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Bidding Farewell to the Ancient City of Ashur
A Qualitative Case Study of the Social and Cultural Impacts of the
Makhoul Dam in Iraq

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Master of Arts
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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores through semi-structured Interviews the social and cultural impacts of the Makhoul Dam, planned as part of Iraq's climate change mitigation work. It was based on the research question: How do local individuals experience the Makhoul Dam's impact on their home environments including the surrounding archaeological sites? And supported by the two operational questions: How are individuals in the dam-affected areas wellbeing and identity interlinked to their native areas including the surrounding archaeological sites? and How does the Makhoul Dam including its decision making process affect individuals in the dam-affected areas' wellbeing and identity? By using Albrecht's theory of solastalgia, the theory of place attachment, where a broader definition of the theory was applied and community participation theory, eight sub-themes were identified under three main themes; "Our Area", Who's decision? and Wellbeing and identity. These showed that individuals in the dam-affected areas wellbeing and identity were strongly linked to their native areas including the surrounding archaeological sites through different attachments, and different identity formations; place identity, community identity and cultural identity. The findings further showed how individuals native areas, including the archaeological sites and the attachments to these, contributed positively to local individuals' identity construction and wellbeing through feelings of relaxation, stress relief, inner peace or solace. It also showed that the Makhoul Dam, through threatening to flood the area and the archaeological sites, and forcibly relocate local individuals, would affect their wellbeing negatively through feelings of distress, grief and fear of breaking social bonds and concerns for the future. These were in turn strengthened by individuals feeling abandoned and left outside the decision making process of the Makhoul dam which they linked to previous experience of displacement.

Keywords: Makhoul Dam, Climate Change Mitigation in Iraq, Solastalgia, Place attachment, Community Participation Theory, Semi-structured Interviews

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1. Introduction

An early summer morning in July during a short stay in my grandfather's house in Baghdad, my grandfather, mum and I went to visit distant relatives in Hillah in southern Iraq. During the warm car trip, my mum started to talk about a big farm in a small sunny village that she used to visit as a child. She described an idyllic countryside with beautiful nature and palm trees along the water. With an absent-minded smile she told me about Najlah, an older woman who used to let her ride on a little horse while the women were harvesting and about a beautiful creek they used to swim in which fed the farm. Arriving outside the house, Najlah's brother who drove us there, showed us around before he pointed to a furrow hidden between dry grass and bushes. - *Do you see? That's where the creek used to run, where we used to play. It has dried up completely. Our farmlands are being lost because the water doesn't reach them anymore.*

Places such as the farm, the creek- and the nature surrounding it, allowed my mum to make a recollection of her childhood memories and of people and events from her past. Similarly different places around the world are associated with peoples' memories, wellbeing episodes of lives, and peoples relationships, both to nature, to others and to their own past. Just like the now dried up creek in the countryside of Hillah, many places and elements within natural- and cultural places globally are changing or dissolving because of environmental degradation or measures taken to cope with the effects of a changing climate. The creek outside the farm used to tell the stories of the people working next to it and the children playing in it, its dissolution does now also tell of the severe water crisis Iraq is undergoing.

Today, the water resources of Iraq are placed under heavy pressure (UN Environment 2019). The political instability of the country has led to a serious neglect of water management and water infrastructure. This has not allowed the country's water supply to recover from over 30 years of war, sanctions and armed conflicts (Von Lossow 2018: 1). Over 90 percent of Iraq's water supply comes from the transboundary rivers Tigris

and Euphrates (United Nations 2013: 2-3). The rivers run through Turkey, Iran and Syria before reaching Iraq. Iraq's downstream position means that over 80 percent of the country's water is controlled by its neighbours which makes Iraq highly vulnerable for the dam activities of neighbouring countries (Rubaie 2019). As a result, the water flow of the two rivers have decreased by 30 percent in the last 40 years, and their waters have been estimated to decrease by up to 60 percent between 2015 and 2025 (Von Lossow 2018: 2). The situation is expected to worsen along with a changing climate and the country's rapid population growth (United Nations 2013: 3).

Moreover, in 2019 Iraq was listed as the world's fifth-most vulnerable country to the impacts of climate change (UN Environment 2019) and in 2021 desertification affected about 40 percent of Iraq's territory (RoI, Ministry of Planning 2020). In order to cope with the drought and water shortage of the country, the Iraqi government decided in 2021 to revive the project of the Makhoul Dam, a dam originally planned in 2000 to increase Iraq's water storage, but postponed due to American invasion of Iraq 2003 (Istepanian and Raydan 2021). The Makhoul Dam is planned to make up a 3227-to 3600-metre-long water reservoir (Shafaq 2021), with the ability to store three billion cubic metres of water (University of Anbar 2014). The dam which is planned on the Tigris river (Marchetti et al. 2018), will extend between the two governorates of Kirkuk and Saladin and cover six sub-districts (Shafaq 2021), and is hence estimated to displace about 100,000 individuals (Zaaimi and Mehiyar 2022) its revival has therefore been highly criticised.

The dam has also been critiqued by UNESCO (Dauge 2003:1) for endangering the world heritage site of the city of Ashur (Qalat Sherqat), (3rd millennium BC) (UNESCO 2003). The Makhoul Dam is planned 40 km downstream the ancient site, within an area known for its richness in archaeological remains (Istepanian and Raydan 2021). It threatens further to flood over 200 other archaeological sites, among these, the remains of the city of Kar-Tikulti-Ninorta (Tulul al-Aqar), (1243–1207 BC) (Karlsson 2015), and the site of Qasr Al-Bint (unknown time period).

The majority of research on the Makhoul Dam, which also reflects literature on dams in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in general, focuses on the technical and economic aspects, and to some extent the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the dam. Research often poses questions examining the safety and efficiency of dams or looking into the impact of dams on international- and state relationships. Few studies on dams shed light on the impact or the position of local communities, and social or cultural factors of dams are often missing. This research gap made me wonder about the social and cultural impacts of the Makhoul Dam and its effects on the surrounding communities. It further gave rise to questions such as; How do the dam-affected communities experience the dam? How do local individuals perceive the Makhoul dam project and having to leave their homes? How do they understand their native area and what do they think of the surrounding archaeological sites and that these might be flooded?

1.1 Aim and Research Question

Looking at the social and cultural aspects of the ongoing construction of the Makhoul Dam, the ambition of this research is to provide an understanding of how the Makhoul Dam in Iraq will affect communities in the dam-affected areas, through impacting their home environments, including the surrounding archaeological places. To that end, the research aim is to investigate and analyse how individuals within the Makhoul Dam area experience the impacts of the dam on their surrounding environment, through examining their perspective and experience. The study in particular attempts to focus on the connection between local individuals' home environments, including the surrounding archaeological sites and individuals' well being and identity. Based on this, the research question that will guide this thesis is:

How does the Makhoul Dam including its decision making process affect local individuals by its impact on their native areas and surrounding archaeological sites?

To help address the research question, following operational questions are applied:

- *How are individuals in the dam-affected areas wellbeing and identity interlinked to their native areas including the surrounding archaeological sites?*
- *How does the Makhoul Dam including its decision making process affect individuals in the dam-affected areas' wellbeing and identity?*

1.2 Thesis Outline

This paper is organised into eight chapters, the following chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature on water, water related conflicts and on dams and their social and cultural impacts. The third chapter presents the three theories of this research, Solastalgia, Place Attachment and Community Participation Theory. In chapter four the choices for methodology are discussed as well positionality and ethical considerations. The fifth chapter outlines the findings, following chapter six is dedicated to the analysis, and is divided into three sections which in turn are divided into several subsections in accordance with the different themes identified. Chapter seven summarises the analytical findings and concludes the research together with a suggestion for further research and is followed by the references.

2. Literature Review

Placing weight on the literature context of this research, this chapter outlines the critical points from the reviewed literature. Firstly the literature on the connection between climate change and water scarcity including water related conflicts will be introduced, this will be followed by literature on dam construction as climate change adaptation. The chapter will conclude with the social and cultural impacts of dams and literature on the Makhoul Dam.

2.1 Climate change, Water Scarcity and Water Related Conflicts

There is today a growing body of literature on climate change and water scarcity and their effects and role within politics, policies and decision making. An increased interest in hydro-politics and the impact of climate change on water has resulted in more literature space dedicated to water related conflicts. Scholars have long stressed that the availability and quality of water is changing among others because of climate change and environmental degradation (Detges et al. 2017). Sowers et al. emphasise that the impact of climate change is not distributed or felt equally throughout the world. This they explain as a consequence of uneven distribution of resources and countries capacity to adapt to a changing climate. In turn they highlight that this has allowed water and hydro-politics to receive higher priority within state politics globally (Sowers et al. 2010: 600-601).

Moreover, the worsening water scarcity globally has been argued by many scholars for the last decades to be a serious conflict driver. According to Halle, more than forty percent of all intrastate conflicts in the world could be associated with the struggle over natural resources and the control of water and fertile land. He argues that as the global population- together with the demand for fresh water resources continues to grow, the

risk for water-related conflicts is escalating (Halle 2009: 8). A focal point within this discussion has been the water-related disputes characterised by transboundary water resources, and the damming of cross-border rivers. While considerable literature space on water is dedicated to studies on Asia and to some extent Latin America, a region dominating literature on hydropolitics is the MENA region. Al-Ansari, Knutsson and Ali highlights that the MENA region on a per capita basis, is the most water-scarce region in the world. With only one percent of the world's freshwater resources, the region hosts five percent of the world's population. They further shed light on the fact that the region is one of the world's most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, where at least 12 countries have less than 500 m³ of renewable water resources per capita, placing them under acute water scarcity (Al-Ansari et al 2014: 1065-1067).

Furthermore, reflecting the number of cross-border rivers of the MENA, there is an abundance of literature dedicated to disputes over the transboundary water resources of the region. One conflict that has gained increased attention in recent years is over the Nile river, where Ethiopia is currently constructing the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Here several scholars argue that the dam is placing diplomacy between the nine riparian countries on the Nile under serious pressure (Baconi 2018: Detges et al. 2017). Scholars have further warned that the dam is threatening the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), a joint directive from 1999 between 9 of the 11 countries on the river (Detges et al. 2017).

Beside this, a water conflict that has shaped the political dynamics of the MENA region is over the Jordan river, shared between Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Syria and Lebanon. Brooks, Trottier and Giordano, shed light in their work on the treaties and agreements over the water between some of these countries, arguing for a high potential for cooperation for development of new water sources in the future. This, since Jordan, Palestine and Israel are all estimated to face a gap between existing water needs and available water by 2030, to such a high extent that these could not be able to live on natural freshwater resources (Brooks et al. 2019: 76-77).

Another much researched water dispute is over the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The waters of the two rivers have long been characterised by power struggles and the political tensions between Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria have allowed the water resources of these two rivers to remain highly politicised (Baconi 2018). Scholars here have often focused on aspects related to energy security, internal political fragmentation, dam construction and water management (Alansari et al. 2014: 1065-1067). Scholars emphasise that the challenge of increasing drought and water scarcity in the area threatens to aggravate the relationship between these countries and threatens to escalate the dispute (Baconi 2018).

2.2 Dam Construction as Climate Change Adaptation

Entering the discussion of literature on dams, more space is now being dedicated to the topic of dams for climate change mitigation. Several scholars argue that because of the environmental- and social cost of dams, the development in Europe and America has for the past 50 years been going towards decommissioning of dams rather than the construction of new ones. Instead dams have moved to developing countries and today dam construction is proceeding at a fast rate throughout Latin America, Asia and Africa, especially for hydropower capacity (Jansson 2006; Moran 2018; Baird and Green 2019). Several scholars press on the role of international donors for the growth of hydropower projects throughout these countries. Scholars point out that hydropower dams have since 2000 become the most funded projects by the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). As a result thousands of dams have been built on the basis of climate change mitigation in developing nations, a majority of these based in Brazil, China and India (Fearnside 2014:681; Baird and Green 2019:369).

