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THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION IN IRAQ: THE INFLUENCE OF TERRITORIAL DISPUTE AND ETHNO-POLITICS ON SCHOOLING IN KIRKUK

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ABSTRACT

The Iraqi Disputed Territories, or Disputed Internal Boundaries, consist of 15 districts stretching across four northern governorates from the Syrian to Iranian borders. The oil-rich Iraqi governorate of Kirkuk lies at the heart of this dispute and reflects the country's ethnic and religious diversity. Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds, and Assyrians all claim ancient settlement patterns within the governorate. The symbolic importance of Kirkuk as a homeland to both Kurds and the Turkmen conflicts directly with its strategic importance to Baghdad. While the two linguistically distinct centers of governance vie for control, interethnic communal tensions are rising and questions of identity increasingly overshadow day-to-day life. The existing research on Kirkuk focuses heavily on governance outcomes and possible administrative solutions, but little has been written about the impact of heightened identity politics on the everyday lives of citizens. This paper explores the influence of these conflicts and contests on education in the city of Kirkuk.

INTRODUCTION

The Iraqi Disputed Territories, or Disputed Internal Boundaries, consist of 15 districts stretching across four northern governorates from the Syrian to Iranian borders. The oil-rich governorate of Kirkuk, with its capital of the same name, lies at the heart of the dispute and reflects the country's ethnic and religious diversity.

Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds, and Assyrians all declare ancient settlement patterns within the governorate. The symbolic importance of Kirkuk as a homeland to both Kurds and Turkmen conflicts directly with its strategic importance to Baghdad. The two linguistically distinct centers of governance have vied for control of the region since 2003, which has resulted in changing regional power dynamics. Military operations to protect against, and later remove, the Islamic State (IS) and the inclusion of the disputed territories in the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) independence referendum in September 2017 have made these power dynamics more complex.

The existing research on Kirkuk focuses heavily on military maneuvers, governance outcomes, and possible administrative solutions to the conflict. However, although the ethnic nature of the territorial dispute has resulted in questions of identity that increasingly overshadow daily life, little has been written about the impact the heightened identity politics have on the everyday lives of citizens. Building on previous research (Shanks 2016) that highlighted the significant role education has played in cultural reproduction in Iraq, this paper seeks to unpack how this environment has influenced the delivery of education in the city of Kirkuk and lay out the specific implications ethnic conflict has for education administration and content.

The paper is broken down into four sections: an introduction to Kirkuk and its political context; a justification for the study's methodological choices; an overview of the academic framing and literature pertaining to the politics of education; and most significantly, a final section that presents the research findings.

THE KIRKUK CONTEXT

Throughout the 20th century, Kirkuk's symbolic importance as a homeland to both the Kurds and the Turkmen conflicted directly with its strategic importance to Baghdad. Identity politics plagued the north of Iraq, and Kirkuk in particular. The Ba'ath political party conducted a brutal campaign of Arabization across the region, systematically expelled hundreds of thousands of Kurds and other ethnic groups from the region, and denied the ethnic rights of non-Arab populations (Shanks 2015). Baghdad made every attempt to assert a false Arab dominance and counter non-Arab ethnic claims to demographic dominance in the north. For example, the central government renamed roads to reflect Arab nationalism and restricted the provision of ethnically specific education for non-Arab groups. Baghdad not only drove out a proportion of the existing population, it also

persuaded poor Arabs from the south to settle in the newly vacated homes in the north, enhancing the offer with grants of up to 10,000 Iraqi Dinars (Romano 2007). During the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi Kurds' involvement with Iranian forces preceded Baghdad's Al-Anfal campaign, which affected all communities in the north of Iraq and claimed the lives of 100,000 to 200,000 Iraqi Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq (Romano 2007).[1]

By the end of the first Gulf War, the majority of the Kurdish-populated areas in northern Iraq were effectively outside of Baghdad's control. The imposition of a no-fly zone and the unofficial boundary known as the green line resulted in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq achieving relative autonomy from Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1991. However, a number of Kurdish-populated areas that lay beyond the green line continued to fall under Baghdad's control, including Kirkuk. In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the KRG and the Iraqi government both laid claim to land bordering the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The official contest over Kirkuk's administration has resulted in a tug-of-war between Baghdad and Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, that has frequently stalled the Iraqi political system; in 2018, an administrative solution for the disputed territories remains elusive. Meanwhile, the disputed territories have been subject to heightened identity politics and sectarian insecurity, and ethnic groups across the region have been pulled into a dispute over complex ethnically defined claims and demographic compositions.

