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**Torn Between Home and Homeland, Present
and Future:
Identity Formation Among Individuals With Assyrian
Background in Sweden**

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Abstract

None of us are immune to the ongoing identity-processes. Identity formation is something that we are engaged in every day, both in our consciousness and our subconsciousness, from the society levels down to personal levels. This study examines how individuals with Assyrian background form their identities in Sweden. Questions on "homeland" and "home", and statelessness are asked to contribute to the understanding of identity formation among Assyrians in Sweden, as well as questions on expectations and concerns for the future to behold. A qualitative method is used, with the purpose to contribute to the existing knowledge on identity formation among Assyrians in Sweden. The empirical analysis is built on 14 Assyrian voices of different ages and backgrounds. Identity and belonging constitute the central conceptual framework of this study.

By analyzing relevant literature and the primary data, the results shows that although Assyrians in Sweden have different ages and backgrounds, their experiences on identity formation are very similar. In relation to their personal identity formation, they emphasize the group-identification as something important. The term of statelessness is recognized to be a burden, at the same time as it is emphasized to be a truthful way of describing the collective identity. Further, questions on the future to behold are highly present, both on individual and collective levels.

Table of Content

1. Introduction	1
1.1 The main aim and research questions of the study	1
1.2 Disposition	3
2. Previous Research	5
3. Theoretical Framework	9
3.1 Identity formation and belonging	9
4. Methodology	14
4.1 Qualitative research methodology	14
4.2 Choice of research sites	15
4.3 Data resources and my choice of techniques of data collection	16
4.3.1 In-depth semi-structured interviews	16
4.4 Limitations and ethical considerations	17
5. Findings and Analysis	20
5.1 Identity formation	20
5.2 Statelessness	24
5.3 Future	28
6. Conclusion	36
7. Bibliography	39
Appendix	

1 Introduction

The aim of this introduction is to give the reader a background of the overall study. I will start off by presenting a short history of the group of focus, followed by the purpose of the study, the research problem and a presentation of my research questions. Lastly, I will end this chapter by presenting the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The main aim and research questions of the study

The Assyrian¹ migration to Sweden is not a new phenomenon, the first Assyrians came to Sweden in 1967. They were a group about 200 people, that were transferred from Lebanon to the southern part of Sweden in a small town called Alvesta, located in Småland (Björklund, 1980, p. 70). Today, there are no exact figures on how many Assyrians that live in Sweden, partly because it is not legal to register migrants by their religious affiliation. But the estimated numbers are 120.000 Assyrians (Assyriska Riksförbundet), however probably more. Assyrians use to consider themselves as indigenous to their place of origin. Although there is not an official definition of "indigenous" adopted by any UN-system body, UN have developed a modern understanding of this term (United Nations, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2009). According to this understanding, Assyrians count as indigenous people, originally from areas of northern Iraq, north-east Syria, south-east Turkey, western Iran, and Lebanon, and refer to this area as their historical homeland. Further, because of their vulnerability they are also counted as an ethnic minority with risk of being threatened to extinction.² The emigration of Assyrians during the 1960s is a part of a still ongoing process of emigration from their areas of origin (Björklund, 1980, p. 56). Today they live in many different parts of the world, which have resulted in a more heterogenous identity: they no longer speak one language with different dialects, they

¹ When talking about the Assyrians, it is important to know that there are different name and naming. The most common names in use are Assyrians, Syriacs and Chaldeans. For further discussion, see the work of Naures Atto (2011) "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses Among Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora".

² See for example Minority Rights Group International (www.minorityrights.org)

speak several languages; they have different church affiliations with different habits and customs. Due to the above movements has resulted in that the group define their ethnic origin, their church affiliation and their identity in different ways (Deniz, 1999).

The purpose of this research is to make a modest contribution to the literature on Assyrian identity and belonging, and to present an inclusive understanding of the group, irrespective of how you define your ethnic origin, what dialect you speak, your church affiliation, or how you identify yourself. My aim is to use my respondents own voices to speak out on questions concerning their identity, their sense of belonging and about their expectations and concerns for the future to behold.

A lot of the research that has been done on Assyrians in Sweden are mostly focused on Assyrians originating from the area of Tur 'Abdin, in south-east Turkey, which clearly cannot be empirically representative for the whole group. Keeping this in mind, I have tried to interview Assyrians from different parts of the historical homeland: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. Unfortunately I was not able to interview anyone from Iran. Furthermore, I tried to be as selective as possible, and chose my respondent based on their personal differences, in order for me to catch their different life stories and experiences. This is partly due to the fact that I find it problematic when researchers claim their study to be representative for the group in large, when we clearly have different preferences and more important, different experiences, depending on how you identify yourself, where you come from, where you live today, how you have been brought up, socio-economic statues, etc. Although most of my respondents call themselves "Assyrians", there is much that is different between them.

Since I identify as Assyrian myself and therefor being so closely related to the topic I have chosen to do research on has obviously many advantages, but it has also disadvantages, one of them being the difficult decision-making with regards to what specific focus one should choose for the specific research, and what research questions to battle. Throughout the fieldwork, I noticed that many of my respondents had difficulties with answering a specific question, a question that might seem very easy to answer for most people: "How would you describe yourself to a person you met for the first time?". I therefore decided to let this question set the base for my research questions:

1. How does Assyrians in Sweden negotiate their identity formation?
2. How does Assyrians in Sweden relate to "homeland" and "home"?
 - do they feel stateless?
3. What are Assyrians expectations and concerns for the future to behold?

The first question on Assyrian identity-formation in Sweden is related to my other research questions on "homeland" and "home", statelessness, and their future expectations and concerns. When I asked my respondents quite general questions on statelessness, many of them automatically referred to their own group as a stateless people, and sometimes in relation to not having a home. I found this particularly interesting and important to highlight, therefore my second question have a sub-question (statelessness) to its main-question on "homeland" and "home".

1.2 Disposition

In chapter 2, I will examine and present the key literature on Assyrians in Sweden, and that somehow are related to the question on identity and belonging. Most of the research discuss *identity* somehow, thus it is important to know that the variation of names for the group of focus used in this chapter depends on the various names the authors themselves are using in their own works. However, it is quite striking that most of the literature primarily focus on west Assyrians, mainly from the area of Tur 'Abdin in South-East Turkey. Although a number of researches has been done on Assyrians in Sweden, very little research has been done with the aims to represent the group of focus various migration countries.

In chapter 3, I will look a the main theoretical and conceptual framework employed by studies on identity and belonging, and that will be used in chapter 5 to analyze identity formation and belonging among Assyrians in Sweden, and further to analyze the data used to answer my three research questions. I will treat identity and belonging as two different subjects that are interdependent, thus they will integrate and interact throughout this discussion.

In chapter 4, I will discuss and present the methodology and the fieldwork conducted in this study. First I will explain the main approach of the study that is mainly based on my conducted fieldwork. This is followed by a presentation of the research sites. Further on, I will account for the resources of data used in this research, and a detailed description of my chosen techniques of data collection: in-depth semi-structured interviews and a literature review on primary and secondary sources, such as published literature, governmental reports, articles, newspapers and magazines, and websites. (I will then justify my chosen methods.) Finally, I will conclude this chapter by emphasize the limitations and address some important ethical considerations linked to the study.

In chapter 5, I will present, discuss and analyze the main findings of this research, and also account for a more detailed description of the conducted field work. I will present this chapter by structure the different themes I mentioned above in the methodology chapter: identity; statelessness; and future. It is not simple to distinguish between some of my respondent's answers and categorize them into different themes, as many of the questions are interlinked and interdependent. However, questions on identity are interrelated with the rest of the sub-themes: statelessness, and future to behold.

In the concluding chapter, I come back to my research questions and discuss the main findings of this study, and give suggestions for further research.

2 Previous research

Although a number of researches has been done on Assyrians in Sweden, very little research has been done with the aims to represent the various migration countries of the group of focus. I will present the main previous research that has been done on Assyrians in Sweden, and that somehow relates to my research topic. Most of the research discuss *identity* somehow, thus it is important to know that the variation of names for the group in focus used in this chapter comes from the various names the authors themselves are using in their own works when writing about the Assyrians. However, it is quite striking that most of the literature primarily focus on west Assyrians, mainly from the area of Tur 'Abdin in South-East Turkey.