The majority of literature on water and climate change adaptation within The MENA region focuses on the agriculture sector, while less scholars discuss dams within a frame of climate change mitigation. Sowers et al. shed light on the fact that MENA countries including Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon have invested in both giant dam

projects and small-scale technologies for water storage here (Sowers et al. 2010: 611-612). Aymar explains that the region's dam phenomena is an action plan with the objective to mitigate the effects of climate change and dealing with water shortages in rural and inland areas, striving towards water and food security (2017: 230).

Further, reflecting the numbers of dams on the ground, a great body of literature is shaped by Turkish dam construction. Several scholars discuss how Turkey for the past 50 years has heavily invested in dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, mainly for irrigation- and hydropower usage (Selek 2016: 206). Keles and Bilgen underline that the Turkish government has been promoting hydropower dams as part of the government's regulatory framework to reduce pollution from energy production (Keleş and Bilgen 2012: 5202-5204). At the same time, there is a little literature on dams in Iraq within a climate adaptation context, instead more light has been shed on the technical aspects of dams as well as on the political and security aspects, here for instance much literature focuses on the Mosul Dam. However there has been a high number of dams constructed throughout Iraq since the 1950s, the majority within the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI). Baban highlighted here that these are part of the KRI's strategic goal for climate change mitigation and achievement of water self-sufficiency in accordance with its 2012 roadmap (Baban 2015).

Baird et al. in their text argue that the last decades renewed interest in hydropower dams could provide opportunities for climate change adaptation (Baird et al. 2019:14). Tullos, Tilt and Liermann presses on that dams have allowed humans to harness, control and store water, emphasising the importance of dams for agricultural purposes (Tullos et al. 2009: 204). Varis adds that with a growing population globally there is a constant need for increased amounts of water for agriculture, where currently dams provide close to 40 per cent of the Worlds irrigation water (Varis 2006: 95). To replace dams Moran et al underscores that there is a need for innovative green solutions to guarantee water- and food security but also to meet the world's energy demands (Moran et al. 2018).

There is also much literature space dedicated to the negative environmental impacts of dams. Many scholars for instance argue that dams and hydropower dams alter the environment of the dammed rivers (Stille, Balfors and Bergh 2006: 72-73). Tullos et al. stresses that water management through dams has both given humans the ability to use and heavily over-use water resources (Tullos et al. 2009: 203-204). Scholars bring forward that dams allow human water needs to control the level of water and therefore dams replace the natural conditions of a river (Jansson 2006; Moran et al. 2020).

2.3 Social and Cultural Impacts of Dams

Beside literature on dams as climate change mitigation, there is a growing body of literature on the social and socio-economic consequences of dams. Here the focal point has been on the socio-economic impacts of dams on populations upstream. Issues highlighted have included changes in the use and access to water and land resources, resettlement, migration and changes in income opportunities (Tullos et al 2009: 206). Cederwall and Varis emphasises that large dams often involve constructions in populated areas, which usually results in displacement of local populations (Cederwall 2006; Varis 2006). Moran et al. stresses that dam projects have displaced almost 80 million people globally (Moran et al. 2018). Scholars have also emphasised that the displacement usually leads to serious disruption of livelihoods and losses of housing- and land rights (Varis 2006; Ökten 2017).

While considerable attention is turned towards the dam's impacts on upstream areas, the social effects on downstream communities, is more understudied (Doria et al.; Runde et al.; Richter et al. 2010). Among others, Cederwall discusses how downstream communities, who don't get displaced, but encounter other challenges often don't receive compensation. They argue further that the effects downstream generally include impacts on both agriculture, livelihoods and food security (Cederwall 20016: Varis 2006).

Another overlooked area is the psychological effects of dams and dam-connected displacement. While there are different views on to what extent relocation impacts the wellbeing of the affected communities, several scholars point out that compulsory relocation in comparison to voluntary, has a significantly more negative impact on people's mental health (O'Sullivan and Handal 1988). It has also been noted that displacement caused by human-made factors instead of natural occurrences, including whole communities, leads to more permanent and extreme forms of mental distress (O'Sullivan and Handal 1988; Steinglass et al 1985; Scudder 1973).

Literature further shows that forced resettlement increases morbidity and mortality rates (Finsterbusch 1980) but also that the threat of relocation itself could lead to serious mental health effects such as mental distress and dysfunction (O'Sullivan and Handal 1988; Topper and Johnson 1980). O'Sullivan and Handal also notes that in many cases dam-caused displacement has given rise to cultural identity crises, especially among rural tribal communities (O'Sullivan and Handal 1988: 3). Ökten and Tullos et al highlight that this displacement often causes losses of social networks and impacts community integrity for the people affected (Tullos et al 2009 205; Ökten 2017: 415). Tullos et al among other authors presses on the importance of paying more attention to the psychological effects when discussing the social impacts of dams (Tullos et al 2009: 210).

Moreover, several authors also shed light on how the groups who benefit from dams usually are different from the ones who lose. For instance it has been pointed out that water gains from dams more often benefit large-scale economic systems such as industries and commercial farms, instead of the local farmers, fisheries or local livelihoods (Varis 2006: 94). Dams also tend to be more beneficial for people living in urban cities and for the middle- and upper class, while their advantages are hardest to reach for people in rural areas economically disadvantaged (Varis 2006 97; Ökten 2017: 415). Furthermore, scholars also underline that indigenous and traditional communities are the ones who usually get to carry the heaviest burden of infrastructure projects such as dams (Moran et al. 2018; Varis 2006).

Tullos et al. and Ökten among others have in their research shed light on policies and decision making regarding dams, which often is executed on a national level, which they stress neglects voices of local communities, typically resulting in overlooking local knowledge and priorities and social and cultural values, but also results in negative impacts on the environment (Tullos et al 2009; Ökten 2017). Cederwall and Varis also bring up the importance of compensation of locals and well-prepared plans for resettlement for the affected communities, which are often overlooked. They further highlight that these plans should be worked out together with the dam affected communities (Cederwall 20016: Varis 2006).

Moving on to the discussion of cultural impacts, there is today a salient limitation of literature within this field, cultural impacts of dams are often treated in more general studies on dams, where the impacts on culture has received little space. Also literature that specifies on cultural aspects are often narrow and limited to a few specific cases. For instance literature on the cultural aspects of dams in MENA often focuses on literature on Turkey and to a lesser extent Egypt. Cases such as the Ilisu Dam in Southeastern Turkey, a controversial hydropower dam which flooded a 12,000-year old cultural heritage site of the Hasankeyf settlement has for instance received a lot of scholarly attention (Biricik and Karakas 2012; Drazewska 2018).

Moreover, according to Marchetti, multidisciplinary models for evaluating disadvantages of dams often neglect dams' cultural impacts, he further stresses that both academia and public institutions have displayed little interest in the threats dams pose to cultural heritages. Several scholars also press on the responsibility of major funders of dam projects, in protecting cultural heritage sites (Marchetti 2018: 5). Varis in his work emphasises that water and rivers historically have been the cradles of civilizations and therefore the impacts of dams often include cultural and ethical confrontation, which he means is under-studied and needs to be placed more under the looking glass. (Varis 2006: 96).

At the same time culture is a more common topic examined within literature on the Makhoul Dam. This since most scholarly sources are published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), exploring the risk of the Makhoul Dam on the World heritage site of Ashur. However, at the time of writing literature on the Makhoul Dam is highly limited. A considerable body of remaining literature on the dam is published in the field of engineering, revolving around the technical details of the dam and dam safety, and the majority of existing articles and reports are written around the 2000s, when the dam was first planned.

Further, mirroring the recent revival of the Makhoul Dam project, studies and literature are limited to a few academic fields and scholars, allowing many literature gaps. For instance within the cultural field little literature goes beyond technical and archaeological studies on the risk of the Makhoul Dam on the city of Ashur. The few social studies that exist focus mainly on the socioeconomic impacts of the Makhoul dam, while the psychological effects of dams and dam-connected displacement are understudied, as well as the perspective of local individuals and locals' connection to their homes and cultural sites.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

The reviewed literature demonstrates a growing body of literature on the connection between climate change and water scarcity and its effect on international relations, where many scholars argue for an increased tendency of water related conflicts in the future. Here, especially many scholars focus on the MENA region because of its water scarcity, many transboundary water resources and the widespread dam constructions of the region. Literature further shows that the question of dam construction has been discussed through various viewpoints, both with focus on hydropolitics, as a conflict driver and as a means of climate change adaptation. The literature further highlights a gap within the literature on dams, where local voices are missing in both the discussion of the social and cultural impacts of dams. At the same time several scholars stress that

the social and cultural impact of dams often are overlooked both in the academic world and in the decision making process of dams.

While literature on the Makhoul Dam is giving more attention to the cultural impacts, the few existing studies do often exclude local perspectives and are generally centred around the ancient city of Ashur. Therefore, the significance of this paper lies within the aim to focus on the social and cultural impacts of the Makhoul Dam through the perspective of individuals in the dam-affected areas. By exploring the perspective of local individuals and their relationship to their home environments and surrounding archaeological sites, this research aims to contribute to filling a literature gap on the Makhoul dam in Iraq and add to the literature field on social and cultural impacts of dams in the MENA region.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter presents the theoretical framework of this research, introducing the theories applied, Solastalgia, Place Attachment and Community Participation Theory. These three theories have carefully been chosen with the objective to combined create an analytical lens which will help process and interpret the respondents answers and make sense of and understand the experiences, causes and influences to the viewpoint of local individuals from the dam affected areas.

3.1 Solastalgia

Starting with the theory of solastalgia, it is a relatively young theory developed by Glenn Albrecht in 2003, broadly describing the relationship between change in a places' characteristics and human distress (Albrecht 2005; Kumar et al. 2021). The term derives from on one hand the concepts of 'solace' and 'desolation' and on the other hand nostalgia. Albrecht explains that the meaning of *solace* is connected to the comfort and consolation from distress provided by a place a person feels affiliated with, and desolation originates from *solus* and *desolate*, meaning loneliness and abandonment, while *algia* relates to feelings of pain, sickness or suffering. The other half is built on a ghost reference to the concept of nostalgia with an embedded reference to place (Albrecht et.al: 2007: 46-47).

Scholars define solastalgia as a sort of homesickness one gets when one is still at home, when one's home-territory and place identity is challenged by change or a threat of change to the present state of home. The concept among other entails the process of grieving that occurs as result of ongoing loss of land, here for instance the pain felt when recognizing that a place of strong attachment or place of residence is under attack or threat of physical desolation. Scholars explain that these feelings could be understood

as a manifestation of an assault on a person- or communities' sense of belonging and identity directed towards a specific place. Here, the desolation of distress over a place's transformation, together with an intense desire for the place to remain in the state that provides comfort or solace is at the core of the theory (Ibid).

At the same time Albrecht makes clear that solastalgia in contrast to nostalgia is not about looking back to a golden past, nor seeking a new place like 'home'. It is instead the lived experience of losing the present, demonstrated through the feeling of dislocation and of being uprooted and undermined by a force that destroys one's potential for solace (Albrecht: 2007: 45). Albrecht and Galway among other scholars also illuminates that the state of solastalgia could escalate into serious health issues such as physical- or mental illness, depression, drug abuse or suicide. Further, both natural or artificial factors have been pointed out as possible causes to extensive change to a person's place of attachment (Albrecht et.al: 2007; Warsini et al. 2014; Galway 2019; Kumar et al. 2021). Later the concept has become more associated with forced change caused by climate change or climate change mitigation implementation.