The dispute runs deeper than the political contest, as Kurds' and others' narratives of belonging rely on historical ethnic claims to their homelands. The Kurds' history of persecution appears to drive the imperative to control their destiny in Kirkuk and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and it is widely accepted that Iraq's Kurdish population would not accept the forsaking of Kirkuk. Therefore, the dispute is closely linked to Kurdish national identity, and the city has come to symbolize the Kurdish struggle (Stansfield 2004). Subsequently, the question of Kirkuk's future has grown into a powerfully sacred concern, with the city often described by the Kurdish leadership as their "Jerusalem" (Rafaat 2008, 252). Since 2003, the Kurdish authorities have consolidated their authority in Kirkuk, demanded protected autonomy similar to what they had pre-2003, and demanded the opportunity, via referendum, to extend the boundaries of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq to include Kirkuk. Kurdish authorities hold that accepting the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's

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1   The Anfal genocide killed between 50,000 and 182,000 Kurds in the north of Iraq. It was committed during the Al-Anfal campaign, which was led by Ali Hassan al-Majid during the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War.

claim to Kirkuk is the only geographically, historically, demographically, and morally sound action (O'Leary 2005).

However, while Kirkuk is often referred to as "The Heart" of Kurdistan, it is equally important to the Turkmen people, who regard the diagonal strip of land stretching from the Syrian and Turkish border areas in the north of Iraq to the town of Mendeli on the Iranian border in central Iraq as *Turkmeneli* (Turkmen land), with Kirkuk as its center. The Iraqi Turkmen community has expressed concern that its suffering has been underplayed or ignored entirely (Kerkuklu 2007; Stansfield 2004; Al-Hirmizi 2005), as academics and commentators alike tend to focus Kurdish demographic movements and suffering in the region. Moreover, the vast majority of the literature from the mid-20th century onward is either focused on elite Iraqi political history or deemed "romantically pro-Kurdish" (Stansfield and Anderson 2009a). The Turkmen narrative is framed by the injustices inflicted on them throughout the 20th century at the hands of the state and the ever-encroaching Kurdish population. The Turkmen claim to Kirkuk is further deepened by a historical narrative in which their ancestors have been present in the region for centuries and have enjoyed key moments in the region's leadership (Stansfield and Anderson 2009b). Many Turkmen commentators point to their community's settlement patterns in and around the citadel, the oldest area in the city of Kirkuk, which they claim reflect their primacy.

Kirkuk is also home to a large Arab population, both indigenous and those forced to migrate, and to a smaller Assyrian population, both of which also have historic claims to the city. Kurdish authorities have pushed for an aggressive reversal of population movements instigated by the central government's Arabization policies (Human Rights Watch 2009), but observations in the media and on social media demonstrate that this push has been met by fervent opposition from Kirkuk's Turkmen and Arabs.[2]

The sheer complexity of the issue is illustrated by the fact that the timeline of the Arabization policies has enabled Arab settlers in Kirkuk, including those who were largely coerced by Saddam to settle in the north under the banner of "return," to intermarry with the existing population and to see their children and grandchildren born in the city. Expelling the Arab settlers now, an action

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2   Reflected in media and social media monitored between 2012-2017.

that is highly contested and frequently seen as the forcible expulsion of the Arab community from Kirkuk[3], is seen as perpetrating further injustice.[4]

Movements of the Islamic State have further complicated the dynamics in Kirkuk. Under the banner of a unified religious identity, IS took control of large swaths of Iraq's multiethnic Disputed Internal Boundaries, including Hawija in the district of Al-Hawija, which resulted in an unforeseen shift in regional power dynamics in Kirkuk. With the sudden departure of Iraqi security forces, the Kurdish military advanced across the green line to protect the city. The Kurdish population viewed this action as necessary to prevent territory from falling to IS, but others saw it as an opportunistic land grab to further the Kurds' control of the city. Feeling empowered by the significant role Kurdish Peshmerga forces played in the defeat of IS, the KRG chose to hold an independence referendum in September 2017. Controversially, and without consensus among the Kurdish political parties, the vote was extended to include Kirkuk—rather than limited to only the three governorates that officially make up the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Turkmen, Arab, and Yezidi communities outside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq objected to Kirkuk's inclusion in the vote, and Baghdad saw the move as inciting conflict. Baghdad subsequently retook control of Kirkuk in October 2017 in a relatively peaceful military maneuver that was preceded by negotiations with the Kurdish political party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Not content with retaking Kirkuk, Baghdad's forces continued across the region and retook disputed territories that had been under Kurdish control since 2003, effectively restoring the 2003 boundaries and halting the Kurds' plan to establish an independent Kurdish state.