One of the first scholarly work and key contributors to the subject of Assyrian identity formation in Sweden is Fuat Deniz (1999), with his dissertation: *En minoritets odysse: Upprätthållande och transformation av etnisk identitet i förhållande till moderniseringsprocesser - det assyriska exemplet* (The odyssey of a minority: maintenance and transformation of ethnic identity in response to processes of modernization - the Assyrian case). Deniz was a Swedish sociologist and a writer of Assyrian descent, who arrived in Sweden as a young child from Tur 'Abdin in South-East Turkey. In his dissertation he focused on the collective identity of Assyrians in Sweden by investigating Assyrians who have migrated to Sweden, where they have been adapted to a new context, thus maintained as well as transformed their ethnic identity as a consequence of migration from South-East Turkey to Sweden. His main finding is that the Assyrian identity transformed with the establishment of the new society, from ethno-religious identity in the homeland to a more ethno-national based identity in Sweden. In his work he uses a triangulation method where he combines his pre-understanding with in-depth interviews (63 participants á 149 hours), observations and printed materials, such as newspapers, brochures and others. Although his work is comprehensive and one of the most important sources of literature with regards to the group of focus, there is undoubtedly more to cover. Deniz focuses on Assyrians from Tur 'Abdin in South-East Turkey, hence Assyrians from other parts of the historical homeland is not represented in this study.

The identity formation among Assyrian is closely related to the question on name and naming, and is something that has been researched upon thoroughly. Recently, Naures Atto (2011) did an extensive research on this question. Atto is a Dutch anthropologist from Assyrian/Syriac descent. She wrote a dissertation: *Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora: Identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora*, in which she uses an anthropological, political and historical perspective to focus on the different naming discourses among Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora. Atto conducted an ethnographic fieldwork in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, and used a triangulation method to combine different methods of data collection: 123 in-depth semi-structured interviews (71 in Sweden) and informal conversations; participant observations; and study of primary and secondary sources. According to Atto, the naming debate have been a central discussion during the past four decades, and this book tries to develop a deeper understanding for the naming debate, i.e what the group should name themselves in Western languages. The main conclusion of the book is that although the name and naming debate mainly emerged in connection with the diasporic situations, new political groups have emerged, who can only be studied in the light of emigration from Middle East. These new groups struggle with redefining themselves, their collective identity and compete with each other to basically determine the correct name in the new language. Her work comprise a huge study, but as she focus on members from a religiously defined community, or "elites", whom according to her are graduate students, clergy, activists (often people in key positions in secular and religious organizations), most of them West Syrian (or Syrian Orthodox) from Turkey, unfortunately, this leads to a misrepresentation of the group of focus, since most of the elites are men and most of them are from Turkey.

Another research that deals with identity formation among Assyrians in Sweden is the monograph that Fuat Deniz wrote together with Antonios Perdikaris (2000): *Ett liv mellan två världar: En studie om hur assyriska ungdomar som andra generationens invandrare i Sverige upplever och hanterar sin livssituation* (My own translation: A life between two worlds: A study of how Assyrian youth as second generation immigrants in Sweden experience and handle their life situation), where they aim at emphasize and illustrate how Assyrian youth, as second generation immigrants in Sweden, experience and manage their life situation, given that they live in two culturally different worlds - the Swedish and the Assyrian. Deniz and Perdikaris used a qualitative method with

three different strategies to collect their data: full participation; participant observation and; in-depth interviews with 12 youth divided into two age categories: 15-17 and 23-25. Their selection of participants were based on other criteria as well, for example, the participants had to live in a specific area in Sweden, and come from Tur 'Abdin in Turkey. The main conclusion of this monograph is that the participants live in two different cultural realities - the Assyrian minority culture and the Swedish majority culture - with different values, norms and rules of behavior. Hence, these problematic and conflicted life situations needs to be adressed to the Swedish society. This is the first work of its kind, and thus important since the only way forward is to create understanding, and support these youth through processes and dialogue.

Further, the psychologist of religion Önver Cetrez (2005) wrote a dissertation: *Meaning-making variations in acculturation and ritualization: A multi-generational study of Suroyo migrants in Sweden*. In his study he researched on how acculturation process affects meaning-making among Suroyo in Södertälje, specifically among the younger generation. Cetrez uses an interdisciplinary perspective to emphasize how religious rituals and symbols, and identification issues have an impact in the culture of the research object. For his methodological part he used a mixed method and combined quantitative method with a qualitative method. More specifically, he used a questionnaire with 219 respondents (age ranging from 16-61 and above, with main focus on 16-19), and 12 semi-structured interviews (age ranging from 19-23). One of Cetrez main findings is the identification issue that primarily the youth faces. By using various designations as Aramean, Assyrian, Suroyo, Syrian and Swedish, either separately or in combination they try to overcome these issues and strengthen their own identity.

In the early beginning of Assyrian migration to Sweden, the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Björklund (1980), wrote his dissertation on behalf of (EIFO, Swedish Expert Group on Immigration Research): *Från ofärd till välfärd: En kristen minoritetsgrupps migration från Mellersta Östern till Sverige* (North to another country: The formation of a Suryoyo community in Sweden), that among other things aim at emphasize and illustrate the migration and settlement process among migrated Assyrians/Suryoye, mainly from Tur 'Abdin in Turkey to Sweden. Since the Assyrian/Suryoye was relatively unknown in the Swedish society, he wanted to help create an

understanding of the Assyrian/Suryoye people, and their adaption process to the new society in Sweden.

A quite different approach to the research on the subject of Assyrian identity formation in relation to migration and integration is the work by the sociologist Marianne Freyne-Lindhagen (1997), and her dissertation: *Identitet och kulturmöte - Syrianska kvinnors exempel: En diskussion om grounded theory* (My own translation: Identity and culture meeting - Syriac women example: A discussion of grounded theory), aiming at establishing whether the Suryoyo (Syrian Orthodox) women can be established as "genuinely integrated" citizens and participant subjects in the Swedish society. Freyne-Lindhagen uses a qualitative method and combines different techniques for data collection, such as participation, observation, open interviews and narratives. All in all she based her analysis on seven short life stories, and two separate cases - one individual case about a physical disabled Suryoyo woman, and the other on a women organization committee in the Suryoyo Association. Freyne-Lindhagen conclude her dissertation by stating that given the complex background to the Suryoyo women's integration process, they are partly "pseudo integrated" in a genuine political, structural and societal meaning.

Since the process of identity formation is my main focus throughout this thesis, I have made use of most of the above mentioned works. My approach resembles what Deniz, Atto and Cetrez have used: through my pre-knowledge, interviews with respondents, and former research on (mostly) Assyrians, I have gathered and analyzed the empirical data to produce new knowledge.

3 Theoretical framework

The study rests upon the theoretical and conceptual framework that I will use as operational tools when analyzing the data used to answer my three research questions. I will treat identity and belonging as two different subjects that are interdependent, thus they will integrate and interact throughout this discussion.

3.1 Identity formation and belonging.

The question of identity and identity formation is a subject that has been well researched upon. Quite often researchers separate between collective identity and individual identity. In Fuat Deniz (1999) he give account for the traditional features of ethnic identity, such as "a collective name, a shared mythology, shared historical memories, one or more distinctive elements of a common culture, associations with a specific homeland, and a sense of solidarity with a significant part of the population" (Deniz, 1999, p. 69). However, Deniz argues that it is only those criteria that are important to the community, that is valuable in the specific context. More importantly, he emphasize the importance of expand the meaning of identity, and specifically the ethnic identity. Deniz define ethnic identity accordingly:

1. Both permanent and changeable, it is responsive to both external and subjective conditions, but it cannot be constructed anyhow, and is always assumed and based on preexisting identity;
2. Consisting of both objective and subjective components whose relative importance changes over time and in new social conditions;
3. Consisting of both strategic and instrumental aspects and non-instrumental aspects such as symbolic and meaning-making aspects;
4. Impossible to understand without understanding of ethnic relations, identity politics and recognition of ethnic identity (Deniz, 1999, p. 70)

Given these definitions, Deniz argues that theories on ethnic identity should allow us to deconstruct and claim, at the same time as maintaining and transforming ones ethnic

identity (Deniz, 1999, p. 69-70). Similar arguments can be found in Barzoo Eliassi's dissertation (2010), here he rests upon the theory of Brubaker and Cooper where they argue for developing the traditional terminology of identity and collective identity, and replace them with new terminology. Instead of using identity they suggest we should replace it with terms such as "identification", "self-understanding", "self-identification", "external categorization", "self-representation", whereas for the collective identity they suggest we should replace it with terms such as "commonality", "connectedness", "groupness", and "sense of belonging" (Brubaker and Cooper quoted in Eliassi, 2010, p. 88).