In this context, the Makhoul Dam is placing areas within Kirkuk and Saladin under threat of change and demolition, being constructed as a part of Iraq's climate change mitigation work. For this reason it was important to include the concept of solastalgia in the theoretical framework which allows the researcher to focus on individuals' experience of change to their home environments, which lays at the heart of this theory. This concept further combines and connects key points which are at the core of this research, such as identity, community and wellbeing. Hence this theory will be valuable looking at local individuals' in the Makhoul Dam areas' connection to their home environments and surrounding archaeological sites. And as more people and communities globally are experiencing the effects of climate change and environmental degradation and a variety of responses associated with this, the use of the theory of solastalgia is becoming more needed (Galway et al. 2018:2).

3.2 Place Attachment

The theory of place attachment has long been used to explain people's emotional bonds to their physical environments (Low and Altman 1992; Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001; Inalhan, Yang and Weber 2021). Kumar et al, explains that place attachment is an inevitable phenomenon. They stress that when people have long lasting engagement, whether historical or cultural with their direct environments, people develop relationships with their local places, therefore the theory of place attachment is fundamental when exploring people's relation or feelings to a place.

However, the multidimensional theory has been criticised for treating different aspects of place-relationship separately, such as social- or community attachment and natural- or environmental attachment. Researchers have therefore called for a more flexible and integrated model of the concept that could encompass different aspects. For instance Raymond stresses that in order to address the identified needs in the use of the theory, different notions of place attachments should be assimilated as well as linked to individuals' self-identity and place dependence (Raymond et al. 2010: 423).

When it comes to the attachment to nature within this theory, the relationship between the self and surrounding nature or environment is at centre (Knez and Eliasson 2017:3). This attachment has been explained as individuals search for places which they can relax or recover from stressful aspects of everyday life, where an attachment toward nature could offer an escape from social or personal pressure (Rollero and De Piccoli 2010: 234). Here it has therefore been noted that climate change especially affects people-place relationships because of how it changes valued landscapes and ecosystems, among others through its impact on vegetation and animal species (Kumar et al. 2021: 208). An individual's connectedness to his or her environment is further, related to how much nature and its surroundings, is included in the cognitive representation of the self, which allows the attachment to rely on a person's historical knowledge of a place and familiarity with its surroundings (Strzelecka, Boley and Woosnam 2017: 12). Hence, places in nature can both remind and symbolise of personal

experiences and events important to an individual, and contributes to sustaining personal identities (Knez and Eliasson 2017: 2).

Furthermore, people could also be connected to their environments and native places for cultural, spiritual or religious reasons (Byg and Salick 2009; Kumar et al. 2021). For instance, different characteristics of landscapes such as mountains or waters around the world have been closely associated with human culture and traditions, holding spiritual or religious importance for local communities (Byg and Salick 2009:157-158). Within the concept of place attachment, culture has among others been described as the society's memory (Knez and Eliasson 2017:2), where places are portrayed as containers or symbols of the different cultures that value them (Adger et al. 2011:4).

Moreover, Raymond points out that people's connections to both culture but also their ancestors are important to develop a rooted attachment to a place (Raymond 423-424). Therefore, both relations and the social processes within a place need to be recognised in the discussion of place attachment (Adger et al. 2011:3). Further, both community and culture are frequently and deeply rooted in place attachment and the notion of place (Ibid). Culture has also been described within this theory as people's beliefs and stories, way of thinking and what is shared or cross-generational (Ibid: 4; Adger et al. 2012: 112). It has further been noted that people self-define through places, allowing the development of a place identity, arising from certain values or beliefs about the own experiences of the environment and the world (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983; Williams et al. 1992).

Moreover, place attachment and identity are also positively connected to an individual's wellbeing (Knez and Eliasson 2017; Rollero and De Piccoli 2010), where a negative transformation of places though for instance natural disasters or climate change, causes a lower level of wellbeing, and loss of the sense of place, affecting place attachment and identity (Knez et al. 2018). This in turn can lead to feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, powerlessness, grief and misery (McNamara and Westoby 2011:). Kumar et al, further highlight that a well-developed relationship with one's local place, and the sense of

belongingness, is crucial for a person's wellbeing psychologically, while disturbance of it leads to distress (Kumar et al. 2021: 209). This theory further stresses how the relationship to one's own environment is a key for understanding the wellbeing and life quality of an individual. However, it focuses rather on how people experience and perception of their environment, than the physical environment as such (Ibid).

Further, since this paper aims to explore local individuals experience, wellbeing and identity in connection to the impacts of the Makhoul Dam, the theory of place-attachment was considered highly valuable since it allows and encourages one to investigate different phenomenon connected to the relationship between people and places, such as attachment to culture and nature but also in similarity to solastalgia places great weigh on identity in connection to places and individuals wellbeing.

3.3 Community Participation Theory

The core of the theory of community participation lies within the general assumption that people affected by a decision have the right to be involved or influence the process and outcome of this decision. The theory has been an essential component throughout different fields and disciplines such as political science, sociology, and public policy (Lachapelle and Austin 2014: 1073-1074). Although scholars have different opinions on the origins of the theory, it has been suggested that community participation more broadly originates from concepts within political sciences and different development theories, such as community development and by top-down development approaches (Claridge 2004). Within this theory, community is conceptualised as involving a social group residing in a certain area or place, alternatively sharing a common heritage or cultural identity (Lachapelle and Austin 2014: 1074)), and are potentially affected by the decision (Prabhakaran et al. 2014: 292).

Within this theory there are three important questions often highlighted, the right to inclusion and to influence, empowerment and the transfer and exchange of information.

When it comes to including communities and individuals in the process of decision making, Timothy and Tosun in their study argue that participation in the decision making allows residents to contribute to the process of planning from their own experiences, as it permits local communities to express their viewpoint on the matters of development that will impact their lives in the future directly or indirectly. Opening up for the participation of community members grants them the opportunity to voice their hopes and desires as well as concerns and fears for the development of the project (Timothy and Tosun 2003 cited in Prabhakaran et al. 2014: 292).

Moreover scholars have shed light on how community participation could be seen as an integral part of any democratic system, where the importance for a community to be included and take part in the decision making process is for their own interest but also the involvement of society (Lachapelle and Austin 2014: 1074-1075). Also, an argument that lays at the nucleus of the concept is how the engagement or participation of communities in different society events or projects such as tourism for instance, allow an empowerment and involvement of the stakeholders as well as the privilege to make decisions that impact the own individual's life (Prabhakaran et al. 2014: 293).

Further, scholars often highlight that promoting the participation of the community within the decision making process provides an excellent opportunity for empowerment of both communities and individuals (Lachapelle and Austin 2014; Prabhakaran et al. 2014). Discussing the matter of information exchange within decision making, the concept of community participation presses on the importance of transferring information between on the one hand policy and decision makers and on the other hand the stakeholders of a project. It has also been noted that community participation can contribute to better communication and updates of the proposed development process for the government or policy makers (Keogh 1990 cited in Prabhakaran et al. 2014: 292-293).

Furthermore, in order to make sure that the planned project will be reflective or representative of the aims of the specific area, the affected community needs to be

encouraged to give feedback and share their knowledge on potential issues for a better project outcome (Ibid). Moreover, for more effective decision-making and to gain the confidence of the affected community, the theory presses on the importance for information access for the project to be understood as a transparent process. Scholars stress here that also in order for a more effective and sustainable resource management in the project, the view of locals needs to be taken in close consideration. The theory of community participation is highly relevant for this research since it will be useful in this analysis, where it will help create a better understanding of the local communities perspective and experience of the decision making process of the Makhoul Dam.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

First, to understand how the Makhoul Dam will affect individuals in the dam-affected areas through impacting their home environments, I will use Albrecht's theory of solastalgia to help explain the relation between the threat of change to a place and an individual's wellbeing and identity. Second, since the theory of place attachment has been criticised for treating different aspects of place-relationship separately, I will adhere to a more comprehensive definition of the theory, considering social- and community attachment, the attachment to nature/environment, as well as culture and place dependence and the notion of identity.

Finally, to explore individuals' perception of the decision making process of the dam, I will use the theory of community participation. Further, notions of place, wellbeing, identity, culture, community, inclusion, empowerment and decision making, are repeatedly placed at centre within these theories and will also be highly focused on in this research. Here, through engaging with the experience of the respondents my aim will be to see how they themselves perceive and talk about these notions.

4. Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology of this research, to start with, it will introduce the research design and method of the paper. The following subsection will hold a discussion on the sampling method. This chapter will be concluded with a reflection on ethics and the positionality of the researcher.

4.1 Research Design

The research design applied is a case study research design. Case studies allows the researcher to carry out comprehensive analysis of a case or several cases. The choice to use this research design, stems from the fact that case studies are designed to focus on and bring to light the details of the participants' viewpoints and stories which is highly relevant for this research that centres around the perspective of people in the dam-affected communities. According to Tellis, case studies allow a multi-perspectival analysis of cases through letting the researcher go in-depth focusing on the voices and perspectives of the actors. He argues that this type of research design can help make voiceless and powerless people heard (Tellis 1997: 1-2).

Moreover, case studies are also beneficial and helpful to use when asking questions as how and why (Yin 2009: 15), as in this research where the focus lays on how the Makhoul Dam in Iraq will affect communities in the dam-affected areas through impacting their home environments, including the surrounding archaeological places. Also, when conducting a case study the researcher gets the opportunity to emphasise either a specific issue through one single case or several cases within a bounded system (Bryman 2008; Creswell 2007). The type of case study that will be used in this research is a single-case study, where the objective is to focus on one issue and outline it through one bounded case.

Additionally case studies are divided into holistic and embedded designs, where holistic refers to the analysis of a full case, and the embedded refers to the analysis of a specific aspect of the case (Creswell 2007:75). The single instrumental case study of this research will be an embedded case study, where the Makhoul Dam construction is the case and the social and cultural impacts of it, is considered the aspect of the case that will be studied.

Further, a common critique of case studies is that these do not produce generalisable findings (Bryman 2008:57). Yin explains that case studies are not sampling research, instead the design is selective where focus is placed on choosing a case or several cases carefully to maximise what can be learned in the limited time period the study is conducted (Yin 2009). In this context, the objective is to examine how the Makhoul Dam and its decision making process affect local individuals by its impact on their native areas and surrounding archaeological sites, thoroughly and draw conclusions on this particular case rather than to generalise. As Siggelkow also highlights, a specific research case could provide highly interesting findings that in turn could be enough for a strong and powerful example (Siggelkow 2007).

4.2 Method

The method chosen for this research is semi-structured interviews. Since the aim of this paper is to explore the social and cultural effects of the Makhoul Dam through the viewpoint of local individuals, I wanted a qualitative method that allows me to focus on the perspective of individuals and matches the research design. Semi-structured interviews is a method that allows interaction with people through direct conversation between the researcher and the participants (Wilson 2014: 24). Unlike structured interviews which are limited to strict interview protocols and propose only already planned questions (statistics solutions 2022), semi-structured interviews are much more flexible. These combine a structured- and unstructured format (Wilson 2014: 24), incorporating both questions that are open-ended and more theoretical.

Moreover, within this method the interviews are concentrated on the viewpoint of the participant (Galletta 2013: 45-46). Galletta explains that the open-ended format of questions makes space for the interviewees to more freely talk about their experiences (Ibid: 47). The open style of the method is designed to encourage the interviewees to narrate their own stories (Ibid: 54). The method is also highly beneficial through allowing the researcher to ask spontaneous- and follow up questions, hence giving the opportunity for acquiring a wider understanding and in-depth examination of the participants narrative, thoughts and feelings (Wilson 2014: 24-25).

