in the Netherlands:**

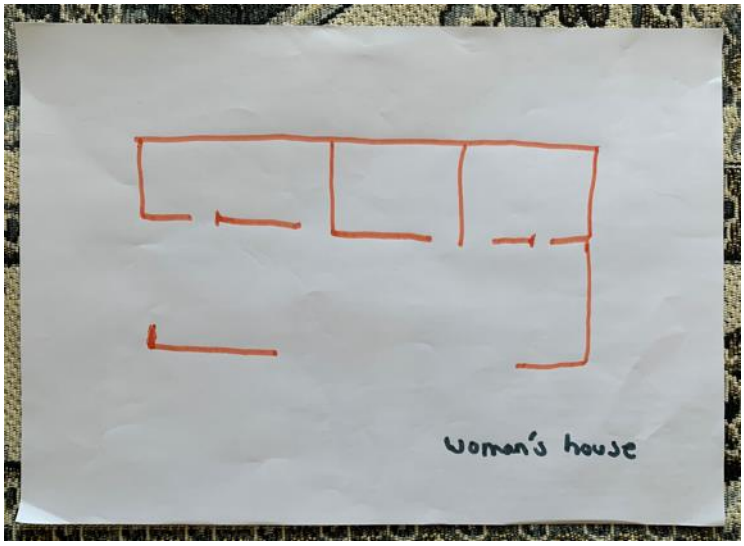
Sana, who is 39 years old has been living in the Netherlands for about five years now. First, her husband trekked arduously across Europe and applied for asylum. He chose the Netherlands because he was following his brother who had come a year or so before him. He was bounced around from AZC to AZC for the first few months, but due to the obvious conflict in Iraq after about a year he was granted asylum and was given a house. He was then able to apply for Sana and their three children to come join him. Sana found it very difficult to leave because she didn't want to leave her friends and family knowing she would probably not see them again for many years, but she had hope. When she and her children arrived in the Netherlands, they stayed in Ter Apel for a few days. Thankfully, since they had a partner visa, they could quickly move into the home that her husband had been given by the government. She has been living in that apartment for the past few years, it is her own little kingdom. She has gotten used to and accepted the way her life is now. There are no other Yazidis that she knows living within a one-hour distance, but the Yazidis that they know, such as her brother-in-law, visit regularly. Sana has done the Dutch lessons which are required, and she found them difficult, especially since she had never gone to a school of any kind before, but she wanted to learn. She tries to speak with her neighbours sometimes, but she still struggles with Dutch since she doesn't get much practice. It has been difficult for her husband to find work because of language and education barriers, but he is hoping to start a job working at a bike repair shop soon. Most of her days, she spends at home taking care of her house and children. She gets

them up and feeds them, then does the laundry, cleans the house, and makes lunch. After that, she goes grocery shopping and gets started on dinner; she always makes extra food because you never know who might be stopping by. She worries about her children and about them not growing up in Yazidi society, but she trusts that they have been raised well and she does her best to support them. Since the children are at school most of the day, she spends a lot of time by herself unlike in Iraq where she had her sisters and sisters-in-law to help her with the household chores. It can be a bit lonely, but she stays in close contact with her sister in Germany and her mother back in Iraq. It was a sacrifice to come here, but it is worth it to be able to live in safety, freedom and to provide a better future for her children.

Appendix 2. Women's Artwork

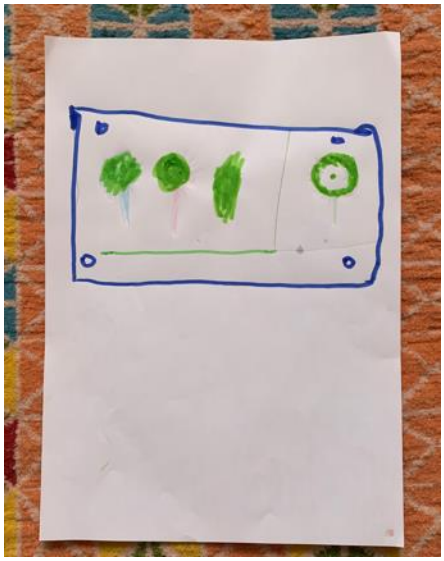
- 1a: This image was coloured by one my participants, who found it in her daughters colouring book and it reminded her of all the children who have lost their lives while making the arduous journey to Europe.

- 2a: This picture was drawn by a woman, who said that she had never drawn before. I suggested she draw something in her everyday life. She drew her house, demonstrating her three rooms and yard.



- 3a: With the prompt ‘what is something meaningful to you?’: This woman drew the cave village that her mother grew up in, and she lived in when she was very little.

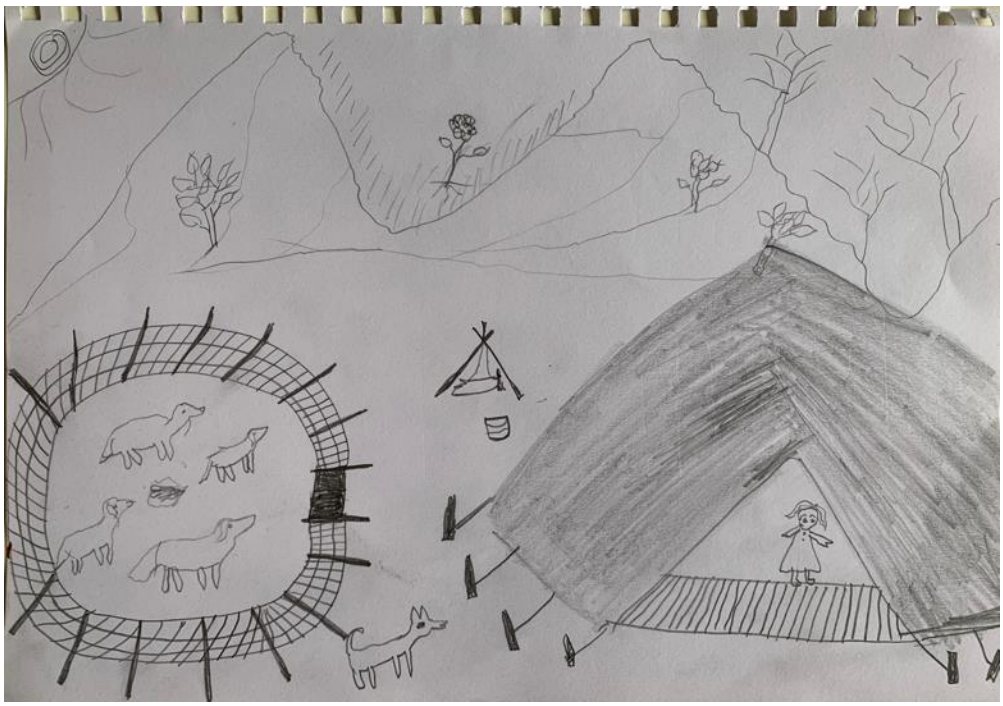
- 4a/4b: These are both images of flowers, by women who said that they have never drawn before because they had not been to school. Left is from a woman in her 30s, right is from a women in her 50s.



- 5a: This image was drawn by a woman who said that she would sometimes draw this tree with her children.

- 5a and 5b: The left was drawn by a young woman, who said it was from a memory of her family having a picnic in Shingal. The right was a woman in her 30s, who did not talk much, but she came back after her doctor's appointment to finish her drawing.

- 6a: a drawing by a woman of when she was a teenager, and she would go up to the mountains for a few months each year to take care of the sheep and let them graze on more land. She described it as a happy and prominent part of her youth.



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