Referring to Sicakkan and Lithman, Eliassi talks about three different forms of belonging which can be helpful when understanding multidimensional identifications: *being*, *becoming* and, *longing*. *Being* refers to terms as gender, ethnicity, age, etc., it is considered as the foundation and is partly static. *Becoming* refers to the ongoing identification construction. *Longing* involves wishing, willing and longing and constitute how we handle our being and becoming (Sicakkan and Lithman quoted in Eliassi, 2010, p. 88). Assyrians have been called a people with multidimensional identities (Deniz, 1999, p. 16). Deniz discusses the complexity of multiple identities and that they can be changeable and sometimes even contradictory (Ibid., p. 70). Referring to Arnstberg and Ehn, and Barth, Deniz talks about how individuals with multiple identities have the ability to, in different contexts, choose between different belonging to gain competency to pass as a member of another group that is not necessarily your own group of belonging. To accentuate or hide ones identity is a competence that the individual uses depending on the the specific situation (Arnstberg and Ehn, Barth quoted in Deniz, 1999, p. 70-71).

The importance of belonging and to have a place to call "home" is discussed by Anthias (2006). According to her, belonging has different dimensions, and include not only forms of membership, rights and duties or the ability to being included in a specific group or people, but it is also about being part of a socially constructed membership and identification that creates the feeling of the self, and being part of this socially constructed phenomena. This becomes important when questions such as "where do I belong?" occur (Anthias, 2006, p. 21). Furthermore, Anthias argue that the sense of belonging becomes important when:

[W]e feel destabilized, when we seek for answers to the quandaries of uncertainty, disconnection, alienation and invisibility that we become more obsessed with finding, even fixing, a social place we feel at home in, or at least home with; where we seek for our imagined roots, for the secure haven of our group, or family, our nation writ large (Anthias, 2006, p. 21)

The question "Where are you from?" is quite common in everyday life but is not always perceived as an innocent one, yet not everyone have a straightforward answer. This fear of not replying in an adequate way is something that she believe individuals with an unclear place of origin suffer from, because your ethnicity is not fully articulated (Kamala Visweswaran, 1994, p. 115). Again, this reminds us of the importance of breaking up the static definition of identification, or otherwise we risk enhancing the sense of exclusion (Anthias, 2006, p. 21). The meaning-making of identity that construct your belonging is something that is discussed in Cetrez (2005), where he state that the Suroyo youth in his research use different designations to identify themselves, such as Aramean, Assyrian, Suroyo, Syrian, Swedish, and immigrant. These designations are used either separately or combined, in order for them to differentiate themselves from other and to be able to negotiate their identity. Further on, Cetrez point out that the self-chosen designations might have the effect of both inclusion and exclusion in groups with similar or different definitions of their identity (Cetrez, 2005, p 16).

As Avtar Brah (1996) suggests, the definition of home is often:

[L]inked with the way in which process of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggle over the social regulation of belonging (Brah, 1996, p. 192).

Brah argue that "home" is not necessarily a fixed place to where you wish to return to, rather it consist of a more imaginative and almost a mythic place, where people as a group can create common grounds (Brah, 1996, p. 192). This feeling of treating "home" as something imaginative, almost mythic is recognized from Deniz discussions on the traditional attributions of identity, as not being sufficient in a modern context, where for

example migrants might lack the recourse of a fixed "homeland" (Deniz, 1999, p. 69). The consequences of the structural opinions of what constitute a "homeland", and the implications that "homeland" brings to an identity, is what Malkki (1992) discusses when examining the discourse of identity and belonging. She argue that this rather narrow approach becomes problematic when used in the context of migrants, that often are considered as "displaced" and "uprooted" (Malkki, 1992, p. 25).

Eliassi (2010) suggest that to be able to approach the complex concept of identity one must define it in numerous ways, rather than "in terms of a single essence". Identity, whether it is ethnic, religious, cultural, national or gender based, is not a static phenomena, thus it is a product of the surrounding environment, something that is constructed, maintained, changed, reified or even rejected. (Eliassi, 2010, p. 94-95). In a similar way, Deniz (1999) talks about ethnic identity, as a quite complex concept since it is build up on a set of combined attributes. Given that single cultural characteristics, such as language, religion, territory, and habits is not sufficient to identify an ethnic group. Deniz believes that all attributes are important for the construction of an identity, however, the significance of the attributes varies for different groups (Deniz, 1999, p. 62).

When it comes to the preservation of an ethnical group, Deniz refers to Barth, and uses his theory about the preservation of ethnical identity synonymously to the preservation of ethnical borders. Here we learn that when one ethnic group interact with another they need to uphold their identity borders. Whether the group will survive as an ethnical group depends on their ability to withhold these borders and remain exclusive. These borders are symbolic, which makes them elastic, according to the situation. The extent, quality and the importance of upholding the borders varies depending on the situation (Barth quoted in Deniz, 1999, p. 86-87). Further on, Deniz refers to Wallman's analysis, which states that different groups have more or less needs and resources whom they can define themselves in relation to other groups. When the group are being exposed to transformations in the society, such as migration, to such an extent that it becomes impossible to withhold these borders, the group risk being dissolved (Wallman quoted in Deniz, 1999, p. 87).

In this paper, I will use the of the above mentioned theories on identity and belonging to analyze my collected data from my fieldwork, which in turn will give me the ability to answer my three research questions. Some of the mentioned theories

comes from earlier periods, but in this thesis I believe the theories benefit from being combined as they give the reader clear answers to my research questions. This will be further elaborated on in chapter 5 in this thesis.

4 Methodology

First, I will explain the main approach of the study that is mainly based on my conducted fieldwork. This is followed by a presentation of the research sites. Further on, I will account for the resources of data used in this research, and a detailed description of my chosen techniques of data collection: in-depth semi-structured interviews and a literature review on primary and secondary sources, such as published literature, governmental reports, articles, newspapers and magazines, and websites. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by emphasize the limitations and address some important ethical considerations linked to the study.

4.1 Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative research methodology is commonly used in studies on identity. As have been stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2013, p. 7) "qualitative research involves interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researcher study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." This design of qualitative research inquiry makes it a valuable method for the study of identity formation amongst Assyrians in Sweden, meaning making of "homeland" and "home", and expectations and concerns for the future to behold, that is examined in this research. To carry out my research process I have made use of Creswell's (2007, p. 37) working definition of how to process a qualitative research: collecting data in the participants natural settings, analyzing data in an inductive way to establish patterns and themes, presenting data by using the voices of the participants and demonstrating the reflexivity of myself as the researcher, and also account for a complex description and interpretation of the research problem. This in turn may lead to either an extension of the existing literature and/or signals a call for action.

4.2 Choice of research sites

The fieldwork of this research was conducted in different cities in Sweden. My initial plan was to do my research on Assyrians living in and around the Nineveh plains in the north of Iraq, but due to the circumstances - Dai'sh's takeover of several cities in Iraq, and particularly the northern parts of Iraq - I had to rethink my plan. I decided to focus on Assyrians living in Sweden instead. I found that questions on identity formation, meaning making of "homeland" and "home", and questions on expectations and concerns for the future to behold, was very relevant both to my respondents and to myself as a researcher as well. Although my respondents live in Sweden, I discovered that many of them still have their minds and hearts in their historical homeland, therefore questions concerning their heritage very much concerns them.

Throughout my prior research I have been confronted with the fact that I am identified as a member of the group. Naures Atto (2011, p. 68) describes this to be a possible asset, to any researcher. She argues that in her case, certain closeness between the researcher and the object of study is necessary to gain deeper understanding of the social aspects. I agree with Atto's argument due to several reasons, if I would not have been a part of the group, then it would have been harder for me to find a broad range of respondents. Not least, I have been training up my ability to be critical to the material because I have done similar research before. Also, my pre-knowledge and understanding of the group has helped me to reach a deeper level of trust through acceptance, which in turn leads to profound answers to my questions. I am convinced that my pre-knowledge and understanding, and the fact that I myself belong to the group have helped me throughout the research on several ways. However, I believe it is important to state the difficulties of being identified with the study object. For instance, I myself and my respondents suffer a lot, mostly on the emotional level, from the horrible ongoing atrocities in the historical homeland. My respondents reflections upon these events influence their answers and emotional ties to the historical homeland. It is a heavy burden to know what is going on there, but at the same time feel powerless to stop the atrocities. Furthermore, it is a challenge for myself to approach other Assyrians in Sweden - because I grew up in a small town in southern Sweden, quite distanced from Assyrians in large - and to be accepted by the Assyrians later in life. I will come back to this in chapter 5.