Further, in a consideration between quantitative and qualitative research methods, the strength of quantitative methods is that these makes it possible to include larger samples, and can generate more inclusive and representative data as a result. On the other hand, qualitative methods and interviews make space for the researcher to delve deeper into a research subject and shed light on different phenomena from individualistic approaches, which is my intention with this research. The choice to apply the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews, stems from the desire to carry out a research that allows more comprehensive and active participation from the interviewees, where the perspective and experience of the holders of local knowledge are at centre.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews are also more close to real-life conversations in natural settings, which in turn could yield more genuine exchanges, conversations and accurate answers. On the other hand a disadvantage with this method, is the time it takes to carry out these types of interviews and the amount of data generated that needs to be transcribed. Interviews with open ended questions permit people's personal experience and way of thinking or responding to a phenomenon to be more easily expressed, this also means that the length of each interview could differ depending on the answers and engagement of the interview participants (Jennings 2005: 225-226). During my interviews I noticed that the interviews varied wildly in length and in some cases the questions opened doors to other subjects, sometimes less relevant for the research topic, in other cases very interesting for the study. For this reason it is crucial to have

sufficient time to process and sort out all the data generated by semi-structured interviews.

Furthermore, Wilson adds that this method is beneficial when the researcher holds some knowledge about the subject but wants to make space for other issues or more specific questions to be raised by the interview participants (Wilson 2014: 24-25). In the case of the Makhoul Dam, I am aware that the dam construction will affect the communities around the dam reservoir and impact the archaeological sites at the dam area, but I want to dig deeper into the specific concerns and issues experienced by the local communities.

4.3 Delimitations

As a researcher you strive to take in consideration as many factors as possible for a nuanced and indepth research paper, but of course you stand with a limited time frame and economic means, and choices of how to limit your research must be made and the collection of new data must end somewhere. My first limitation was that I could not visit all the areas that would be affected by the Makhoul Dam, so out of the six sub-districts that would be affected by the dam, I made a choice to sample from two of these, the choice is discussed further in the next section.

Another limitation concerned the number of respondents included in the research. At first I planned to talk to and include more people in the research to increase the diversity of the research group, but given the objective to acquire in-depth data and that I could only spend a limited time in the two research villages because of bad commuting possibilities of the area, I had to limit the number of participants to be able to obtain more in-depth data. Since the focus of this research is on individual experience of the respondents rather than comparison between them, I am overall satisfied with the outcome.

4.4 Sampling

Since the area that will be affected by the dam construction is relatively large, covering six sub-districts in the two governorates of Kirkuk and Saladin (Zaaimi and Kathem 2022:14), it was not feasible to visit or sample from all the affected locations. For the sake of efficiency and to be able to go more in-depth into the chosen data, I chose to focus on two of the affected sub-districts from both affected governorates. Previous to the study, I did an internship at a local water NGO in the region, which allowed me to get to know the affected areas better, and helped guide my choice of research sites. Additionally, for a well-informed selection, previous research and popular sources on the topic from the location were reviewed. After careful consideration, Al-Zab in Al-Hawija district in Kirkuk governorate north of Tigris and Al-Zawiya in Baiji District in Saladin governorate south of Tigris were chosen.

Further, the total number of interviews carried out were 12, 7 with respondents from Al-Zawiya and 5 with respondents from Al-Zab, matching the availability and engagement of the respondents. The participants from these villages will be treated as one large sampling group without distinction between the respondents' geographical background, since the ambition isn't comparison but lies on an individualistic focus.

Moreover, the selection of participants was carried out through the sampling method of snowball sampling, a purposive sampling technique focusing on one research case through the study of a smaller sample (Naderifar et al. 2017: 2-3). Snowball sampling, which is a non-probability method of sampling, includes samples chosen by the researcher instead of samples selected on a random basis (Ibid). The main reason for applying this method is that it helps include hidden populations, and find samples that otherwise are hard to access. Hence, in order to get a more diverse group of respondents and more consistent and representative data, snowball sampling was chosen for this research. An advantage with this sampling method is that it is both a time- and cost effective sampling method. The sampling process is carried out through the researcher asking each interviewee about other people relevant for the research to participate in the

study. This process is repeated until a sufficient amount of samples is reached. How to select which of the samples to include is then guided by relevance for the research topic and aim (Dudovskiy 2018).

Criticism that often is highlighted when discussing snowball sampling, is that there is little assurance of representativeness, due to sampling from the same network. This in turn could lead to biased samples. For this reason I decided to use a linear snowball sampling method that decreases possible biases. Linear snowball sampling means that the sample group starts with one subject, the first subject provides only one referral. Also the next referral provides only one new referral, which continues until the number of samples are fulfilled (Dudovskiy 2018). For this study, I found my first sample through the gatekeeper Humat Dijle, a local partner organisation to my internship organisation. Still despite the use of this purposive sampling method there are more men than women in this study, since the majority of women that my samples pointed me towards were not available or able to participate for different reasons. Even if I sought for a more diverse group of respondents, the main focus of this study is on the individual perspectives, therefore this is not considered an issue.

4.5 Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Miller et al explains ethics as the morality of human conduct, which within social research could be translated into the moral deliberation, accountability and choice of the researcher (Miller et.al. 2012). While it is necessary to consider ethics in every step of a research process, it is even more important to adhere to the ethical guidelines of research when involving other people in the data gathering process (Punch 2014: 32). At the core of the ethical responsibility lies the obligation to protect the people involved (Mauthner et l. 2012: 177-178). Here a crucial aspect is informed consent, where participants can join voluntarily and with full information about the study, what it means for them to take part and what they consent to, before entering the research (Ibid).

For this research, an oral consent process was applied, this meant that information about the research and consent from the interview participants was exchanged through verbal conversations. The participants were informed about the aim and purpose of the study and the outline of the interviews. After agreeing to participate, they were again instructed that what they shared would be anonymous and that they could end the interview or withdraw their participation at any time. I also asked for the participants' contact information for follow-up and to share the findings with them so they could take part of the research they contributed to. The participants were also reassured that their contact information would remain confidential. I also decided to use pseudonyms in the research to protect the participants' identity, even if the majority allowed the usage of their names.

Moreover, as researchers it is always important to strive towards objectivity in our work, but as members of societies we are constantly faced by social phenomena that we can not control (Bryman 2008: 18). To be completely objective is never realistic, therefore it is always important to reflect over one's own positionality (Creswell 2009:267) and allow the reader to weigh this information into the research. Acknowledging my positionality in this research context, I am a Swedish student at a Swedish University and I have Arabic origins. Both my parents are from Iraq and I speak Arabic as my mother tongue. I hold knowledge of Iraqi culture due to my parents origins, which could help decrease potential cultural barriers. I have visited Iraq a couple of times before this study, but I have never been to any rural area in the country before, nor to the northern regions of Kirkuk and Saldin where the study was carried out.

Moreover, when it comes to language, the interviews were carried out in the participants native language Arabic. Afterwards I translated all the transcripts into English before analysing the data. With translation of interviews there is always a risk that the meaning in the transcripts changes, therefore for the sake of reliability several translation drafts were made of the recorded interviews. I also went over and compared these to the

original language a number of times to make sure the translation would be as accurate as possible and the meaning of the interviews wouldn't be lost.

Furthermore, in connection to my reflexivity, I tried to be careful to not depend on my own assumptions during the data collection and analysis, and tried instead to look at my data with fresh eyes. Before this study I had assumptions concerning the water situation of the country, mostly limited to the national and political level, I found these repeatedly challenged during the research. Reflecting further on the context in which the research took place, the people who participated in the research were in a vulnerable situation in the sense that they were threatened by forced displacement. Here, some were expressing their desire to make their case or voice heard to authorities, for instance one participant listed everything that would be needed to save the Ancient city of Ashur and hoped I could forward the message to decision-makers. Here I was respectful of their concerns and explained that I was a university student and could do little besides sharing and publishing my research.

5. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings, and analysis how the Makhoul Dam including its decision making process affect local individuals by its impact on their native areas and surrounding archaeological sites. For the ease to follow the analysis, the research participants will first be introduced, following I will outline the different categories and themes of the analysis and present the findings of the research.

The majority of the interviews were carried out face to face during in person visits to the research areas, while one interview was carried out online because of the participant's preference due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents are made up of nine men and three women, all the respondents are in the ages between 35 and 64 and have lived most of their lives in the research villages. Many of them have previously been displaced for a period of one- to three years during 2014 - 2020, at the time the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (Daesh) had occupied territories within Kirkuk and Saladin, among these Al-Zab and Al-Zawya. The appendix presents the pseudonyms and backgrounds of the research participants, including gender, age and occupation.

Shakir lives with his wife and children in Al-Zawiya, his attitude towards the Makhoul Dam is generally positive because he thinks that it will benefit the area. The dam would not affect his livelihood, but he is negative about having to leave the area. **Lu'ay** lives in Al-Zawiya with his wife and children, he believes the Makhoul Dam is important because of Iraq's water situation, but he is against it because he doesn't want the area and the archaeological sites to be flooded and he worries about the people that would be displaced, his livelihood would not be affected. **Nora** lives in Al-Zawiya with her husband and children. She is against the dam, she would however not be economically affected. Nora had earlier been displaced for three years during Daesh occupation of the area.

Adnan is single and lives in Al-Zab with his brother's family, he believes the dam would benefit the area but is generally against it. He doesn't want to leave the area and

his livelihood would be affected, he has also earlier been displaced for a year during Daesh occupation. **Adil** lives in Al-Zawiya with his wife and children, he worries about the water situation but he wants a water reservoir to be built instead of a dam, his livelihood would not be affected. Like Nora and Adnan he was displaced during Daesh occupation. **Batoul** lives in Al-Zab with her husband and children, she is against the dam because she does not think she would be compensated and she relies on her sons economically since she is a housewife and her husband is sick. **Marwan** lives in Al-Zab with his wife and children, he thinks the disadvantages with the dam outweigh the advantages and does not want to leave the area, his income would be affected.

Ibrahim lives in Al-Zawiya with his wife and children, to him the benefits of the dam appear ambivalent, he doesn't mind moving from the area since he works in Tikrit. His livelihood would not be affected, but he worries about his neighbours and about the fact that the area and the archaeological sites would be destroyed. **Jalil** lives in Al-Zawiya with his wife and children, he is against the dam and having to leave the area he was displaced during Daesh occupation, and his livelihood would be affected. **Leyla** lives in Al-Zawiya with her husband and children and is against the dam and leaving the area, she was displaced during Daesh occupation, and her livelihood would be affected. **Faisal** lives in Al-Zab with his wife and children, he is against the dam because it will destroy the archaeological site, his income would not be affected. **Anwar** lives in Al-Zab with his wife and children. He is against the dam because he does not want to leave the area nor see the area and the archaeological sites be destroyed, his income would be affected.

The themes of the analysis have been categorised in accordance with the research questions and the theoretical framework, with the aim to answer how individuals in the dam-affected areas wellbeing and identity are interlinked to their native areas including the surrounding archaeological sites, and how the Makhoul Dam including its decision making process affect their wellbeing and identity. There were eight sub-themes identified under the three main themes, "Our Area", Who's Decision? and Wellbeing and Identity. "Our Area", looks at the different attachments to the place identified, the

first “I can live here but not someplace else” explores the attachment to the area as a community and to the area as a physical place. The second sub-theme “We want to save Ashur” examines the relationship to the culture and archaeological places of the area. The third sub-theme “The history of our grandparents and our parents” discusses the place and its surrounding archaeological sites through the history of individuals and their ancestors.

Further, under the second theme, Who’s decision? the three sub-themes, Outside the process, Public interest or personal interest? and “Where will we go?” explores different aspects of the decision making process of the Makhoul Dam and local individuals' different experience and feelings with it. The last theme Wellbeing and Identity explores through the two sub-themes, “If I have to leave my house and this place, I might get sick” and “Ashur is our identity” the meaning of wellbeing and identity in connection to the research participants native area and the surrounding archaeological sites. It also examines how these are affected by the Makhoul Dam and its decision making process, as well as the respondents previous experience of displacement.