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3   The Coalition Provisional Authority, which governed Iraq in the year after the 2003 invasion, responded to the demographic situation in Kirkuk by implementing a "stay-put" policy for Arab settlers. Negotiations over the permanent Iraqi Constitution almost failed over the question of Kirkuk, but the Kurdish parties were ultimately successful. The resulting Article 140 of the new constitution necessitated a three-stage process: normalization, census, and referendum. Normalization would be achieved by the assisted return of internally displaced people and the recovery of their property. Arab settlers who choose to return to southern and central Iraq would be helped in doing so, and the boundaries of the governorate of Kirkuk would be restored to that of pre-1974. Subsequently, a census and a referendum would be conducted to decide the future of the city and the governorate. The set deadline for the implementation of this article was December 2007. However, the implementation window expired, was extended, and expired again. Efforts to resolve the status of Kirkuk have currently stalled over non-implementation of Article 140.

4   Media observations supported by interview data collected between 2012-2015; media observations and interviews AB2, ABA, KD9, and thesis interviews 2012.

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this paper draw from research conducted between 2011 and 2014 and follow-up data collection conducted between 2014 and 2016. The study employed a purposive sampling method involving qualitative data collection tools. The key modalities for the primary data collection were focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews; consultations were conducted in Kirkuk and Erbil.[5] Data from interviews and focus groups were supplemented by secondary document analysis; monitoring of local and international media and social media; NGO field reports and cluster meeting minutes; and various local human rights agency reports, most of which were associated with one particular community, to further inform and contextualize the research findings.

The criteria for selecting interview and focus group participants centered around two principles. The first was the general rule of achieving a purposive sample that was representative of city's diversity and which included balanced representation from the different ethnically defined schools. The second was that participants had to be knowledgeable about the research questions on education. Therefore, head teachers, teachers, and community representatives were selected. These criteria were later expanded to include education specialists from within political, religious, civil, and international organizations operating in the area. This reflects the myriad actors who, due to the limited capacity of state-funded education, currently influence the provision of education in Iraq's disputed territories.

Participants were located through a number of channels and all efforts were made to ensure a diverse range of participants. To unpack the influence of politics on classrooms, it was vital to ensure that all perspectives were given a voice. First, ministry of education officials from both Baghdad and Erbil were contacted to gain permission to do the research. This had a snowball effect, as the ministry contacts eventually led us to additional interview subjects. It was essential to also seek participants who were not working with UN agencies or closely associated with the education ministry. Therefore, the third source of participants was local civil society organizations and academics with a vested interest in the formal education system. Ultimately, the interview and focus group data and secondary

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5   Interviews and focus groups were the most appropriate modality of data collection in order to gain an in-depth and thorough understanding of peoples' experiences of education policy and practice. The use of such open discussion would aim to establish the necessary factual information, as well as interview participants' perceptions of education's purpose. Connor proposed that "identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions; perceptions are as important or more than reality when it comes to ethnic issues" (1997, 33). This influential work resonated with the objectives of this research and further confirmed the necessary modality for primary data collection.

materials, such as statements issued by government officials or representatives of a particular ethnic group, were collected from 48 education officials and community representatives across the territories.

The researcher was acutely aware of her lack of fluency in the three main languages of the region and took measures to counteract this deficit. To ensure that academic literature in languages other than English was obtained, the researcher contacted two Iraqi academic research centers in Amman, spent a day at each, and then conducted Arabic-language interviews with the academics working there to determine if any publications had been missed. The researcher also was assisted by the Turkmen Human Rights Foundation, a Turkmen NGO, in identifying Turkish literature on the subject. Finally, colleagues helped conduct the Kurdish literature search. Although nothing was found that tackled the main topics of this paper, these efforts did enable the researcher to identify key texts that helped to contextualize the data described above.

The political realities of the contested territories had an impact on the data collection and consultation process. Interviews often ended abruptly due to security alerts, and it was necessary to travel at certain times for security reasons. In this respect, it was essential to have a flexible research design in terms of collecting the required data. For example, using email to interview participants who were unable to travel, whose interviews were cut short, or who were not forthcoming in the interview setting was a useful tool.[6] The insecure environment also created a degree of distrust, and a number of interviewees requested that notes not be taken. In these cases, notes were written up directly after the interview but they included no direct quotes, for fear of misquoting participants.

Great importance was placed on validating the findings and analytical conclusions, which was achieved through a number of channels: emailing report findings to a number of key community members; providing report findings to key members of the journalist community and NGO workers; and, finally, presenting the research at a UNICEF-sponsored workshop on peace education in Kirkuk in 2015.[7]

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6   Providing participants with the opportunity to follow up on the interview via email enriched the data collection more than was anticipated. Many participants had more information to share after the interview. This generally consisted of a written report pertaining to the issues we had discussed during our interview and opened channels for continued communication and clarification of issues raised in the reports provided.