The research sites were chosen based on where most of the Assyrians in Sweden resides: in and around Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. However, I interviewed members of the group residing in other cities and towns in Sweden as well, such as Södertälje, Linköping, Gothenburg, Malmö and also some smaller towns in Sweden.

4.3 Data resources and my choice of techniques of data collection

In my attempt to understand the social (Hennink, Hutter, Baile, 2011, p. 17), I have chosen to triangulate between different methods of data to be able to deepen, complement and cross-check the results (Lapan, Quartaroli, Riemer, 2012, p. 99). This allows me to understand the social both from the perspective of whom I study, and from my own perspective as a researcher (Hennink, Hutter, Baile, 2011, p. 17). The different data used in this research consists of my pre-understanding of the group of focus, information from primary and secondary sources produced by different scholars, such as published literature, governmental reports, newspapers and magazines and websites, and in-depth semi-structured interviews.

4.3.1 In-depth semi-structured interviews

The main data is collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, chosen based on the inductive methodology of this research. My aim with these interviews was to reach an understanding in relation to questions concerning identity formation among Assyrians in Sweden, meaning making of "homeland" and "home", and expectations and concerns for the future to behold. I chose to keep my interviews semi-structured, thus allowing my respondents to be able to elaborate on related elements which I would otherwise have missed. I conducted 14 in-depth interviews, including 8 women and 6 men ranging from 20 to 71 years old. More than half of my respondents were born outside Sweden. The selection of respondents were based on a purposive sample method, and the snowball sampling method. I used the purposive sampling method to start off with and for as far as it took me, and continued to complete the selection with the snowball sampling method (Bryman, 2012, p. 202). My aim with the purposive sample method was to make sure I interviewed people from different backgrounds, i.e place of birth, age, gender, where in Sweden they reside today, and different socio-economic backgrounds. The duration of each interview was between one and two hours,

with an average of about 1,5 hours. In cases where I have used names, it is crucial to know they are only pseudonyms, for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality.

Before going to the field, I had designed an interview guide that covered different elements of interest concerning questions on identity and the homeland. Before starting each interview, I informed the respondents about the purpose of the research, that the anonymity and confidentiality of data were assured, and that they were allowed to cut at any time. The interviews were done in Swedish, either face-to-face or through Skype or FaceTime, and were digitally recorded. All interviews were then transcribed into Swedish and the data were later on categorized into different themes. Lastly, I translated parts of interest related to this thesis into English. The categorization into themes has helped me to identify similarities and differences between the answers.

The themes I used as a starting point were these:

1. Identity formation - what and whom do they identify themselves with.
2. Statelessness - how does Assyrians in Sweden relate to "homeland" and "home", and do they feel stateless.
3. Future - expectations and concerns for the future to behold.

4.4 Limitations and ethical considerations

In this part of the chapter I will discuss ethical considerations that I have come across when conducting this research. First and foremost, I am aware of the limitations of this study and issues of *ethnographic* research on vulnerable population such as minorities. By naming the Assyrian population in Sweden as 'minorities', I want to emphasize I am referring to their total population number. As have been mentioned before, I had to change my initial plan that was to conduct a field study in Iraq. Instead, I chose to conduct a field study in Sweden. Although I know my study is not representative of the entire Assyrian community in Sweden, I am confident I am doing the right thing and that my thesis is a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge of the Assyrian people living in Sweden. I know there is a lack of representation in my research among those who today prefer to call themselves Syriacs, but my interviews show that there have not been a consistency amongst the naming preferences, on the contrary, these naming preferences are very much fluent and can sometimes change over time. This will be further elaborated later on in the thesis.

One among many other things that influenced my decision not to go to Iraq, was the possible impact of the recent takeover by Dai'sh of several cities in the northern part of Iraq. Even though I am considered to be a member of the group of focus, I was afraid that my respondents would have given me answers in affect, which in turn could have affected the outcome of my thesis. This is indeed something to be aware of and consider even when conducting research in Sweden, especially since the development in our historical homeland affect us in Sweden too. Recently, I was co-working on a similar study, and was reminded of the positive effects of belonging to the group of focus, especially when conducting this sort of research, and asking questions which can be perceived as sensitive questions. This became very clear when I asked my respondents how they would have presented themselves when they met a new person for the first time. Most of my respondents would have presented themselves differently depending on if the person was from Assyrian origin or Swedish origin. Almost all of my respondents would emphasize they are Swedish if a Swedish person asked them, and on the contrary, if they met a person from Assyrian origin, they would have emphasized their Assyrian origin. I believe this to be an asset and strength to my research.

Unfortunately, due to the time constraints I choose to interview 14 people. However, I knew I had to gain as much information as possible on what I wanted to study before going into the field. Once out in field, I realized many of my respondents had very much to say. In fact, I could have written a book per each respondent replies. Fortunately, I had had much time to think through my questions before entering the field, thus I was well prepared before going.

In the introduction I mention the problematic nature of stating ones research as being representative for the whole group, which I believe to be true. However, it is not my intention in this research to use my respondents voices in a way to represent their different backgrounds and thus opposing their voices, rather on the contrary, I intend to use their voices to represent the same questions irrespective of their different backgrounds. Perhaps in a future research, one could try to see if there are differences in Assyrians identities and how they form and identify themselves, based on their different backgrounds. Although I believe such a research needs more time and more interviewees.

Last but not least, I want to emphasize that it is not my intention to present the entire history of Assyrians in this thesis, because it is very extensive. Since it is not the

specific focus of this research and due to time constraints, I have given a very short description in the introduction.

5 Findings and analysis

I will present this chapter by structure the different themes I mentioned above in the methodology chapter: identity formation; statelessness; and future. It is not simple to distinguish between some of my respondent's answers and categorize them into different themes, as many of the questions are interlinked and interdependent. However, questions on identity formation are interrelated with the rest of the sub-themes: statelessness, and future to behold.

5.1 Identity formation

Before I continue with presenting the first of the four themes I want to go back to the role of the researcher as promised above in the methodology part, and emphasize the benefits I met during the fieldwork just by being an insider or someone from within the group of focus. Atto (2011, p. 68-75) talks about her role as a researcher and the benefits of being an insider of the study object, and this was something I experienced throughout my fieldwork. Quite early in the interview I asked my respondents how they would describe themselves and their family background to a person they met for the first time, followed by the question if their answers would vary depending on if the person was a Swedish or an Assyrian. Their answers varied some although almost everyone stated that their description of themselves and their family are more in-depth when they meet someone from within the group. Their reasons varied, quite a few respondents said they wanted to avoid giving history lessons. However, most of the respondents whom could likely go in-depth in their description to other members from within the group, would do it because they felt the connection of trust and unity to other members of their group.

In my research I wanted to start off by finding answers to what and whom my respondents identify themselves with. Assyrians have been moving to different countries in different time periods, and therefore some of them grew up in the historical homeland while others grew up in different countries, mostly in western countries. It was interesting to learn that the Assyrian heritage was as strongly present both among those born in the historical homeland, as well as among those born in Sweden or outside

the historical homeland. This is something that all of my respondents mention when asked about their identity.

I think it is very important to say what you call yourself. The fact that we do not have a country, I believe it is important for me to say I am Assyrian. It does not matter if I say I am Assyrian or Syriac, but I choose that naming because I feel that that is what ties together all of our nationality. So I say that I am Assyrian, born in Syria and live in Sweden. (Nohadra)

Nohadra, who is a 35 year old woman, emphasize the importance of mentioning her Assyrian identity in relation to who she is, because she believes that the term Assyrian has a collectiveness that needs to be addressed. Therefore, she recalls her historical homeland by identifying herself as Assyrian. In a similar way Wardiya, who is a 31 year old woman, describes herself to be an Assyrian from Iraq, even though she has been living in Sweden for many years. Ninorta, who is a 31 year old woman, had similar experiences, and she gave me similar answers after I asked her how she would describe herself. First she laughs and asked me If I am asking about her identity.