5.1 “Our Area”

Opening up the subject of the Makhoul Dam with the research participants, they were first asked about their view on the Makhoul Dam construction, how they experience that it affects them or their areas or villages. Here the most common thoughts shared by a majority of the participants concerned the ache of having to leave their homes and native areas or what was often referred to as “our area” or “our community.” Sometimes it took the shape of an attachment to the neighbourhood and its people, and other times it was talked about as the physical place that includes archaeological sites and natural places, and sometimes as “the history of our grandparents and parents” often referring to the personal history of the inhabitants. Accordingly three sub-themes were developed, the first capturing the attachment to the area as a community as well as to the area as a physical place, the second theme covering the relationship to the culture and

archaeological places of the area and the third theme concerning an identified attachment to the place and its surrounding archaeological sites through a connection to the history of individuals families in the area and an attachment to their ancestors.

5.1.1 “I can live here but not someplace else”

Starting the conversation with the question of the impacts of the Makhoul Dam and how it affects the participants area and home villages lead to many of the individuals expressing feelings of attachment towards the area and to their homes, but many also conveyed how hard it felt to stand in front of the public decision to suddenly have to leave one's home unvolenterly. Nora and Jalil did in their way of putting it especially press on their attachment to their community and how hard it would be to leave it behind.

“We have not agreed to the dam, I have built a new house and our community is benevolent [...]. It's [to stay within the community] better for us than being displaced. [...]. So cancel the dam, I want our area! Where will we go? [...] What is our area in comparison? [...].”

(Nora)

“Our area is precious to us [...]. who could pursue himself to leave. you know? The displacement from Daesh took about 20 years from our lives, and now we will be displaced because of the dam [...]. We would be split up as a community. and here we are all very close to each other, [we are] one tribe, the dam will destroy us, destroy our lives.”

(Jalil)

These expressions highlight among others an affection towards the own community and the neighbourhood or the people of the area. But it also portrays an underlying fear of breaking social bonds and losing contact with friends and family, beside the feeling of having to leave what is considered or what is described as their own, or precious area to the inhabitants or the local population of it. Further, the emotional expression of a fear or deep concern over having to leave and to be split up and separated from one's community is here a very rational fear or feeling, where displacement often impact the community integrity for the individuals affected and does in many cases lead to the losses of social networks among (Tullos et al 2009; Ökten 2017). This could also affect people's wellbeing or lead to different mental health issues, which will be discussed further in the last section of the analysis.

Furthermore, other respondents such as Adil when talking about his feelings towards the impact of the Makhoul Dam on his home village instead expressed sadness and grief over the loss of the area as a physical place, referring to the village of Zawiya as a historical and cultural place and pressing on the importance to preserve it among other because of the age and old history of the village of Al-Zawiya:

“We don’t want to leave our area [...]. When we leave Al-Zawiya the history of Al-Zawiya will be erased, and so will the civilization of Al-Zawiya and the name Al-Zawiya. We firmly refuse this because this area is from 1568, it has an old history [...]. But we wish or prefer it [the dam] to be a reservoir instead of a dam, we don’t reject public interest but we want it to be a reservoir instead so Al-Zawiya with its history, culture and roots could remain and not be erased [...]. We refuse the dam... and agree to it at the same time, we refuse it because we can not leave Al-Zawiya [...].”

(Adil)

Describing how hard it would be to be forced to leave behind them their home areas and move to another place, and explaining their relationship to their home areas, both Adnan

and Adil brought up their past life experience, comparing their home villages to other places such as Erbil City and Kirkuk City, where they lived when they were displaced at the time of Daesh occupation of their home villages.

“We lived in Erbil during the displacement but our hearts were in Al-Zawiya, it will always remain our area.”

(Adil)

“There are positive aspects and negative aspects, the positive is that it [the dam] will be useful for us in the future. The negative is that we will have to leave our homes, our land and are farmers and everything [...]. I can live here but not someplace else such as Kirkuk. At the time of displacement I lived for a year in Kirkuk which was mentally exhausting for me.”

(Adnan)

5.1.2 “We want to save Ashur”

Furthermore, talking with participants about the archaeological sites of the area, and the potential impacts of the Makhoul Dam on these, several of the respondents brought up how they viewed the sites and talked about their relationship to archaeological places and the culture of the area:

“Being born and raised in Al-Zawiya, the archaeological sites, such as Qasr Al-Bint, are always in front of you. I can see the site of Qasr Al-Bint from my house. Every morning I wake up and look out over the Tigris and Qasr Al-Bint, it gives me inner peace. I have it as a background on my phone. It is not only viewed as an archaeological

site here, but as a person, it is one of us. [...] If I have to leave my home and this place, I might get sick”

(Adil)

Here Adil talks about how the archaeological sites always have been present during his upbringing in Al-Zawiya, and explains that he lives near the site of Qasr Al-Bint and that he can view it from his home. He also recounts that he looks out over Qasr Al-Bint and the Tigris river every morning after waking up, which could be understood as a habit or a sort of ritual related to his native place, which he here describes as a routine that ‘gives him inner peace’.

Further, Adil also highlights that he has Qasr Al-Bint as the background of his phone. This could reflect his way of viewing the archaeological site as an important part of his life. It also reflects that the archaeological sites together with the nature of the area continuously have been a source of appreciation, contentment or internal satisfaction for him. By Adil’s description of it, as ‘not only’ an archaeological site, also indicates that his relationship to the archaeological places and the site of Qasr Al-Bint in particular goes beyond a cultural symbol or a historical place, where it is rather perceived or felt as something more, as something closer to a living object and part of- or inseparable from the community: “[...] *It is not only viewed as an archaeological site here, but as a person, it is one of us [...].*”

Similar to Adil, other respondents also described having a close and personal relationship to the surrounding archaeological sites, in some of the cases going back to their childhood. For instance Lu’ay and Anwar explained their relationship to the archaeological sites as a felt spiritual association to the archaeological places:

“Since you are at the age of two you keep visiting these archaeological places such as the city of Ashur, Kar-Tikulti-Ninorta and Qasr Al-Bint therefore you develop a spiritual relationship to the sites [...].

Everyone feels they will lose a soulful part of themselves if the sites will be flooded.”

(Lu'ay)

“Our relationship to these places is religious. This is a relationship that goes beyond job, we come here at evenings too. [...]. So surely the dam will affect the value of the city [...].”

(Anwar)

This feeling of an experienced spiritual interconnection to a cultural place that is described by the respondents, could be viewed as a rash of an attachment, closeness or affectedness towards a culture or an aspect of the own culture. This in turn could be strengthened by individuals' personal history and memories attached to the place. As for instance here were Adel and Lu'ay mention their upbringing or childhood in the area together with the archaeological sites. Also Adnan brings up how his relationship with the archaeological places goes back to his childhood and birth in the area:

“Of course I would be upset if the archaeological sites were lost, I am forty years old and since I was brought to this world they [the sites] have been in front of me [...].”

(Adnan)

In this case it is apparent that the archaeological sites have had a strong spiritual significance for them, where to help understand the individual's relationship to the archaeological sites, the role that culture could hold in an attachment to a place is key. People could be connected to their home areas and elements within their surrounding environments for both religious or spiritual reasons (Byg and Salick 2009; Kumar 2021), and what holds a spiritual or religious importance for the local population are

associated with human cultures and traditions. Where culture can be seen as everything from people's stories, to their way of thinking as well as their beliefs (Adge et al. 2012:112) and strengthen the tie between people and their places.

Moreover, another topic that came up during the conversations on the archaeological places of the area, was a perceived political neglect towards the archaeological sites but also towards the people:

“I don't care if the archeological sites will be lost, let the civilization be lost, there is no state, the state is lost, what will we do with the civilization, right? What have we benefited from civilization? What have we benefited from the state? "We have nothing [...].”

(Batoul)

In the conversation with Batoul, she shows anger towards the decision makers or what she refers to as ‘the state,’ and talks about the culture of the area with bitterness and what could be interpreted as a feeling of resignation. This could tell of previous negative experience with decision makers and a belief that they haven't done enough for her or helped her family, *“What have we benefited from the state? We have nothing”*, following the expression that she doesn't care about the archeological sites, or the history of the old civilization, because she feels she never benefited from these and has ‘nothing’. This expression shows that she might feel powerless, experiencing being left outside or lacking a social safety net which could be seen as the state's responsibility, were as a result she feels like she won't care what would happen to the archaeological sites of her native area.

Moreover, Batoul and Faisal hold very different opinions and express entirely different attitudes and feelings towards the archaeological sites, but both have in common a strong feeling of been ignored or treated unjustly.

“The government is not directed towards Ashur, they are not doing enough [...]. Honestly the government is not paying attention to us, nor thinking of coming here. There are only excavations in the south of Iraq, they have neglected the city of Ashur [..]. We want them to come and do excavations, and there are facebook campaigns, but they are not responding [...]. We need excavations, we need maintenance work, because if the water level rises the city of Ashur will fall. We want to save Ashur”.

(Faisal)

Here Faisal is expressing feelings of being treated with injustice, through what he is experiencing as a discrimination against the archaeological sites in northern Iraq. He among other talks about how excavation work only is carried out in southern Iraq while as he expresses it, *“they have neglected the city of Ashur.”*

Whether looking closer at what is experienced as discrimination based on a geographical basis or just the feeling of possibly being treated with injustice because of where in the country you live, could in the context of Iraq and its political history be read as signs of ethno-religious discrimination or exclusion, were mid- and north Iraq is geographically associated with Sunni-muslims and southern Iraq with Shia-muslims. Such expressions indicate that Faisal understands political favouritism directed away from the sites in his native area. This in turn might strengthen his attachment to the archaeological sites and desire to safeguard these, where he conveys that there is a desperate need to protect the archaeological places which otherwise might be lost, *“[...] because if the water level rises the city of Ashur will fall. We want to save Ashur”.*

5.1.3. “The history of our grandparents and our parents”

Another highly salient theme that repeatedly came up during almost all the interviews were the respondents' attachment or connectedness to the area through their parents or ancestors, and their family history. In many of the conversations held with the interviewees, a felt link between the area and its archaeological sites and their family and family's history were brought up. For instance, several of the respondents did in different ways put words on how hard it would be to leave behind the area that once was their ancestors' area or to see the archaeological sites which both themselves and their grandparents were brought up with be flooded. This link or perceived connectedness was sometimes explained as the interlinked history of the area or village and one's parents or grandparents history, and other times expressed as the bond to a cultural place or an archaeological site between a son, father and grandfather. For instance in the conversation with Adil and Adnan about the archaeological sites of the area they said:

“[...] Al-Zawiya is the history of our grandparents and our parents. We were born here. When we leave Al-Zawiya the history of Al-Zawiya will be erased, and so will the civilization of Al-Zawiya and the name Al-Zawiya. We firmly refuse this because this area from 1568, it has an old history. [...] we wish or prefer it [the dam] to be a reservoir instead of a dam, we don't reject public interest but we want it to be a reservoir instead so Al-Zawiya with its history, culture and roots could remain and not be erased.”

(Adil)

Adil starts with talking about the importance of the village Al-Zawiya though describing it as the history of “our grandparents and our parents”, and emphasising that he was born in Al-Zawiya, “We were born here”. He further connects the history and past of his family members and older generations to the history of the village, recounting that the area goes back to 1568. Here he stresses the age of it as another reason to value and protect the village: “We firmly refuse this because this area from 1568, it has an old history.” Beside seeing a tie between the history of his forefathers and the village, it is

also salient that Adil associates the present state of Al-Zawiya and its existence or character with the people in the area or the community, here by implying that there is a close link between the area and the ‘history’ and ‘civilisation of it and whether its residents will stay or leave the area: “When we leave Al-Zawiya the history of Al-Zawiya will be erased, and so will the civilization of Al-Zawiya and the name Al-Zawiya.”