7   The findings were supported by all but one interlocutor present at the workshop. There was some objection from a member of the Kirkuk provisional council during the workshop. This individual rejected the findings and registered a complaint that the research portrayed Kirkuk in a negative light.

UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION DELIVERY

To understand the complex relationship between identity politics and education in Kirkuk, we must first move away from the commonly held belief that education is an apolitical technical pursuit. Just as aid interventions are no longer viewed as impartial, there is increasing awareness that education systems are not unbiased and are usually designed by elite groups. Correspondingly, over the past decade the international education agenda has shifted to recognize the potential influence education has over social dynamics and the spheres of security, governance, and economics (Brock 2011; Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Conflict Sensitivity Consortium 2012; Davies 2004; Mundy and Dryden-Peterson 2015; Gaigals and Leonhardt 2001; Østby and Urdal 2010; Shields and Paulson 2015; Smith 2010).

The conceptualization of education as being outside the political framework was first challenged by early analysts of nationalism. The important purpose endowed on education by 19th-century state-building projects saw schools play a key role in government communication with the population, which served to disperse an image of the nation and promote national loyalty (Hobsbawn 1996). The transmission of nationalist propaganda through what Gallagher refers to as "common rituals and practices toward iconic images of state and nation" (2004, 23) has seen education commonly being used to assimilate populations (Churchill 1996). Smith and Vaux (2003) have given nationalist school structures a corresponding assimilationist classification. Assimilationist systems provide the opportunity to reinforce the governing language and culture by offering "single institutions operating according to the values of the dominant tradition" (46). As such, ethnically and politically exclusive versions of history, geography, and religion are used to transmit an exclusive banner of national identity, at the expense of minority groups (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002).

Conversely, Smith and Vaux (2003) highlight the fact that "separatist" school systems can serve different constituencies through relatively ethnically homogeneous intakes. Discussions of separatist institutions depend on the historic, geographic, and political contexts in which they operate. Separatist structures exist in a number of forms in countries with divided societies: the peaceful educational pluralism of Canada and Belgium, the complicit character of separatist schooling in Bosnia (Torsti 2009) and Northern Ireland (Gallagher 2004), the imposition of apartheid in South Africa (Davies 2008, vi), and the privatized education system in Lebanon that has resulted in the de facto separation of students based on community affiliation (Akar and Albrecht 2017).

Separatist education systems are no more insulated from political influence than assimilationist systems, and they can as easily become party to broader ethno-political or sectarian agendas. Gallagher (2004) offers three hypotheses to explain how separatist education structures have negatively impacted sectarian divides, using Northern Ireland as an illustrative case.

First, the cultural hypothesis suggests that separatist schools exacerbate community divisions by introducing potentially opposing cultural environments. Curricula that offer the potentially political subjects of history, geography, and language tend to emphasize the differences between communities and fail to acknowledge mutual dependency. In this sense, many have proposed that education content can be manipulated for ethnocentric purposes (King 2011; Kirk and Winthrop 2007; Paulson and Rappleye 2007; Smith 2005). School curricula provide a medium for the transmission of knowledge between generations and therefore are seen as an "extremely powerful tool to promote particular political ideologies, religious practices or cultural values and traditions" (Smith 2010, 17). As such, school content gives students a narrative of the "past and visions for the future" (Paulson 2011, 3) that can influence how they locate themselves and their communities in the context of present conflicts. King (2014) observes that the curriculum was a key tool of the state in the construction and collectivization of ethnic groups in Rwanda. She demonstrates how the histories of the Hutus and Tutsis were depicted as being fundamentally oppositional. Examination of textbooks used in Pakistan and India has shown how they similarly emphasize sectarian divisions and promote exclusive identities (International Crisis Group 2014; Kumar 2002; Lall 2008). In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese textbooks in the 1970s and 1980s were strewn with descriptions of the Tamils as the historical enemies of the Sinhalese and actively celebrated those who had vanquished the Tamils in ancient wars (Nissan 1996).

Second, Gallagher's (2004) social hypothesis suggests that, regardless of what is taught, separatist schools emphasize and validate group differences and hostilities, thereby encouraging mutual ignorance and suspicion. Third, Gallagher points to wider inequality between groups, noting that separatist school structures create an opportunity to provide unequal education between communities. This creates concerns about education inputs, such as how state resources are allocated. Schools are one of the most prevalent and obvious state institutions, and as such have the potential to highlight institutional discrimination. In Nepal, for example, the Maoist insurgency capitalized on educational disparities as part of its campaign to undermine government legitimacy (Parker and Standing 2007; Pherali 2013).