As earlier when asking about identity, I realized my respondents referred to identity in different ways. When I asked Ashur how he would describe his family background, he said he would refer to the Assyrian history and as an example, he would talk about Mesopotamia, and the area of his homeland being north-east Syria, south-east Turkey, northern Iraq, and western Iran. The storytelling is well-known from earlier statements, and seems to be something Assyrians in Sweden are used to.

How I would describe myself? That is a quite difficult question. You mean how I identify myself? I am, I feel like a Syriac in many ways. I have lived in Sweden all my life, therefore I feel Swedish in many ways too. I would probably never feel at home in, what to say, it is not my country either, Lebanon and Turkey as well, unfortunately. This is my home. My identity. I am Swedish, one could say. (Ninorta)

Ninorta states that she identify herself with the term Syriac identity, but also the term Swedish, when referring to formation of her identity. However, when I asked Ninorta how she would describe herself, I noticed some kind of insecurity. That insecurity was confirmed partly because she asked me what I meant by that, and because she had to think through the question. I was under the impression that she had not thought about this question before, and was a bit torn between choosing or even knowing how she identify herself. Her family has an origin both from Turkey and later Lebanon, which might have had an effect on her choosing Sweden, or the fact that she was a young child when the family came to Sweden. However, the fact that she ended her answer by saying "one could say", also verifies her insecurity. This insecurity is something that quite easily can be linked to what Visweswaran (1994) talks about when arguing that the question of "where are you from" is not an easy answered question for everyone. Ninorta immediately related the question of how she would describe herself (her identity) to where she has her roots. Further on, the insecurity I noticed can be explained by Visweswaran's argument that for those who experience difficulty in answering questions such as "where are you from" might lead to a sudden failure of confidence, by never being able to answer adequately to question like this (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 115).

As have been mentioned above more than half of my respondents were born outside Sweden, most of them in countries referred to the historical homeland. My respondents willingness to mention their Assyrian background, even among those who were born in Sweden was predominant.

I would describe myself to be an Assyrian, second generation immigrants, born and raised here, but has my origin in Turkey. (Sargon)

Similar answer was given by one of my respondents who is born outside Sweden.

I would describe myself to be an Assyrian. If the question was 'where do you come from', I would say I am Syrian'. (Ashur)

It is interesting to learn how much my respondents are affected and influenced by their family history and their family origin, which in turn influence their lives in Sweden.

Although they live in Sweden today, everyone refer to their historical homeland somehow. As my example above shows, Sargon who is a 38 year old man and is born in Sweden, second generation immigrant in Sweden, but relates to his family in Turkey in his description of himself.

Further on, Hammurabi who is a 29 year old man and identifies himself as a Swedish-Assyrian. I asked him what he meant by that and why he preferred that identity, since I had not heard that before, whereupon he expressed the difficulty of being able to call himself Swedish-Assyrian, as this is the most accurate description in his opinion.

Because it is simply the most accurate description of myself. I am born and raised here, and therefore that title is the most accurate one. I am Swedish also, but I have an Assyrian background. It is almost like in the U.S., I think we are very poor in Sweden to recognize that background. My cousins who comes to the U.S. can be Assyrian-Americans after two days. In Sweden, I was born and raised here, but still cannot be called Swedish-Assyrian, instead I am called either Swedish or Assyrian. And I think that combination says best.. but then, if someone asks me, straight out, then of course I say that I am Assyrian. (Hammurabi)

Hammurabi states that a combination of Swedish and Assyrian is what best describe him, but at the same time, if someone would ask him straight out he would identify himself as an Assyrian. Here we can see that Hammurabi resembles what Önver (2005) found in his research, that Assyrian youth use different designations depending on the context. Although Cetrez point out that self-chosen designations might exclude you from those who identify themselves differently, it can also create a bond with others who identify themselves in a similar way. I believe Hammurabi use these combined designations to several reasons, one being that he gets allowed to be included in both the Assyrian and the Swedish community, which is important to him in his work.

One of my respondents who was born in Sweden, reflects on why he think Assyrians already residing in Sweden tend to be more nationalistic compared to Assyrians who seek refuge in Sweden today.

Partly perhaps it is because the people who live here may have fled for political reasons. And then maybe, while in the diaspora, you long back to your roots. Thus, no matter how long you have lived here in Sweden, you are not Swedish in the same way as an ethnic Swedish is Swedish. And then you can always go for the Swedish politicians language "what is a Swedish", and all that, but I think everyone understands what you mean when you say you are ethnically Swedish. And I am not ethnically Swedish. Whatever happens, you do not belong in Sweden in the same way that you belong to our own countries. (Ninos)

Ninos who is a 21 year old man, states that Assyrians residing in Sweden long back to their roots, their homeland, perhaps because they once fled due to political reasons, at the same time as he expresses the feeling of exclusion to the Swedish society. The longing for his homeland that he expresses, while in the diaspora, can easily be connected to what Brah suggest is a product of the need for the group to create common grounds (Brah, 1996, p. 192). Ninos is born in Sweden, but still expresses the feeling of exclusion to the Swedish society. This feeling of exclusion can be linked to Deniz discussion on a static definition of identity, and how the definition has to be expanded for a more inclusive meaning of identity (Deniz, 1999, p. 70).

5.2 Statelessness

When talking about statelessness with my respondents I wanted to find out what they think it means for a people not to have their own state. I also wanted to know if they feel stateless. I discovered that my respondents had different experiences on the question of statelessness. Some of their statements constitute very serious parables.

It means not so good for the people. They feel powerless since everyone can argue that you do not have a homeland. Where do you come from? You feel powerless. As if you do not have any parents. That is how it is not to have a land of your own. You are a refugee everywhere, no matter how long you

have been staying in your new country. You should be from where you come, where you have your roots. Then you can feel that you have a roof over your head. (Nineveh)

Nineveh who is a 58 year old woman, says that stateless people can be equated with someone who do not have any parents, as something very bad that you bring with you wherever you go. According to Nineveh, it is important to be in the place where you have your roots. Only then, you have a roof over your head, and you stop being a stateless person. Her parallels of lacking parents demonstrates the difficulties which a stateless person can be faced with. As Malkki discusses, migrants are often considered to be "displaced" and "uprooted" (Malkki, 1992, p. 25). Since the common attitude is that everyone should have a defined place of origin, or in this case "homeland", this will complicate the process of creating an identity.

Similar statements were given by another one of my respondents when I asked about what it means for a people not to have a state of its own.

It affects a person very much, I think. Never to be able to feel at home, not knowing where to ahead, have to constantly adapt to other cultures and other people. I think it is very difficult. I notice that behavior about my parents today as well. I grew up here, I have gotten used to it over time, this is who I am. But for my parents who grew up in a different country, with a different culture and all that, for them it is still very difficult to grasp much about the Swedish culture. Some things are completely incomprehensible to them, how Swedes are, or do you understand? That you should do in a certain way, and so on. (Ninorta)

When I asked Ninorta about a state, she choose to talk about the culture within a state, the difficulties that comes from not having a state to call "my own": the constant feeling of having to adapt to other cultures and other people. For herself its quite easy to adapt, however her parents struggle a lot with this. Her parents still find it difficult to understand some of the structures in the Swedish society. This can be seen as an example on what Anthias discusses about the constant uncertainty on how to behave in

the everyday context, that in turn creates an uncertain self-image, and you no longer know what or whom to belong to (Anthias, 2006, p. 21).

Assyrians have been living in the diaspora for many years now and although some of my respondents do not consider themselves to be stateless, there are those who think exactly the opposite. Here, Nineveh refers to stateless as not having what once was theirs, not having a "homeland".

I believe that a people who have lost what once was theirs, fled their country because of war and so on, they are stateless people. They have no state, or they have no country. I would probably call us stateless. We have no country, we have no state. (Nineveh)

Nineveh states that Assyrians probably are a stateless people, due to the fact that they have fled from what once was theirs. This is elaborated on differently in a statement by Ashur. I asked him what he believe is the meaning of statelessness, whereupon he refers to the concept as being useful when explaining the situation for Assyrians in the homeland.