Moving on, Adnan similar to Adil places weight on his birth in the area:

“Of course I would be upset if the archaeological sites were lost, I am forty years old and since I was brought to this world they [the sites] have been in front of me, and before that in front of my father and grandfather [...].”

(Adnan)

Adnan goes on saying that the archaeological sites have been present during his entire life, since he was brought into the world. He does also connect his birth and upbringing in the area to both his father and his grandfather before him and in turn their life and upbringing in the same place together with or in connection to the archaeological sites. Here, what is shared with family or the own community or what is cross-generational is a vital part of cultural practices and the understanding of culture, where culture is often profoundly rooted in the attachment to a place (Adger et al. 2012:112). Here this can explain the strengthening of the feeling of Adnan’s attachment towards the archaeological sites or the fear of losing them, which he explains has been part of both his, his fathers and grandfather's life.

Furthermore, this could also allow the understanding of physical places such as the archaeological sites in another context were these are part of someone's upbringing or a family history or personal memories, where in turn cultural sites similar to other places connected to a group or an individual's life have been described by among others Adger

et al. as containers and symbols of the cultures that value them (2011:4), where places could be seen or understood as among others containers of memories and therefore mean a lot to the people growing up with and spending time around them.

Further, another line that was brought up within the bond between the respondents ancestors and the area, was a sensed bond between the archaeological sites and the graves of the respondents' grandparents or ancestors. For instance Leyla, Jalil and Ibrahim did when talking about their feelings of losing the archaeological sites talk about the archaeological sites together with their family's graves:

“I would be very upset if the archeological sites would be flooded. And they will be flooded [...]. It's our area, our parents and grandparents are buried there, and all would be flooded. It is a crime, we reject the dam, and inshallah there won't be a dam.”

(Jalil)

“We would be really sad if the archeological sites were lost. This is the area of our parents' graves.”

(Leyla)

“I don't have an image [of what would be sufficient compensation], because) you will move people, lives, lives of fathers and grandfathers, generations, their graves, their legacy and their heritage”.

(Ibrahim)

Here they all view the archaeological sites and their parents' graves as inseparable as discussed in the previous section, and express sadness and distress over losing them. This could partly be because these are something they can't take with them, at the same

time as holding the knowledge that they have to leave them behind together with the archaeological sites and the rest of the area, and that they will not be able to visit them. Here, in both cultural- and religious traditions in many countries, visiting the tomb of family members or loved ones with gifts and prayers is an essential practice. And such practices could often be both spiritually and mentally important for the relatives of the people who passed away, and for individuals' grief process.

Hence having to leave their family graves with the understanding that the place they buried their parents and grandparents will be flooded together with their graves could be deeply upsetting and overwhelming. As Jalil expresses it feels like “It is a crime.” Further, for these individuals to move from the areas where their older relatives are buried could also be anguishing and viewed as leaving family members behind, strengthened by knowing that their resting place will not be sustained. Here, Kumar et al. called places ‘the collection of lived experiences’ and pointed to how important places could be for people to remember their past (2021: 209), where places as graveyards could be understood as places important for remembering people and relationships from the individuals’ past.

Alongside the pain of losing or leaving the place of the archaeological sites they grown up with together with the area where their parents or grandparents is buried, Ibrahim also brings up the difficulty of compensating for- or replacing a place which you see or perceive as the legacy and heritage of your parents or grandparents:

“I don’t have an image [of what would be sufficient compensation], because you will move people, lives, lives of fathers and grandfathers, generations, their graves, their legacy and their heritage [...]”.

(Ibrahim)

Through talking about “lives, lives of fathers and grandfathers, generations” Ibrahim here signifies that what makes it burdensome to leave the area or what makes his home area something you can’t be compensated for, are among other things his and his

family's background, experience or past at the place. Here he conveys the image of a more spiritual bond between his father or grandfather and the area. Where 'lives' or 'generations' or what they leave behind, their 'legacy' 'heritage' are described as something more abstract, things that can not be carried or packed in a bag when leaving the area.

Further, this could for instance include what relatives and the older generations of his family have accomplished or produced during their time in the area. In contrast to material things it could here be described more in terms of history or experience, the knowledge that they lived their lives there, everything they encountered there, milestones during a lifetime or several lifetimes, things that could be interpreted as what would be left behind when leaving the area, because they can't take them with them. Instead these experiences would remain connected to different physical places within the area that might symbolise or might awaken memories of these. Here including a person's happenings and events or periods important to the individual or his family (Knez and Eliasson 2017:2).

Moreover that the respondents kept referring and connecting the area to their parents and forefathers before them indicates the importance of the relationship both between an individual to his or her family, and ancestors at the same time the crucial role this relationship to one's ancestors plays in the attachment to an area. It also indicates how strongly the respondents value specifically their history and their families relationship to the area historically. It also shows what contributes to the understanding of a place like home and the feeling of one's own place and that individuals' connections to their ancestors are important for a strong attachment to a place to develop and remain. It further suggests that the knowledge that a place once meant a lot to your parents or grandparents allows one to value the place in a different way and as a result mean more to you, where the next generations might value it higher because of their ancestors' bond to it.

5.2 Who's Decision?

This section will look at the themes connected to local individuals' experience with the dam construction and the decision making behind it, where the three sub-themes that will be placed under the looking glass are: Outside the process, Public interest or personal interest and “Where will we go?”

5.2.1 Outside the Process

Looking into the topic of local individuals' experience of the decision making behind the Makhoul Dam project, the sub-themes that could be distinguished here were firstly the subtheme; Outside the process, which covers local individuals' experience and perceptions that they have not been included in the project of decision making. Here the research participants were asked to share what they knew about the project, their experience with the decision making process and what they thought about it. Here many of the interview respondents expressed that they have never been asked or agreed to the project. This theme also pays attention to that they often experienced that they have been left without information over how the project is going to be conducted, what stage it is at, nor what would happen when the dam is completed:

“We have not agreed to the dam, I have built a new house and our community is benevolent [...], it's [to stay in the area is] better for us than being displaced [...].”

(Nora)

“We reject it, where would we go? Everyone has built houses and shops [again]. We didn't know where to go when Daesh displaced us.”

(Leyla)

Here both Nora and Leyla start the conversation by saying that they have not agreed to the dam and that they are against the construction, shedding light on the discussion in chapter three on how decision making behind dams often is carried out on a national level, where it ignores the voices and viewpoint of local communities (Tullos et al 2009; Ökten 2017). Further, Nora goes on to say “it’s better for us than being displaced”, while Leyla continues, “where would we go?” Both these expressions embody concerns of not having gotten enough information about resettlement plans or information about potential compensation for what they will lose or leave behind. This in turn has placed them in a situation where they feel deep concerns and fear over having to leave their home areas and not knowing where to go.

Also Jalil explain that he has rejected the dam and makes clear that he wishes the government would listen to the concerns of the affected community and cancel the plan of the Makhoul Dam:

“There won’t be a dam [in my opinion], I don’t want the dam. The dam will harm us, it will harm us a lot [...]. This is a crime, we reject the dam, we pray there won’t be a dam. We wish that the government would cancel the dam project. It is an unsuccessful project, highly unsuccessful, it will hurt us and it will ruin us, and our request from the government is to cancel the project.”

(Jalil)

5.2.2 Public Interest or Personal Interest?

This sub-theme encompasses the topics raised during several interviews, which were often connected to responsibility, concerns over the water situation in Iraq and the question or issue of on one hand choosing or wanting what is perceived as right publicly

or on the other hand personally. With other words what is right or good on an individual level and for one's self as well as for one's own family, and on the other side what could be viewed as right in the context of public good, here concerning the water issue of the country. During the interviews opinions and feelings towards the Makhoul Dam construction varied from strong stance against it, to more uncertain viewpoints, which could also be perceived in previous sections. This section will shed more light on opinions or expressions where the respondents are more uncertain or ambiguous over the decision, which first came up in the conversation with Adil:

“When it comes to the public interest, Tigris is lost and the water resources have decreased in Iraq, that's very true. But at the level of personal interest, no this community rejects it, we don't want to leave our area! The dam will affect us and our farms, we have a lot of land here, we are a farming community [...]. Therefore we wish or prefer that it [the dam] will be a reservoir, we don't reject public interest but we want it to be a reservoir instead so it won't affect the area.”

(Adil)

Adil starts with saying that the river Tigris is lost and that the water resources in the country have decreased when taking the public interest into consideration. This does in some way show that behind the arguments and opinions for or against the dam, lies a concern over the water situation of the country and how it affects the public. This could explain why Adil later argues for the desire that the Makhoul Dam project would be a water reservoir instead of a dam, which would provide the possibility of storing water without flooding the area and affecting the surrounding villages. The fact that a suggestion or request for a water reservoir instead of the dam is proposed here, rather than just a direct refusal of the idea of the Makhoul Dam that threatens to flood his home village and force him to leave, could give an indication of how serious the question of water scarcity is perceived or felt, especially within these villages within the research area.

A reason for this could be that these villages lie within rural areas where the access to water differs in comparison to urban settlements. Also considering the fact that Al-Zab and Al-Zawiya are to a high extent dependent on agriculture and farming, and many of its inhabitants are full-time farmers or work in nearby cities but holds farmland and livestock in their home village, these people do in many cases to a much higher extent experience and are affected by the water scarcity and drought. This in turn, can make it harder for them to disregard the worsening water situation that already is strongly affecting the rural areas of the country, nor disregard the feelings of responsibility towards it.

Moreover Adil's way to frame it as a choice between "public interest" standing against "personal interest," shows that some of the respondents are having a internal struggle or what could be described as a sort of moral dilemma over the feeling of having to choose between taking responsibility on one hand over what is referred to as "public interest" or what is the public good and best for the public concerning water access, and on the other hand the "personal interest" or what the respondents wants for themselves and their families or community, which is further complicated by the individuals' attachment to the area.

Also, that Adil starts with the argument for the public interest indicates a desire to show that he is not only thinking about what matters to him personally, but also that he thinks in long term goals of what would be best for the country. It does further also display possible personal ideals, or ideals of the society where the public good or the nation's interest *should be* prioritised or expected to be put first. This could also be seen in Ibrahim response where he repeatedly comes back to the argument that what is in the public interest, or what is in the best of the country is what matters most, even over personal interest:

"If the project of the dam will be of public interest and benefit the whole area and all of Iraq I am with it [...]. To be honest it is an

embarrassing question. It is not an easy question, there are advantages and disadvantages. In general I am with the dam in the end if it will benefit Iraq as a whole and if there is sufficient compensation. The most important thing is that it is in the interest of Iraq, this weighs above all, over all our personal interests.”

(Ibrahim)

Also Adnan’s answer here did display an uncertainty regarding the dilemma of having to choose a stand between either what would be better for him personally or what could be understood as more long term or sustainable for the best of the people when it comes to the water situation the country is facing.

“There are positive aspects and negative aspects [with the dam], the positive is that it [the dam] will be useful for us in the future. The negative is that we will have to leave our homes, our land and our farms and everything [...]. I can live here but not someplace else. At the time of displacement I lived for a year in Kirkuk which was mentally exhausting for me.”

(Adnan)

5.2.3 “Where will we go?”

A natural transition in the conversations on how the respondents experienced the dam construction and the decision making process, lead to the topic of the interview respondents future plans when the dam would be completed. Here many of the respondents rhetorically asked the question “where will we go?” expressing both their frustration of the situation as well as the lack of consultation and information leaving them without many choices.

This section further captures much of the respondents' concern and their worries for the future because of the dam construction and over having to leave their homes and having to leave their area and their neighbourhood for something that is still unknown and undecided. This theme could also be seen as a continuation of the previous theme, where the lack of information and insight the individuals and community as a whole has gained in the process and decisions behind the dam construction, but also on information concerning both resettlement plans and the question of compensation, was highly salient through its absence and was repeatedly reflected in the concerns expressed by the respondent:.