Another category in Smith and Vaux's (2003) classification of school systems highlights the more positive role of an "integrationist" system, which is defined as "common or shared institutions with diversity represented within the population of each institution" (49). In its ideal form, this model should allow divergent identities to be negotiated in the classroom without political influence. Although it is worth noting that, in a fragile multiethnic society, achieving this form of schooling is challenging. Historical representation of different groups can create ideological battlegrounds that are extremely difficult to navigate.

Smith and Vaux's (2003) typology highlights the need to pay significantly more attention to potential political influence in the classroom. Kirkuk has witnessed a number of ethno-politically driven changes in education over the last 20 years as school systems have moved from assimilationist to separatist (Shanks 2016). The Ba'ath party used the curriculum to promote party ideology and enforce the image of an exclusively Arab Iraq. History and geography lessons failed to recognize the ethnically diverse makeup of Kirkuk, and at the same time as community language schools were obstructed and ethnically specific education rights were denied to non-Arab groups (Shanks 2016). Schools even became party to the regime's surveillance operations, as those who expressed themselves freely were reported and punished (de Santisteban 2005). Education's role in the socialization of identity and its significance in building national unity ensured that it was manipulated by the Ba'ath party's Arabization policies.

The post-2003 reconstruction process saw the new Iraqi constitution recognize the country's multiethnic and multireligious nature. It guaranteed "the right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as Turkmen, Syriac and Armenian" (Article 4), which obligated the KRG and the central government in Baghdad to provide education in a variety of languages. Consequently, calls for linguistically appropriate schooling were heard from all of Kirkuk's communities. Previous research has noted that education reconstruction in post-2003 Iraq was shaped by the need to preserve identity, with community education decisions being made to promote ethnic distinctiveness and fortify difference (Shanks 2016). As a result, education in Kirkuk is ethnically segregated, with separate schools serving the Arab, Turkmen, Kurdish, and Assyrian communities.[8]

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8   Different mediums of instruction have arisen within these schools, varying from entirely mother-tongue education in Kurdish and Turkmen to dominant language instruction in Arabic, with the inclusion of lessons in traditional languages such as Turkish and Assyrian in the school's timetable. This has resulted in increasingly ethnically homogeneous school intakes and a separatist education system within the multiethnic city (Shanks 2016).

This case study investigates the relationship between the ethno-political territorial dispute and the school system in Kirkuk, asking in particular how schools maintain a neutral position in such a complex environment. Due to the fluctuating administrative control of Kirkuk, issues of geography, history, and cultural representation are of great significance. While the political and military contest continues, the portrayal of ethnic histories has emotive value and can be linked with wider territorial claims and justifications. Ethnic groups in the city vary in terms of their geographic interpretation of homeland, their perception of ancient battle victories, and their experience of genocide. Such issues are contentious enough in a postconflict society, but with the added administrative contest in Kirkuk, history has become an extremely political tool. It is within this complex environment that the rest of this paper explores the influence ethno-politics has had on education delivery in the city of Kirkuk.

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN KIRKUK

As a result of the unsettled questions regarding administrative control in Kirkuk and the evolution of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, two regional education ministries administer education in northern Iraq: the central Iraqi ministry in Baghdad and the KRG ministry in Erbil. The two systems differ in terms of delivery and structure and are officially confined by their respective geographic remits. All education in Kirkuk Governorate, irrespective of the schools' ethnic or linguistic markers, officially falls under the jurisdiction of the central education ministry in Baghdad.

While the constitutional right of all Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue is accepted by Baghdad in principle, there has been little exploration of how this can best be implemented in practice. In the same way, many regional governance issues have been left ambiguous in the post-2003 Iraqi constitution (Bowring 2012), so too have the extent and implementation of mother-tongue education rights. Consequently, memorandums of support for non-dominant language schools receive little in the way of practical governmental support from Baghdad. The lack of textbook translations, teacher-training colleges, and supplementary teaching courses in non-Arabic languages are all points of contention across Iraq's multiethnic disputed territories (Shanks 2016). The government's failure to provide linguistically appropriate education resources has resulted in the perception that schools are receiving unequal education inputs due to their population's different identity markers.

In response to the lack of investment in non-Arabic education, communities have sought ethnically affiliated backers to ensure their ability to deliver mother-tongue or ethnically appropriate schooling. In Kirkuk, Kurdish language schools have turned to the KRG Ministry of Education in search of increased KRG influence. The Turkmen community has similarly sought support from a range of external sources to facilitate the translation of the entire Baghdad curriculum into Turkish. This support has come from a number of different actors in keeping with the geographic location of the recipient schools. Ankara Waqf and the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs have translated the central Iraqi curriculum into Turkish (Interview TK34, conducted 2012), while the Iraqi Turkmen Front, a local political party, has periodically taken responsibility for printing and distributing textbooks (Interview TK34, conducted 2012).