I think it is a good concept to describe the reality for some people like the Assyrians. Sometimes I have heard Assyrians describe themselves as a people without a land. I am strongly against that because it is not true. It implies that the Assyrian do not have a residence of their own. But that is not the fact since we come from a specific geographic area where we have been living for thousands of years. So I think stateless is a good concept to describe our situation. (Ashur)

Ashur resembles to be a stateless people, he believes the concept per se is a good concept to describe the reality that Assyrians are in, as a stateless people. Further, he oppose those statements arguing that Assyrians are a people without a land, since it implies that they do not have a residence of their own, when on the contrary they do have a specific geographic area where Assyrians have been living for thousands of years. Ashur strongly connects to Brahs theory that "home" does not necessarily need to

consist of a fixed place (Brah, 1996, p. 192), instead the claims of the geographical areas that together defines an ancestral homeland is sufficient and something that can be defined as the "homeland".

Some of my respondents argued for the negative effects when being linked to statelessness. Although they do not deny it, they argue for the consequences of having to deal with this quite strong meaning of being a stateless person. One of them argued for the more or less indirect recognition of belonging to a stateless people.

Yes of course, I have heard it before i started studying law, regarding the Assyrians. I have heard it in political discussions when I was little, where they discussed the Assyrians survival as a stateless people. It is clear, you know, all young people know that they do not have a country, and they are confronted with this [...] frankly, it is a fact that you get confronted with this every day. When we are asked "where are you from" 99% responds with "a country", while I would reply "I am Assyrian". And that is, just that in itself is recognition of knowing that there is no homeland. (Hammurabi)

Hammurabi talks about the indirect recognition of knowing that there is no homeland. According to him, you automatically admit this fact when you unknowingly replace the question of "Where are you from" with "what are you", and answer it with "I am Assyrian". Hammurabi gives us an another example that yet again confirm the problems migrated people faces when confronted with questions like "where are you from", since they cannot answer with a consisting country. Hammurabi is born in Sweden, but still faces problems in situations where he has to answer questions on identity and belonging. When being asked on a rather common question as: "where are you from", he prefer to reply with how he form his identity: "I am Assyrian". Given this statement, Deniz would argue that Hammurabi should be allowed to both deconstruct and claim, as well as maintain and transform his ethnic identity (Deniz, 1999, p. 70). Given these expanded definitions of ethnic identity, Hammurabi's answer should be sufficient, because this is how he prefers to identify himself. This statement is reinforced by Brubaker and Cooper through Eliassi who suggest that identity should be replaced by for example "self-identification" (Brubaker and Cooper quoted in Eliassi, 2010, p. 88).

Shmoni who is a 37 year old woman, gave me a similar statement regarding the same question, where she spoke about the never-ending pressure that comes along with not having a state of their own.

I think it means that the pressure on the people in the diaspora increases that, like a cliché expression, that all must become a miniature of the state that does not exist. That one must, that the state then becomes something culturally and socially that we carry with us, as we embody. And that is an enormous pressure really. I mean, Swedes do not have to think about it because Sweden will probably always remain, while it allows for every individual to be faced with how, what do you do yourself for the emotional state, or what to name it, lives on. (Shmoni)

Shmoni is saying that it becomes so difficult for one person to constantly have to live with the feeling and pressure of what you could do for your emotional state, which becomes one's reality once you identify yourself to be stateless. Again, we are reminded of the importance to expand our definition of identity and understand that one's place of origin does not have to constitute the primary defining element to who you are. Instead, the different elements, such as language, religion, territory, and habits, should be allowed to be used in ways that benefit the individual or the specific group, in that specific context (Deniz, 1999, p. 62). When the concept of identity is restricted to only include place of origin, it easily becomes exclusive for those who identify themselves with a traditional state, and thereby exclude people that are considered to be stateless.

5.3 Future

The last theme I chose to name 'future' and it intends to find out what my respondents think regarding expectations and concerns for the future to behold for the Assyrians, both in general and specifically in Iraq. However, when I asked my respondents questions on expectations and concerns for the future to behold, relatively few of them thought of their individual lives in Sweden, being their family, their friends and so on. Some of them talked about their collective identity though, and expressed their fear and concern of the Assyrian identity to disappear once in the diaspora.

Have you read Simo Parpola, about the Assyrian identity, in historic times and today, there is a source that shows that after three generations or four generations, you start to forget your ethnic identity. It is based on those who move to U.S., after two-three generations, four generations; they identify themselves as Americans, and not as Italians, Irish or whatever it is. My hope is that we should not be like that, because it lives pretty much as many Assyrians in our home countries as there. If we begin to assimilate ourselves to the countries we live in then we are doomed, seriously. (Ninos)

Ninos expresses his concern over the group assimilating to the Swedish society, and pretty much relates it to the complete loss of the identity of the groups. This is something that is discussed in Deniz (1999), referring to Barth and Wallman, that preservation of a groups ethnical identity will occur difficulties when being exposed to dramatic situations, such as (extensive) migration. The group will have problems withholding their own significant ethnical aspects that constitute their ethnical identity (Barth, Wallman quoted in Deniz, 1999).

I believe it was interesting to learn that most of my respondents talked about the expectations and concerns for the future to behold for Assyrians in the ancestral homeland. The idea of a free-zone for Assyrians has grown increasingly stronger, not least since Dai'sh takeover of several cities. This specific topic was something that interested my respondents and that I realized throughout my interviews. I learned that my respondents automatically referred to the Nineveh Plains in Nineveh Province in northern Iraq in relation to the topic of a free-zone. I believe it partly has to do with the fact that Nineveh Plains are inhabited by a majority of Assyrians, and most of my respondents knew that. In fact, Assyrians call this the heartland. Nineveh plains is an area east of Mosul, 3000-40000 square kilometers.

Sadly, the Assyrians feel that they are left to their own destiny, and needs to fight for their own cause since no one wants to fight along with them. This has been recognized in several articles, news, social networks and so on. Recently, Rakel Chukri who is a Swedish journalist, published an article about Seyfo, the Assyrian genocide in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. There, she retells her family story, about how only 100 years ago (two decades away) they were directly affected by the genocide. Near the end

of the article she states that Seyfo is back "past and present merge. A hundred years ago the outside world was horrified by the Ottoman Empire's actions, but no one intervened. Just like today" (Chukri, 2015). This is something that was mentioned by many of my respondents. Ninos reflects on this in my interview with him.

Obviously a free-zone is the only alternative. Historically we have seen that this is exactly what works for other people. We Assyrians have tried to live in Iraq since the state was created. Apparently it does not work, therefore we need to be independent and be able to defend ourselves. It has been proved that no one else will come to our protection. (Ninos).

Ninos expresses his concern over losing the last bridge, connection and links to the homeland, if not given a free-zone. According to him, Assyrians will not last, nor be able to exist in the historical homeland if the current development continues. I think his concerns are legitimate, due to several reasons, one being that all my respondents expressed their concern of the groups survival in the historical homeland.

The penultimate question I asked was if my respondents wanted to add anything to the interview, whereupon Ashur, who is a 34 year old man, added a reflection of his.

Historically, the last time that the Assyrians had some sort of autonomy in any part of its area of origin, it was actually just before the genocide of 1914-1915, in the Hakkari mountains of modern Turkey. The Assyrians were basically autonomous. Since then we have not had that kind of autonomy. Now we are looking forward that it can become a reality once again, in a small area in Iraq. (Ashur)

Ashur talks about the historical connection to when Assyrians last had some sort of autonomy, which was just before the genocide of 1914-1915. He ends his statement by expressing his hope for regaining autonomy. Ninos and Ashur's statements enhance the collective and individual longing for a defined "home", which is something that I noticed during my fieldwork has increased among my respondents, especially since Dai'sh takeover during the summer of 2014. As Anthias (2006) discusses, there are several

reasons as to why it is important to have something to call "home", one being the willing to achieve stability to be able to secure the future of one's group.

A couple of my respondents do not believe in a free-zone for the Assyrian people in Iraq. According to them, it is too difficult given the surrounding environment, with a lot of sectarian violence, disputed territories, and much more. Even if they get a free-zone they say, would not bring the Assyrian people in the Nineveh Province any guaranteed security and safety. Shmoni expressed the risk of having an Assyrian free-zone with a strong patriarchal society, very religious, and so on, although in the long run she could imagine a free-zone, like Tel Aviv, young and modern.

The solution of a free-zone has shown is not as easy to implement in practice as one could hope for. Wardiya express the importance of listening to those who are directly affected by the future propositions of having or not to have a free-zone, and she believe their voices should be emphasized.