“[...] The displacement from IS took about 20 years from our lives, and now we will be displaced because of the dam. Where will we go?” [...] I don't know where we would go? We would be split up as a community, and here we are all very close to each other, [we are] one tribe. The dam would destroy us.”

(Jalil)

“[...] My opinion is that the negative impact of it [the dam construction] is more than the benefits. For sure our life will be affected, we don't know where to go [...].”

(Marwan)

Further, this lack of consultation had left the respondents clueless and often in despair, not wanting to leave the area but also concerned over where to go when the construction would be completed and not knowing either if there would be any compensation for them if they suddenly were forced to leave their homes.

“ [...] I don't have a house except for the one I live in and I will have to leave it! How long will it take for the state to give me enough to make a new home? Who will give me land? ”

(Adnan)

“[...] For sure we will be affected, we have no income, no livelihood except for this one here. Our livelihood is in this area. If we have to go someplace else how will we eat and drink? [...] They would probably give us tents... we will have to live in tents. If you don't have an income you will be highly affected.”

(Batoul)

“My husband is a governmental employee, but there are people who depend on their shops. They don't have salaries, so their livelihood depends on their shop. Where will they go? To live in Al-Jazeera, to live in Tikrit, where will they live?”

(Nora)

During these interviews concerns among the respondents of having to rebuild their lives again also came up during the conversations. Here especially Nora and Leyla expressed that they were deeply worried over having to leave their area and start over for a second time. Since the two villages of Al-Zab and Al-Zawiya had as mentioned previously been under Daesh occupation, and a majority of people within these communities have been internally displaced up until the area was liberated from Daesh, were most were just recently able to return to their home villages, to build up their lives again:

“[...] I have built a new house and our community is benevolent, we had to flee during the time of Daesh and we really suffered, [...] I want our area. Where will we go?!”

(Nora)

“We reject it [the dam], where will we go? Everyone has built houses and shops [again]. We didn't know where to go when Daesh displaced”

us, I don't know where to go, no one has offered us a place to live. A lot would be needed to compensate us, Al-Zawiya is a place with all beautiful homes.”

(Leyla)

“After the liberation from Daesh, people started to rebuild and now they will be displaced again, the biggest issue is the displacement and if you have projects or if you have lands or farms here you will lose all that.”

(Marwan)

5.3 Wellbeing and Identity

This part of the analysis will look deeper into the notion of wellbeing and identity in regards to the research participants native area and the surrounding archaeological sites, as well as the Makhoul Dam and its decision making process and the research participants previous experience of displacement. It is accordingly divided into the two subsections “If I have to leave my house and this place I might get sick” and “Ashur is our identity”.

5.3.1 “If I have to leave my house and this place, I might get sick”

During almost all of the interviews with the research participants, the topic of the respondents' wellbeing came up in one way or another. This either when they were describing their relationship with their native area, or though explaining how having to

leave the area or the thought of the archaeological places being flooded made them feel. For instance Anwar, Adil and Ibrahim all in different ways expressed how their area or element within the area contributed positively to their wellbeing.

[...] The Assyrian city is the only place where you go to breathe out, the only place to go in the spring [...]. The dam will ruin the town. [...]. Our relationship to this place is religious. This is a relationship that goes beyond job, we come here at evenings too [...].

(Anwar)

Anwar describes the city of Ashur as his favourite place for relaxation and talks about how it is the only place he likes to go to, especially in the spring. He continues by saying that it is the only place he could go to be able to breathe out and that he not only goes there for reasons of work but in his spare time. Anwar's description of the historical place could therefore be interpreted as a place where he goes for calmness or for meditation; this image is further strengthened by his view of it as also an area that holds an almost religious meaning to him. For this reason it could be seen as a significant place for making him feel well, as a kind of stress relief which he associates with calming down or refilling energy. Furthermore, much like Anwar, Adil paints an image of the archaeological site of Qasr Al-Bint, as his source for relaxation or for 'inner peace':

“Being born and raised in Al-Zawiya, the archaeological sites, such as Qasr Al-Bint, are always in front of you. I can see the site of Qasr Al-Bint from my house. Every morning I wake up and look out over the Tigris and Qasr Al-Bint, it gives me inner peace. I have it as a background on my phone. It is not only viewed as an archaeological site here, but as a person, it is one of us. [...] If I have to leave my home and this place, I might get sick”

(Adil)

Here Adil describes how this particular site has always been part of his life and places weight on how looking at it and the Tigris from the window of his home gives him ‘inner peace’. Beside describing that it gives him positive feelings of peace, it is clear that the archaeological place that he talks about as ‘one of us’, means a lot to him, where he also says that he has it as the background of his phone. Beside the positive feelings he explains that this site is the source to, Adil also mentions how he feels like he would get sick if he would have to leave ‘my *home and this place*’ which further argues for its importance for his feeling of mental health or wellbeing.

Ibrahim on the other hand, didn't talk about one special place, but rather about the nature of the area in general with devotion:

*“All that are within the area represent us, the river, the mountains. . .
We have lived here for a thousand of years [...].”*

(Ibrahim)

The connection Ibrahim makes to the area, through talking about the river and the mountains, could display an expression of an attachment to an area by way of nature or to the nature of the area in itself. This could in similar to the answers of Adil and Ibrahim be interpreted as an relationship or attachment to nature, where nature is understood as a place where the individual can escape from the pressure of personal or social phenomena and where one can recover from negative feelings and stress and relax. Moreover, while some of the answers showed the positive impact the respondents relationship to the area and places within it could have on their wellbeing, other conversations instead revealed how having to leave the area and its surrounding archaeological places was perceived to affect their wellbeing negatively:

“[...] The dam will harm us, it will harm us a lot. Our area is precious to us, who could pursue himself to leave, you know? [...] For sure our lives would be over [...]. If they would compensate us with a billion it still couldn't compensate us for it, the most important are our wellbeing”.

(Jalil)

Here Jalil expresses strong feelings of distress talking about the Makhoul Dam as something harmful that would force him to leave his area that he expresses as invaluable to him. Jalil also shows grief arguing his life would be over and stressing that no economic compensation would be enough, because the most important thing is ‘wellbeing’. This clearly indicates how he views his home, his community and native area as strong contributors to his wellbeing while he at the same time feels his life would end if he would be forced to leave, emphasising that no money could replace mental wellness or satisfaction. Some of these feelings could also be seen in the dialogues with Adnan and Shakir:

“Of course I would be upset if the archaeological sites were lost, I am forty years old and since I was brought to this world they [the sites] have been in front of me, and before that in front of my father and grandfather [...].”

(Adnan)

“We would be upset to leave our area where we have been living for years, of course [...].”

(Shakir)

Both Adnan and Shakir express here their sadness of leaving their area and the archaeological places within it, Adnan stresses that the archaeological sites have been present during his entire life, since he was brought into the world, while similarly Shakir

emphasises how he has been living in the area for years. Here for the individual to hold the knowledge that a place you know so well and that has been familiar to you since the days of your childhood or as long as you could remember is about to disappear, explains why an individual would find it upsetting, disturbing or even frightening, since a place like this could stand for comfort as well as childhood memories. Another example of emotional discomfort could also be found, returning to the conversation with Adil:

“[...] Al-Zawiya is the history of our grandparents and our parents. We were born here. When we leave Al-Zawiya the history of Al-Zawiya will be erased, and so will the civilization of Al-Zawiya and the name Zawiya. We firmly refuse this because this area from 1568, it has an old history. [...] Therefore we wish or prefer the dam to be a reservoir, we don't reject public interest but we want it to be a reservoir instead so Al-Zawiya with its history, culture and roots could remain and not be erased. [...]. We refuse the dam because... and agree to it at the same time, we refuse it because we can not leave Al-Zawiya [...]”.

(Adil)

Here this expression could be seen as an example of as the notion of ‘solace’ within the theory of solastalgia, with other words the feeling of consolation and comfort from distress or hardship provided by an area or place an individual feels affiliated with, and how leaving it or in this case knowing that the the area might be flooded leaves a feeling of sadness or abandonment taking away all the comfort the area represented. Adil here paints a picture of this feeling through recounting that leaving Al-Zawiya and knowing it might be flooded would feel like ‘erasing’ the village and its history as well as the ‘civilization’ and “*the name Al-Zawiya*” .

Furthermore, in many of the conversations another topic that constantly came up in relation to the research participants' wellbeing were also their concerns or anxiety over the risk of having to move or being displaced again. Here many of the participant's

connected this to their past experience of having to flee or being displaced during “the time of Daesh.”

“We reject it [the dam], where will we go? Everyone has built houses and shops [again]. We didn't know where to go when Daesh displaced us, I don't know where to go, no one has offered us a place to live. A lot would be needed to compensate us, Al-Zawiya is a place with all beautiful homes.”

(Leyla)

“[...] I have built a new house and our community is benevolent, we had to flee during the time of Daesh and we really suffered, [...] I want our area. Where will we go?!”

(Nora)

“After the liberation from Daesh, people started to rebuild and now they will be displaced again, the biggest issue is the displacement and if you have projects or if you have lands or farms here you will lose all that.”

(Marwan)

Here it is much apparent that the respondents’ concerns are among other related to how they during the time of Daesh occupied their home villages, didn't know where to go, were left on their own to deal with the crisis, where many ended up displaced without knowing where they would go or when or how they would be able to return to their home areas. Leyla, Nora and Marwan all bring up how people just started over, returning to their native places and rebuilding their homes or building new shops, testifying of a fear of once again having to leave everything behind for a new area and start all over again

for a second time. Further, also Adnan and Jalil brings up their previous experience during the period they were displaced:

“[...] I can live here but not someplace else such as Kirkuk. At the time of displacement I lived for a year in Kirkuk which was mentally exhausting for me.”

(Adnan)

“[...] The displacement from Daesh took about 20 years from our lives, and now we will be displaced because of the dam. Where will we go?” [...] I don't know where we would go? We would be split up as a community, and here we are all very close to each other, [we are] one tribe, the dam would destroy us.”

(Jalil)

All these expressions not only show the respondents' fear of being displaced and forcibly separated from their communities and native area again, but also of how their past experiences have left a strong mark on them and seem to strengthen their love for the area and their communities as well as the attachment to the place. As discussed further up in this section, an individual's home area and the attachment to it could play a crucial role for internal satisfaction and wellbeing. At the same time knowing you might be forcibly separated from it gives rise to mental illness or pain, anxiety and feelings of grief and frustration due to the knowledge that this place might disappear, together with a desire for the place to stay in the same state it has always been recognised in, giving comfort and solace.

5.3.2 “Ashur is our identity”

During the conversations with the research participants three different identity formations could be described, related to the main themes identified when the respondents were talking about their area, describing their relationship to the archaeological sites and remarking on the Makhoul Dam and the decision making process of it. Accordingly this section will outline the three identity formations, of place identity, cultural identity and community identity identified.

To start with, the identity formation of place identity, were identified through the different group constructions related to the place as a holder of personal experience, memories and history as well as the place as a historical and geographical area including physical elements. For instance Adil refer here to his native area as both his and his family's history but also emphasises the area's own history:

“[...] Al-Zawiya is the history of our grandparents and our parents. We were born here. When we leave Al-Zawiya the history of Al-Zawiya will be erased, and so will the civilization of Al-Zawiya and the name Al-Zawiya. We firmly refuse this because this area from 1568, it has an old history. [...] Therefore we wish or prefer the dam to be a reservoir, we don't reject public interest but we want it to be a reservoir instead so Al-Zawiya with its history, culture and roots could remain and not be erased.”

(Adil)

Also Ibrahim, does here talk about the area as the history of “*fathers, grandfathers and generations*”, but also as a heritage:

“I don't have an image [of what would be sufficient compensation], because) you will move people, lives, lives of fathers and grandfathers, generations, their graves, their legacy and their heritage”.