The involvement of the KRG Ministry of Education and Turkmen parties in Kirkuk's education was justified by interlocutors with emotive language and presented as necessary for the continuation of ethnically appropriate education. The framing of Kurdish education in Kirkuk as being under threat is not uncommon; all the Kurdish educationalists and community leaders consulted stated that it would not be possible to provide mother-tongue education if it were not for Erbil: "The Kurdish authorities acted because they had to . . . without their support the Kurds in Kirkuk would only have Arabic textbooks" (Interview KD3, conducted 2011). "The KRG support has developed from necessity, Baghdad provide NO support . . . no teacher salaries, not my salary, no textbooks . . . Just this desk" (Interview KD, conducted 2011). This has created a variety of complex challenges, including the perception of enforced inequality, damage to political legitimacy, and a weakening of educational oversight.

That these external actors have varying degrees of influence and resource capability has further exacerbated the existing funding inequality between Arabic and non-Arabic schools and has created new divisions between the education systems in the non-Arabic communities. This has resulted in a complex service-delivery system based on ethnic identity, wherein education quality is reliant on identity affiliations. Returning to Gallagher's (2004) final hypothesis about the influence education inequality has on conflict, this is particularly concerning, given the existing intergroup fragility and wider ethno-political context in Kirkuk. Interviews and focus groups with Kurdish, Turkmen, and Assyrian actors referred frequently to the lack of central support given their ethnically defined separate schools and demonstrated resentment of the external support sought by their neighbors of other ethnicities (Interview data, collected 2012-2013). This

resentment appears to be compounded by the lack of communication between schools and a lack of transparency among school backers.

The perception of discrimination in the allocation of public spending has led to serious unrest in many conflict-affected countries (International Crisis Group 2014; World Bank 2011). There is an established understanding in political science that relative deprivation (Gurr 1970) and the resulting feelings of grievance can instigate internal conflicts. Stewart expanded on the notion of inequality and grievance in an ethnically homogeneous population (vertical inequality) to introduce the concept of horizontal inequality, or "severe inequalities between culturally defined groups" (2002, 3). When such inequalities are perceived to be horizontal, and therefore defined by identity markers such as language, religion, or tribe, mobilizing groups for the purpose of collective action can lead to ethnic conflict and sectarian fighting (Murshed 2008).

A decade of armed conflict and insecurity has resulted in significant instability within the social and political realms in Iraq, which has included the weakening of state institutions and insufficient funding of education across the country post-2003 (Shanks 2015). Moreover, due to the broader political standoff over the administrative control of the disputed territories, these lower levels of allocated resources were often perceived by interview and focus group participants to have a deliberate political purpose. The neglect of Kurdish education has often been presented as a deliberate attempt to deny Kurds their place in the region and limit their numbers. Interviewees often made comments such as, "Kurdish language is unimportant to the center and they think it is politically unnecessary in the region as they want to control the area and have the administration in Arabic. It is a continuation of the Arabization policies of the past" (Interview KD8, conducted 2011).

Baghdad's perceived neglect of non-Arabic education has a number of complex implications for future governance solutions. As a public good provided by the state, education plays a vital role in establishing state legitimacy. Scholars have found that equal educational investment decreases grievances against the state (Østby, Nordås, and Rød 2009; Thyne 2006). The state's commitment to all of Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups is symbolically represented through its commitment to culturally appropriate education access. The Kurdish community's reliance on the KRG Ministry of Education and the involvement of Turkmen political parties in state education serve to undermine Baghdad's role and validity in Kirkuk's overall administration. The involvement of ethnically affiliated political parties in school management can enforce the view that a community's needs are served only

by those representing their identity group, thereby enforcing the ethno-political mindset. Such an arrangement supports the prevalent fear that, if administrative control of Kirkuk falls to an ethnically defined community group, the interests of others will not be met, thus hampering interdependency and cooperation.

The involvement of external actors has also affected the quality and oversight of education in Kirkuk. While the administration of education in Kirkuk remains officially under the remit of the central education ministry's directorate, the directorate in reality has no practical jurisdiction within the schools managed by the regional Kurdistan ministry. The Kirkuk education directorate expressed frustration that the mixed administration of schools limited their ability to oversee all teacher recruitment and prevented them from having a clear and transparent process (Directorate interview, conducted 2015). This situation has resulted in more than 7,000 teachers who are not answerable to the local education directorate (Directorate interview, conducted 2016), which raises questions about accountability and educational alignment. Focus groups with head teachers similarly raised concerns about the fact that no one body has jurisdiction in all schools, which has blurred the codes of conduct for schools and teaching staff. This is particularly important in terms of distinguishing between cultural celebration and political nationalism in the classroom, which the paper discusses in the next section.