I am ambivalent to the issue and definitely think that we in the diaspora do not have much of a say. Given is, however, that the individuals at place should decide on their own fate, no question about that. In other words, I am not against or in favor of a free-zone on the Nineveh Plains. It is important to point out in this that I am not ignorant to the result, on the contrary I am deeply concerned about finding out about how the individuals themselves see their future. Either a free-zone on the Nineveh Plains, or continuing being outspread in different parts of Iraq. My motto is that individuals should be free to live wherever they want and to live in free and peace with their neighbors (Wardiya).

Wardiya expresses her concern over that not listen to those directly affected by the decision of a free-zone in the historical homeland. However, she wants to make it clear that she is not either in favor of, or against a free-zone in the Nineveh Plains. Her main priority is that people should be able to choose for themselves where they want to live. Unfortunately, I did not hear many concerns like the above during my field work, expressing the common good for the people directly affected by the future solutions.

Furthermore, I was also curious to know if my respondents thought of any other place in what today is the Middle East, and that could be a free-zone for Assyrians.

There is not a chance in the world that it can be in another area. There may be a little minimal chance in northern Syria, but no, I do not think so. Honestly, it is totally dependent on others benevolence. There is not much we can decide for ourselves there. Then the safety aspect is very important. What will happen if there is an Assyrian state, or autonomy, will you be able to keep away terrorists. There is a security issue that also needs to be discussed. And it will be, that aspect will make it extremely important, how autonomous you can become, that is, will we be able to protect ourselves, if not then there must be ways to get help from the outside. And if there are protection from the outside then they will have very much power over you. So there are aspects of protection that you are dependent on, and then it is simply other people's benevolence. (Hammurabi)

Hammurabi states that undoubtedly there is no place where Assyrians could reach for a free-zone. He argues that if Assyrians reach a free-zone, will be dependent on other peoples benevolence, and more importantly, there is the aspect of security. Will a free-zone for the Assyrians attract terrorist, and more importantly, will they manage to keep them out. The question of a free-zone for the Assyrians has been discussed extensively in Sweden not least. Lars Adaktusson is a Swedish politician and a member of the European Parliament for the Christian Democrats. He has discussed the importance of a free-zone for Assyrians in Iraq both in Sweden and within the European Union (EU), where he was the one initiating a resolution about a free-zone for Assyrians, Yazidis and other indigenous people of Iraq. (The European Parliament, 2015). Recently, he wrote an article stating "Free-zones can prevent genocide by IS in Iraq", and was basically a reaction to Margot Wallströms (Swedish foreign minister) claims that a free-zone in the Nineveh Plain would go against the Swedish position with regards to free-zones in particular. The Swedish position is to oppose free-zones, simply because they are difficult to maintain and risk of being a "deathtrap" given previous experiences. Adaktusson disagree with Wallström, and believes that the only way forward is to create one or more free-zones with help of military forces from the outside world, given the previous experiences we have, such as Kosovo and the Kurdish Regional Government (Adaktusson, 2015).

My father spoke about a free-zone in an article in 2006. He stressed that our future in Iraq depends on the government, and also if EU and U.S. will help us realize our dream. Several times during the interview he comes back to his dream that one day be able to see a new country where the Assyrians can live. He talked about Iraq, a country where muslims and christians can live side by side. But at the same time he talked about the future expectations of a free-zone with an Assyrian ruled government. (Wennerberg, 2006)

I hope to come back to a homeland where we have our own place for our culture and religion. If it can be a reality, it would be very good for us. But it is partly due to the government that sits in Iraq right now, but also if America and Europe can help us to realize it.

My father talks about his longing for to one day be able to return to the place that he used to call his homeland, where we have our own place for our culture and religion. Further on, I will end this section by quoting one of my respondent's very figurative description of the importance of getting a free-zone for the Assyrians in the homeland.

A state of our own? This is the one thing my feelings has changed the most. I think it is of utmost importance now that Assyrians get a state of their own in Iraq. We human beings need laws and rules and we need borders, exactly as when we buy a house. We know how big our yard is and we know where it ends and our neighbors yard begins. It gives a sense of security. Exactly like that, the Assyrians need a place to feel secure. I would love to dedicate time and effort on creating an independent state for Assyrians in Iraq. (Ishtar)

Ishtar who is a 36 year old woman, states that she would love to dedicate of her time to help creating an independent state for Assyrians in Iraq. Ishtar told me that her opinion concerning an independent state in Iraq changed for her after Dai'sh takeover. Before, she did not have any distinct interest to the matter of neither survival nor connection to the historical homeland. Now, she believes in the future for the Assyrians and could

imagine herself to be part of the demands and reconstruction of what once have been the homeland of the Assyrians in Iraq.

There was a research conducted in September 2014, which is interesting in relation to this thesis, not least because I had at least one respondent who was concerned about how the Assyrians in Iraq would be affected by a free-zone in Iraq. The research was conducted through a two week long field study by the Nineveh Center for Research & Development (NCRD) in the Dohuk and Arbil Governorates. The purpose of the research was to gather and assess the opinions of the very people directly affected by Dai'sh reign of terror. Furthermore, they wanted to highlight the voices of the internally displaced people (IDP) from members of the minority communities of Iraq, specifically Assyrians and Yezidis that came from the Nineveh Governorate and parts of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah Al-din in June of 2014. The survey included one question with five options and involved 4,011 Assyrians and Yazidi IDPs.

56% of those interviewed said they would prefer to go back to their homes, but only under international protection. Another 42% of IDPs would prefer to leave their country and migrate overseas, whether collectively, with family or individually. Less than 2% of IDPs interviewed indicated they would either prefer to return to their homes without international protection or stay in the displacement areas. This field study shows that the majority of IDPs believe the only assurance for their future, and the future of their communities, is a free-zone with International Protection. Without it, they fear they have no chance of survival in their ancestral homeland. (Nineveh Center For Research & Development, 2014)

However, it is not just to seek for the directly affected people's opinions and endorsements; there are other obstacles within the Iraqi community as well. Sargon G. Donabed and Shamiran Mako (2012, p. 281-293) have given us an introduction to the hardships of belonging to an ethno-religious minority group in Iraq. The struggles that Assyrians in Iraq have been fought against and still are fighting against are not easy to overcome - e.g. Arabization, economic- and political discrimination, illegal land seizures in the Kurdish-controlled territories in northern Iraq - especially since most of it are happening with the silence of the international community. According to Donabed and Mako, this has led to the non-physical destruction facet of genocide; a cultural genocide. This in turn has had an impact on the emigration of Assyrians from Iraq and has aggravated it.

Christianity is a world religion, and its roots esteem from the Middle East. In Svante Lundgren's book "Stanna eller inte Stanna" (2011, p. 9-11), he talks about the Assyrian dilemma, which according to him is the decision of to stay or not stay, emigrate or subordinate yourself. Lundgren talks about how the future of Christianity in the world is dependent on how the Christianity in the Middle East is developing, since its roots are within the Middle East, not in Europe. If you cut of peoples roots, the whole tree will be affected. This made me think of Walter Frankenstein, a World War II survivor. He once said that "a people is like a tree. The root is the history. The strain is the present. The crown is the future". He talked about in relation to how to get the tree to prosper, and never again fall for a man like Hitler (Sveriges Television Aktuellt, 2015).

6 Conclusion

At an early stage of my research I have talked about the complexity of conducting studies that claim to represent one group, that they might be misleading, or not enough. I realize though, after I have done this research, which although I have put a lot of effort to selectively choose my respondents, based on their differences, their similarities are more striking than their differences. My respondents have very similar experiences, irrespective of where they are born, where they live today and so on. This is perhaps because they have the same experiences of their time in Sweden, i.e. my respondents have formed and shaped their identity in similar ways, and therefore have similar experiences. This research do not put its effort around these questions, regarding similarities or differences between the individuals in the Assyrian group, however I believe it would be an interesting research to conduct for future research, if allowed more time.

As I have mentioned above, I developed my themes and research focus based on one question: "How would you describe yourself to a person you met for the first time?". Although the question per se might be difficult for people to answer in general, I believe that a person who have a clear definition on who they are, i.e. "where do you come from" have an easier way to answer the question. As have been supported through the chosen theory, the question of "who are you?" have almost become synonymously with the question "where do you come from?". And migrants, as have been shown above, might find it more difficult to answer this question.