(Ibrahim)

Both Adil and Ibrahim talk about the area or its history using plural form, referring to the area as not only their own- or their family's history, but rather the history of all the residents of the area and their grandparents or ancestors, among other this is apparent when Adil says: "*Al-Zawiye is the history of our grandparents and our parents.*" or Ibrahim says: "*you will move people, lives, lives of fathers and grandfathers, generations.*" This way of talking about the area reveals a perception among the respondents of a common or united identification over the place, that is shared between its residents and possibly between one generation to another, where this identity departs from a common history of the residents that could be seen to be entwined with the history of the area. Moreover, this identity formation could also be viewed in the bond Ibrahim conveys between the residents of the area, their history and its nature:

"All that are within the area represent us, the river, the mountains. . . We have lived here for a thousand of years [...]"

(Ibrahim)

That Ibrahim views every element of the place or the nature of the area as representative of the self, does evidently tell of how an individual can recognise or identify himself with or through a physical place or element within it. Ibrahim's identification with the nature of the area could here be explained by the extent nature is included in the cognitive representation of the self, where the connection relies on a person's knowledge of the place and familiarity with its surroundings. Additionally, physical places contribute to the memory and symbolism of personal experiences and to preserving personal identities As also mentioned by Strzelecka, Boley and Woosnam 2017 and Knez and Eliasson 2017.

Furthermore, in contrast to place identity, the identity construction connected to the respondents community, could here be understood as an identity tied to the area as a social place with its community and residence as the point of departure. For instance in

the conversation with Nora, there are clear examples of an identity tied to the area as a social place:

“We have not agreed to the dam, I have built a new house and our community is benevolent. It's [to stay within the community] better for us than being displaced. We had to flee during the time of Daesh and we suffered. So cancel the dam, I want our area! Where will we go? [...] What is our area in comparison? [...].”

(Nora)

Here Nora talks about the area with devotion together with the word ‘community’ which she repeated throughout the conversation. She further stresses that she doesn't want to leave the area or her community which she refers to as “our community. She here talk about it in plural but also about the time of Daesh in plural saying: “ We had to flee during the time of Daesh and we suffered” which indicates a group recognition or a group identity, which includes the community and the people within it, and their common story or past, were they had to flee or leave the area, as a group made up by their area. The identity that arises from this group formation could be perceived to be to a great extent strengthened by the residents past experience mentioned here. This is also highly apparent in other participants' answers where the topic of their previous displacement runs like a red thread in connection to their love for the area or the attachment to it and when they talk about having to leave the area or community. This could for instance be seen in- but not limited to Adil and Jalils answers:

“[...] this community rejects it [the Makhoul Dam], we don't want to leave our area! The dam will affect us and our farms, we have a lot of land here, we are a farming community [...]. Therefore we wish or prefer that it [the dam] will be a reservoir, we don't reject public interest but we want it to be a reservoir instead so it won't affect the area [...]. We lived in Erbil during

the displacement but our hearts were in Al-Zawiya, it will always remain our area. I have four farms and they can't replace them.”

(Adil)

“Our area is precious to us, who could pursue himself to leave, you know? The displacement from Daesh took about 20 years from our lives, and now we will be displaced because of the dam [...]. We would be split up as a community, and here we are all very close to each other, [we are] one tribe, the dam would destroy us.”

(Jalil)

Adil and Jalil touch upon many different subjects that could be understood as connecting to an identity formation. They for instance often talked about the area in plurality, where both Nora, Jalil and Adel constantly referred to the community and area as “our area” or “our community.” It could also be noted how they sometimes talked about the dam and the place on behalf of the whole community, “[...] *this community rejects it [the Makhoul Dam]*” and “*The dam will affect us.*” Also like Nora, Adil and Jalil associate the Makhoul Dam project with having to leave the area with experience of previous displacement.

Further, the association made between the respondents past and future, explains why they don't want it to be repeated and that they don't want to leave their area. This once again underlines how what they experienced in the past impacts or contributes to reinforcing an identity drawn from the community's common past. In these conversations, the connection to their past also conveys that it was a period when the residents of the area felt they were left alone to deal with the crisis and fend for themselves which in turn testifies of an identity affected by a stronger image of ‘us’. This construction of “us” as an inside group is also salient in Faisal and Batouls responses:

“[...] there is no state, the state is lost, [...] What have we benefited from the state? "We have nothing. All of my children are unemployed, my husband has suffered two strokes and there is no healthcare services. We just want healthcare. Of course we will suffer, if they would just leave us here and provide some service that would be better.”

(Batoul)

“The government is not directed towards Ashur, they are not doing enough [...]. Honestly the government is not paying attention to us, nor thinking of coming here. There are only excavations in the south of Iraq, they have neglected the city of Ashur [...]. We want them to come and do excavations, and there are facebook campaigns, but they are not responding [...]. We need excavations, we need maintenance work, because if the water level rises the city of Ashur will fall. We want to save Ashur”.

(Faisal)

These examples further show that the community identity is not only limited to a construction of an “us” but also to an 'us' that is placed in relation to 'them'. In the dialogue with Batoul, they or them could refer to the decision makers, since she talks about the state, while it is not clear why she thinks ‘they’ are not doing enough for her family or the residents of the area. At the same time Faisal clearly indicates that ‘they’ are the policy makers behind the dam or the politicians, and that ‘they’ consciously are treating he and his area or archaeological sites differently, because of where in the country he or they live and who they are.

Moving on to the cultural identity observed, it is here an identity formation drawn from the attachment and connection to the place’s culture, mainly represented through the

archaeological sites of the area. This could be found in the majority of the participants' conversation about the archaeological places and their relationship to these. It was among others highly salient in the conversations with Faisal:

“The human is known through her history, if there is no history that human can not be called a human, therefore the most important is to care for the history, if there were preservation work at the site, we could preserve our history. Ashur is our history, Ashur is our identity, we are affiliated with the Assyrians, so if we lose Ashur, we lose our identity, we will not have an identity.”

(Faisal)

Faisal stresses here the connection between the archaeological places, in particular the city of Ashur's 'history' and the identity of the area and its residents. He further emphasises how important the history of a person, community or 'humans' in general is, for how they will be understood and for their own identity and identification. The way he presses on the importance of human history, or history in the context of the perception of people also explains his upsetness and alarming way to speak about the archaeological sites, a crucial need to preserve them. It is also apparent that Faisal feels that his and his community's identity is threatened by the Makhoul Dam project and how the dam would affect the archaeological site's fate. Here not only the risk of dissolution of physical places such as the archaeological sites could be understood as a threat against their cultural identity, but also the dam-related displacement in itself that in many cases causes a cultural identity crisis for the affected communities.

In other cases the cultural identity could also be perceived as an identity formation going beyond the areas attachment to the surrounding archaeological sites they grown up with, and instead prolonging itself to include a national identity over the

archaeological sites, which here would be understood in the context of the country's history not limited to just the area of the archaeological sites:

“I am sure every Iraqi will be affected if the archeological sites would be lost, every honourable Iraqi would be.”

(Ibrahim)

The cultural identity could further also be found in most of the respondents' declarations of their feelings and attachment towards the archaeological sites and how they were relating these to their childhood, or family history among others present when Adnan were talking about the archaeological places:

“Of course I would be upset if the archaeological sites were lost, I am forty years old and since I was brought to this world they [the sites] have been in front of me, and before that in front of my father and grandfather [...].”

(Adnan)

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the social and cultural aspects of the ongoing construction of the Makhoul Dam with the ambition to answer the research question, how does the Makhoul Dam including its decision making process affect local individuals by its impact on their native areas and surrounding archaeological sites? Through the operational questions and support of Albrecht's theory of solastalgia, the theory of place attachment, where a more comprehensive definition of the theory was applied and community participation theory, eight themes were identified, categorised under the main themes, "Our area", Who's decision? and Wellbeing and identity. These showed that individuals in the dam-affected areas wellbeing and identity were strongly linked to their native areas including the surrounding archaeological sites through different sorts of attachments and different identity formations.

Firstly, the wellbeing and identity of individuals in Al-Zab and Al-Zawiya were connected to the area through an attachment or affection towards their community and neighbourhood and the people of the area, as well as an attachment to the area as a physical place. Secondly through an attachment to the cultural or archaeological places of the area such as the remains of the city of Ashur and Qasr Al-Bint, expressed both as a spiritual relationship and as a bridge between the individuals past or childhood and the archaeological places. This was often entwined with their personal history and memories attached to the area. The third attachment was an attachment similar to the previous, where the connection to individuals native area and its surrounding archaeological sites went through the history of individuals, but here the place was instead valued, because of a bond or relationship to the individuals' ancestors and their family history in the area.

The analysis further showed three different identity formations that connected the individuals to their native areas. The first were place identity, related to the individuals'

native area as a historical and physical place and the place as a container of personal memories, personal experience and history. Community identity was an attachment linked to the area as a social place with its community and people, and lastly cultural identity was based on an attachment to the culture of the area, embodied through the archaeological sites. This identity was also sometimes extended to include a national identity over the heritage of archaeological sites. These identity formations were in turn strengthened by individuals' feelings of exclusion in the decision making of the project which they related to their past experience of displacement from the area.

Furthermore, the native area of local individuals and their attachments to it helped contribute positively to their well-being and to sustaining different identity formations bound to the place. Here the archaeological sites and elements such as natural places within the individuals' native area were often associated with relaxation and feelings of inner peace, comfort or what could be described as solace. Further, the knowledge that the Makhould Dam would flood the area and destroy the archaeological sites and their ancestors' graves, together with feelings of exclusion from the decision making and planning of the dam project as well as having to leave the area, had a strong negative effect on local individuals. This gave rise to feelings of upsetness, distress and grief as well as exclusion and worries about an uncertain future. The research additionally showed a fear among individuals of breaking social bonds and losing contact with family and friends from their native area. Thus, the project of the Makhoul Dam by threatening to uproot local individuals and destroy their native area, which they hold strong attachments to and contributes positively to their wellbeing and identity, strongly affects individuals in Al-Zab and Al-Zawiya.

Moreover, there is a need to study further the social and cultural impacts of dams, and projects with climate change mitigation purposes. In a world and time where the effects of climate change are being increasingly felt, through more extreme weather, drought and water scarcity, measures to mitigate climate change will increase, and with these their impact on our societies and native areas - home towns as home villages. Since climate mitigation projects such as dams and exclusion in decision making of these

projects can have a strong negative impact on individuals and their wellbeing, we need to pay more attention scholarly as well as in policies and decision making to social and cultural effects on an individual level. This, so we can better understand how we can adapt to a changing climate with respect for the affected communities, their knowledge, experience and wellbeing.

6.1 Future Research

During this research many new questions arose and different thoughts about possible further research emerged. For instance an idea came from the fact that there were more male participants than female participants in this study, where an angle for future research could be the impact of dam construction or climate change mitigation projects through a gender perspective with focus on women or a feminist approach. Another interesting perspective would be to look deeper into the individual experience by following an individual or family throughout the whole process of implementation of the dam project through for instance anthropological research. Here also a comparative study looking into the impacts of dam projects on local populations at other places, for instance including socio-economic aspects could be an interesting future research project.

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8. Appendix. Research Participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Occupation
Shakir	♂	42	Civil Servant
Lu'ay	♂	64	Academic administration
Nora	♀	42	Housewife
Adnan	♂	39	Farmer & vegetable seller
Adil	♂	50	Civil Servant
Batoul	♀	43	Housewife
Marwan	♂	35	Teacher
Ibrahim	♂	43	Civil Servant
Jalil	♂	38	Employee at local education agency
Leyla	♀	41	Farmer & housewife
Faisal	♂	40	Professor
Anwar	♂	56	Archaeological administrator