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION CONTENT IN KIRKUK

The content of the Baghdad education ministry's curriculum is another highly contentious issue in the city of Kirkuk. The need to address the legacy of Arabization and remove Ba'athist ideology from textbooks was met with consensus from most Iraqis after 2003. Yet the resulting discussions created "debates that reflected the very rifts in Iraqi society that the curriculum sought to address" (IslamopediaOnline 2015). In 2008, the Iraqi government began a complete curriculum review under the guidance of UNESCO that was due to conclude in 2012. However, the satisfactory completion of the curriculum has evaded educationalists (Interview CRB1, conducted 2013).[9] The education ministries in both Baghdad and Erbil have registered the idea that a curriculum should not be dominated by ethnocentric interpretations of curricular subjects and should reflect the diversity of Iraq through history, religious education, geography, and language studies. Nevertheless, the persistent pattern of ethnic conflict and coexistence

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9   Interview with member of curriculum review board, Kirkuk 2012.

across Iraq has created (as yet) irresolvable differences over interpretations of national and local histories.

The failure to overcome such difficulties has resulted in both education ministries facing continued criticism in Kirkuk for their representation of ethnic groups. Baghdad's textbooks are accused of failing to be inclusive and lacking recognition of non-Arab groups (Focus group 2, conducted 2015; Interviews conducted 2012-2015). Interviewees offered numerous examples to demonstrate that curriculum resources do not represent Kirkuk's diverse population. The religious and ethnic diversity of northern Iraq is not reflected through any subject, which has caused discontent and resentment in among non-Arab and non-Muslim communities. The Turkmen community feels aggrieved by their group's depiction through the lens of Ottoman rule and brutal colonialism (Focus group 2, conducted 2015; Interviews conducted 2012-2015). As one Turkmen teacher noted, "history books portray Turks as wrongdoers and killers. This is the remnants of Saddam's regime, but the bad information about Iran was removed so why not remove the bad against the Turks? I do not understand why we have not been supported in this way" (Interview TMN, conducted 2011). This statement was supported by a Kirkuki head teacher, who noted that "Turkmen are not represented in these textbooks. They do not show our impact on Iraqi culture. Kirkuk is a Turkmen city, the citadel has the original settlement patterns of the Turkmen people, our history is everywhere" (Focus group TMN, conducted 2011).

The KRG's curriculum includes greater representation of minority groups, but it is contested due to the Kurd-centric interpretations of historical events in textbooks and teaching resources. Minority groups are represented through their association with the Kurdish narrative, with Yezidis and Christians deemed primarily Kurdish regardless of their self-identification, which has prompted accusations of attempted "Kurdification" (numerous interviews with minority group community leaders from Ninewa and Kurdistan Region of Iraq, collected between 2011 and 2016). This can be illustrated through the mixed terminology used in textbooks. Kirmanj notes that textbooks often conflate the terms "Kurdish" and "Kurdistani" and use them interchangeably (2014a, 737). Moreover, the presence of Islamic education in the curriculum has been criticized by regional academics who suggest that the absolutist nature of the subject influences the delivery of religious science—a subject wherein students learn about other faiths in the region—by teaching about the religions from an Islamic perspective (Kirmanj 2014b).

With the omission of modern historical events and the denial of Iraq's indigenous diversity, it is possible that each community within the separatist education system will resort to presenting its own conflicting interpretation of history, as cautioned by Gallagher's (2004) cultural hypothesis. Graham-Brown also points out that an ethnic group's control of the history curriculum often leads to "the construction of a version of history . . . which heightens the role of that group at the expense of the others . . . [and the] suppression of events or cultural ideas . . . viewed as subversive or divisive' (1994, 28). Numerous accusations were made during the interviews that, in Kirkuk, history is already a matter of teacher interpretation: "The teaching of history in the schools here [Kirkuk] depends on the school and the teacher in charge. It is the same with Islamic classes. It is about the teacher's belief. Who is to complain when all the pupils are [of] the same [community]?" (Interview AS2, conducted 2012). In the absence of a workable curriculum, the subjects of history, geography, and Islamic education can become reflections of the classroom teacher's ideology. Anecdotal evidence from schools and education actors gathered during data collection confirmed that many teachers exercise their own judgment in the classroom and put less emphasis on parts of the curriculum that may conflict with their own views. The ethnically homogeneous nature of schools in Kirkuk has added to the acceptance of this improvised, ethnically biased presentation.

The interview and focus group data also provided numerous examples of what teachers perceived to be "intentional ethno-political interference" in Kirkuk's schools (Interviews HTT1, HTKD4; Focus group 1; Focus group 2; conducted 2015). Citing partisan and corrupt practices, interviewees indicated that both teacher recruitment and school ethos were subject to political intrusion. Accusations that teachers were appointed based on their political affiliation were heard within all teaching communities. This added credence to the fear that subject matter in the classroom would be used for politically motivated socialization projects. The perception is that, if teachers are appointed as a form of political patronage, the risk of teacher bias increases. Focus groups with head teachers also revealed that political pressure had been exerted on numerous schools across the ethnic spectrum to create an identity-driven ethos in school. This included pressure to commemorate ethnic martyrdom festivals, fly ethnicity-related flags, and sing ethnic anthems daily. Interviews also revealed that the political pressure on schools focused a good deal on encouraging exclusionary actions rather than on holding cultural celebrations that acknowledge the interdependent nature of Kirkuk's ethnic groups. They criticized the pressure for both its political nature and its imposition on the already limited teaching timetable. As one Kirkuk head teacher explained, "We do not have time for the full timetable, schools are in

shifts (classroom time is limited). Yet 'they' insist on these political displays . . . each ethnic group has a lot of martyrs you know! It's not possible to teach if we cover them all! But there are people with influence who put pressure for us to do this" (Interview, conducted Kirkuk 2015). Nevertheless, the insecure ethno-political environment has led many schools to accommodate these requirements, often due to fear of reprisals.

How best to represent identity in the classroom emerged as a continuous theme throughout the data collection. Due to the complex context in the city, the line between expressing identity and ethnic nationalism is blurred. Ethnicity and control of political and social spaces underlie intercommunal conflicts, forced demographic changes, Article 140, and IS control of Mosul. The result is that politics and identity become viewed as one. When a school wants to celebrate a cultural event, those outside the ethnic group involved often consider it part of a political agenda rather than a celebration of identity. Therefore, innocent festivals with no political intentions are often frowned upon by those trying to insulate education from wider political influence. Flags, celebrations, anthems, and traditional clothing all have the potential to be imposed on others and misused for political purposes. However, some of these are also expressions of cultural freedom, which is deemed essential to the post-Arabization education system in Kirkuk. Kirkuk educationalists therefore face a distinct dilemma concerning how to celebrate their own cultural identity without alienating others or being drawn into the wider political contest. As one head teacher noted, "I want to show the children their history and culture, but I don't want to teach them to hate their neighbor. Yet when I try it is high-jacked by the politicians, they change it, make it about politics" (Focus group 2, conducted 2015).

In such a heightened ethno-political environment as Kirkuk, all expressions of identity in the school system have the potential to underplay the need for mutual dependence among the communities. The separate nature of the system in Kirkuk, coupled with the intrusive political pressure on schools, creates an environment in which communities are left with irresolvable uncertainty about how their neighbor uses education. Communities are left wondering if other schools are celebrating their own distinct culture or are deliberately denying their place in the city. As one interviewee remarked, "Turkmen teach Turk history, Kurds teach Kurdish history, it is all separate. I do not think that a Kurdish teacher would choose to teach my history, would he? No" (Interview ABA2, conducted 2012). The ambiguity of nationalist projects within schools prompts an action-reaction process from other communities, whereby schools operate on the assumption that if "they" are teaching their version of events, we should teach ours. As one teacher

commented, "people teach their own history, so we should do the same" (Interview TK37, conducted 2015). When coupled with political pressure, contradictory and vague rhetoric and poor intergroup communication leads to the assumption of a worst-case scenario and provoke measures and counter-measures in which one group attempts to reinforce its own cultural existence by denying its neighbor's cultural existence and claim to the city.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated how the current education system in Kirkuk risks undermining Baghdad's legitimacy in the region and creating intercommunity grievances in the city. The assimilationist system in Kirkuk was replaced after the 2003 invasion of Iraq by separate school structures based on ethnic and religious identity. Ethno-political contest, the legacy of Arabization, and the underfunding of public services have since resulted in disparate support for ethnically defined schools and a continued contest over representation in the curriculum. Furthermore, the failure to safeguard schools from external influence has opened education up to interference from varying ethnically defined organizations striving to fortify their presence in the city. Consequently, schools wishing to foster cultural identity and heritage have faced challenges because distinguishing between expressions of culture and of politics has become particularly difficult in this context in which politics and identity are closely tied.

Education in Kirkuk should strive to preserve the city's rich ethnic diversity while fostering interdependence. As such, teaching staff will require support in negotiating the fine line between cultural celebration and politically motivated expressions of division. Educationalists need to work in partnership with political actors and government to address the education challenges faced in this highly politicized and fragile environment. In Kirkuk, achieving equal funding, clear and inclusive administrative responsibility, and a multiperspective curriculum will require cross-sector efforts that examine education through a political lens.

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