More specifically, when it comes to my first research question, on Assyrian identity: "How does Assyrians in Sweden form their identity" I realized, first and foremost through my respondents, and also through the theory I have used to analyze my respondents answers, that identity is not an easy defined subject. More than half of my respondents were born outside Sweden, in their historical homeland, while the rest are born in Sweden, I learned that their experiences of identity and identity-formation are very similar. This might be because almost every one of my respondent mentioned the importance of calling oneself Assyrian/Syriac/Chaldean, in relation to where they actually come from, if not themselves then at least where their origin esteem from. This

was something truly important to them. As have shown above, even among my respondents that relates their identity to "Sweden" or "Swedish" do that in relation to their group-identification. As Hammurabi stated, he feel that the combination of "Swedish-Assyrian" best exemplify who he is. This urge of mentioning the historical homeland, either in combination with, or by itself, reflects what Brah suggest that this is because Assyrians in Sweden want to create common grounds (Brah, 1996, p. 192).

Moving on to my second research question on "homeland" and "home", and statelessness I asked: "What do "homeland" and "home" mean to Assyrians in Sweden?". And "do they feel stateless?". I learned that my respondents had quite different feelings towards statelessness, thus they had different opinions about whether they perceive Assyrians to be stateless or not. Those who recognized their stateless identity, had very serious parables, As for Nineveh who is born in the historical homeland, the question of statelessness is linked to not knowing who your parents are. Or as Ninorta states, that the feeling of statelessness means that one must constantly have to adapt to new cultures and new people. Then there where one respondent, Shmoni, who argued for the difficulties of constantly have to bring this burden on ones shoulder, the never-ending pressure of that it means to constantly be reminded of what you could do for your emotional state. And this, Shmoni means, becomes one's reality once you recognize yourself as stateless. But in between these statements, there were those who favored the statelessness concept as a good way to describe the real situation for Assyrians. As Hammurabi states, when Assyrians are asked "where are you from" they immediately turn this question to be about "How do you identify yourself", and therefore the questions are often replied with "I am Assyrian". This is something I noticed during my fieldwork as well, many Assyrians do not feel connected to a specific country, and therefore they answer the question with what they feel connected to, i.e. Assyrian/Syriac/Chaldean.

For my last question, on future expectations and concerns: "What are Assyrians expectations and concerns for the future to behold?" I realized would need much time with my respondents in the field, and place in my thesis to cover. As expected, my respondents had different thoughts on what specific future I was talking about: their own personal future, their family future being in Sweden, or the future of our ancestral

homeland. Of course I was interested in all three variations of future interpretations, thus they all are connected to their identity and belonging. Most of my respondents mentioned something on the future expectations and concerns for Assyrians in the ancestral homeland, often related to a free-zone in the Nineveh Plains in northern Iraq. My respondents wish for survival in their historical homeland was a future expectations shared by many of my respondents, at the same time as they expressed their concerns on this matter: they feared the that they were left alone to struggle for their right to survive, they feared a mass emigration related to Dai'sh takeover and other internal and external threats, they feared that they would never be able to return, if only for a visit or summer-vacation, and that they would lose their only connection to their historical homeland. Linked to this question, Hammurabi stated that there is no other place in the historical homeland that could be a free-zone for Assyrians. Furthermore, there were some voices among my respondents discussing the security aspects, just as Sweden's Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström, that even if the Assyrians get a free-zone in Iraq, how can we ensure that this area does not become a target for terrorists.

As I have experienced before when doing research on Assyrians , I am always a bit torn between being very proud to have accomplished my research, but at the same time, I am left with a feeling of emptiness, hence I find it so interesting to research on this area.

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Appendix

Interview guide

Part One: Genealogical Mapping and Discussion (20 minutes)

Ask the interviewee to explain the location and legal status of different family members (3 generations = siblings, parents, grandparents, in addition to maternal and paternal uncles/aunts and cousins).

The discussion should explore

- * the migration histories of different family members (ideally 3 generations),
- * the legal statuses and travel documents/passports held (if any) for each family member, and
- * the points of origin, transit and destination for each individual.

Interviewees should be asked to reflect on the migration or lack of migration of female and male, child and adult family members.

In later parts of the interview, particular emphasis will be given to connections between people, places and legal statuses, and how these change over time and space.

Part Two: Identity, Connections and Belonging (20 minutes)

- How would you describe yourself to a person you met for the first time? (*For instance, the interviewer*)
 - *Is there a difference if the person you are speaking with is Swedish, or Assyrian, Syriac, Chaldean? If so, why?*
- How would you describe your family background to a person you met for the first time?
 - *Is there a difference if the person you are speaking with is Swedish, or Assyrian, Syriac, Chaldean? If so, why?*
- What kind of contact do you have with your family who don't live in Sweden?
 - For instance:

- *Type and frequency of communication (i.e telephone, email, Skype...; which language is used?)*
- *Material connections (remittances, food, medicine, etc)*
- *Visits*
- *Frequency of visits*
- *Reasons for visits (i.e special occasions)*
- What makes these forms of contact easy?
- What makes these forms of contact difficult?
 - *If legal status and/or travel documents are mentioned, invite the interviewee to explain the implications of status and documents.*
- Why is contact important?

In particular, please explore who maintains different forms of contact/connection (male, female, adult, child, adolescent, elders), and why (family commitments and obligations, organizing visits, political involvement).

Part Three: Continuities and Discontinuities Over Time (20 minutes)

- How has your connection with different **people** changed over time?
 - Why?
- How has your connection with different **places** changed over time?
 - Why?
- Has your legal status (immigration status, nationality, citizenship) influenced your connection with other members of your family over time?
 - If so, how?
 - If not, do you think legal status affects other people's connection with other members of their family over time?
 - If so, how?
- Has your legal status (immigration status, nationality, citizenship) influenced your connection with other **Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans** (i.e not family) over time?
 - If so, how?

- If not, do you think legal status affects other people's connection with other **Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans** (ie not family) over time?
 - If so, how?
- Has your legal status (immigration status, nationality, citizenship) influenced your connection with different **places** over time?
 - If so, how?
 - If not, do you think legal status affects other people's connection with different places over time?
 - If so, how?
- Are there specific events which have influenced your desire to maintain contact with different people and different places?
 - Family events
 - Political events (local, national, regional, international)
 - Economic shifts

How the Arab Spring influenced the situation of the Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans?

Part Four: Expectations and Fears for the Future (20 minutes)

- If you could change anything in your own or your family's life, what would it be?
- What do you wish/pray for in the future?
- What do you fear in the future?
- Where do you see yourself and your family in 5 years?

Scaling up from family to the "bigger picture"

- To what extent do you think that other Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans share your hopes and dreams for the future?
 - Why?
- To what extent do you think that other Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans share your fears for the future?
- What are your hopes and fears for a free zone for Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans in the future?

- How does the current situation in the Middle East, and especially in your country or origin affect you? How does it affect your family?

Part Five: Statelessness and Diaspora (approx. 30 minutes)

- What do you think it means for a people not to have their own state?
- What does the term “stateless” mean to you?
 - Is this a term you have heard before?
 - If so, when/where? Who used it and why?
 - Have you met any stateless people before?
 - Have you heard of any groups which are described as “stateless”? Which ones?
 - Is this a term you have used before?
 - If so, when/where and why?
- How do you personally feel about the term “stateless”? [ask the interviewer to elaborate as much as possible on this point]
- What does the term “diaspora” mean to you?
 - Is this a term you have heard before?
 - If so, when/where? Who used it and why?
 - Have you heard of any groups which are described as “diasporas”? Which ones?
 - Is this a term you have used before?
 - If so, when/where and why?
- How do you personally feel about the term “diaspora”? [ask the interviewer to elaborate as much as possible on this point]
- What does the term ”Seyfo” mean to you?
 - Is this a term you have heard before?

- If so, when/where? Who used it and why?
 - Do you think that there are clear perpetrators and victims in this context?
 - Would you say that Seyfo is a part of your own identity?
 - If so, why?
 - What is the role of Seyfo in relation to the statelessness?
 - What is the role of Seyfo in relation to the diaspora?
- Are you familiar with the successes of the two football teams Assyriska FF oh Syrianska FC?
 - Does their successes mean anything to you?
 - To your family? To your friends? To your family and friends in the Middle East?
- What are your views on the Swedish immigration/nationality institutions you have interacted with?
 - Why?
- What are your views of Sweden's role regarding Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans and their claims for a free zone?
- What are your views of the EU's and UN's role regarding Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans and their claims for a free zone?
- Do you have anything you would like to add?
- Would you be interested in participating in a focus group with other Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans?